The Role of the Writer and the Making of Hong Kong in Dung Kai-cheung's *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera*

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The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera (*Tiangong kaiwu xuxu ruzhen* 天工開物栩栩如真) is the first book of Hong Kong fiction writer Dung Kai-cheung's 董啟章 (b. 1967) *Natural History* trilogy (*Ziranshi sanbuqu* 自然史三部曲).[1] In this semi-autobiographical novel, Dung writes about his family history and his earlier adult years, from his grandparents' migration to Hong Kong during the Sino-Japanese War to his experience of growing up in Hong Kong during the 1970s and 80s. Juxtaposed with Dung's life story (referred to as the "Story of I") is the story of Xuxu 栩栩, a teenage girl searching for her identity in the fantastic World of Characters (*renwu shijie* 人物世界). The two storylines set up what Dung calls the "two-part inventions" structure of two fictional worlds—the Real World (*zhenshi shijie* 真實世界) and the World of Characters—and presents binary oppositions between history and fantasy, writer and character, human and objects.

Critics have analyzed key themes, such as the entanglement of personal identity and Hong Kong subjectivity, the relation between modern subjects and material culture, and the problematics of fictional representation and historical narrative.[2] This essay focuses on a topic that has been addressed, but not yet fully elaborated: the role of the writer and the meaning of writing Hong Kong (*Shuxie Xianggang* 書寫香港), which refers to both the act of writing about Hong Kong (its history, culture, and people) as well as the representation of Hong Kong in literary imaginations. Chau Man-lut is one of the few who have analyzed the novel's writer-character dynamic. He argues that Dung's depiction of writers and their changing relationships with the characters of their own creation challenges the authority of writers and highlights the ethical responsibilities that they have for their characters (185). Building on this point, I further advance the notion that the

writer-character dynamic is, in fact, part of a larger question about the problematic status of writing Hong Kong, a central subject that surfaces in many of Dung's stories.

The story of Hong Kong has been a difficult one to tell (Leung 4). As a former British colony that was "returned" in 1997 to become a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong has often been characterized as a liminal space positioned in between binaries—Britain and China, the West and the East, modernity and tradition, the global and the local. Its role as the hub of transition and transformation in East Asia further presents a challenge to define Hong Kong—a linguistically, ethnically, and culturally diverse society that is always in the process of becoming. As China has continued to strengthen its social and economic ties with Hong Kong over the past two decades, the story of Hong Kong has become even harder to tell, as the encroachment of dominant Chinese ideologies further threatens the development of an independent Hong Kong identity.

Published eight years after the 1997 handover, *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera* can be regarded as Dung's attempt to rewrite Hong Kong in response to Hong Kong's socio-political changes under PRC rule. Here, I suggest that Dung, through challenging the power relationships between writer and character, human and things, creator and creation, seeks to break the binary structure of the colonizer and colonized and advocate for a new mode of writing Hong Kong that is decentralized, collaborative, and forward-looking. This mode of writing sees Hong Kong not as an object of representation passively defined through looking into the past, but a subject of creation that comes into existence through the collaborative act of imagining the future.

I first discuss the problematics of writing Hong Kong and how Dung attempts to depart from current discourse by promoting a new mode of writing Hong Kong that emphasizes inclusivity, collaboration, and ethnical responsibility. In the second section, I analyze how Dung incorporates his perspective in *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera* by tracing the changing relationships between writers and characters, from the former dominating the fate of the latter to the two becoming interdependent and mutually responsible. In the third

section, I discuss how the novel emphasizes imagination as the source of creation that can generate a collective representation of "possible" realities, which turns the writing of Hong Kong from an act of representation into an act of invention. Lastly, I make the case that this mode of writing not only generates a textual "space of appearance" that encourages the collective making of possible Hong Kongs, but also seeks to assert Hong Kong's autonomy through the creation of spaces for self-definition.

Writing Hong Kong in Post-1997 Era

The difficulty of telling Hong Kong's story lies in its unique colonial history and current postcolonial or, some would argue, neocolonial condition after its "return" to China. Since the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, the anxiety over an unknown future under PRC rule generated a sense of urgency to assert Hong Kong's subjectivity through establishing its unique status in the global community. Rey Chow argues that Hong Kong's uniqueness is its "in-betweenness" as a "postcolonial anomaly" caught between Britain and China, the dominant and subdominant, the local and the global, occupying a "third space" that can resist colonial and neocolonial forces (157-58). While Chow's postcolonial reading of Hong Kong as the "third space" may fuel the formation of Hong Kong subjectivity between colonial powers, Ackbar Abbas questions the possibility of constructing a Hong Kong identity, which he sees as a "space of disappearance," often misrecognized and/or misrepresented when old cultural bearings and orientations are erased before it can be captured (11).

Hong Kong's "in-betweenness" was called into question when Deng Xiaoping's "fifty years without change" promise gradually lost its hold as the Chinese government tightened its control over Hong Kong after the handover. Though designated as a Special Administrative Region of the PRC with more autonomy than other regions under Chinese territory, the "mainlandization" of Hong Kong in various sectors continues to deepen the political, economic, and cultural relations between Hong Kong and mainland China. With China's strong entry into the global market in the new millennium, Hong Kong started to lose its competitive edge as more coastal cities in the mainland grew into major trading ports and financial centers

for international business. Policies implemented by Beijing in recent years have further depleted Hong Kong's political and legal autonomy, which were the critical advantages that made it more attractive than other Chinese cities in the eyes of foreign investors. The threat to its autonomy resulted in civil protests, such as the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the Hong Kong protests that started in 2019 and continued into 2020. These public reactions demonstrated Hong Kongers' anxiety about losing Hong Kong when the supposedly self-governing "special region" loses judiciary independence and becomes no different than any other city under PRC rule.

Writing Hong Kong after 1997, hence, carries a strong sense of urgency to assert its subjectivity by resituating Hong Kong beyond the Britain-China binary and into the world as a unique entity that plays an irreplaceable role in the world. Science fiction author and cultural icon Koon-Chung Chan, for example, proposes to see Hong Kong as a "method" (*My Generation* 47). He argues that Hong Kong, in spite of having a strong identity and a vibrant local culture, has not developed its own theoretical language of self-articulation and that, by celebrating its hybridity and cosmopolitanism, Hong Kong can serve as a method that offers different perspectives and possibilities to problematize the dominant discourses (*Postcolonial* 388). Though Chan's "Hong Kong as method" provided an interesting framework that creates a space for self-definition outside of postcolonial discourse, this stance casts Hong Kong into an abstract concept that seems to function mainly on a theoretical level.

The notion of "Sinophone," pioneered by Shu-mei Shih, provides a framework that allows Hong Kong to articulate its resistance against mainlandization with a stronger political tone. According to Shih, the Sinophone concept, "allows for the emergence of a critical position that does not succumb to nationalist and imperialist pressures and allows for a multiply-mediated and multiply-angulated critique" (*Visuality* 190). The Sinophone world, in Shih's definition, is a network of places of cultural production situated "outside the geopolitical China proper and in many parts of the world through historical processes of (im)migration and settlement spanning several centuries" ("Against Diaspora" 25). Categorizing Hong Kong literature as Sinophone, then, implies a resistance to the homogeneous

understanding of "Chineseness" and a push against the nationalistic ideologies that is gradually erasing Hong Kong's colonial history and its uniqueness as a transnational and culturally hybrid city. However, to classify Hong Kong as one of the "non-China proper" regions ironically places Hong Kong back into the colonizer-colonized duality that further strengthens the role China plays in the construction of Hong Kong's subjectivity.

Dung Kai-cheung, a prominent novelist and critic in Hong Kong, has voiced his concern for Hong Kong's fate by rethinking the meaning of writing Hong Kong as well. In *Writing in the World, Writing for the World* (2011), Dung seeks to break from the postcolonial/neocolonial discourses by reimaging Hong Kong as a member of the global community constituted not by nation-states, but by interpersonal relations and mutual responsibilities. In one essay, he stresses that writers have the ethical responsibility to "write for others" (*wei taren xiezuo* 為他人寫作), since writers are always situated in a web of social relations and, therefore, are inevitably "responsive to" and "responsible for" others (296).

Dung also cautions against the idea of the "local Hong Konger," a term used to distinguish locals and outsiders in the process of constructing a native Hong Kong identity and sees it as a problematic term, since it presumes a singular, homogenized identity that could limit our understanding of what Hong Kong is and what it could be. Similarly, the meaning of being a "Hong Kong writer" is also problematic, as it presumes an authentic local identity that often excludes writers who write about Hong Kong, but are not considered "local," whose meaning remains ambiguous. Instead, Dung proposes to expand the meaning of "Hong Kong writer" beyond the "local." Rather than dwelling on what qualifies a person to be a "Hong Kong" writer, Dung advocates that anyone can *become* a "Hong Kong writer" through the act of writing Hong Kong (59). This view welcomes all to be a part of the process of writing Hong Kong and repositions Hong Kong within the world by highlighting interpersonal connections built out of individual concern for Hong Kong, as opposed to focusing on ethnic, cultural, or national identity. In the following, I show how Dung illustrates this point in *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera*, where he invents a binary narrative structure to reconfigure the

power relation between the writer and Hong Kong from that of creator and creation to being mutually dependent and coexisting entities that can work together to create possible Hong Kongs through collective imagination.

Rethinking the Writer-Creation Relationship through Human-Thing Entanglement

The most conspicuous narrative feature of *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera* is what Dung calls the two-part invention narrative structure. Like a two-part counterpoint musical composition by Bach, in which two voices are harmonically interdependent yet independent in rhythm and contour, the novel sets up two seemingly separate, but intertwined, storylines that juxtapose history and fiction, human and objects, and writer and character. At the beginning, this setting seems to highlight the active role of the "maker/creator" and the passive role of the "thing/creation," with the former occupying the realm of the real/natural and the latter fictional/artificial. Yet as the story develops, the relationship between the two starts to change as the maker/creator becomes more dependent on the things he makes, while the thing/creation demonstrates its power to alter the course of the maker/creator's life.

This change between creator and creation is best exemplified in the complex relationship between the protagonist in the "Story of I" and his fictional creation Xuxu, a teenage girl in the fantastic World of Characters. On the surface, the protagonist occupies an authoritative position as both the writer of his own story and Xuxu's story. Yet we later learn that the "Story of I" is, in fact, framed as letters addressed to Xuxu, turning Xuxu into an imaginary listener and an essential component of the "Story of I" that compromises the protagonist's authority as a writer-creator, who has to rely on the existence of an invented character to sustain the narrative. As the plot further develops, the protagonist's dependence on Xuxu gradually fuels Xuxu's autonomy. This eventually leads Xuxu to obtain independence as she breaks the binary narrative structure by leaving the World of Characters to meet her writer-creator in the Real World.

The reversed power relations between the writer and the fictional character parallels the change of relations between human and things, as we see how a human becomes more dependent on the

material objects they have created. For example, in the first chapter of "The Story of I," titled "Radio," the radio functions as a significant object that ties the family together. The protagonist recounts how his grandfather Dung Fu meets his grandmother Long Jinyu when he is testing radio signals, which Long is able to capture and translate into a "song" (34). Long Jinyu's ability to translate the frequency into words and music makes her a perfect counterpart for Dung Fu, a reticent man who expresses himself better through electronics than with words. Afterwards, the radio becomes the medium of communication not only for Dung Fu and Long Jinyu, but also for subsequent generations as the protagonist remembers how his parents and siblings have to fall asleep with the radio on (37).

The protagonist also depends on material objects to deal with emotional distress. In the chapter "Television," the narrator recounts a traumatic incident during his childhood in which he fails to help a sister-like neighbor Xiaolin when she is being raped by her adopted brother. In this scene, the narrator is split into two selves—"This I" and "That I"—one "self" witnessing the rape on site and the other "self" walking into the television watching the attack. The protagonist turns the television into a space for self-critique, creating a split self (That I) to condemn his past action, as "That I" calls "This I" a "rape facilitator" whose "body becomes united with the rapist" when he fails to help Xiaolin and kicks "This I" in the face as a way to redeem himself and ease his guilt (171).

Ian Hodder theorizes that humans and things are relationally produced and mutually dependent since humans rely on things that have to be maintained and are "caught in the lives and temporalities of things" (14). The dependency of humans on things, therefore, may lead to a sense of entrapment when things fail to function as humans intended. In the chapter called "Walkman," for example, the protagonist tells how his Walkman[3] fails to help him maintain his relationship with his first love Ruzhen when she leaves Hong Kong to study abroad. As an attempt to "bridge the broken connection with Ruzhen," the narrator originally hopes to use the Walkman to record the sound of the places to which they have been and send the recording to Ruzhen as a farewell gift. However, he later realizes that a recording is inevitably an "echo of the self" that will "bounce back from the invisible wall"

(454), and decides to record a speech on a cassette tape, which he sends to Ruzhen, but it is returned to him shortly thereafter. Years later, the protagonist discovers that Ruzhen has recorded her response on the other side of the tape, most of which has been accidentally erased or become too damaged to be comprehensible. This leaves the protagonist trapped in the thought of what could have been between him and Ruzhen if he had heard Ruzhen's response when it had been originally sent back to him.

The entanglement of human and things is portrayed more literally in Xuxu's story with the creation of *renwu* 人物, a compound word consisting of human (*ren* 人) and objects/things (*wu* 物) but that together means "fictional character" (*renwu*). In this fictional world, written by the protagonist in "The Story of I," each *renwu* is born with a material object attached to its body that can define their social role. For example, Xuxu's math teacher has one hand made of a drafting compass and the other of a triangular ruler, which taken together determine his profession as a math teacher. As parts of the human body, the material objects cannot function without the character using them. Yet at the same time, the characters rely on the objects to perform their social roles, which are predetermined by the protagonist of the "Story of I," the writer-creator of Xuxu's story.

At the beginning of the story, the fictional characters created by the writer-creator appear more like objects than humans, and the protagonist of the "Story of I" lays down the "principles of characters" (*renwu faze* 人物法則) in a third-person omniscient voice. The principles are as follows: first, *renwu*, like human beings, have no past lives; second, *renwu* are neither human nor things, but have to be both human and things; third, *renwu* have inborn characteristics that may become limitations to them at some point in life (75-77). Yet as the story develops, we see some *renwu* breaking these rules and following their own desires. For example, a girl born with a pair of roller skates for feet defies the second and third principles as she decides to pursue her dream as a singer and guitar player instead of being a roller-skater, the profession assigned to her at birth. Her determination to follow her own interest also challenges the first rule as she frees herself from the "character identity" assigned by the writer, an act of free will and imagination, qualities that determine one's human identity. Her biology teacher, Zunni, explains:

> . . . humans have consciousness and the capacity to make decisions and judge with free will. Most importantly, humans have imagination . . . and collective imagination produces culture. . . . Since we have no essential difference with humans, why can't we create our own lives using our imaginations like humans do? Why should we follow a certain trajectory and conform to the roles pre-assigned by others? (229-30)

Zunni encourages his students to challenge their assigned "character identity" and take control over their fate. This call for individual autonomy and self-definition not only mirrors the demands of Hong Kongers in the recent protests against Beijing's tightened control, but also calls into question the role of the writer in the act of writing Hong Kong. That is, instead of seeing Hong Kong as the creation of a dominant writer, Dung shows how the writer is inevitably entangled in the process of creating Hong Kong, which is not merely an object invented by the writer, but a production that involves collective imagination.

Imagining/Creating Possible Hong Kongs

Dung has continued to explore various ways of writing Hong Kong in other works. In his 2012 *Bowu zhi* 博物志 (A Record of the Myriad Things), Dung constructed an image of Hong Kong through stories surrounding various "objects" that mark significant moments in people's lives. This idea of Hong Kong as a construct is also manifested in his prominent novella from 1997, *Atlas: Archeology of an Imaginary City* (*Dituji* 地图集), where Hong Kong is presented as a collage of historical records, local legends, and myths pieced together by future archeologists. While Hong Kong in these works appears to be more like an object made by human agents, *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera* presents a Hong Kong that is less of a *wu* (object) and more of a thing that has a life of its own.

This is illustrated through Xuxu's transformation from being a character-object to becoming a "thing" independent from its creator, as the protagonist reveals to Xuxu about her existence:

> Xuxu, you should know, I would never treat you as my creation. And I, being the "maker" of the word factory, cannot presume to be the Creator because both you and I had to follow the command of Nature. Though you existed because of me . . .

> you have your own life, your own path, your own will and body. . . . I don't know how much time has passed for you to evolve into the way you are now, from a simple but vague impression to becoming a formation as you gradually change and adapt to new modes and models. Therefore, you should understand, that the *mode of imagination in the word factory* in fact emerges out of Nature. And you, Xuxu, are the daughter of Nature. (292)

In "Bringing Things to Life," Tim Ingold argues that things, unlike inanimate objects, should be regarded as life forms. He contends that the maker is not the "life giver" in the process of making, but a participant joining force with the active and vibrant materials being worked (10). Similarly, the protagonist sees himself not as the creator of Xuxu, but as a participant in Xuxu's life, which started as an idea conceived in the protagonist's head and later grew to become a life form subjected to "the mode of imagination" that emerged out of Nature. Therefore, even though the protagonist is the maker of the "word factory" in which Xuxu is produced, Xuxu is not merely "a robot made in the factory," but "is imagination itself," the mechanism that drives the formation of the fictional world (118).

Xuxu, as an embodiment of imagination, functions both as a vehicle for generating possibilities and a manifestation of possibility itself. Berys Gaut, in "Creativity and Imagination," defines imagination as the entertainment of propositions without assertions. To entertain a proposition, Gaut explains, is a matter of having it in mind, which is "a matter of thinking of it in such a way that one is not committed to the proposition's truth, or indeed to its falsity" (152). In fact, as Xuxu discovers more about herself, her identity appears more ambiguous and her existence becomes more of a "possibility" than a reality. Unlike the *renwu* in her world, Xuxu lacks an apparent "object" attached to her body and instead looks merely human, which makes her existence in the World of Characters questionable. Her existence in the Real World is equally suspicious despite her normal appearance as a human being, for ultimately, she is an imagined character who, by the laws of nature, cannot be physically present in the author's world. The ambiguity of Xuxu's existence, hence, challenges the validity of both worlds as she defies the basic principles that make up the two worlds, turning both into "possible" worlds that can only exist contingently.

Dung uses the idea of possible existence not only to challenge the status quo, but also to encourage the creation of realities based on shared imagination. The power of imagination to generate possible realities is best demonstrated by Xuxu's encounter with Mr. Writer, a character-object born with a typewriter belly who can only communicate with others through his typewriter. Despite having the title of a "great writer" (*da zuojia* 大作家), Mr. Writer never produces any literary works because he is unable to use his own language to write, given that his typewriter can only produce English, which is not his native language. Mr. Writer's inability to express himself due to the limitations set by his creator is an obvious reference to the difficulty of self-expression for Hong Kong writers, who have been the subaltern subjected under the cultural, political, and linguistic barriers erected by the colonizers. Yet instead of reiterating the impossibility of writing Hong Kong outside of post/colonial discourses, Dung sees the act of fiction writing as a way to create possible realities of Hong Kong. As Mr. Writer explains to Xuxu, what makes him a great writer lies not in the amount of writing he produces but in his special skill to "create reality through imagination" (322). He demonstrates this ability by asking Xuxu and her friend, Not Apple, to read typed instructions and imagine bright sunlight in dark night. As they read the words, Xuxu and Not Apple start to feel the warmth of sunlight. This experiment not only demonstrates how imagination can create "real" feelings, but it also points to the importance of the collaboration between writers and readers, as both the writer (Mr. Writer) and the readers (Xuxu and Not Apple) need to exercise their imaginations to be able to turn imagination into realities.

This also echoes Dung's idea that Hong Kong literature should be regarded not as a product that is "made in Hong Kong" (*Xianggang zhizao* 香港製造), but a mode of "making Hong Kong" (*zhizao Xianggang* 製造香港). He argues that Hong Kong literature should go beyond "root-seeking" and be viewed as a process of subject formation. Rather than "hiding behind the cover of the root-seeking movement," Dung thinks writers should actively assert their subjectivity by assuming the role of the "maker" of Hong Kong (*Writing in the World* 在世界中写作 *Zai shijiezhong xiezuo*, 61). In this process, the writer engages in a circular mode of creation, of

constantly creating and being created by Hong Kong. This implies an interactive and mutually dependent relationship between the writer and Hong Kong and highlights the impact on the formation of the writer's self-identity in addition to the writer's ethical responsibility towards its subject of writing. Writing Hong Kong, in this sense, is a forward-looking process that aims to imagine possible Hong Kongs formed through the dynamic relationship between human and things, self and others.

From Space of Disappearance to Space of Appearance

When Dung talks about "making Hong Kong," he uses the word "*zhizao*" 制造, which means "to make" or "to manufacture." While "to make" means more broadly the formation of things, "to manufacture" refers to large-scale production with the use of machinery. Dung's word choice, in addition to referencing Hong Kong's rapid development of the manufacturing industry during the 1960s and 70s, also implies a call for mass production of Hong Kong through writing. Instead of treating Hong Kong as a commercial good, massively produced under the same model, Dung is calling for the collective act of writing Hong Kong, an act that rejects predesigned models or predictable outcomes and has the capacity to bring possible realities into being through collective imagination.

The collective act of writing Hong Kong creates a textual "space of appearance" that invites writers to shape and be a part of Hong Kong's future. In Hannah Arendt's political theory, "space of appearance" is a space that occurs when individuals come together to undertake some common project and that disappears the moment these activities cease. The term stems from the Greek word *polis*, which means not the city-state itself, but the "organization of people as it arises out of acting and speaking together . . . no matter where they happen to be" (198). Dung's call for the collective act of writing Hong Kong, I argue, can be regarded as a political action in the sense that it generates a textual "space of appearance" in which writers shape the future of Hong Kong through imagining possible realities outside the limitation of current conditions.

It is important to note that Dung is not advocating imaginations of a Hong Kong that is pure fantasy and has no connection with reality. On the contrary, imagination, for Dung, is always tied to reality

and is what makes one world "possible" and others not. In "World and Non-world," Dung states that imagination is the key to constructing a world and creating shared emotions (*gongtonggan* 共同感); he suggests that the task of the fiction writer is to "find the line between what is possible and what is impossible" (*Writing in the World* 232). This implies that writers, though having the freedom to create *any* world they can imagine, have the responsibility to imagine worlds that are "possible," that is, worlds that are generated out of meaningful connections to the real world but that do not presume to represent one reality.

The textual "space of appearance" poses an interesting contrast vis-a-vis Ackbar Abbas's "space of disappearance." While Abbas emphasizes the ephemerality of Hong Kong and the impossibility of capturing the real Hong Kong in a rapidly changing cultural space, Dung presents a "forward-looking" mode of writing possible Hong Kong realities, contrasting with those who look back and make "deconstructionist noises" (Wang 85). This mode, Dung explains, aims to "create a tension with the real world in which we currently live" (*Writing in the World* 474-76) and to have an effect on reality. As he further comments in *Histories of Time*, the sequel to *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera*, using the voice of a writer-character called the Dictator (*ducaizhe* 獨裁者): "I have no interest in writing the so-called true people, true story . . . what I care about is how the possibilities of literature can be generated out of reality, and in turn, have an effect on reality" (128).

Dung's call for the collective creation of possible Hong Kongs highlights the power of writing to both break (the current status quo) and create (possible futures). This echoes the recent political protests that aimed not only to resist the encroachment of Beijing's control over Hong Kong, but also sought to ensure Hong Kong's future as a free and democratic region separated from mainland China. The Umbrella protest in 2014, for example, demonstrated Hong Konger's resistance against the electoral reform that undermines self-rule, as the new system allows Beijing to screen out unfavorable candidates before the voting occurs. The proposal of the extradition law in 2019 further deprived Hong Kong of its autonomy since the bill would subject Hong Kong residents and visitors to the legal system of the PRC. Both protests have been initiated and led by young people,

including college students and high school students. They represent the new generation of Hong Kongers who wish to break out of the post/colonial discourse and reimagine a future where Hong Kong is not subjected to the rule of another nation, but a space where people can voice their opinions freely and have the right to create their own futures.

Revisiting Dung's novel today also raises the question of the role literature plays in current Hong Kong, a time when the space for freedom of speech and publication continues to shrink. The abduction of Lam Wing-kee in 2015, the owner Causeway Bay Books known for selling books that are banned in China, sent a clear message to Hong Kong writers and publishers that Hong Kong will no longer be free from censorship.[4] How, then, do we write about Hong Kong when writers' intellectual freedom is being compromised? Is it meaningless to imagine possible Hong Kongs when the future seems predictable given Beijing's strong-handed measures towards recent protest? I argue that it is precisely under this dire circumstance that writing, particularly fiction-writing, can serve its social function, for it provides an "imaginary space" that can circumvent censorship and allow writers to create possible Hong Kongs to disrupt the status quo. As the young protesters continue to fight for Hong Kong's freedom and democracy despite the dire outlook for Hong Kong after the passing of the "national security law" in May of 2020, the call for the collective making of Hong Kong through writing provides an alternative channel of resistance to counter China's nationalistic discourse. That is, through the mode of imagination, writers can create "word factories" that call for a collaborative, decentralized, and forward-looking mode of making possible realities of Hong Kong outside of the preset model imposed by the dominant other.

Notes

[1] Dung Kai-cheung is one of the most popular and respected contemporary writers in Hong Kong. In Pinyin, his name is romanized as Dong Qizhang, reflecting the Mandarin pronunciation that is standard in mainland China, but since Cantonese is the dominant language of Hong Kong, it is customary to use the Cantonese pronunciation in transcribing the names of public figures into romanization. *Tiangong*

kaiwu xuxu ruzhen is the first part of the Natural History trilogy, published in 2005. It was translated as *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera* by Wai-ping Yau and published by Hong Kong UP in 2018. All translations in this article are my own. In 2007, Dung published Part 2, titled *Shijian fanshi: yaci zhiguang* (*Histories of Time: The Luster of Mute Porcelain*). In 2010, Dung finished the first half of Part 3, named *Wuzhong yuanshi: Beibei chongsheng* (*The Origin of Species: The Rebirth of Beibei*). *The History of the Adventures of Vivi and Vera*, the English translation of *Tiangong kaiwu xuxu ruzhen*, was published in 2018. I have used the title of the published English translation to refer to the novel. However, readers should refer to the original Chinese text (published by Maitian in 2005) for the quoted lines, which are my own translation.

[2]See Hu Jinlun's "*Guangyu Dung Qizhang: Ducaizhe zuozai wenzi gongchangli qi xuanzhuan muma*" (About Dung Kai-cheung: The Dictator Rides on a Carousel in the Word Factory) on the discussion of Hong Kong subjectivity. See Luo Yijun's "*Pangda de luoxuan jianzhu--Tiangong kaiwu*" (The Giant Double Helix Architecture—Tiangong kaiwu) for the discussion of the entanglement of fiction and history represented through the two-part invention narrative structure. See Liao Weitang's "*Cong baiwuzhe de wutuobang zouxiang keneng shijie*" (From Fetishizer's Utopia to Possible Worlds) for the discussion of materialization and anti-materialization.

[3]The Sony Walkman was a portable cassette player and recording device produced between 1979 and 2010.

[4]Lam Wing-kee was released months later after performing a public "confession" on media. He moved to Taiwan in 2019 and reopened Causeway Bay Books in Taipei in April 2020.

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