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Hong Kong Literature at Its Crossroads

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It has been a most exciting adventure guest-editing the special issue on contemporary Hong Kong literature for *Writing Chinese*. At the outset I thought—as contributor Elizabeth Chung rightly pointed out—that Hong Kong literature often goes unnoticed or remains invisible. In the editing process and during my discussion with contributors, one vital question that we keep returning to is: what is HK literature and who is it for? How is it situated within the larger ‘Chinese’ literature and translated literature? What is the value of Hong Kong writing and in what ways are Hong Kong-Chinese writers uniquely placed at the frontiers of a changing Chinese literature?

Responding to these urgent questions, Prof Gregory Lee’s keynote ‘Cantonese, Polyglossia and the Postcolonial Condition’ serves as a much-needed comprehensive review on the diasporic nature of such writing, which has assimilated influences from Cantonese films, songs, indie magazines etc, as writers find their outlets for capturing complex memories of home and their questioning. It is, of course, impossible not to acknowledge the cultural and political changes centred around Hong Kong writing, as a result of the Handover and the subsequent social movements, and how these have shaped the trajectory of such a Hong Kong-focused imaginary, unique to its heteroglossia and locality and yet constantly misunderstood or marginalised.

To a large extent, based on the submissions we received, we celebrate a Hong Kong literature that is growing and diverse, that has at its core an intersectional quality about it, demonstrated in the vast range of topics and

perspectives. On a macro level, in Christopher Tong's 'The Making of a Cosmopolitan Literary Genre', we are introduced to the intersections between early modern Sinophone literature in mainland China and the foundation of Hong Kong poetry in the 1970s, using examples of pioneering Sinophone Hong Kong poets such as Ma Bo-Liang.

Further, Mei-Yi Kuo's thoughtful book review on Hong Kong's own version of *Inspector Morse* by Trevor Morris encourages us to rethink the demographics and linguistic capability of the readership for Hong Kong literature, and hints at the many possibilities of publishing for the local book market. Hong Kong scholar, editor and poet Chris Song in 'The Trope of Life in Hong Kong Poetry' alerts us to the use of popular culture in early Hong Kong poetry, theorising that Hong Kong writers are keen to embody a sense of place and local identity and realism (i.e. 'shenghuohua') in their writing, through looking at poetry by the late P K Leung, one of the first-generation, best-known Hong Kong Sinophone poets.

Meanwhile, some of the articles in this issue explore the current frontiers of Hong Kong writing, such as Elizabeth Chung's interviews with the contributing writers and artists from the *Where Else: An International HK Poetry Anthology*, creating not just an essential companion to the anthology itself but an interactive approach towards questioning authorial intentions, while giving due weight to the complex and changing cultural and multilingual landscape for Hong Kong writers. Meanwhile, Antony Huen and Felix Chow's 'Cosmopolitan Hybridity, Cultural Memory and Curation in Hong Kong Poetry' revisits the nature and direction of belonging and cultural hybridity in Hong Kong's current Anglophone poetry writing scene.

Given the growing diversity and emphasis on experimentalism and surrealism in contemporary Hong Kong writing, Roman Lashin's 'The Troubled Identity in Dorothy Tse's *Owl-ish*' is a timely and insightful contribution, analysing the importance of the academic novel sub-genre and the use of irony and surrealism to capture identity politics. On the other hand, Vanessa Wong's close reading of Sinophone fiction writer Wong Bik-wan's *Nausea* highlights the connection between trauma and language, the untranslatable gendered perspectives, raising our awareness towards the depiction of the body as metaphors of resistance.

Drawing from the uniqueness of Hong Kong's locality and polyglossia, addressing the bold range and cultural specificity of the writers and their thematic, global-looking concerns, this current cross-section of Hong Kong's contemporary literature—when the city itself finds itself in the midst of changes— is set to encourage more timely critical discourses, close readings of experimentalism or stylistics, as well as to invite more literary appreciation and translation.

Remarks:

Given the very diversity of Hong Kong literature which makes it hard to categorise, standardise or regulate writing about, or from, it, we have deliberately tried to avoid imposing a unitary editorial voice across the contributions, and where possible. We have left issues including choices about romanisation, italicisation and political terminology, up to our individual authors' preferences, asking only for consistency within each piece.