The Hi/Stories of Hong Kong

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The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with that insight. Then we shall realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency.

--Benjamin

The issue, then, is not about "making" history, but about "remaking" it.

--Abu-Lughod

Introduction

The proliferation of historical, fictional and critical works in recent decades, all of which carrying an anthropological thrust, can be regarded as a convergence of diversified disciplinary efforts to rewrite the history of Hong Kong.[1] These efforts demonstrate that the need to rewrite the history of Hong Kong is in "a state of emergency." (Benjamin 1969:257). They are in fact responses to the grand narrative of Hong Kong history characterized by the dominant representation of Hong Kong as a capitalist success and the miraculous transformation of Hong Kong from a remote fishing village to a world-class metropolitan. Based on a linear view of history, this grand narrative recognizes colonialism as a developmental project and modernity as progress. For British historians like Nigel Cameron, Alan Birch and Frank Welsh who frame their Hong Kong story in this kind of narrative structure in the historical texts that we will examine in this paper, modernity is an amalgamation of new forms, practices and institutions (capitalist modernity, urbanization, industrialization, advancement in constitutional, legal and infrastructural development). Their historical representation of Hong Kong, aptly summarized as the success story of "British Hong Kong", has powerfully shaped the collective imaginary of the people of Hong Kong in

the years before and after the 1997 turnover. They pay very little reference to various kinds of problems produced by modernity (exploitation, alienation, uneven development), not to mention the history of pre-colonial and rural Hong Kong or the history of everyday life which embody many historical anomalies that the Hong Kong grand narrative cannot absorb and silence.

For critics who are concerned with problems of Hong Kong identity, the formation of the Hong Kong success story, either in the above-mentioned historical discourse or elsewhere in other cultural texts such as fiction, film and various media, has been aligned with what we may now call the "status-quo imaginary". This collective imaginary which has been triggered off by Hong Kong's inevitable retrocession to Chinese sovereignty manifests in the desire for the presentation of Hong Kong's "prosperity and stability" and more precisely in the paranoia for "the end of capitalist Hong Kong". Undoubtedly, this imaginary has been a very powerful force in shaping the collective experience of "Hong Kong people" not only in the years between 1984 and 1997 but also in the years after. Generally, critics are highly critical of this imaginary and the success story because in "complicit" partnership they produce "decadence", cultural chauvinism, and an ambivalent sense of history. In his idiosyncratic idiom, Ackbar Abbas (1997) describes the over-concentration of the city's energy and vitality in the economic realm as a phenomenon of "decadence". Critics such as Hung Ho-fung, Ip Iam-chong and Law Wing-sang (1995) turn to fictional texts, the critical discourse and political culture in an attempt to critique how Hong Kong's economic advantage has produced a problematic Hong Kong megalomania which they call "the Northbound imaginary". Others include Stephen Chan (1995) and Blanche Chu (1998) who are mainly concerned with the effect of this imaginary on people's inability to imagine history.

The above endeavors to rethink Hong Kong's colonial modernity constitute a significant portion of the critical discourse on the problematics of Hong Kong identity. They all share an earnest and critical concern to disclose the impact of capitalist modernity and problems of coloniality. From their analyses, we can also observe that this imaginary contains ideological elements which are organized intertexually within and across different discourses, ranging from cultural productions to political culture, from the critical discourse to historiography. In this paper, with an emphatic study of the historical discourse, we will consider three kinds of historical representations of Hong Kong, namely the epic, microhistory and allegory and observe how they confirm or subvert the Hong Kong grand narrative and the status quo imaginary. I have chosen to leave out the pro-nationalist discourse because the scope of the topic may require another full-length paper.[2]   Instead of a systematic study of each kind of representation, this paper will offer a historical "bricolage" of Hong Kong history which is constructed with the consideration of the articulation of the dialectical tensions among the three kinds of Hong Kong stories. If, as Gordan Goodman puts it, historians are to become bricoleurs, the fragmented pieces that I use to construct what Claude Levi-Straus calls an "intellectual bricolage" would be content of a politically committed project. Before we do such an analysis, let us examine some basic questions spinning around "who" "what" and "when" so as to decipher the historical conditions that produced these texts.

Historical representations and moments of danger

The first kind of story is the historical epic of Hong Kong's colonial modernity in Nigel Cameron's *An Illustrated History of Hong Kong* (1991), Alan Birch's *Hong Kong: The Colony that Never Was* (1991) and Frank Welsh's *A History of Hong Kong* (1997). We will examine the formation of modernity and how it is constructed as a historical norm in the three colonialist historical writings. They are epic histories of Hong Kong of a general kind

or what we may call "macro-history", aiming to encompass the major historical events of colonial Hong Kong. As the preference of macro-historians is often broad social, economic and political developments of a place with little emphasis on its cultural aspects, this historical approach offers an "ideal" form for the discourse of progress and the glorification of the British imperial empire.

Perhaps what we see more in their histories of Hong Kong is the presence of the "now" -- the impact of the moment when British Hong Kong was coming to an end. According to Walter Benjamin (1969), the time of the "now" or what he calls *Jetztzeit* is what produces the impetus for historians to write the past. He suggests that to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" but "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at the moment of danger" (1969: 255). In this connection, we may suggest that the 1997 turnover as a moment of danger has created some kind of existential crisis in these historians, driving them to make sense of the past. In fact it is not hard to observe that the three historians express a mixed bag of sentiments which include entrepreneurial "passions" and pro-democracy urges coupled with "red xenophobia" which were all triggered off by the advent of 1997.[3] Frank Welsh is the most forthright among the three to acknowledge his entrepreneurialship. As he mentioned in the preface, when the acquisition of Dao Heng Bank was made in 1970, he was the director of the London bank that did the purchase. His long-term connection with British trade in China has been a major factor accounting for his favorable attitude towards British imperial history. As a long-time practicing historian in Hong Kong history, Birch is less concerned with trade than the democratization of Hong Kong. The Tiananmen Incident, to which he has dedicated a section in his book, becomes a crucial clue for us to decipher his historical stance. Being a humanist, Birch cannot but feel the threat to the "stability and prosperity" and the future of Hong Kong brought about by Hong Kong's retrocession to the Chinese sovereignty. To preserve what might be lost, they

both resort to glorifying the history of colonial Hong Kong. Cameron is equally explicit in expressing the anxiety of preserving Hong Kong as it had always been. Writing at a time when the more recent phase of Hong Kong had yet to be written, he concentrated on the earler developments of colonial Hong Kong up to its industrial takeoff in the 1970s and 1980s. He states clearly in the introduction that Hong Kong may not continue "as the same sort of organism for very long" as "western democarcy" merges with "Chinese socialism" (Cameron 1991:3).

In order to demonstrate how the "comprehensive" and progressive visions of colonial Hong Kong are constructed as result of forgetting and repressing many anomalous historical moments experienced by the colonizer's other, we will survey the second kind of historical representations in Hong Kong local history which demonstrates an interesting thrust toward anthropology and ethnography. I will call this kind of historical writing "micro-history".[4] Micro-history is not a synonymn of local history; it refers to the microscopic study of a specific historical subject, often a history from below. In this paper, examples of this sort include the history of rural Hong Kong and the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*). To turn to the forgotten histories of rural and pre-colonial Hong Kong so as to reconstruct the history of the local , we will look at two volumes of essays *From Village to City: Studies in the Traditional Roots of Hong Kong Scoiety* edited by Alan Birch (1984) and *Beyond the Metropolis: Villages in Hong Kong* edited by Patrick Hase and Elizabeth Sinn (1995) contributed by scholars from diverse disciplines--history, anthropology, sociology, and political science. We will also examine a recent work by Hung Ho-fung (1998) which aims to rediscover the colonial process through the rewriting of the repressed in Hong Kong rural history. In contrast to the macro-historical epic approach adopted by the colonialist historians, authors in these volumes seek to provide monographical and microscopic research on specific areas such as rural politics, rural institution (e.g. The Heung Yee Kuk), the

urbanization of the rural and rural customs and practices. They aim to discover the Chinese traditional roots of Hong Kong so as to provide the missing puzzle pieces for the history of Hong Kong.

Unlike the macrohistories which were mainly triggered off by the 1997 turnover, the so-called "anthropological turn" in the research of local history took place mainly because of what I call "cross-disciplinary fertilizations". The 1997 turnover served mainly as a catalyst. Elizabeth Sinn, one of Hong Kong's local historians, remarks that the "main impetus has come from Sinologist Maurice Freedman whose *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (1958) inspired a long-running debate on the structure of Chinese rural society." (Sinn 1994:668-69)[5] The most fundamental change can be found in the methodology of historical research.   Historians of local history rely heavily on anthropolgical and ethnographic materials, for example, records of inscriptions, interviews, written records in villages. No doubt this changing orientation in historical research aims to reconstruct Hong Kong's past and rediscover its traditional roots when urban and industrial developments swept through the villages ever since the 1970s, drawing the migration of non-indigenous people to the New Territories. By emphasizing what Sinn calls "vestiges of the village tradition" (Sinn 1995:12), they seek to demonstrate the lingering and resilient influence of the past in the present so as to subvert the project of modernity articulated in the colonialist historical epics. Their major assertion is that there is history "beyond the metropolis". I would argue that their writing of rural history was produced as a result of the gradual effacement of the New Territories just as the epics of Hong Kong were written on the eve of "the end of (British) Hong Kong." As Walter Benjamin suggests, since "the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" (Benjamin 1968: 255), I would suggest that these moments of danger where the past is "disappearing" generate the diveristy in historical interpretation of Hong Kong's past and liberate alterity which has been repressed

by the monolithic discourse of progress and colonial modernity. These moments of danger are thus politically important times which bring forth a dynamic dialectic of past and present.

The moment of danger in the third kind of Hong Kong story is directly associated with the 1997 turnover. In the fictional works of two locally bred Hong Kong writers Xi Xi and Dung Kai-cheung, we are provided with alternative historical representations of Hong Kong's history, some of which have to do with its everyday life. The works that we will examine are Xi Xi's Fertile Town Series and especially *Flying Carpet: A Tale of Fertilla* (1996) and Dung's *Visible Cities* (1997)[6] in which we are given a rich repertoire of bits and pieces of aspects of Hong Kong culture. In face of the hegemonic representation of Hong Kong as a capitalist success because of the advent of 1997, they both attempted to re-politicize the social and cultural history of Hong Kong through the reconstruction of everyday life. They both share a common interest in weaving their stories of Hong Kong with rich resources from history, legend, gossip, myth, and above all their own imagination. Their works are fragmented in style, bordering on fiction and reality.

Their works are closer to the form of *Alltasgeschichte* even though they are by no means formal history of any kind. In fact both writers acknowledge clearly the fictionality of their texts. In the preface of *Visible Cities*, the narrator says that the book is in fact a reconstruction of fragmented manuscripts in the year 2047 by seven women all bearing the names starting with the letter "V" (Victoria, Veronica, Viola, Vivien, Venus, Virginia, Vienna). The recovered fragments, originally written by a man named Liu Hua-sheng during the 1997 turnover, could be aptly titled *Remembering Prosperous V-City*. By composing their bricolage out of the ruined manuscripts and Liu's own journal writings which include his own romance, the seven bricoleurs rewrite the history of V-City as "representation within representation" (preface). The inexhaustive accounts are organized around three major areas--infrastructure, urban consumer culture, and traditional customs and festivals, emphasizing

what can be seen and cannot be seen in this city. From the most visible modern structures such as high rise, the airport and bridges to the most mundane spaces such as restaurants, streets, and shops; from well-known entertainers to forgotten people such as prostitutes and poets; from traditional Chinese festivals to western lifestyles, the book offers many encyclopaedic categories of both human and non-human agents which define themselves by relation and through interaction. (Harraway 1994:64).

Similar to Dung who self-reflexively describes his tale as representation within representation, Xi Xi also admits that her Hong Kong tale is fictional. In earlier works of the Fertile Town Series such as "Marvels of a Floating City" (1984) and "The Story of Fertile Town" (1984), she has already attempted to shatter the capitalist myth of Hong Kong by displacing it with her own fairytale. What is new in *Flying Carpet* is the abundant use of anthropological and ethnographical details of Hong Kong life. As a bricoleur, she is not only interested in the stories of people (e.g. civil servants, nanny, merchants), social customs (e.g. gift-giving, legends, festivals), animals and things (e.g. plants, food, furniture, insects) but also of language (e.g. Chinese words, pidgin English), social space (e,g, domestic space, slums, streets) and theory (e.g. seismology, astronomy, biology, physics, literay criticism, archeology). These multifarious facets of everyday life of the Fertillia are woven together to produce a fantastic tale of Hong Kong. Xi Xi even further explores what she means by the archeology of knowledge through her characters' conversation.

"The purpose of archeology is to reconstruct the life of the past."

" But no matter what we do, we can only reconstruct a partial past."

"And reconstruction depends on different people's interpretation."

"Similarly, culture and cultural identity are subject to historical change." (my translation 1996: 453)

The stories narrated by Xi Xi and Dung can be called allegories in the Benjaminian sense that their stories do point to a real world outside the text but both writers never intend to achieve a coincidence of image and reality in their representations. As storytellers, they both echo with Calvino's "melancholy of language" in *The Invisible Cities*. They are neither systematic nor chronological but are "comprehensive" in vision and scope, spanning from pre-colonial times to the very recent developments in Hong Kong and covering nearly all aspects of Hong Kong life. They are not epic in the mode of emplotment, without heroic figures of imposing stature, either of national or legendary importance. In this regard, they are very interesting counterparts to the three colonialist macrohistories discussed above.[7]

Having considered two kinds of microhistoric representations of Hong Kong which focus on the reconstruction of the Hong Kong "local" , do we mean that in the rapprochment of history and anthropology the writing of "microhistory" is the panacea to the problems of Hong Kong historiography? In close relation to this disciplinary question, do we mean to propose a "nativist" orientation for a post-colonial project as Frantz Fanon suggests in *The Wretched of the Earth*? In other words, is nativism the only legitimate end to decolonization? What kind of history of the "local" do we envisage as liberating and what direction should Hong Kong historiography take in the post-1997 years? These questions are related to each other as we very well realize that the possibility of resloving or tackling issues about cultural identity depends greatly on the availability of effective critical and disciplinary tools.

In his discussion of the crossing of the two disciplines, Gordan Goodman is right to query the optimism expressed by historians like Natalie Davis who believe that anthropological literature "liberates historians from a metanarrative that ranked past phenomena by importance, marginalizing some events and privileging others" (in Goodman 1997: 786). To Davis, anthropology is of use to historians because it is "close observation of living processes of social interaction; interesting ways of interpreting symbolic behavior; suggestions about

how the parts of a social system fit together. . ." (in Goodman 1997: 786). Goodman is skeptical of this argument because it makes the assumption that anthropology is a panacea, privileging microhistory over macrohistory in a rather simplistic manner. The writing of microhistory is not simply to make sense of everything but the question is how to make sense of it. Drawing upon anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff, he proposes a model of dialectics so that theoretical and methodological approaches from anthropology can be better integrated.

> An internal dialectic, a set of systematic contradictions of the local that shape and are shaped by historical outcomes of complex arrangements, and a dialectic of articulation, the contemporary principles that underlie the interaction between the local and its encompassing context (Goodman 1997:794).

It is in fact very important to decipher the internal contradictions of the "local" because such a model prevents us from totalizing the Hong Kong "local" as a pregiven coherent whole. Not only does it liberate us from essentalizing Hong Kong identity, it will also enable us to uncover the contingent processes of domination and resistance which exist in rural politics.

In a similar way, the study of *Alltagsgeschichte* (i.e. the history of everyday life) is then to see "social formations as historical agents" involved in cultural practices where power relations are exercised (Goodman 1997:795). Along with other historians--Donna Harraway, Eve Rosenhaft and Mary Strathern, Goodman views cultural historians and anthropologists as politically committed since they see culture as an arena of domination and negotiation. Harraway even suggests that history is the study of "anomalies" and practices responding to them; it is a terrain of cultural history where historians make sense of human and non-human agents. (1994:63) The process involves categorization and making connections. Donna Harraway is apt to claim that "what counts as human and non-human" is not given by definition, but only by relation, by engagement in situated, worldly enounters, where

boundaries take shape and categories sediment" (Harraway 1994:64). This argument aims to object to the view that the world is given and categories are pre-selected:

> I...stress that the agencies and actors are never preformed, pre-discursive, just out there, substantial, neatly bounded before anything happen. ...Human and non-human, all entities take shape in encounters, in practices. (1994:65)

This view of social formations will be useful when we turn to Xi Xi and Dung's works in which they both strategically catalog a series of human and non-human actants. A central point of discussion in the interface of history and anthropology is the significance of *Alltagsgeschichte*--the history of everyday life and how to make sense of it. Compared with macrohistory, *Alltagsgeschichte* can be regarded as a history from below, a study of cultural practice. This kind of "minor historiography" enables us to examine how social formations play the role of historical agents in cultural practices. Because of the need to emphasize subjectivity and experience in *Alltagsgeschichte,* culture is then seen as a site of domination and negotiation.

Equally inportant is the dialectic of articulation. The reduction of scale in microhistory is not the reduction to the particular so as to simplistically displace the general; it emphasizes the possibility of placing the local in relation to the larger tapestry, the general. In my historical bricolage that follows, I will attempt to examine how the "local" is constantly subject to constant flux amid an uneasy coexistence of localism (a complex mix of nationalism and traditionalism) and globalism (urbanization and modernization). In this regard, I would suggest that macrohistory can also embody these two kinds of dialectic. In his analysis of Marc Bloch's *The Feudal Society*, Ginzburg claims that Bloch has reconciled the two:

> [There is] a constant back and forth between micro and macro-history, between close-ups and extreme long shots, so as to continually thrust back into discussion the

comprehensive vision of the historical process through apparent exceptions and cases of

brief duration. (Ginzburg 1993:27)

In the following, acting as a bricoleur, I will try to construct an anomalous history of Hong

Kong making use of various fragments from the above selected texts. It is by no means a

comprehensive study of Hong Kong history and it aims to disclose the tensions between

different historical narratives through the thrust between "close-ups" and "long shots".

Piecing bits and pieces from macro and microhistories, I would like to examine the dissenting

ways of representing modernity. Since the history of Hong Kong cannot be a monolithic

linear process of progress but an amalgam of continuities and discontinuities, and of tensions

and complicities, the historical bricolage that this paper offers will enable us to interrogate

and historicize the contingent conditions that have made "Hong Kong" what it is. I believe

that "historical knowledge is not discovered but produced in and through language"

(Munslow 1997:26). Having said this, I do not mean to adopt a radical postmodernist

position to deny the existence of lived experience. What is at issue is to make a distinction

between "the past as it is in itself"--*res gestae*--and "the past as it is narrated"--*historia rerum*

gestarum (Munz 1997:854), and to acknowledge our limitation that "history" is only

"available" to us in narrative--somewhat like "hi/stories".

Re-articulating the "biography" of Hong Kong

In early 1980s when the Sino-British negotiations on Hong Kong's future began, the

anecdote of the natural mother (China) and the foster mother (Britain) gained widespread

popularity in Hong Kong. However this anecdote created dissenting responses. In this

section, we juxtapose two opposing ways of appropriating this anecdote as attempts to

historicize Hong Kong's roots.[8]

In her discussion of Immanuel Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" (1784) and Foucault's critique (1984) in an article of the same title, critic Leela Gandh (1998) notices the complicit relationship between rationality as maturity for all humanity and the colonialist imagination of the colonized other. In Foucault's view, Kant's conception of rationality annihilates "radical heterogeneity of human nature" and celebrates "the normative condition of adult rationality" (1998:31-2). This conception of humanity has a complicit relationship with the colonial discourse that "rationalizes itself through rigid oppositions such as maturity/immaturity, civilization/barbarism, developed/developing, progressive/primitive" (1998:32).

The three macro-histories of Hong Kong reveal this kind of colonialist logic through the trope of "biography". It is interesting to note that the three historians intend to "naturalize" Hong Kong history by invoking familial and natal images such as " parents," "offspring," and "birth". These are perfect examples illustrating Roland Barthes' idea of how a myth is constructed by transforming history into nature, through the process of naturalization (Barthes 1972/1982: 118). In *An Illustrated History of Hong Kong (1991)*, Nigel Cameron opens his historical narrative in a highly biographical style. He traces Hong Kong's dual parental origin:

> A war with China gave it birth, its other parent being the Western passion for trade. Further wars between the British and the Chinese, basically over that unruly headlong passion, were to shape Hong Kong's society, while the flux of trade itself conditioned its thinking as well as the physical form of Victoria, its main settlement. (1991:1)

Natal tropes such as "birth" and parental "passion" naturalize and implicitly endorse British imperial history. These tropes are important elements constituting the shape of the "miraculous" transformation of Hong Kong from "an insignificant mountainous scattering of larger and smaller coastal islands in the South China Sea" to a "commercial, industrial, and

financial giant" (Cameron 1991:1). No doubt if one resorts to quantitative analysis, one readily finds an array of "objective" figures and data illustrating this transformation. Let us cite some figures on exports. In post-war Hong Kong, local manufacturing only accounted for 15% of the exports; in the 1970s and 80s, it has exceeded 80%. These figures show that Hong Kong has been transformed from an entrepot into an industrial and then major marketing center in the world. I do not want to deny the fact that contemporary Hong Kong is more modernized, urbanized, and "advanced" than that years ago. What I want to stress is that the ideological implications of Cameron's natal tropes are disturbing since colonial conquest is euphemistically articulated as "passions" for trade.

Similarly Welsh (1997) also manipulates natal troping as a way to interpret Hong Kong history. But unlike Cameron who pampers the infant with parental passion, he decribes Victorian Britain and Qing (Ching) China as "unwilling parents" at the beginning of *A History of Hong Kong (1997):*

Hong Kong, that natural child of Victorian Britain and Chi'ng China, has been a source of embarrassment and annoyance to its progenitors since it first appeared on the international scene in 1842. Neither parent was initially prepared to recognize the infant- .... (1997:1)

It is interesting to note that Welsh's natal metaphors enable him to emphasize the remoteness and valuelessness of Hong Kong at its "infant " stage. They thus become useful means for him to confirm Hong Kong's later achievements which "outperform" Britain and China (1997:2), being on par with other Asian little dragons. This kind of rhetoric which implies the colonized culture as fundamentally "childlike" "feeds into the logic of the colonial civilizing mission" (Gandhi 1998: 32), justifying colonialism as a progressive developmental project.

To explain Hong Kong's growth, Birch (1991), on the other hand, sounds rather nativist in his interpretation when he seeks to offer the local factor as a major reason in *The Colony That Never Was* (1991)*:*

Yet there has been a remarkable fusion of Chinese and British cultural values interacting with one another to produce a miraculous offspring. (1991:22)

By the same token, the Chineseness of Hong Kong has been influenced by western values to produce a complex, subtle amalgam of behavior. It could be said that there has been in Hong Kong a true marriage of Confucian values and British colonial ethics. (Birch 1991:23)

By naming capitalism as a "miraculous offspring" and by calling the fusion of Chinese and British cultural values "a true marriage", Birch harmonizes cultural differences and tensions, naturalizing colonial and imperial history. The tendency to harmonize is even more evidently seen in his own autobiographical preface:

Back in 1984, when it seemed as if the project had come up to the boil with the completion of negotiations and the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, my own map of Hong Kong's past and future, up to 1997, was complete. All I had to do was to sort out my ideas and my pictures and the book would emerge as a memorial to the British presence in my adopted city-state. (Birch 1991: 6)

To Birch, although the relation between Hong Kong and Britain cannot be natural and blood-tie, the "miraculous" fusion can be in the form of "adoption". The ways these historians mediate Hong Kong's past through the natal and familial tropes recognizes the "the benign" imperial history of the British Empire. Perhaps now no one would deny the paradoxical relationship of colonialism and modernity but a linear view of causality forged by this discourse of progress arouses skepticism. These attempts to naturalize history have caused tensions and anomalies to disappear. They have also consolidated the rigid oppositions of the

colonial discourse and reduced Hong Kong to the position of a voiceless other. Adopting the same natal tropes that these colonialist historians use, Xi Xi (1986/1997) problematizes this relation between childhood and the state of being colonized in "The Fertile Town Chalk Circle" which can be regarded as a post-colonial rewriting of Hong Kong's "biography".

"The Fertile Town Chalk Circle" (hereafter shortened as "Chalk Circle") draws on the well-known story of the fight between two women (the biological mother and foster mother) over the custody of the child. It is discernible that such a story can be found in various cultures of the world. From the ancient story of King Solomon of the Old Testament in the Middle East to Li Dao-xing's Yuan drama of the chalk circle, one finds an unconditional celebration of the blood-tie relationships as in both stories, the natural mother wins. In the 20th century, however, when Bertolt Brecht adapted the familiar story in *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, he privileges class consciousness and humaneness over familial ties[9]. In the 1980s, Xi Xi's chalk circle developed yet another dimension of this rich narrative. It is through the construction of a five-year-old child-observer that the story is given a new thrust. "The Chalk Circle" is an adaptation of Li Dao-xing's play in which the narrator Shoulang is a silent member. As discussed above, this metaphor of mother-child relationship was always on the lips of people of Hong Kong in the 1980s. The feelings of entrapment and frustration that people felt was mainly caused by the deprivation of the political rights to decide their future. Based on this political context, Xi Xi posits an ideal reader who easily interprets the Fertile Town as Hong Kong, the chalk circle as Hong Kong's trapped condition, and Shoulang as a representation of Hong Kong. In the allegorical play, Shoulang speaks for himself the first time in the history of East and West. Unlike the other narratives of the Fertile Town Series, "Chalk Circle" does not conjure up a world of fantasy. There are no magic, enchantments, fairies, or angels but a voice of the repressed that returns after at least 600 years of silence.

Shoulang does not speak in an ordinary child's voice. He is not a typical fairy-tale child like Everlasting Bloom in "The Story of Fertile Town" (1982) who is often fascinated by miraculous transformations in the world of fantasy. His voice is a mixture of frustration and bitterness injected with an intelligent adult's point of view and knowledge:

> Let the drums and gongs ring out, let the spot lights shine on this part of the stage. I am standing here, in the court, at centre stage. I ask you all, members of the audience, to listen, I have something to say. After six hundred years, are you still not going to let me grow up? (1986:106)

The narrative voice is charged with a strong sense of futile resentment and angst. He knows the play so well and has seen so many stagings of it that he has no illusions about authority, tradition, and justice. He only wants the right to choose: "But really, it no longer really matters who is my true mother. What really matters is the right to choose. Why can't I have the right to choose, why should there always be someone giving orders?" (1986:106). Readers of Xi Xi will immediately notice that Shoulang's voice expresses a much stronger sense of attachment to and identification of Hong Kong as home than her other narratives which are often delivered in a more detached voice. One such example can be found in the depiction of a similar adult-child in "Child Prodigies" in "Marvels of a Floating City" (1984) where the narrator speaks in a light-hearted tone to invert the usual roles of parents and children. She writes, "The mothers feel that they are becoming more and more like babies, while their children become the pillars of the family, taking over from them as parents, subverting their traditional role of authority" (1984:25). In comparative light, we can sense Xi Xi's urgency for a subject speaking position for Hong Kong.

The sense of futility in "Chalk Circle" is enhanced when one realizes that the world beyond the chalk circle may be the same old world even if the repressed is given a voice. Will this voice be heard? Can this voice affect Judge Bao's decision? The answer is no. But

what is important about the whole chalk circle situation is voice and the importance of narrative. That is why at the outset of the play, Xi Xi blurs reality and illusion:

> You can see the lights, you can hear the gongs, you can watch the actors filing onto the stage. But allow me to insist on one thing: Fertile Town is not staging a play, because the whole of Fertile Town is itself a stage. It is all completely real, there's no need for acting. This is not some time in the past, this is right now. Anyway, past or present makes no difference: the transition has not yet eliminated the old, nor has the new actually arrived. It is still a dim and uncertain age. (1986:68)

It is a world of narrative or a site of enunciation where the child trapped in a fight has a say, speaks with a voice that breaks the silence. It is no doubt that the yearning for a subject speaking position allegorizes the wish of the people of Hong Kong since the 1980s.

Critic Huang Zi-ping (1996) suggests that all is trapped in the chalk circle: "the narrator is confined and imprisoned by it but what gets out of it is narrative" (1996:165). He observes that the motif of the chalk circle recurs very frequently in Xi Xi's other stories. One such example can be found in the image of the floating city which is also "trapped" between the ocean and the clouds.[10] Our entrapment in the chalk circle is undeniable and yet Xi Xi's view that "narrative" transcends its limits coincides with Cornelius Castoriadis' idea that the most intriguing social and cultural problems are resolved in our cultural imaginary since people are only capable of the imaginary. After all, "nobody believes in what I (Shoulang) have said". The futility of voicing out one's views is intensely felt when there is nobody to listen to but, as Huang puts it, the narrative of the chalk circle is our endeavor to "conquer silence", "to fight for one's right of interpretation" (169). It is an act of participation however useless it may seem.

Xi Xi's biography of Hong Kong is liberating because of its ability to challenge the colonialist, hierarchical normative condition of "adult" rationality embodied by the colonizers who are being allegorized by the two mothers and Judge Bao. Her biography demonstrates "the attitude of modernity" which Foucault (1984:39) refers to as the ability to relate to one's contemporary reality so as to critique the problems of modernity. It offers an alternative modernity which is juxtaposed against the colonialist narrative.

The Spectacle of Modernity and beyond

It is interesting to note that the Hong Kong grand narrative is a visual representation of Hong Kong's transformation. When the macro-historians emphasize the miraculous metamorphosis of Hong Kong from a remote fishing village to a world-class metropolis, they are in fact juxtaposing two contrasting visual representations of Hong Kong: a backward fishing village vs an advanced successful city. What are the tensions between these two kinds of visual representation and what kinds of history beyond the spectacle of modernity have been forgotten?

Just take any postcard of Hong Kong, one would agree that the representative image of Hong Kong relies heavily on the creation of the spectacle of the Hong Kong cityscape. This image seems to serve as the "empirical proof" of Hong Kong's miracle. Coincidentally the three historical epics contain pictures of the representative skyline of Hong Kong either viewed from the Kowloon side or overlooked from the Victoria Peak. In a chapter on Hong Kong's industrial growth, Cameron (1991) inserts three photos of the famous Hong Kong skyline, one in 1960, one in 1962 when the City Hall was completed and a panoramic view of Hong Kong in 1988. Together with other projects of modernization, for example housing, transportation, the changing skyline provides a standard and dominant representation of Hong Kong. Welsh (1997), in similar way, places two pairs of photos of the Hong Kong

island, one set viewed from the Kowloon side, the other overlooked from the peak. Birch (1991) even closes his book with a chapter on Hong Kong as an international city, with familiar pictures of Hong Kong's night scenery. He remarks:

> No other place in the world makes of itself so perfect a spectacle: extravagant, electric, mesmeric in its beauty, equal to any biblical view the Devil might have shown Christ from the mountain-top as an advertisement for the superiority of worldly goods. (1991:150)

While Birch's biblical allusion seems to suggest both the "spectacular" and the "spectral" sides of the spectacle, he erases the tension by reiterating the miraculous story of transformation and glorifying what he calls "two great historical progressions: the industrialization of Hong Kong and the liberalization of the post-war British Empire" (Birch1991:151). Indeed a spectacle is the exaggeration of the pleasure of looking; it foregrounds the surface and denies the depth of meaning. It is fundamental to the making of myths; it demonstrates how history is turned into a hi/ story, flattened into an image and frozen into a spectacle.

While the historians of the Hong Kong epics turn Hong Kong into a "visible" city of spectacle, in *Visible Cities,* Dung Kai-cheung problemaizes the visual nature of the V-City, the allegorical Hong Kong. He calls this visible, "vertical city" (Birch) the "outer city". This outer city which is sinking bears resemblance to Xi Xi's floating city in "Marvels of a Floating City" which is unreal and disappearing. In his narrative he seeks to shatter the glamorous outer shell of this visible city with visual representation of "the imploded city," the-city-within-a-city where congestion, chaos, and uncontrollable growth are experienced. Within this imploded urban space, subjectivity takes shape.   In a chapter on cataloging different kinds of Hong Kong snack, the narrator Virginia reconstructs the story of the "snack people" from Liu Hua-sheng's manuscripts. The "snack people" define themselves in

relation to the snack they eat and the snack they share with other people. In a society where alienation and commodity fetishism are the rule rather than exception, dehumanization becomes a kind of ironic survival tactic for the lonely and the isolated. He then introduces similar kinds of dehumanized humans in other chapters. The "shadow" waiters and waitresses in a "A city of restaurants," the living mannequins in "A city of shops," the fashion model in "A city of entertainers" constitute a tragic-comic ethnographic backdrop of the (in)visible city. Dehumanization is always a form of exaggeration which creates comic effect. When we hear someone saying, "My name is Egg Ball, " and then another replying, "I am Chrysanthemum Tea," we cannot but sense the absurdity in a culture of reification. Although some people cannot resist the crushing dehumanizing forces of domination and mechanical life, they still express deep yearnings for a better life. There are some such as the fashion model and the blind entertainer who continue to survive in tragic defiance.

In his classification of the lonely and the underprivileged, Dung also expounds on anomalies in Hong Kong colonial history by attending to the modern forms of illnesses (alienation, dehumanization, meaninglessness). Indeed such a negative view of modernity is not something new; what is new lies in the form of historical representation that he adopts. In face of a world of commodities with an overabundance of material goods and sensory stimulations provided by capitalist modernity, Dung compiles catalogues of humans and non-human entities (food, brand names, restaurants, sex services, fashion) characteristic of Hong Kong. This cataloging technique is somewhat like Michel de Certeau's popular tactic with which one can manipulate and adapt the "enemy's" language to speak one's own voice. Dung never hesitates to "bombard" us with an equally abundant repertoire of historical entities from the Hong Kong society. He thus defines what Hong Kong culture is by way of a retrieval of what are "made" in Hong Kong and more importantly by way of how people respond to such bomardments.

In great contrast to the historical epics which offer the spectacle of Hong Kong's modernity, *Beyond the Metropolis: Villages in Hong Kong* (1995) provides a different kind of visual representation of Hong Kong. It looks like a book of archives in the traditional sense constructing the "spectacle" of the rural and the traditional . The book opens with a series of photographs of still objects (lamp, stool, straw hat, basket, ancestral plaque). In fact, it is not a book of history in the strictest sense but a collection of photos containing an introductory essay and nine interpretive essays by different people According to one of the editors, Elizabeth Sinn (1995), the book was produced with the purpose to introduce Hong Kong's tradition to the world upon the celebration of the 35th anniversary of the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS). The contributors include architects, historians, museum curators, photographers, some of whom are council members of the RAS and other antiquities society. The essays are supposed to be secondary, helping the readers to interpret the pictures. Unlike the pictures depicting the urban skyline as spectacle witnessing the glory of progress, the pictures aim to unveil the lingering influence of Hong Kong's past. Nearly all the pictures, except a few, are illustrations of remains and ruins of the past demonstrating what the essayists call the lingering and resilient influence of the past. Sometimes it is an empty deserted house here, sometimes a traditional temple there; a fung shui sign here, a quiet elderly headman there. The pictures do, as different writers of the volume remark, express some sense of melancholy about the inevitable passing of time. Despite the urban and industrial developments, the contributors especially the photographers seek to depict the villages and villagers as folorn as the Baudelarian dandy whose heroic determination to resist change earns him the image of a setting sun. Sinn's introduction to the book in a way represents such a tragic mode of emplotment:

For many of the villagers. . . the emotional ties with the land, the home of their ancestors for ten, twenty, or thirty generations, remain unchanges. The sense of being a part of a

long tradition and the desire to perpetuate it, too, remained unchanged. . . In face of the advent of the metropolis, the villages are demonstrating the same resilience that has enabled them to survive for a millennium. (Sinn 1995:12)

If we find the visual representation of Hong Kong skyline static and superficial, the village archives and images of picturesque rural landscape are not sufficient sources for us to understand the New Territories in flux, nor do they enable us to observe the internal dialectic of the "local" in the rural region of Hong Kong. On the contrary, most of the essays, some of which we will turn to in the next section, in fact narrate dynamic stories of the villages and the villagers ever since pre-colonial times, uncovering various kinds of contradictions among villagers and between villagers and the world outside. Without them, the book would simply be like a collection of frozen visual archives of exquisite beauty without reference to the larger tapestry of life.

Having said this, we must mention a stark photograph of the Lantau Bridge over Ma Wan which is placed alongside Joseph S. P. Ting's essay titled "Pak Mong, Ta Ho, and Ngau Kwu Long: The Three Hamlets of Mui Wo" in *Beyond the Metropoplis.* It is really interesting to narrate the history of Lantau since rapid infrastructure projects of the Chek Lap Kok Ariport have been fastly eroding the face of the district. The photograph has the following caption:

Modernization and development are often traumatic for village communities. Here, the new Lantau Bridge towers over Ma Wan. It is, however, somehow not unexpected that, even though the bridge is founded in the soil of the island, and even though the deck of the bridge will pass right over the settlement, its settlement, its residents will not be able to have access to the bridge, nor to use it to bring the full benefits of modernization to what will remain a remote place, accessible only by ferry. (1995: 119)

Unlike other photos in the volume, this one together with the above caption presents rather explicitly the grotesque impact of modernization. Despite its reduction to a micro scale, the story of Lantau constructed by both word and image is a dialectical one. Not only does it place Ma Wan a remote village now and then in relation to its larger context, the drastic development of Hong Kong into a highly technologized and globalized city, it also exposes the problem of uneven development and exploitation. While the residents of Ma Wan continue to live with the remoteness of their village, the bridge towering above them stands monumentally glorifying the achievements of the metropolis. Furthermore it is not just a lamentation of the passing of time and a demonstration of resistance to change but a critique of the project of prosperity which is fostered at the expense of the interests of the repressed.

In his essay "Rediscovering the rural in Hong Kong's history" , Hung Ho-fung (1998) points out a similar problem but of a different repressed people. Examining how the Hakkas and Puntis were transformed into "modern economic men" , he narrates lucidly the ways the immigrant farmers and Tanka fishermen were exploited economically. His observation is that the Tankas "were sacrificed under the Hong Kong miracle" and were repressed in the developmental discourse on Hong Kong's past" (Hung 1998: 2). In his study, the Tankas had long been subject to Han discrimination as an inferior people in traditional China. This kind of cultural marginalization was followed by economic exploitation in Hong Kong under the colonial rule. He notices that ever since the post-war industrial take-off in Hong Kong, the colonial government placed heavy restrictions on fishery and agriculture since they were of little value to Hong Kong's project of "modernity". Strict regulations which were placed on the Tanka fishermen finally brought an end to the fishing industry. His exposition of the repressed history of the Tankas echoes my critique of the problematic nature of the visible city, disclosing the tensions between the visual images of Hong Kong:

It is now "common-sensical" to think that Hong Kong is a "fishing village-turned-metropolis". This narration of Hong Kong history represents fishermen and their livelihoods as traditional categories in opposition to and to be replaced by urbanism and industrialism. Ironically, the development of an urban and industrial Hong Kong is made possible by exploiting these Tanka fishermen. In other words, the Tanka fishing community is never a residual category in the social formation of a metropolitan Hong Kong, but an essential part of it. Their communities have been dissolving and the Tankas have been paying the price for the rise of a modern Hong Kong. However, they are not remembered in any writing of Hong Kong's developmental history. (1998:11)

Modernizing the rural

It has been repeatedly asserted in this paper that Hong Kong's cosmopolitanism is remembered and fostered in the three historical epics and Hong Kong popular memory with the amnesia of the repressed people in the pre-colonial and rural history. To raise this point, I do not intend to establish another monolithic discourse of "native" history to displace the colonial discourse; instead it is important to re-think colonialism as moments of contradiction, of domination and resistance, and of complicities . In the following, I would like to construct a rural ethnography amid a complex web of power relations so as to demonstrate how economic rights and territorial fights preoccupied the rural people when they underwent modernization and urbanization.

Let us start with an essay in *Beyond the Metropolis* (1995) on the story of Sha Lo Tung. In his account of the Golf Course project in Sha Lo Tung, Richard Gee narrates the complex processes of domination and negotiation in rural history. In 1979 when a developer decided to turn Sha Lo Tung into a luxurious golf course and to re-build the village houses, villagers

were urged to sell their land.   But then plans were suspended for a decade and when they were resumed in 1990, environmentalists opposed furiously claiming that the government was "giving public recreational land to private commercial interests" (Gee 1995:143). Then the developers conceded by reducing the course from a 18-hole to 9-hole and at the same time proposed a wildlife conservation area.   As Gee observes, the debates over the re-development of the area have been changing in nature:

> The grounds for opposition by environmentalists have shifted. Initially they were based on the government's perceived neglect of its duty, and the impact that the project would have on the surrounding area--mainly visual but also ecological, such as the risk of polluting Hok Tau Reservoir. But as both sides have done more studies, Sha Lo Tung has emerged as a unique and environmental niche. (1995:143)

The situation then got very entangled when the government did not respond to the suggestions given by the environmentalists to build either a scientific site or to designate it as a protected wetland. What was worse was the fact that the villagers would even be more indignant if the village were turned into conservation site because they would not have their houses built as promised by the 1979 proposal. They then petitioned to the developers and the government about their rights. This event illustrates what Camaroff calls an internal dialectic and a dialectic of articulation. This local story of Sha Lo Tung exposes the clashes of interests of different parties and how they negotiate with each other. Apart from the confrontations of commercial and environmental concerns which foreground the event, what is central is the interests of the villagers which ran into conflict with the other parties. In fact the two clans Leis and the Cheungs protested in solidarity to fight for their rights.

To further discuss village solidarity and strife, we should turn to P.H. Hase's essay titled "Traditional Village Politics: Lau Shui Heung" in the same volume which aims to unveil the

myth that "the traditional rural life was simple and unsophisticated, and that the villages of the New Territories used to live a peaceful and bucolic existence , far removed from the political stresses and problems of the city." (Hase 1995:103). Among the three colonial histories discussed above, Welsh's is the only one which contains a brief account of the New Territories in pre-colonial times. In his narrative, we only get a glimpse of the strife of between the Puntis and the Hoklos and Hakkas whom the former consider "uncultivated aborigines." (Welsh 1997:329) By narrating the history of the powerful clans of the Lau Shui Heung ever since pre-colonial times, the writer shows the vigorous and violent village politics. The great clans of the New Territories often contested with other great clans, trying to dominate and control the smaller villagers around them. In response to this, the smaller villages would then try to form yeuk ("sworn mutual defence alliances") to defend themselves against the great clans. The villagers of Lau Shui Hang never really achieved full independence but the yeuk alliances as Hase observes did improve the position of the smaller villagers. Although Hase has emphasized a great deal the formation of yeuk alliances as structures of defence, his historical narrative highlights the fact that military and political significance of the clans relies greatly on economic strength:

> The more tenants and clients a great clan had, therefore the greater its position, influence, and potential military strength. The great clans traditionally demanded obedience from their tenants, even military support if need be. (1995:103)

Village struggles in many ways are territorial and economic fights. In some cases, these fights cannot be fully deciphered without reference to the villagers' relation with the colonial government and the more general economic developments.

In a discussion of the evolution of the Heung Yee Kuk (hereafter the Kuk) in *From Village to City: Studies in the Traditional Roots of Hong Kong*, Lee Ming Kwan (1984) explores how rural politics were carried out in the context of such complex webs of relations.

In a microscopic study of the Kuk since its genesis, he traces how it evolves from a village pressure group into a powerful voluntary association. The most interesting point is the relationship between this change in the structure of the kuk and its interaction with "colonial authority in general and land administration policies in particular" (1984:176). This relation is best illustrated by a split of the kuk in 1957. In the post-war years, the colonial government promulgated new election rule which favored the more urbanized districts with expanding population such as Tsuen Wan since the exact number of kuk councillors for each district would be based on the population size of each district.[11] This new policy was met with oppositions from clans in Yuen Long , Kam Tin and Fanling. Their disputes finally led to the government's dissolution of the kuk in 1957 and the declaration of it illegal. When the government issued a letter to the kuk, requiring it to register or face the charge as an illegal society, the vehement faction led by Yuen Long continued to resist while the more urban Tsuen Wan yielded to the government.

Amid the power politics between the two factions, the colonial government did not play a passive role, as Endacott presents[12]. It declared the kuk illegal immediately after the more rural faction made amendments to the constitution. In Lee's analysis, this chapter on the evolution of the kuk demonstrates village politics and its relation to the colonial administration.

> This and subsequent actions were calculated to establish the Government's control over an important but autonomous institution. . . .From the case study of the Heung Yee Kuk, one wonders whether the government was as passive and as impartial as Nelson thinks it was[13]. But if the government had used the Tsuen Wan faction to bring down the Heung Yee Kuk, the Tsuen Wan faction had used the government to get back to power. The chairman of the Heung Yee Kuk in the decades to follow. . . were all central figures in the Tsuen Wan faction. (Lee 1984:177)

This historical narrative reveals the fact that the history of Hong Kong cannot be viewed as a monolithic process of progress or a harmonious amalgamation of the East and the West. We can see dynamics of negotiation and confrontation of parties of different interests. The internal contradictions of village relations cannot be divorced from the larger tapestry of colonial history and particularly uneven post-war developments in the rural districts and among different ethnic groups.[14]

Modernizing everyday life

For the macro-historians who aim to articulate modernty as progress, the value of the history of Hong Kong's everyday life accounts for little significance. We have mentioned before that *Alltagsgeschichte* can be regarded as a history from below, some forms of *petit* narratives which are fragmented and "minor". Their significance lies in its emphasis on how social formations play the role of historical agents. By taking "close-up" shots of the mundane aspects of everyday life, a historical bricoleur of *Alltagsgeschichte* does not have to be confined by a narrow scope of time and space. The following fictional *Alltagsgeschichte* from Xi Xi demonstrates how historical agents take shape in their encounters with other agents and how these processes are inseparable from the changing social and economic milieu of colonial Hong Kong.

Xi Xi (1996) expresses a strong desire to render Hong Kong as an ordinary unheroic space for ordinary people in *Flying Carpet* (1996). Unlike Dung's book which is satirical, Xi Xi's accounts tend to be neutral, descriptive and expository. Her book is more like a repertoire of encyclopaedic entires interwoven with the experience of her fictional characters. That is also why some critics find this work fragmented and uncritical, neutralizing the tensions and conflicts in Hong Kong society. It is undeniable that if the work is read in isolation, it is relatively more neutral and descriptive than Dung's text. However, as *Flying*

Carpet is somewhat like a final movement of the Fertile Town Series, Xi Xi chooses to be constructive rather than critical. In fact earlier works such as "Marvels of a Floating City" and "The Story of the Fertile Town" have shown her critical determination to question the Hong Kong myth of capitalist success. This book is thus an attmpt, as archeologists do, to reconstruct the past life of Hong Kong. This reconstruction does not produce a purely objective *Alltagsgeschichte* but rather a hybrid of reality and utopian ideal. The fairytale elements and quality enable her to express her desire for "flight"--a state which she thinks is significant to solving problems in real life. To her flight is a change of perspective, likening to the shifting point of view in postmodern metafiction (1995:20); the act of flying can happen in reality (by means of balloons, rockets, planes), in fairytale (the flying carpet), or in dream and the unconscious. If her book is a "flying carpet" (preface), as she herself describes, it offers such a change of perspective via the form of historical representation as a means "to redeem the past" (Benjamin).

Flying Carpet which contains almost two hundred "encyclopaedic" entries--some real, some imaginative--shows Xi Xi's interest in exploring social formations as historical agents. If Dung's categories of everyday practices constitute somewhat like a bibliography of Hong Kong, Xi Xi's is a bibliography with annotations. Let us begin with the example of the teahouse as a historical agent and how this public space plays a role in the everyday life of the people of Hong Kong. In an exposition of people's activities in a teahouse where Chinese dimsums and tea are served in the morning , Xi Xi describes in great detail the seven steps of "oral movement", various kinds of dimsum, the culture of tea-drinking. Later the teahouse becomes a public sphere as the customers in the restaurant take us to topics in their everday life. Comparable to cafes in Paris and other European cities, the teahouse becomes a space where everyday life is being politicized. Public opinion is mediated and circulated through mundane cultural practices. No doubt, the teahouse has not beome the European salons

where rational-critical public discourse produced literary journals and it has later merged with the restaurant where people hold feasts. Despite all these, in modern day Hong Kong, the teahouse/restaurant on Sundays is still the most vibrant public space in the territory.

Xi Xi's method of narrating everyday practices is similar to Goodman's idea of "historical ethnography" (1997). Instead of viewing categories as pre-selected, he insists, as he cites Bruno Latour, "on following the actors wherever they make take us." (Goodman 1997:798). A short narrative on the local custom of "tea-drinking" in the most mundane space of the restaurant provides a brief sketch of the changing image of women in earlier Hong Kong. From female transvestites, naked models, to women's participation in film acting, the narrator traces the gradual liberalization of the female body, be it social or individual. Although it is not stated clearly when events like these began to emerge, we may well guess that Xi Xi alludes to Hong Kong in the 1920s and 30s when women were recruited to film acting. Before then female roles in films were cross-acted by men, for example in *Zhuang Zi Tests His Wife* (1913), a film that the characters in the film talk about. The film was produced by Li Min-wei who played Zhuang Zi's wife. According to sources on early Hong Kong cinema, it was until 1932 that the first actress named Wong Man-lei was to appear on public screen. [15]

The gradual liberalization of the female body, like other kinds of social formation, is not treated systematically in Xi Xi's narrative. However throughout the book, entries of this kind cohere to piece together a bricolage of the changing experience of Chinese women in Hong Kong. Let us now turn to a fictional account of a nanny which illustrates the impact of the release of female labor and the incorporation of it into contemporary consumer culture. To show how women and their changing experience cannot be divorced from the social and economic milieu, the narrator begins this entry on the story of the nanny with the feather dusters. First of all, we are led to survey the various functions of feather dusters in Chinese

society. Then the dusters take us to the dusty streets which have been dug up for the installation of utility. It is clear that the story is set at a time when life was only beginning to be modernized, without water supply and electricity. The filth and dust from the dug-up roads further lead us to the nanny's clogs which have also been tainted by dust. The movement is lateral, metonymic and cinematic. At last we meet the nanny who is in fact not a baby sitter for the Ip family but has to do hard manual household chores. The entry then provides us with details of her chores, ending with an interesting account about the nanny's strength of mind:

> Actually her family was not badly off and had no need to worry about food and clothing. On top of that, her husband was foreman! She went to work because of a quarrel with her husband. She did not want to have babies. But as she told Mrs Ip on the quiet, it happened that he did, so what could she do? He said, A man gets married to have children. (Translation by Lau 1997:90)

The female subjectivity of the nanny takes shape as we move along with the narrator's cinematic description of the duster, the dug-up roads, the close-up of her clogs and the tedious household chores. In earlier times, with limited job opportunities, independently minded women like the nanny had to release their labor so as to liberate themselves from social confinement. In fact, in early Hong Kong, many women were able to gain economic independence by working as household maids. A majority of them remained celibate throughout their lives. They might have been occasioned by circumstances without the nanny's feminist determination but they can be regarded as the first group of female workers to release their labor in Hong Kong long before intensive industrialization of Hong Kong demanded a huge labor force.

If we follow the traces of this character further, we will be able to see how this woman's experience is connected to the changing social and economic milieu of Hong Kong. She ends

up being very rich and donates a huge sum of money to a theme park to set up an exhibition hall named the "Pirates' Paradise". Her wealth comes from the treasures of her grandfather who was once a pirate. In the "Pirates' Paradise", one can see a picture of a female pirate, dressed in coarse ordinary clothes--she is the nanny. What has guided us to recognize her is the green hairpin that she wears throughout her life. As a fetish which manifests the nanny's femininity which contrasts with her reluctance to procreate, the green hairpin charts the traces of a woman's route in a society which has been transforming from a labor-intensive industrial city into a modern consumer society where one easily finds all sorts of simulated reality ranging from theme park to high-tech hyperreality. The "Pirates' Paradise" is only one such example of reproducing and commodifying an out-moded Hong Kong symbol--pirates--which was once a threat to the "nurturing" of the western "passions" (Cameron) for trade ultimately turns out to be a commodity in a consumer society. Although the above is only a fictional account, it is a parody of the colonialist epic by illustrating how the micro-history of everyday life can provide us with better understanding of historical anomalies which have not captured the attention of the macro-historians.

Let me round up this discussion on *Alltagsgeschichte* by saying a few words about the allegorical form and its relation to historical writing. In the discussion of historical tropes and the method of emplotment in historical narrative, Hayden White (1973, 1987) has not discussed allegory simply because it has never been a form chosen by historians. The allegorical form, especially the Benjaminian mode[16] with the discrepant relationship between signifier and signified, is beyond the limits that historians can take since history is often considered as belonging to the discourse of the real. As poetic and literary as Alan Birch, the trope he favors is only metaphor. However subjective they may be, they cannot afford to border on ambiguities and to blur fiction and reality. In contrast, fiction writers such as Dung Kai-cheung and Xi Xi have found allegory a powerful form of historical representation

because the lack of coincidence between signifier and signified allows them to create alternative ways of seeing reality so as to question notions and views that have been taken for granted. Therefore to deny objectivity is not an interesting point to make; what is more productive, as this distinction between history and literature shows, is to decipher the degree of objectivity in the texts that we analyze.

Final Reflections

From the epics of the imperial empire, to the tragic narratives of the resilient rural, and then to the allegorical tales of colonial Hong Kong, it has been stressed that the discourse of the "local" is an important concern. The writing of micro-history which includes rural history and *Alltagsgeschichte* has been considered as a means to offer an alternative to the discourse of modernity-as-progress, providing the understanding of alternative modernities. This alternative form of historiography liberates alterity and diversity in historical interpretations and the making and re-making of history. But it must be stressed that the "local" is not a homogeneous "sacred" given but contingent historical agents which take shape in constant flux. From the villages (*Beyond the Metropolis*) to the Kuk members (Lee), from the disempowered urban dwellers (Dung) and the repressed rural (Hung) to the self-empowered individuals (Xi Xi), we have seen the paradoxical relationship between modernity and colonialism and the intricate processes of negotiation and resistance in both rural and urban colonial Hong Kong. While some are maimed and silenced, others resist and defend their own rights. There is a third group, as the Tsuen Wan faction of the Heung Yee Kuk has shown us, who may enter into "complicit" relationships with the colonizer. Above all, modernity, colonialism, and globalization have brought about inescapable impact on the people of Hong Kong.

The above conclusion shows that an essentialist nativist project offers little help to the search of identity in the writing and rewriting of Hong Kong history. Inasmuch as this discussion benefits from the post-structuralist view of identity as " a matter of becoming" which is "subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power" (Hall 1990:225), it is also informed by the post-structuralist view of history. Let me quote Derrida's discussion in *Positions* (1981).

> What we must be wary of, I repeat, is the *metaphysical* concept of history. This is the concept of history as the history of meaning, as we were just saying a moment ago: the history of meaning developing itself, producing itself, fulfilling itself. And doing so linearly, as you recall: in a straight or circular line. This is why, moreover, the "closure of metaphysics" cannot have the form of a line, that is the form in which philosophy recognizes it, in which philosophy recognizes itself . . . .Althusser's entire, and necessary, critique of the "Hegelian" concept of history and of the notion of an expressive totality, etc, aiming at showing that *there is not one single history, a general history*, (my emphasis) but rather histories *different* in the their type, rhythm, mode of inscription--intervallic, differentiated histories. I have always subscribed to this, as to the concept of history that Sollers calls "monumental". (1981:56-58)

Benjamin's explication of the significance of Jetztzeit (moment of danger) in a similar way calls for a non-linear view which generates "heterogeneous, irreducible histories " (Derrida: 1981:58). My historical bricolage of Hong Kong's past has been constructed with the same intent to liberate "history" as a site of contestation both in "content" and "form" (White). I believe that future endeavors in the writing of Hong Kong history should also take this direction since in the post-1997 era, nationalism can be as monolithic and hegemonic as the

colonial discourse. In fact such a tendency has already been revealed in the histories of Hong Kong with a nationalist bent which were produced around the time of the 1997 turnover.[17]

Let me end this paper with some self-reflexive words on the issue of "Englishness". When problems of identity began to preoccupy the people of Hong Kong, I was struck by the fact that the English historical discourse carries such a myth of Hong Kong which echoes with other discourses. Then I decided to look for "historical" writings in English which respond to it since their "Englishness" enables the diaspora of the imaginations of Hong Kong cross-culturally; I also decided to write such a research paper in English. Except Dung's *Visible Cities* which has yet to be translated, all the other selections are either in English or in English translation. I consider this endeavor a tactic of resistance by a "local" who happens to know English through colonial education. It is a tactic of resistance because I attempted to use the "colonizer's" language to speak "my" own voice, without losing sight of the impact of the colonial legacy of Hong Kong.

Endnotes

1.   For examples of historical and fictional texts, refer to the latter part of this paper when the writing of rural history and the history of everyday life is discussed. For examples of critical text, see *The Future Unimagined* coauthored Wong Wang-chi, Liu Siu-leung and Stephen C. K. Chan (1997) in which constant reference to anthropological and local historical sources is made to provide the arguments against the dominant discourses of Hong Kong.

2.   For examples of the pro-nationalist discourse, refer to *Hong Kong* (1997), edited by Guo Chaoren (Beijing : Xinhua News Agency) and *The History and Development of Hong Kong* (1997), edited by Liu Zhongde (Beijing: Wen hua yi shu Publishing house). As Hung Ho-fung (1998) observes, this kind of history "attributes Hong Kong's 'success' to the indulgence and intelligence of the Chinese immigrants, as well as 'China factor' such as the provision of cheap raw materials" (Hung 1998:2).

3.   Before the turnover, the western press or some Taiwanese critics prefer to articulate the 1997 turnover as "the end of Hong Kong" or "the death of Hong Kong". As of writing, more than two years have elapsed since the turnover, the western press continues to express its paranoia about the end of Hong Kong. But now gloom and doom recede to the advent of a hazy picture. The editor of *The Economist* remarked in an issue in 1999:

> The sky has not fallen: The Chinese army does not strut around the financial heart of Hong Kong island; pro-democracy politicians are not in prison; there has been no flood of emigrants taking up the rights of abode so painstakingly acquired in Canada and Australia; Beijing has not caused a business slump … . China's takeover of Hong Kong in 1997 has not been the heavy-handed disaster its critic foresaw." (1999 August :11)

It is not hard to sense the anxiety about Hong Kong's impeding death between the lines.

4. For detailed discussion of the evolution of microhistory in western historiography see, Ginzburg (1993) who provides a useful geneology of the term and its historical mode.

5. See Elizabeth Sinn's entry on Hong Kong historical writing in *Encyclopaedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (1994: 668-669). James Hayes' *The Hong Kong Region 1850-1911: Institutions and Leadership in Town and Countryside* (1972) and David Faure's *The Structure of Chinese Rural Society: Lineage and Village in the Eastern New Territories, Hong Kong* (1986) are cases in point.

6. The Fertile Town Series includes "The Story of Fertile Town" (1982), "Town Curse" (1985), "The Fertile Town Chalk Circle" (1986) and *Flying Carpet* (1996); all of which are set in the allegorical town of Hong Kong, the Fertillia. Other related works are "Marvels of a Floating City" (1984), "The Case of Mary" (1986) and "Delights of the Universe: A Supplement" (1986); all of these translated versions were by Renditions of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. See also Dung's earlier work *The Atlas: The Archeology of an Imaginary City* (1997) which explores Hong Kong's colonial history through a spatial journey around Hong Kong.

7. Other notable literary works which aim to rewrite the history of Hong Kong are Xin Qishi's *The Red Chequers Pub* (1997) , Ye Si (Leung Ping Kwan)'s *City at the end of Time* (1992) and Shi Shuqing's *The Hong Kong Trilogy*.

8. For other interesting endeavors to rediscover Hong Kong roots, see Faure whose book *The Structure of Chinese Rural Society: Lineages and Village in the Eastern New Territories, Hong Kong* (1986) offers groundbreaking research on how lineages in rural Hong Kong were in fact constructed as a result of rights of settlement--a basic economic and territorial concern of the rural residents in the New Territories.

9. Refer also to "The Case of Mary" in which Xi Xi draws on a real case about the custody of a Dutch girl in Sweden. See Huang Zi-ping for a detailed analysis of this narrative.

10. See Huang for other examples of the chalk circle motif in Xi Xi's works, 164–65.

11. The ratio set by the government was one councillor per 2000 inhabitants. For details, see Lee (1984) 172-73.

12. See Endacott (1964), 208-209.

13. Lee cites Howard Nelson who remarks in an unpublished paper, "The government is being drawn to an even greater extent into local political disputes: and not so much as a mediator, although it attempts to preserve an aura of impartiality, but as the tool of whichever side has its arms twisted more sharply behind its back." (Lee 1984:177)

14. See also Hung's (1998) discussion on the struggles among the Hakkas, Punti, and the Tankas.

15. For information about early Hong Kong cinema, see *Early Images of Hong Kong and China* (1995).

16. See Walter Benjamin (1977), *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*.

17. See endnote 2 of this paper for examples.