



**Heartburn on a Map Called Home:
Yau Ching and the (Im)possibility of Hong Kong Poetry as
Chinese Poetry**
叫做家的版圖上心的抽搐：
游靜與香港新詩作為中國詩之(不)可能

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—What is your nationality?

some people will ask, because to them all this sounds very strange.
And you say: Well, well, as for nationality... You look at your C.I.
over and over again, and discover that you have no nationality, just
citizenship.

—Xi Xi 西西, *My City* 我城

We are a floating island

We have no site

Nowhere to land

No domicile.

—Louise Ho, “Island”

In her 2000 bilingual collection *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, contemporary Hong Kong poet Yau Ching 游靜 (b. 1966) uses poetry to challenge fixed notions of identity, constructing a subject that engages Hong Kong’s specific history, spatial configurations, and sociocultural politics.¹ Some of these poems originate in Chinese and others in English, illuminating the phenomenon of Hong Kong poetry being situated at the convergence of multiple languages and literary traditions. Poetry writing itself is thus transformed into an act of linguistic and cultural translation, negotiating between Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, as well as British imperialism, mainland Chinese and Taiwanese nationalisms, global cosmopolitanism, and the hybridized and marginalized local spaces of Hong Kong. By exploring Yau’s poetic destabilization of Chineseness in relation to categories of nation, language, and ultimately the places that one calls home, this essay endeavors to open up new discursive possibilities for interrogation in the field of modern Chinese literary studies, probing the parameters of what constitutes “Chinese” poetry.

During World War II, Hong Kong was transformed into a popular transit point for Chinese writers who composed literature about their sojourns in Hong Kong from a primarily China-centric perspective. Postwar, several mainland modernist poets from the 1930s and 40s, many of whom had been neglected in China, influenced a new generation of Hong Kong writers as their work came to be published in Hong Kong journals edited by poets (most notably Stephen C. Soong 宋淇, 1919-96, and Ronald Mar 馬朗, b. 1936) who had relocated to Hong Kong from Shanghai. Following in their paths, Hong Kong-raised poets such as Quanan Shum 岑崑南 (b. 1934), Wucius Wong 王無邪 (b. 1936), and Wai-lim Yip 葉維廉 (b. 1937) later founded more publications which built upon their predecessors’ efforts, drawing on classical Chinese poetry, vernacular Chinese poetry from the Republican period, and Western modernist texts to forge a new type of modernist poetics in Hong Kong.² According to author and critic Leung Ping-kwan 梁秉

1 *The Impossible Home* also features numerous paintings by Siu Yi Ky 蕭綺琦, a Hong Kong-born artist now living in New York. It is beyond the scope of the current essay, however, to offer an analysis of Siu’s works.

2 Soong, also known as Lin Yiliang 林以亮, migrated to Hong Kong in 1948 and was involved with the publication

鈞, the result of these “negotiations of various cultures was also the yet-to-be-defined subjectivity of Hong Kong, which identified to a certain extent with the dominating Chinese and Anglo-American cultures while at the same time differing from them, thus highlighting its ambivalent colonial position.”³ During this period, Hong Kong and Taiwanese poetry also witnessed a period of literary cross-fertilization that ultimately led to burgeoning communication between Hong Kong and Taiwanese poets, with literary journals in both territories producing special issues to introduce local readers to modernist poets from across the Straits; additionally Taiwanese and Hong Kong magazines tended to similarly promote forgotten modernist poets from the mainland.⁴ Yet in spite of the similarities between Hong Kong and Taiwanese poetry, the 1970s also gave rise to nativist trends in modernist Hong Kong poetry, with younger writers making Hong Kong their primary subject matter.⁵ The works of several of these poets, all of whom were raised (though not necessarily born) and received the majority of their early education in Hong Kong, have been reproduced in the 1998 collection *Shiren shixuan* 十人詩選 [*Anthology of Ten Poets*]⁶, showcasing the poetry of modernist writers who emerged in the 1970s and could be regarded as forerunners to the newer generation of Hong Kong writers to which Yau Ching belongs. In fact, Yau studied under one of the poets included in the anthology, Leung Ping-kwan (b. 1948), and in terms of poetic expression, her writing reveals a closer affinity with the works of these authors

Renren wenxue 人人文學 [*Everyman's Literature*] (1952-55), while Mar, also known as Ma Boliang 馬博良, moved to Hong Kong in 1951 and headed *Wenyi xinzhao* 文藝新潮 [*Literary Current*] (1956-59), an important modernist journal. Many of the contributors to *Everyman's Literature* expressed nostalgia for the mainland in their writings, while Soong translated and introduced Western poets, in addition to promoting lesser-known Republican-period poets like Wu Xinghua 吳興華 (1921-66) and exploring possibilities for renovating classical Chinese poetic forms. *Literary Current*, meanwhile, bestowed greater attention upon contemporary Western literature. Yip, Shum, and Wang established three journals: *Shi duo* 詩朵 [*Poetry Petals*] (1955), *Xin sichao* 新思潮 [*New Currents*] (1959-60), and *Hao wangjiao* 好望角 [*Modern Edition*] (1963-64), which featured content similar to Soong and Mar's, though they were considered more radical. For further information, see Leung Ping-kwan, “Modern Hong Kong Poetry: Negotiation of Cultures and the Search for Identity,” *Modern Chinese Literature* 9.2 (1996): 221-45.

3 Ibid., 221.

4 Ye Si 也斯 [Leung Ping-kwan 梁秉鈞], *Xianggang wenhua kongjian yu wenxue* 香港文化空間與文學 [*Hong Kong Culture, Space, and Literature*] (Hong Kong: Youth Literary Bookstore, 1996), 22-23.

5 Lo Kwai-cheung 羅貴祥, “Jingyan yu gainian de duizhi: qishi niandai xianggang shi de shenghuohua yu bentuxing wenti” 經驗與概念的對峙: 七十年代香港詩的生活化與本土性問題 [“Confronting Experience and Ideas: The Problem of Verisimilitude and Nativism in 1970s Hong Kong Poetry”], ed. Chan Ping-leung 陳炳良, et al., *Xiandai hanshi lunji* 現代漢詩論集 [*Discussions on Modern Chinese Poetry*] (Hong Kong: Centre for Humanities Research, Lingnan University, 2005), 182.

6 Chin Ya Ting Amy 錢雅婷, ed., *Shiren shixuan* 十人詩選 [*Anthology of Ten Poets*] (Hong Kong: Youth Literary Bookstore, 1998).

than with those from other schools of Hong Kong and mainland Chinese poetry.⁷

Yau's poems do not express nostalgia for an imagined homeland of China; rather, the poet situates herself and her work in a complex global nexus of international cities, reflecting her own background of being educated in Hong Kong (from primary school until she received her B.A. in English and Comparative Literature from the University of Hong Kong), New York (where she earned an M.A. in Media Studies from the New School), and London (where she obtained a Ph.D. in Media Arts from the University of London), and working in New York, San Diego, Ann Arbor, and Taipei, among other places. Her diverse geographical and cultural experiences, which are not uncommon among her contemporaries, are manifested in her work, which addresses the fluidity and constraints of boundaries as she embarks on a poetic odyssey which traverses the world. Images of flight, airplanes, and (frequently overweight) baggage continually recur as she self-consciously ponders the paradoxical nature of Hong Kong. Her writing serves as a poetics of intervention as she calls into question the notion of home from the vantage point of a Hong Kong native navigating the tenuous and often unequal relationships between her city and the hegemony of "Greater China," Britain, and global urban centers while investigating the (im) possibility of home. Only one poem in the collection, "Hong Kong Illness" 香港病, specifically focuses on Hong Kong in isolation, while the majority of the poems investigate Hong Kong's connections with the rest of the world, whether it be China, Taiwan, Europe, or North America. Settings range from the interior of an apartment to a Toronto airport to a Parisian cemetery to a New York Korean restaurant, while other poems concentrate on mental, rather than physical, explorations. Martha Cheung's remarks on Leung Ping-kwan's poems are thus also applicable to Yau's: "Traveling is therefore not simply a physical activity; it also represents a poetics, a mental state, and even an attitude toward life."⁸ In addition to the overall journey motif, themes that predominate throughout her work include displacement, restlessness, powerlessness, resistance, uncertainty, departure, and reunion.

As Agnes Lam has observed, while earlier writers who had moved from China to Hong Kong yearned for the mainland, poets of Yau's generation who have immigrated to other parts of the world now yearn for Hong Kong.⁹ Lam therefore muses that if Hong Kong is merely a transitory space, then "[. . .] why should so many of its people long for it as a home wherever they may be? The theme of exile is part of the theme of Hong Kong as home. To be homesick one must first know what home is like."¹⁰ Many of Yau's works explore this idea, but she does not lament the loss of home as an abstract concept as much as she bemoans the loss of the concrete things which constitute her home. "New Year Resolution" 新年願望 declares: "when I say home/ I mean spiritual life/ founded on material being/ writing poems on/ rugs cooking congee/ with

7 I am grateful to Leung Ping-kwan for bringing this fact to my attention.

8 Martha P.Y. Cheung "Introduction," in Leung Ping-kwan, *Travelling with a Bitter Melon: Selected Poems (1973-1998)*, ed. Martha P.Y. Cheung (Hong Kong: Asia 2000 Ltd., 2002), 22.

9 Agnes Lam, "Poetry in Hong Kong: The 1990s," *World Literature Today* 73.1 (1999): 57.

10 *Ibid.*

eggs a thousand years old” 當我說家/ 我指的是/ 精神生活/ 建基在物質生活上/ 躺在地毯上寫詩/ 煲皮蛋皮蛋粥。¹¹ Similarly, in “Lost Baggage Therefore” 失去的行藏, she writes: “[...] lost a bag/ with publications of Hong Kong of the/ sixties and seventies/ airline perhaps out of guilt/ offers to compensate/ is 70 dollars enough?” [.....] 失去行李/ 內有各式香港六七十年代刊物/ 航空公司內疚/ 我們願意賠賬/ 七十塊美金夠嗎? ¹² At the poem’s end, she concludes that no monetary amount can offset the loss of Hong Kong literary culture, ruminating: “lost baggage irreplaceable/ people like you come handy/ places to call home/ melt in thin air” 行藏的失去/ 無可取替/ 像你的人很多/ 可以叫家的/ 愈來愈少。¹³ The local literature that emerged in the 1960s and 70s brought the city of Hong Kong to the forefront, and thus the loss of these pioneering literary works is equated with the loss of home, which bears no price tag. This sentiment echoes the insistence in “New Year Resolution” that home is grounded in mundane acts such as poetry writing and cooking while emphasizing its vulnerabilities. Later in “New Year Resolution,” she reflects:

**we’re exiled everywhere
 (creatures kill their fellows)
 each sees each other
 off each others’ paths
 sending away passports
 flying carpets safety nets
 Hong Kong becomes one type of
 heartburn on a map
 called home**

我們流徙各地 (物傷其類)
 各自送各自的路 護照 飛地毯 安全網
 香港成為一個在一幅
 叫做家的版圖上 其中一種
 心的抽搐¹⁴

11 Yau Ching, “New Year Resolution” 新年願望, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家 (Hong Kong: Youth Literary Bookstore, 2000), 29, 28. All of the Yau Ching poems cited in this essay are from *The Impossible Home*. As she is the author of both the Chinese and English versions, I do not consider the English renditions to be “translations” *per se* and therefore have not altered them in this paper, even though there are some instances where the English may feel awkward to native speakers of English (particularly American English). Additionally, as Yau notes in the acknowledgements section, occasionally there are slight discrepancies between the two versions.

12 Yau Ching, “Lost Baggage Therefore” 失去的行藏, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 87, 86.

13 *Ibid.*, 89, 88.

14 Yau Ching, “New Year Resolution” 新年願望, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 29, 31; 28, 30.

She concludes the poem by urging Hong Kong residents not to wait until the 1997 handover to become politically aware, noting that by then it will be too late: “not to wait until ‘97/ home will crumble/ (as in ‘fuck ol’ home’)/ and that really would be/ so called Hongkongese/ no longer (you wish)” 不須等九七/ 家也淪陷 (所謂陷家劇)/ 更不再有所謂/ 香港人 (你就想).¹⁵ Again, the poet draws attention to the ephemeral nature of home, this time in relationship to political issues as she warns that concern for Hong Kong should not solely be limited to its return to mainland China as it deserves to be defined by more than its nonconsensual transfer from one polity to another. In this instance, exile therefore has multiple references: perhaps most obviously to Hong Kong residents who have left the territory as a result of the handover, but also to Hongkongese who move abroad for other reasons, as well as various ethnic groups who, for either political or economic factors, have relocated to Hong Kong, leaving behind previous homelands, and finally, and perhaps most significantly, to the native Hongkongese whose lack of nationhood could be considered a metaphorical exile, linking them to worldwide Chinese diasporic communities. I have selected part of this passage, “heartburn on a map called home,” as a portion of the title for this essay because the jarring image of Hong Kong as a site of indigestion illuminates the unique complexities of the city which challenge its ability to serve as what is conventionally thought of as a stable home.

In his critique of the problematic of Chineseness, Allen Chun argues that cultural discourse “involves the authority of statements about shared values embodied in language, ethnicity, and custom, as well as shared myths encoded as genres of knowledge, such as history, ideology, and beliefs.”¹⁶ Traditionally, he observes, the people themselves rarely dictate cultural discourse, particularly those on the periphery, and thus Hong Kong has often been deprived the right to assert its own cultural agency, especially with regards to its complex relationship with Chineseness. Describing Hong Kong as a peculiar historical accident, Rey Chow asserts that Hong Kong’s cityness is inseparable from its violent origins of British mercantile imperialism,¹⁷ and with its 1997 “return” to the PRC, it has undergone a new sort of colonialism, thereby differentiating it from other international cities, including those that are postcolonial (according to Chow, there is no “post” in the case of Hong Kong).¹⁸ Thus, while Hong Kong is an active participant in the global sphere, it is also isolated by the peculiarity of its situation, which threatens to render it politically powerless. In Yau’s “Poem of Hong Kong Taiwan Mainland Airplanes” 港台中飛機詩, she distinguishes Hong Kong from other cosmopolitan centers by writing: “It’s in the skies of Paris New York London Lucerne Taipei/ Hong Kong/ I imagine helplessness and coincidence/ a pair of felt slippers given out for free/ endless frivolous Cantonese a bag full of Xi/ Xi’s stories

15 Ibid., 31, 30.

16 Allen Chun, “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity,” *boundary 2* 23.2 (1996): 115.

17 Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 175.

18 Ibid., 174.

[...]”是在巴黎紐約倫敦蘇黎世台北香港的/ 上空 想像無助與巧合/ 一對免費派發的絨布拖鞋/ 絮絮繁雜的廣東話 滿袋子西/ 西的小說 [.....].¹⁹ From an aerial view, these places are virtually interchangeable, with the exception of Hong Kong, which Yau characterizes by language (the chattering of Cantonese) and literature (prolific local writer Xi Xi 西西, b. 1938), echoing “Lost Baggage Therefore” and “New Year Resolution” in her use of mundane details to pinpoint what qualifies Hong Kong as home.

Several of her poems are about cities, circumventing the boundedness of the nation-state to link Hong Kong with other cosmopolitan environments, yet her city is nevertheless different from more “rooted” places that enjoy the status of being supposed centers of world civilization, such as London and Paris, and even Beijing.²⁰ Displaying themes of rootlessness reminiscent of those found in other poems, “Seasonal Bird” 候鳥 reads:

**a city where you and wild geese live temporarily
to return to the city where Vincent Chin was killed
between a snowing city and another snowing city
waiting for the snow to stop otherwise we can't depart
waiting and longing for a city without snow
waiting to return to a city which does not wait**

[.....]
**is it really homecoming or is it just
moving towards another
land of ice and strangers**

I thought wild geese belonged in the South

在一個你與雁暫居的城市
將回到陳果仁被殺的城市
在一個下雪與另一個下雪的城市中間
等候雪停否則無法開航
等候與懷想沒雪的城市
等候回到不等人的城市

[.....]
**是真的回家還只是
又航向另一個**

19 Yau Ching, “Poem of Hong Kong Taiwan Mainland Airplanes” 港台中飛機詩, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 21, 20.

20 Chow, *Ethics after Idealism*, 177.

In this poem, the “you” and the wild geese are displaced from their city, which merely acts as a temporary residence and not a permanent home, as emphasized in the lines “is it really homecoming or is it just/ moving towards another/ land of ice and strangers.” The temporary home is somewhere in Michigan, perhaps Ann Arbor, where Yau taught at the University of Michigan, but the airport itself is in metropolitan Detroit, referred to in the poem not by name but as “the city where Vincent Chin was killed.” Chin, a Chinese American industrial draftsman, was murdered in 1982 by two white autoworkers in suburban Detroit who had mistaken him for being Japanese; after his death, his mother, a native Cantonese, returned to her home province of Guangdong, which borders Hong Kong, and thus Yau is connected to Chin not by nationality but by ethnic and regional ties. The strong sense of regionalism is further conveyed through the employment of the standard trope of wild geese familiar in classical Chinese poetry, which, like Yau and Chin’s families, has its origins in the South, though now they all have been scattered elsewhere. The racially motivated violence committed against Chin, to whom the speaker is connected via race, ethnicity, and regionalism, accentuates the sense of dislocation by depicting the speaker’s place of sojourn as unwelcoming, leaving her caught in limbo between two inhospitable spaces mentioned in the poem.

While she primarily embarks on a physical journey in pieces such as “Poem of Hong Kong Taiwan Mainland Airplanes” and “Seasonal Bird,” there are also several poems which connect individuals on a metaphysical plane as they defy the idea that people and things must clearly fall into one distinct category. In “To Musicians I Love” 給我愛的音樂家, she details various types of music that she has enjoyed at different life stages, relating them to friends from various backgrounds. Among this diverse group, she refers to a Latino jazz musician in New York who is advised to play Latin music instead of jazz because it better fits his ethnicity, famed Brazilian singer Caetano Veloso, and a Middle Eastern friend named Abed who lessens the distance between “Paris Hong Kong New York Chicago Lebanon Michigan” 巴黎香港紐約芝加哥黎巴嫩密芝根²² with his music, which she describes as a “dialogue between Middle East and Latin/ singing political love songs/ with transsexuals” 中東跟拉丁的對話/ 跟跨性別的唱/ 政治的情歌²³. It is in the music of these performers, which straddles cultural, geographical, ethnic, gender, and sexual boundaries, that she finds solace, pronouncing: “Knowing you/ reminds me/ before and after/ there will be others/ more in their own culture/ strangers/ oblivious and brave/ inherit and expand/ please teach me to/ continue to sing gently/ in a gender stranger than/ yours on a journey without/ safety belts” 認識你們/ 叫我知道/ 之前或之後/ 還有其他人無數人/ 各自在

21 Yau Ching, “Seasonal Bird” 候鳥, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 13, 12.

22 Yau Ching, “To Musicians I Love” 給我愛的音樂家, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 143, 142.

23 Ibid., 143, 145, 142.

各自的文化/ 形同陌生/ 且堅定並勇敢/ 繼承亦開展/ 請教我/ 繼續溫柔的歌唱/ 在這沒安全帶的旅程上。²⁴ Home is not restricted to physical locales but also ventures into the abstract, where culture, gender, and ethnicity are by no means fixed entities but are riddled with ambiguities. In another poem about music, “After Caetano Veloso’s Concert in Paris” 在巴黎聽Caetano Veloso音樂會後, she espouses similar sentiments as she empathizes with the musician: “we’re both foreigners speaking/ a clumsy language/ [.]/ a soft voice/ links the ears from/ Guatemala to Haiti/ [.] taking hold of/ every note/ in a language of will/ singing to/ endless languages” 同是異鄉人說着/ 蹩腳的外語/ [.]/ 悠悠的話語/ 聯結危地馬拉至海地的耳朵/ [.]/ 掌握每一個音符/ 以堅定的語言/ 向不同的語言歌唱。²⁵ Veloso sought exile in London due to his radical leftist political involvement which resulted in him falling out of favor with Brazil’s military dictatorship in the 1960s, and now in the 1990s, both he and the speaker are sojourners in another land where neither are native speakers of the local language. Other parallels can also be drawn between the musician and the poet, including the fact that both of their artistic works are inspired by a myriad of influences: Yau’s by her experiences both in Hong Kong and abroad, as well as multiple poetic traditions (as is the case with most Hong Kong authors), while Veloso is known for incorporating both international and local styles into his music, which has earned him the disdain of certain Brazilian leftists who have criticized his songs for not being “national” enough. Similarly, if one characterizes Chinese poetry on the basis of nationalistic interests, then Yau’s work falls outside of this rubric, which her poems outright challenge.

Yau’s poetry, like Hong Kong itself, resides in a precarious zone of inbetweenness, especially vis-à-vis the Greater China tripartite and vis-à-vis China and Great Britain. Her writing delineates the tenuous relationship between Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan, questioning who has the right to assert what is authentically Chinese. Chun points out that in China and Taiwan, the emergence of a national identity is tied to ethnic consciousness, yet Hong Kong is devoid of nationality, and thus:

Hong Kong represents a distinctive variation on the theme of “Chineseness.” The formation of culture in the postwar era was, in several ways, the product of its liminality vis-à-vis the PRC, the ROC, and Western mainstreams. As inhabitants of a British colony ceded by China in 1860, the predominately Chinese population of Hong Kong had no independent national identity to speak of. [...] A separate Hong Kong identity began to emerge only with the widening rift between Nationalist and Communist China, which turned Hong Kong initially

24 Ibid., 147, 146.

25 Yau Ching, “After Caetano Veloso’s Concert in Paris” 在巴黎聽Caetano Veloso音樂會後, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 133, 137, 132, 136.

into a battleground for contesting “national” identities.²⁶

In this regard, Hong Kong offers the possibility for a Chineseness that is not dictated by national interests, thereby decentering the mainland as the authority on Chinese culture and allowing for multiple definitions. As Chun muses: “The fact that different cultural narratives differ in different Chinese political contexts is a testament to the possibility of different interpretations and political uses of Chineseness.”²⁷ Aside from the dominant articulations, it is worth investigating the alternative voices offered by the periphery to consider the political ramifications of how cultural narratives of Chineseness have been appropriated by different parties for various purposes.²⁸

Yau confronts this issue at great length in her long piece “Poem of Hong Kong Taiwan Mainland Airplanes” (a portion of which I have already briefly cited), scrutinizing the link between territory, travel, and privilege in the context of the Greater China tripartite:

**It is heavy
says a boy whom I think
comes from Hong Kong to whom I think
his Filipina maid heavy
is the luggage in his hand
another hand grabbing a thick
world map**

**Chung Ching is the
name of an airport dad has never told me
in '49 in fact he applied to
Taiwan and was rejected wasn't he a KMT member?
my naiveté “riding a bike to flee from communist
burglars” hero adventure stories of my
youth [...]**

**[.....]
it is at Chung Ching
airport I imagine my freedom
don't tell me travel is not a privilege
my father does not go to China
my father does not go to Taiwan**

26 Chun, “Fuck Chineseness,” 120.

27 Ibid., 116.

28 Ibid., 120.

my father does not go to America
my father refuses to get a BNO
my father's only travel document
is called a Certificate of Identity
my father considers going
to eat at the Daipaidong
across the street as
too far even if I am paying

I write never write about them
my freedom comes from despising them
despising one class one history
one Chinese people after one form
of trauma living at the end of a long corridor
in a form of resettlement estate
[.....]

on a China Airlines plane
flying to New York
I imagine I am Taiwanese Chinese Mainlander
Yugoslavian I am
Hongkongese just a coincidence
now becomes an insistence
temperature outside I heard was -32° and I am
Hongkongese I don't have to be
I imagine I am not I desire
I am not above the East China sea
the night market of Chee Lung reminds one
of the night market of Hong Kong If
we also have martial law one party rule senators who tug
at each others' ties would we then become a
country (decency strength autonomy) and not a
night scene with a junk imprint

[.....]

	I imagine
a glass of water	totally without history
I like to drink	because of its non-history and its
non-citizenship	but if I don't have
a BNO	would I be here

drinking you and writing you into
a poem I think about identity?

service people wearing cheongsams
handed over pineapple juice airline magazine reports
plum blossom sticker at the plane tail peeling off
sure to be a problem of
3M stickers
that have nothing to do with
the sticking technology of
China Airlines Plum blossom sticker
I wish you
decency strengthau-
-tonomy as well so you get to be
no longer face-loving bubble-blowing cheongsam-wearing
military-shows-running visa-never-proceeding
a China
even though you've rejected endless
Chinese
who believed in you
homeless due to penniless

by now I imagine flying in a
land without identity
with regard to plum stickers 1997 Chinese history I am
Hongkongese
BNO and my bags heavy

learning to be grateful
and autonomous like water
held in a transparent glass

It's heavy

一名我想是來自香港的
小男生跟我想是他的
菲傭說 重
是手中的行李
另一手挾着厚厚的
世界地圖集

中正是一個
機場的名字 爸爸從來沒告訴我
四九那年 他申請的 是去
台灣 不獲准 “他那時不是國民黨員嗎？”
是我問 “騎單車走共匪” 是我少年的
英雄歷險記 [……]

[……]

是在中正國際
機場 想像我的自由
不要跟我說旅遊自由不是一種特權
我爸爸不旅遊大陸
我爸爸不旅遊台灣
我爸爸拒絕拿BNO
我爸爸唯一旅遊證件叫
身份證明書 我爸爸認為
到對面街的大排檔吃飯是
太遠了 即使是我付賬

我寫 從來不寫他們
我的自由 來自唾棄他們
唾棄一個階級 一段歷史
一種創傷 後的中國人
住在一種 廉租屋邨的
一道長廊的盡頭 [……]

是在中華航空 飛往紐約的班機上
想像 我是台灣人我是中國人我是大陸人我是
南斯拉夫人我是
香港人 不過是巧合
如今 成了堅持
外面的氣溫 據說是攝氏零下三十二度 而我是
香港人 我可以不是的
我想像 我不是 我渴望
我不是 在東中國海上空
有夜市的基隆 也叫人想起
有夜市的香港 如果
也曾經有軍國統治以黨專政互相勒對方領吐的
議員 或者香港會是 一個
國家(莊敬自強)而不是一幅

夜景 有一隻帆船

[.....]

我想像 完全沒有歷史的
一杯水 我喜歡飲
因為它沒有歷史 也沒有甚麼
民族身份 但如果我沒有
BNO 我會在這裏
飲你 而且把你
寫在一首 我想是關於身份 的詩裏面去嗎
服務員穿着旗袍
送來鳳梨汁 航空雜誌報道
機尾翼的梅花貼紙脫落
已確定是 美國3M生產的
膠紙不良 與華航黏貼技術無關
梅花貼紙 我也希望你
莊敬自 強成為中南海外不再
吹牛愛面子穿旗袍抽領呔攪演習扮蝸牛簽證的
一個中國
即使你曾經拒絕無數
無家因為無身家的
相信你的中國人

事到如今 我想像航行於我想是
沒有身份的國度
對於梅花貼紙一九九七中國歷史我是香港人
BNO與我的行李 重

學習感激
與自強 如水
盛在一隻透明玻璃杯內²⁹

The title alone reveals that this is a poem about traversing various zones of Chineseness, the piece beginning and ending with the familiar motif of heavy luggage, alluding to the baggage of identity politics. The mobility of the younger generation, in this case the speaker and the boy from the poem's opening, is contrasted with the restricted movement of the speaker's father, who comes to represent "endless Chinese." Likewise, the trajectory of the flight attendants and the Filipina maid (to whom the Hong Kong boy speaks in English) is also limited, as their itineraries are not

29 Yau Ching, "Poem of Hong Kong Taiwan Mainland Airplanes" 港台中飛機詩, 16-25.

self-determined. As a mainland Chinese-born Hong Kong resident, the father does not have a passport but merely a Certificate of Identity (C.I.), a document which effectively renders him stateless, thereby confining his movements because he holds the lowest-ranking travel document. His immobility is contrasted with the worldly experiences of his Hong Kong-born daughter, who has the luxury of carrying a British National Overseas Passport (BNO), thus granting her the privilege to journey the globe. Having the correct type of travel document is so crucial that at the poem's end, when the speaker asserts herself as "Hongkongese," she immediately follows with "BNO," stressing the intricate connection between the two in articulating her own identity. While she yearns to escape the confines of history and citizenship, she cannot help but acknowledge that possessing a BNO is in fact what grants her the authority to compose a poem on the politics of representation in the first place, while her father, meanwhile, remains not only immobile but also silent about his failed attempt to emigrate from China to Taiwan in 1949. Therefore, while symbolizing the speaker's freedom to travel and to write about identity politics, the Taiwanese airport also symbolizes her father's inability to do so, as detailed in the second and third stanzas; while the daughter boards a plane from Taipei to New York, her father rarely even ventures across the street to eat. As she acknowledges in the fourth stanza, her own position of power comes at the expense of differentiating herself from and even despising this other group of Chinese people to which her father belongs, revealing that even within Hong Kong, Chineseness assumes varying meanings.

In the fifth stanza, however, instead of distinguishing herself from other Chinese, she blurs national and geopolitical entities by pronouncing: "I am Taiwanese Chinese Mainlander." From the Chinese text, one sees that Yau clearly employs three distinct markers of identity—*Taiwan ren* 台灣人 (Taiwanese), *Zhongguo ren* 中國人 (Chinese), and *Dalu ren* 大陸人 (Mainlander)—thereby articulating Chinese to be a category separate from Taiwanese or Mainlander while briefly imagining herself as all three, declaring that identity alternates between being arbitrary and essential in the lines "Yugoslavian I am/ Hongkongese just a coincidence/ now becomes an insistence." Throughout the remainder of the poem she vacillates between envisioning herself as transcending these groupings and expressing the necessity to distinguish herself as Hongkongese. Labels are further muddled as she, an ethnically Chinese Hong Kong native, occupies a China Airlines flight from Taiwan to New York, her means of transportation rather ironic given that the company is the flagship carrier of Taiwan yet is named *China Airlines* (*Zhonghua hangkong gongsi* 中華航空公司), provoking the question of who and what have the proper claim to the name China. The flight attendants are clothed in cheongsams, stereotypical emblems of their Chineseness, while the plum blossom sticker that decorates the tail of the plane symbolizes the airline and by extension Taiwan itself (in 1995, the plum flower logo replaced that of Taiwan's national flag). Therefore, when the speaker elucidates her wish for the plum sticker to obtain "decency strength autonomy," she in fact alludes to Taiwan, the aircraft thus transformed into a contested site of power exemplified in the lines "China Airlines Plum blossom sticker/ I wish you/ decency strength au-/-tonomy as well so you get to be/ no longer face-loving bubble-blowing cheongsam-wearing/ military-shows-running visa-never-proceeding/ a China/

even though you've rejected endless/ Chinese/ who believed in you/ homeless due to penniless.” Interestingly, the term which she renders into English as “a China” is written as *Zhongnanhai* 中南海 in Chinese, referring to the Communist Party headquarters which have become synonymous with the central government, hence indicating that the China from which she wants Taiwan (and perhaps Hong Kong and the mainland itself, given the pun on the name of the airlines and the “Chinese” uniforms of the flight attendants) to break away is not an imagined cultural China but rather a China dictated by the national interests of the Communist government. The poem ironically concludes with the speaker stating that she is simultaneously “learning to be grateful/ and autonomous,” two somewhat disparate ideas—on the one hand, Hong Kong residents are expected to be indebted to the mainland for rescuing them from colonialism (while prior to 1997, they were expected to be appreciative toward Britain for saving them from communism), yet in reality many of the people desire autonomy from both polities. The precariousness of the territory’s situation leaves it vulnerable, prompting Rey Chow to caution that Hong Kong and Hong Kong literature must avoid becoming “discursively swallowed,”³⁰ and indeed throughout her poetry, Yau investigates what is unique to Hong Kong and Hong Kong people, delving beyond clichéd postcard images as she hopes for her city to “[...] become a/ country (decency strength autonomy) and not a/ night scene with a junk imprint.”

In another poem about suitcases and travel, “Lost Baggage Therefore” (which I have already briefly discussed), Yau continues to strategically interrogate Hong Kong’s position among the contested terrains of Chineseness:

[.....]
**New York Times reports
China has a Tang
suing the Japanese Canon
software containing material that
calls China Hong Kong Taiwan as
“three regions”
therefore causing his
spirit being attacked
dignity damaged
Tang demands Canon to apologize
to all Chinese people hey
regarding all
Chinese peoples could you also
apologize to me
your suing Taiwan Hong Kong China into**

30 Rey Chow, “Foreword: An Ethics of Consumption,” in Leung Ping-kwan, *Travelling with a Bitter Melon: Selected Poems (1973-1998)*, 15.

one country also
damages my spirit emotions brain cells central
nervous system you think
central is all? Using
your racial inferiority xenophobia in
drag to represent me
instead

[.....]

紐約時報報道
中國有個鄧某
控告日本錦囊公司
軟件中誤寫中港台為“三地”
導致他
精神受打擊
尊嚴受損
鄧某要求錦囊向全中國人民道歉
喂關於中國人呢
你可否也向我道歉
把中港台告成一國也
損害了我的道德使命
精神感情大腦枝節脊椎骨精神
你以為中樞就是一切嗎
用你的種族自卑感喬裝的異國情仇
把我代表過去³¹

Addressing the tense relationship between Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China, she affirms resistance against mainland Chinese chauvinism for claiming to know how the people of Taiwan and Hong Kong feel, refusing to let the political interests of the PRC government dictate what it means to be Chinese to “all Chinese peoples.” As Ien Ang contends, “‘China’ can no longer be limited to the more or less fixed area of its official spatial and cultural boundaries nor can it be held up as providing the authentic, authoritative, and uncontested standard for all things Chinese.”³²

In the poem “You and Me” 你們與我, Yau similarly voices protest against mainland Chinese hegemony:

31 Yau Ching, “Lost Baggage Therefore” 失去的行囊, 86-89.

32 Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm,” *boundary 2* 25.3 (1998): 282.

The enormous expanse of a seafood *Pa Jun*
situated between one Hongkongese and
three mainlanders
in this New York Korean restaurant
at the table one asks: “People in Hong Kong are
really that scared? There’s got to be some
who are patriotic as well.”

intricacy of Bi Bim Bop
I retaste your
“in” in your “people in Hong Kong”
Using all my power of
sucking milk to stir
this big black bowl made of
raw steel reminds me of Chinese wok
unavailable here
scratchy noises you see
tired army boots dragging on the
ground rice grains shining soaked in
egg yolk, mandarin, no, I mean —
Putonghua, your “common language” —
also says, egg yolk?
“If you’re all like this, what shall we who live
in the interior all this while do?”
I want each rice grain to
become yellow squid crushed in
the middle of flour
middle is middle my country is not your
country don’t make me into your “common”
even the scallop has a right to
choose whether to continue
business in its shell or merge with
the rest of the *Pan Jun*
If you’re serious about asking me
what do we do, I’ll say
don’t tell me what to do
even when you’re paying the bill

氣拔山河的海鮮薄餅
擺在一個香港來的人三個大陸來的人中間

席上問：香港的人真這麼怕嗎？
 在這家紐約韓國餐館內
 總有一些愛國的吧你們
 Bi Bim Bop 的斑駁細緻
 我一面回味你說的
 香港的人中的“的”
 一面耗盡飲奶的力攪起
 這生鐵製的大黑碗
 叫人想起中國的錢這裏買不到
 沙沙刮着的聲音
 疲乏的軍靴在地上拖行
 飯粒滲着蛋黃發光
 國語不我的意思是
 普通的——話中也有蛋黃嗎？
 你們這樣那我們一直在裏面生活的
 怎麼辦
 我要每一粒白飯變成黃色魷魚夾在麵粉正中間
 中是中我的國不是你的
 國不要把我變成你的普通
 帶子也有選擇繼續帶它的子抑或同化成為
 薄餅的權利
 若果你是認真問我
 怎麼辦呢我將回答你
 請不要告訴我
 我應該怎麼辦
 即使是你們付賬³³

Although the poem is set in the neutral space of a New York Korean restaurant, the lone Hong Kong representative is still marginalized as she is outnumbered three-to-one, her isolation emphasized in the Chinese title, which posits the single “I” against the plural pronoun for “you” (*nimen* 你們). The Chinese word used to denote patriotism, *aiguo* 愛國, literally means to love one’s country, which is ironic given Hong Kong’s unique case of being nationless; in this context it implies loyalty toward the nation to which the former colony has been returned, not to the actual territory itself. The speaker notes that even the scallop in the seafood pancake “has a right to/ choose whether to continue/ business in its shell or merge with/ the rest of the *Pan Jun*,” thereby rendering the scallop more autonomous than the people of Hong Kong. Rey Chow laments, “[t]he people in Hong Kong can sacrifice everything they have to the cause of loving ‘China’ and still, at the necessary moment, be accused of not being patriotic—of not being ‘Chinese’—

33 Yau Ching, “You and Me” 你們與我, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 32-37.

enough.”³⁴ From the PRC viewpoint then, patriotism, i.e., loving China (and not necessarily Hong Kong), is an integral component of Chineseness, and to take matters a step further, from the vantage point of the mainland Chinese nation-state, patriotism and Chineseness are also entwined with the Chinese language, specifically Mandarin, known in China as *putonghua* 普通話, or “common language.” The speaker in Yau’s poem challenges China-centric notions of patriotism, Chineseness, and language by employing the plural “your” to distinguish herself from the three mainlanders to inform them that Mandarin is their language, not hers, contrasting the way in which Mandarin is referred to in Taiwan (*guoyu* 國語, literally meaning “national language”) versus the PRC (*putonghua*), thereby using language to insist upon an alternative Chinese identity distinct from both regions. As in “Lost Baggage Therefore,” the speaker resists being lumped into one monolithic politicized “Chinese” identity, both poems playing on the character for “middle” (*zhong* 中), a pun on the word for China (*Zhongguo* 中國, or “middle country”).

Chow reflects, “[k]nown in the People’s Republic by its egalitarian-sounding appellation Putonghua (common speech), the hegemony of Mandarin has been made possible through its identification more or less with the written script, an identification that lends it a kind of permanence and authority not enjoyed by other Chinese speeches,”³⁵ thereby prompting the degradation of other regional languages as the enforcement of Mandarin is “a sign of the systematic *codification and management of ethnicity* that is typical of modernity, in this case through language implementation.”³⁶ Linguistically speaking, if Mandarin is valued as embodying greater legitimacy than other regional languages, Hong Kong poetry is therefore subject to being trivialized in the larger realm of Chinese-language poetry, with the polyphonic capabilities of the Chinese language running the risk of being unexplored and even neglected, and hence Hong Kong poets who draw on Cantonese grammar, expressions, sounds, and syntax may find themselves composing verse in a marginal language, especially if their poems are to be recited aloud in Cantonese.

Additionally, Hong Kong literature must not only negotiate between various Chinese languages but also English.³⁷ Claiming his own poetry as linguistically homeless, Leung Ping-kwan observes that British professors of English consider Hong Kong to be the place with the poorest English, while mainland and Taiwanese authors have deemed Hong Kong writers as linguistically handicapped since Mandarin is not their native language.³⁸ This sense of being trapped between two linguistic spaces is articulated by Yau Ching in the acknowledgements for *The Impossible Home*, where she explains:

34 Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

35 Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” *boundary 2* 25.3 (1998): 10.

36 *Ibid.*, 11, emphasis in original.

37 It is worth keeping in mind that Chinese was not legally recognized as an official language in colonial Hong Kong until 1972.

38 Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading*, 178.

Some of these poems originate in Chinese; some in English. My experience of moving from Hong Kong to New York ten years ago reminded me how insecure I have always been with my English, growing up in British colonial Hong Kong. My recent experience of moving back to Hong Kong the Special Administrative Region of China has suddenly made me very insecure about my Chinese. It is with these feelings of somehow being trapped between two languages that I want this book to be published bilingually.³⁹

Growing up in a British colony and returning as an adult to a “special region of China,” coupled with her physical movement across geopolitical boundaries, Yau finds herself navigating an uncomfortable and ambiguous linguistic space. As she writes in her poem “Word-learning” 學字: “[...] this is what is real/ *difficult*// Learning to speak again/ in a new place” [...]. 這才是/ 難// 在異地重學話語⁴⁰. It is almost impossible to ascertain which poems have originated in what language, but it is noteworthy that as Yau admits, the literal definitions of each word do not always match, though the overall meaning remains the same. While it is beyond the realm of this paper to probe the significance of English-language poetry in Hong Kong, the fact that Yau’s poetry volume is intentionally bilingual and refuses to consider only one language as its rightful “home” complicates how her work fits into the larger spectrum of Chinese poetry, her poems an intersection between heterogeneous cultural and linguistic elements and histories that reveal the plurality of language in the self-writing of Hong Kong.⁴¹

Continuing to examine the diverse strains that influence and inhabit her writing, I will now turn my attention to a couple of Yau’s works which directly confront the issue of British colonialism. In “British Airways” 英國航空, the familiar motif of heavy luggage reappears.

39 Yau Ching, “Acknowledgements,” *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 191. Interestingly, no Chinese version of the acknowledgements is given.

40 Yau Ching, “Word-learning” 學字, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 9 (emphasis in original), 8.

41 Important recent collections of Hong Kong English-language poetry (by ethnically Chinese writers) include Louise Ho, *Local Habitation* (Hong Kong: Twilight Books, 1994); *New Ends Old Beginnings* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 1997); Agnes Lam, *Woman to Woman and Other Poems* (Hong Kong: Asia 2000, 1997). Additionally, many renowned Hong Kong poets write poetry in both Chinese and English, with Leung Ping-kwan and Laurence Wong Kwok-pun two notable examples, and there are numerous others who translate their work between languages; see Leung Ping-kwan, “Writing between Chinese and English,” *World Englishes* 19.3 (2000): 399-404 for his own chronicle of negotiating between the two. For further information on Hong Kong poetry in English, see Agnes Lam, “Defining Hong Kong Poetry in English: An Answer from Linguistics,” *World Englishes* 19.3 (2000): 387-97; Mike Ingham, “Writing on the Margin: Hong Kong English Poetry, Fiction and Creative Non-Fiction,” in *City Voices: Hong Kong Writing in English, 1945 to the Present*, ed. Xu Xi and Mike Ingham (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003) 1-15. In her acknowledgements, Yau mentions the aid of Agnes Lam, one of Hong Kong’s foremost English-language poets, in polishing the English versions.

Yau employs the example of paying a steep overweight luggage fee to expose how Britain has prospered at Hong Kong's expense, declaring: "[...] British Airways/ you help me understand how/ Hong Kong came about if you/ didn't punish me how could you afford all the/ extra fuel and labor you incur because of my/ twelve point five kilograms if you didn't/ rip us off how could you afford your/ welfare country Tory government or anything you have had" [.....] 英/ 國航空怎樣叫我明白香/ 港如何出生如果我/ 們不罰妳我們為了妳的超重而加的汽/ 油及人工怎樣計呢 [.....]⁴². The poem concludes:

**[...] you
make me feel having chosen British
Airways economy class is what I should be ashamed of
a cross to bear destined to be
punished my class my
blood unable to benefit from your extra
pure butter united kingdom come royal
standard supreme privileges too deviant from
your Greenwich clock had always wanted to
punish my yellow tech Chinatown labor illegal
immigrants once and for all so as to
teach us a lesson about class to bring back our
bloody country serving as your
fatherfuckin' servant putting several drops of
Worcestershire sauce same color as rat poison
into tomato juice destroy
every piece of luggage
unattended**

[.....] 你令我感到搭英
航經濟客位是我的恥
辱我天生低劣必須背
負的罪應當受罰因為我的階級我的
血經不起你的特純牛油聯合王國皇家
標準頭等優惠偏離你的格蘭威治時間太
遠你恨不得把我這
黃種科技廉價非法
移民都狠狠罰一次罵一頓教我們什麼是
階級最好趕回去我們血淋淋的
家當你永遠的

42 Yau Ching, "British Airways" 英國航空, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 44-47.

操你爹的奴僕在番
茄汁裏面放幾滴威
斯特郡又稱噫汁跟老鼠藥一樣
顏色毀滅
如一件乏人看管的行李⁴³

A metaphor for the former British colony, the overweight luggage risks being destroyed if the fee is unpaid, a point that is emphasized by the lines that bookend the poem, opening: “Unattended luggage/ we’ll destroy” 無人看管的/ 行李我們會毀滅 and similarly concluding “[...] destroy/ every piece of luggage/ unattended” [...] 毀滅/ 如一件乏人看管的行李.⁴⁴ The speaker perceives Britain’s flagship carrier to be profiting at her expense, reminiscent of how it once exploited Hong Kong into a commodity, abandoning it when it is no longer commercially valuable. Along the same lines, in “Notary” 公證 she writes:

**here i sit
a post-colonial subject
among objects *acquired*
refined to the minute
Renaissance detail
grand white walls sealed by granite ceiling
the notary public asks to see my passport**

**here I sit
a british national bracket overseas bracket passport
looks just like a british passport
without the rights of abode, registration,
immigration, protection, subversion,
demonstration, interpretation, signification,
nation
from the wrong side of the planet
[.....]**

**i shall always wait here
for your power to approve
your stamp sealing my history
permanent, as public**

43 Yau Ching, “British Airways” 英國航空, 46-49.

44 Ibid., 45, 44.

我坐在這裏
一個後殖民樣板
在其他收藏品之間
受文藝復興細節潤飾分毫
高貴的白牆
密封於石屎天花內
公證問要看我的護照

我坐在這裏
一個英國括弧海外括弧護照
長的跟英國護照一模樣
只不過沒了居留，登記，移民
保護，顛覆，遊行，詮釋
創造
國家的權利
從行星錯誤的一方來
[.....]

永遠待此
守候您認可的權柄
您的印鑒密封我的歷史
印證永恒如公眾⁴⁵

The speaker, and by extension Hong Kong, are again objectified as commodities, pushed to the periphery for being “from the wrong side of the planet.” As in the earlier discussed “Poem of Hong Kong Taiwan Mainland Airplanes,” here the speaker’s travel document is again a BNO, which superficially appears to be identical to a British passport but in fact deprives her of the rights of more “authentic” British citizens. Hence, as a postcolonial subject in possession of a BNO, she is dependent upon the mercy of the former colonial bureaucracy which holds the power to decide where she can travel, live, and what other rights she will (or will not) be granted, perpetually waiting to be recognized as “permanent.” Hong Kong has similarly become an acquired object in itself, non-consensually transferred between powers. As Chow articulates, Hong Kong exists as a “third space” between Britain and China, its supposed situation of postcoloniality unique in the world as it “is a forced return (without the consent of the colony’s residents) to a ‘mother country,’ itself as imperialistic as the previous colonizer,”⁴⁶ depriving the territory of political autonomy.

Likewise, in “Men and Country” 男人與國, Yau investigates Hong Kong’s conflicting attitudes toward Chinese and British cultural subjectivities. The speaker wonders whether post-

45 Yau Ching, “Notary” 公證, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 39, 41, emphasis in original; 38, 40.

46 Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading*, 151, emphasis in original.

1997, “[...] this city [Hong Kong] has been turned into the/ most profitable chinese/ megastore itself?” [...] 這個城/ 成了最賺錢的超級國貨公司？⁴⁷ noting that PRC-owned Chinese stores no longer need to be used as tools for spreading government propaganda now that the mainland government has seized control of Hong Kong, the most lucrative store of them all.⁴⁸ She ends the poem by expressing nostalgia for Lane Crawford, the British luxury department store chain in Hong Kong, although she claims to have never set foot inside one, thereby demonstrating a contradictory relationship with her city’s colonial past that is conveyed in the lines “I miss so much/ the Lane Crawford/ I never dare enter” 我多麼懷念 / 永遠不敢進的 / 連卡佛,⁴⁹ revealing a longing for something which she never really had. In the context of Hong Kong, Leung refers to the “double impossibility” of identifying “with the colonizer’s culture as well as with an alienated national culture,” which thereby results in an unstable hybrid identity,⁵⁰ as is conveyed in this poem.

Hong Kong literary culture is charged with ambiguities, embodying a multitude of characteristics. Explicating what constitutes Hong Kong poetry is by no means clear-cut, with numerous available possibilities, including poetry composed by Hong Kong writers; poetry that circulates within Hong Kong; and poetry that takes Hong Kong as its primary subject matter. These broad categories can be further dissected, calling into question the poet’s ethnicity (must s/he be Chinese?), duration of residence in Hong Kong, and linguistic preferences (most significantly, Chinese versus English and Mandarin versus Cantonese).⁵¹ In a similar vein, adopting a nativist stance, Lo Kwai-cheung 羅貴祥 argues that Hong Kong poetry has its own value outside of the realm of Chinese poetry, asking whether the “essence” (*benzhi* 本質) of Hong Kong poetry is innately Chinese, a remnant of Western colonialism, or something else entirely.⁵²

Hong Kong poetry shares several commonalities with what is typically thought of as Chinese poetry (be it classical or modern or from the mainland, Taiwan, or elsewhere), but it also offers new perspectives, frequently informed by other literary traditions, indicative of the multifaceted nature of a Chinese poetry that is continually evolving in an increasingly global society. Yau Ching’s strategic articulation of a poetics and politics of self-representation can be viewed as analogous to the problematic of determining how Hong Kong poetry fits into the larger framework of Chinese poetry, with both journeys offering alternative worldviews. Neither Chineseness nor Chinese poetry have ever been monolithic entities, though there are certainly specific motivations behind various uses of these terms. Questioning the intent behind the impetus to essentialize

47 Yau Ching, “Men and Country” 男人與國, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 83, 82.

48 The idea of Hong Kong as a megastore calls to mind Xi Xi’s 1975 novel *My City* 我城, where she employs the metaphor of the “super supermarket” 超級超級市場 to refer to Hong Kong. See Xi Xi 西西, *Wo cheng* 我城 [*My City*] (Taipei: Hongfan shudian, 1999), 28-31.

49 “Men and Country” 男人與國, 82, 83.

50 Leung, “Modern Hong Kong Poetry,” 240.

51 Lam, “Defining Hong Kong Poetry in English,” 391-94.

52 Lo, “*Jingyan yu gainian de duizhi*,” 182.

certain traits as “Chinese,” in her prose poem “china” 中國, Yau considers: “what was individual fades into a variety of general patterns, becomes immortal therefore invisible and silent—that is so chinese. or is it just general but china enforces it and the chinese seek refuge in it?” 個人淡出成概括的圖紋，在消失與沉默中化成不朽—那“如此”中國呢。抑或這只是一般而中國實行，而中國人尋其庇護。為了避開中國⁵³. From a literary standpoint, reevaluating what constitutes the peripheral in linguistic, cultural, historical, and geopolitical terms to allow for the inclusion of Hong Kong poetry into the category of Chinese poetry (while also acknowledging its importance independent of this heading) on its own terms holds the potential to open up new discursive spaces for modern Chinese poetry in general by recognizing and expanding its multiple possibilities, just as Yau Ching uses her writing to assert plural identities, imbued with a desire for the poet, her homeland, and her poetry to all be self-autonomous.

In conclusion I would like to quote Yau’s short poem “City” 城, a piece in which she locates the means by which to identify Hong Kong as a possible home. While cities such as Paris or New York have served as places of residence for fixed periods of time, from the poet’s vantage point, in spite of its supposed marginality, Hong Kong is never-ending, a place which offers perpetual return.

**Every city is a beginning and an end.
New York marked my work.
Paris defined my love.
Nothing can be more cliché
only Hong Kong
is always a beginning
because it is impossible to end
perhaps this is what is
called home**

每一個城市都是開始與總結
紐約總結了我的創作
巴黎總結了我的愛情
沒有甚麼比這更濫調
只有香港
永遠是開始
因為不可能
也許這便是
所謂家⁵⁴※

53 Yau Ching, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 65 (emphasis in original); 62.

54 Yau Ching, “City” 城, *The Impossible Home* 不可能的家, 85, 84.