Research Article

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Hong Kong as Alternative Sinophone Articulation: Translation and Literary Cartography in Dung Kai-cheung's *Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imaginary City*

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Abstract: Following the 2014 Umbrella Movement, Hong Kong society has witnessed a series of fights between social (youth) activists and its Special Administrative Government (SAR). What was at stake really boils down to the issue of Hong Kong's self-positioning vis-à-vis the rising economic and political strength of Mainland China. This issue is certainly nothing new, given that most cultural discourses in the 1990s, both within and outside Hong Kong, have focused on the city's postcolonial status after the handover. This article therefore proposes to approach such an issue from the perspective of the Sinophone to bring to light how cultural production in Hong Kong can generate alternative thinking. It considers specifically a literary work by a native Hong Kong writer, namely, Dung Kai-cheung's *Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imaginary City (Atlas)*, through the lens of translation. By analysing how Dung Kai-cheung engages in three levels of translation to paint a kaleidoscopic image of Hong Kong, this article shows how the concept of Sinophone can inspire, enlighten and even question existing knowledge about Hong Kong's history and culture. Eventually, *Atlas*, shown as deprived of a nativist or nationalistic discourse, creates new epistemic possibilities for understanding Hong Kong. As part of the ongoing global Sinophone cultures, *Atlas* also exemplifies how Hong Kong can be imagined to hold an equally important position vis-à-vis Mainland China.

Keywords: Hong Kong, history, Sinophone articulation, cultural/regional identity

> *"You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours."*
> —Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Introduction

On the twentieth anniversary of the 1997 handover, Hong Kong society continues to bear witness to a series of fights between local (youth) activists and its Special Administrative Region (SAR) government. What is at stake really boils down to the issue of Hong Kong's self-positioning vis-à-vis the rising economic and political strength of Mainland China. This issue is certainly nothing new, given that most cultural discourses in the 1990s, both within and outside Hong Kong, have focused on the city's postcolonial status after the handover. The most famous discourse probably would be Rey Chow's notion of Hong

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Kong residing between two colonisers.[1] While such a view distinguishes Hong Kong's culture from that of Mainland China, it nonetheless confines us to thinking of Hong Kong in a postcolonial framework that is not necessarily adapted to its specific context. The complexity of a local Hong Kong identity lies precisely in its historical connection with the mainland. As such, if the social movement in Hong Kong today can be called an act of decolonisation, of people figuring out how to position themselves vis-à-vis the world, such an act cannot be simply understood in the well-established terms of the coloniser and the colonised. This article, therefore, proposes to use Shih Shu-mei's concept of the Sinophone to understand the current effort in cultural discourse to conjure up an alternative image of the city beyond the coloniser/colonised dichotomy. According to Shih, the Sinophone refers to "a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localising of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries" (4). The Sinophone thus acknowledges the similar cultural roots that Sinitic language-speaking communities share outside of China. It also pays close attention to the different degrees and levels of localisation in which those communities engage in different lands. In this regard, the historical particularity of a locale is respected, and the concept of Sinophone does not yield a monolithic framework of analytic thinking.

Specifically, this article will look at a literary work by a native Hong Kong writer, namely, Dung Kai-cheung's *Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imaginary City* (hereafter *Atlas*). Published in 1997, *Atlas* depicts Hong Kong as a ruined site from a remote past, awaiting excavation and rediscovery by future archaeologists. The narrator, an alleged archaeologist from the distant future, now free of any context, reconstructs the city's history, people's lived experience, and cultural customs mainly through map-reading. However, the narrator does not fully trust the messages brought about by the maps. As he transposes them into a written record of the city, the codes and signs are questioned and challenged, and even new information is added to help us gain a better understanding. Deconstructing the codes and signs on these maps, I argue, is the author's proposed method of re-conceptualising Sinophone Hong Kong. Ultimately, such an act of translation (from maps into texts) becomes the narrator's way of writing against any grand narratives about Hong Kong in official discourse. As more nuances of the city are laid bare in the text, translation is also construed as expressive of Hong Kong's Sinophone cultural vitality, stretching far beyond the China-Hong Kong dichotomy. In addition, although the narrator assumes himself an archaeologist from the future, his reading of maps delineates a strong emotional attachment to the city that only a living Hong Kong native could possess. In this way, Dung Kai-cheung seems to be proclaiming that any understanding of Hong Kong would not be comprehensive if there were no great love of its cultural soil from within.

This article proceeds to explicate how Dung Kai-cheung writes of Hong Kong's Sinophone cultural space by translating maps into the written text. The analysis is divided into three layers of translation, touching on the issues of Hong Kong's colonial modernity, historiography and post-colonial cultural identity. As this article will show, these issues are important aspects of the narrator's "writing back" to the master narrative about Hong Kong in official discourse. Finally, this analysis concludes that *Atlas* intends to problematize the current incomplete project of decolonisation rather than provide any definitive solution. Translation becomes a trope to encourage more diverse approaches to articulating Hong Kong's multifaceted Sinophone culture. In a larger frame, it is the experiment on the novel form in *Atlas* that suggests possible ways for artists from Sinitic language-speaking communities to battle political and cultural homogenising measures from institutions of power on their own creative terms.

Hong Kong as Translated—Charting the City

The English publication of *Atlas* came out two years before the famous Umbrella Movement in 2014 that took the world's attention. Whether from its original publication date or from that of its English version, *Atlas* is fated to leave an important mark on our understanding of Hong Kong during these unique times. The book is divided into four chapters: "Theory," "The City," "Streets," and "Signs." Each chapter is composed of a

1 Chow, Rey. "Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 2.2 (1992): 151-170.

series of essays in which the narrator gives his own interpretation of the maps at hand. In writing down his understanding of the maps, his words give rise to a tension between what Hong Kong was and what it could have been. This is made possible precisely because the translation is taking place between two systems of signs, i.e. intersemiotic translation. Eco once claimed:

> Intersemiotic translation cannot be anything other than *adaptation*, because it transforms, often radically, the previous text, inevitably explicating the unsaid, showing something in image form and therefore establishing a point of view precisely where the novel maintains a greater degree of undecideability. (79; italics original)

Eco's notion of intersemiotic translation is primarily concerned with turning words into images, during which process any previously unclear meaning between the textual lines is unveiled in newly created image forms. Here, although *Atlas* carries out a reversed intersemiotic translation, Eco's words point out something fundamental in the nature of such a translation. Both images and novels are composed of systems of signs that evoke different levels of cognitive and emotive responses in the minds of the audience. The meaning received is often coloured by the social and cultural context in which audiences locate themselves. Put simply, the message that a reader takes from a map or a piece of writing never equates all that a city, say, Hong Kong, stands for. The words or images take on their own autonomy once they are distributed and in circulation as a final product.

In addition, there is always something unclear and open to interpretation. This aspect, though, is not a deficiency that must be fixed. Instead, it draws attention to the aesthetic capacity of a work of art. The question, then, is how a work can communicate to its readers about a city as inclusively as possible. To seek an answer, we return to Eco's argument about the difference between the two systems of signs, namely maps and writing. Not only do maps and writing share the common trait of uncertainty, but they are also nuanced in "the different ways in which they represent the so-called real world, by *distinct degrees and areas of indeterminacy*" (Dusi 192; italics original). In a way, what is obscure in writings is announced with gleaming clarity in maps, and vice versa. Therefore, when the two systems are combined, they forge a more comprehensive picture of a city that transcends barriers among different groups of readers, whether cultural, racial or political, while informing and touching them to the heart. In view of this, the following analysis divides the translation activity in *Atlas* into three levels in accordance with the different tactics of translation employed by the narrator. Eventually, these three levels showcase three key aspects of understanding Sinophone Hong Kong.

Translation as Performing Hybrid Sinophonicity

In this section, I consider on a macro-scale how the city space of Hong Kong is translated into a textual form in which maps and individual stories work together and inform each other, drawing an image of Hong Kong's colonial modernity that is termed hybrid Sinophonicity. By hybrid Sinophonicity, I refer to the varying effects of the modernisation brought by colonialism on the local residents. The main technique of translation the narrator employs here is supplementation with the everyday lived experience of a Hong Kong resident in his writing to better inform readers. The primary focus of this section is on the second chapter of *Atlas*, namely, "The City." Containing fourteen essays regarding the city space in the colonial era, this chapter illustrates perfectly and in detail the varying degrees of hybrid Sinophonicity through the interplay of the two genres. For instance, in the essay "'Plan of the City of Victoria', 1889," the narrator reads the eponymous map on which all the blueprints for future urban development are drawn. It is as if the map has predated and ordered the story of the city, thus eliminating any future creative human endeavours. Not only space but also time is distorted and telescoped within one frame of perpetuity. As the narrator observes,

> Apart from affirming a perpetual present tense (i.e., repeating over and over to the reader: this is Victoria as it is now in 1889), at the same time, it also pointed towards a future tense (i.e., the future Victoria is like this). Inevitably these tenses, in the end, become part of past time, thereby making it impossible for people to neglect the difference between tense and time. In this difference, we can glimpse the city's *fictionality*. (Dung 55-6; italics mine)

What the narrator tries to reveal are the insidious effects that the map, emblem of colonial authority, has on its readers. While the map instructs its readers what to make of the city in concrete form, it also destabilises its own structure by adding a vector of change to the whole picture. However, this feeling of disquiet is experienced only at a psychological level. That is, the possibility of further development in effect starts to exert its impact on readers' mentality long before the actual change occurs. Consequently, having internalised this mode of thinking, readers, or citizens of Victoria, cannot think otherwise but conform to the rule of authority. Therefore, understanding the working mechanism of the colonial discursive power is crucially important to decry its imposition on citizens' perceptions of the city. The reason is that, as Chen Meng-jun acutely observes, "maps carrying the grand historical accounts often render oblivious those small narratives" (171; my translation). It is in this way that in the translation of the maps, the narrator's addition of "small" individual stories is extremely important. Such additions serve as a countertactic against the grand narrative of the maps, inspiring readers to seek an alternative way of putting together the original puzzle.

The adding of "small" individual stories is not an arbitrary act. The stories are employed in the text by the narrator to unveil what the maps fail to convey. Nowhere is this point better demonstrated than in the essay "The Curse of Tai Ping Shan." The essay traces the change of Tai Ping Shan on maps, in which it is initially "a densely built-up area crisscrossed by alleys" in the late 19th century whereas in the next century, "the only signpost that remains to connect people's minds to the past is Tai Ping Shan Street" (Dung 76). The essay, then, enlists two stories related to the landmarks near this street, in which many lower-class people were stricken by plague, poverty and eventually death. Such an image is often neglected in official discourse when Hong Kong is praised for its economic success. With the exposure of such horrific incidents of mass death, this essay is a resounding reminder of the fact that the negative aspects hidden underneath Hong Kong's successful economic development are also part and parcel of its hybrid Sinophonocity.

A question comes to mind: to what end does this counter-developmental narrative lead us? Unlike the discussion in the last paragraph, these two stories about a remote past appear to have no currency in the present, let alone the future. Nonetheless, I would like to argue that the tension addressed in these stories between the city space as planned and constructed and as lived and experienced is absolutely relevant to our own present situation. As the narrator himself poignantly notes, the comfort that we greatly enjoy now in modernity

> [E]roded the memories of Victoria's inhabitants, while also bequeathing the symptoms of forgetfulness to later generations, so that people eventually began to doubt that Tai Ping Shan had been the home of their forefathers, just as they also failed to realize that many directors of the earliest charitable institution in the entire city, Tung Wah Hospital, had been opium merchants. (77)

In a way, to remember is to connect ourselves to our own roots. Hong Kong has always taken pride in being a city of free capital flows and accumulation, and what descends on people's mindset is a somewhat unnerving feeling of liminality and hybridity. Since everything is readily in transit, where do we find ourselves at home? Therefore, these stories, mind-boggling as they might be, make the city more endearing and relatable to its residents, as they call upon a cultural memory that is deep-seated in the past of the city and its resident families. Such an understanding of Hong Kong's hybrid Sinophonicity then is more likely to unite us as one people under political exigencies across the barriers of race, religion, ethnicity, nationality and language.

Nevertheless, not all personal small stories are to overturn the grand narratives represented by maps. In the essay "Mr. Smith's One-day Trip," Mr. Smith's travel log colludes with his map of walking to chart the city as an exotic "Other" in the Westerner's fetishised imagination. For instance, Smith "described himself as 'just like an explorer entering a tropical rainforest, a hunting rifle in hand and with dangers on all sides'" (65). Although he sees the city, he is not really *seeing* it but adding yet another piece to the dominant stupefying Eurocentric rhetoric about the East. By contrast, in the essay "The Four *Wan* and Nine *Yeuk*," the map and stories collaborate and narrate the everyday experience of the city. According to the map that marks different districts of Hong Kong, the city is initially divided into six parts, but the

local Chinese residents reset the demarcation of space of their own accord. The result is that there are four *wans* visibly marking Hong Kong streets in contemporary maps. As the narrator ponders, *wan* ("ring" in English) signifies both "an inward-looking point of view with focus on its own area" and "a chain-shaped relationship … to the point that they are one another's fetters, depending on as well as holding back one another" (58). Therefore, it is a metaphor for the city's cultural identity. The co-dependency between the districts fosters a common identity that ties the whole community together, and simultaneously, each district celebrates its cultural differences, highlighting the city's always vibrant and open atmosphere. Such a hybrid Sinophonicity then adds more weight to the construction of a community with the genesis of the nine *yeuks*. Based on a sad love story, the nine *yeuks* indicate nine promised meeting places between a young couple who fail to do so each time. The girl from the couple eventually commits suicide at their last promised location. As the story spreads over the district, a sense of shared past behind the nine *yeuks* helps to consolidate the cultural ties among the local communities.

Overall, the power dynamics between maps and stories speak to us of the hidden dimensions of the city and the disjunctions of modalities between colonial authority and the colonised, as "the materiality of various semiotic components come together to construct the holistic meaning of a text" (Lee 243). Here, to revisit the question of what to make of the city, the narrator provides us with an insight in "The Centaur of the East," where the city of Victoria is essentially never the binary opposition between Eastern and Western cultures but a hybrid, "a product of mixed blood ties, tangled up and impossible to dissolve" (Dung 61). To emphasise the city's hybrid Sinophonicity is, first, to remember the past. Colonial modernity, whether commendable or deplorable in one's own opinion, still has its influence on our bearings of the city. Second, the notion of hybrid Sinophonicity also underlines and justifies the struggles and striving of common, underprivileged or marginalised people. The stories listed above showcase a strong communitarian culture. Such a way of thinking can then become a source of resistance to give voice to those who go unheard under the overriding grand narratives of the currently ongoing nationalisation measures from the central government in Beijing. In addition, when the tension becomes an everyday reality, how to understand and love his/her city is ultimately the responsibility of each and every individual. The notion of hybrid Sinophonicity as a dynamic process of becoming effectively enables individuals to think in ways.

The interplay of maps and stories is mostly based on the pre-conception that maps are devised as an authoritarian construct so that stories can either reinforce or subvert this grand narrative. What happens, then, if maps themselves are polysemous and open to a multiplicity of interpretations? Meanwhile, if the place where we are living is portrayed on more than one map, how do we navigate all the signs and symbols to gain a better understanding of the city, both diachronically and synchronically? Thus, in the next section, I shift my focus to how maps are translated into writing that ultimately aims to probe into the question of knowledge creation.

Translation as Establishing Historical Sinophonicity

In this section, I analyse how translation can become a source of contestation of the knowledge production of Hong Kong's history and past. This questioning of historical consciousness is what I term historical Sinophonicity. The focus of my analysis is on the first and last chapters in *Atlas*, "Theory" and "Signs," which are structured as different readings of maps. Here, instead of supplementing with individual stories, the narrator turns his translation into a site of contestation. To expound my argument, I invoke Roland Barthes's discussion of the relationship between texts and images in his seminal essay "Rhetoric of the Image." Barthes introduces the concept of anchorage, which refers to when a text "directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others," as a result of which it "remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance" (Barthes 40). It is through anchorage that the narrator uses his words to lead his readers to embark on the journey of questioning the historical veracity that is often presumed with maps. In the process of translation, the components of maps are dissected, interrogated and conceptualised within proper social and cultural contexts. In this way, the city's past is unmasked and confronted, extending its influence to our present approach to the city with regard to its future.

In the first chapter, maps are compared diachronically and synchronically, the result of which is a noticeable amount of inconsistencies and gaps between one another such that the narrator parodies them in a conceptualised format. For instance, in the essay "Nonplace," the narrator challenges the normative definition of place: "Commonsense tells us that to have a name but no referential reality or to have referential reality but no name, does not count as a 'place' in the strict sense" (Dung 14). However, a nonplace refutes the exclusivity that such a definition claims by expanding the term. As Dung writes, "so long as it is included in the area of a map … no two-dimensional space at any bearing should ever be denied the legitimacy of being a 'place'" (14). Accordingly, a nonplace is a type of place, something "that exists but is not to be experienced" (15). Underlining this parodic wordplay is the narrator's incisive acknowledgement of the flaws in the existing historiography of Hong Kong. The reason is that as much as the city's history is factually based, it is also highly selective. It decides a starting point for itself and obliterates other possibilities. Thus, a nonplace could have been an actual geographic "place" whose name has changed over time. With its new name known to everybody, its old name disappears into a nonplace, as does that part of its history. Such recognition also registers the narrator's anxiety. The fact that the city's past can so easily be neglected through the name-play on the map portends a gloomy future of forgetfulness.

Therefore, the problem falls on the matter of names. As the name of a place is introduced to us, it imposes its referential reality on us and restricts us to responding only to this correlation between the name and the reality. Thus, names become an emblem of power. Similarly, in the essay "Boundary," as the narrator articulates, a "boundary is a fictional exercise of power" (20). There are two sides to this argument. On the one hand, since a boundary is a power construct devised between nations to establish their own territories, there exists no natural line of demarcation between two territories. It is an artefact of power itself. On the other hand, because of this symbolic implication of power, the boundary on a map demands a physical reality in the natural landscape. Thus, barricades, watchtowers and iron wire nets are set up for such an order. The end result is a dialectic of exclusion and inclusion. As the narrator says, "all outsides are a form of being inside and all insides are a form of being outside" (20). However, what occurs when this dialectic of exclusion and inclusion is imposed on the city by an external force? In the essay "Extraterritoriality," the narrator raises this question as he observes the position of Hong Kong in relation to the Chinese national boundary on maps produced by both Chinese and British governments before and after the First Opium War. Naturally, in the map "The Coast of South China" after the ceding of Hong Kong, Hong Kong is excluded from Chinese territory, but the map "denies the possession of Hong Kong by the British at the same time" (17), showing a blank space on the spot where the city is supposed to be. The narrator does not provide an answer as to what to make of this situation. Rather, he problematizes our understanding of this history by defining it as extraterritoriality, being outside/beyond any territory. In this light, Hong Kong's subalternity is underscored and highlighted. Since the city's status is forever defined by and subordinated to either China or Britain, it loses its own independence and autonomy. The voices of Hong Kong people are unwillingly subsumed or even silenced.

How do we move beyond this stupefying dichotomy of China and Britain? To transgress the dominant paradigm means to mark Hong Kong's own existence in its own terms. In other words, we need to probe deep into the mechanism of how our existing historical knowledge is produced, as a way of setting up historical Sinophonicity. In the last chapter entitled "Signs," the narrator explores possible ways of doing so. In the essay "The Decline of the Legend," as legends of maps "became uniform, compulsory supplements without any imaginative power to speak of" (125), they eventually become the executors of authoritarian power, just like boundaries. As the narrator asserts, "it is only when individual ways of reading legends return that we can again read legends as tales of marvels" (ibid.). What he actually indicates is a method of deconstructing maps. As Terry Eagleton contends,

> To deconstruct is to reinscribe and resituate meanings, events and objects within broader movements and structures; it is, so to speak, to reverse the imposing tapestry in order to expose in all its unglamorously dishevelled tangle the threads constituting the well-heeled image it presents to the world. (80)

Eagleton's proposal to expose the constructed nature of an image points to possibilities for alternative constructions of the image. Here, the narrator intends to create new signifieds from legends by filling in

these symbols with the lived experience of common Hong Kongers. In the essay "Geological Discrimination," the narrator presents us with a concrete example. In a scientific study of the geological structure of the city, the narrator notes that most of the urban area is built on artificial materials, a hybrid of "all kinds of organic and inorganic materials such as soil, gravel, and refuse," which indigenous chauvinists claim "to be a special characteristic of being 'indigenous'" (Dung 140). The narrator then goes against the grain and deconstructs the legitimacy and primacy of this indigenous-like material by shrewdly pointing out that it is "loose, fragile, and subject to erosion" and "will eventually collapse and disappear under the unrelenting onslaught of time" (140). In lieu of this hybrid product, he advocates the value of granite lying "at the deepest underground level," as it "will fearlessly stand its ground, impervious to wind and rain" (140). Thus, granite and artificial materials become highly infused with cultural connotations. Nevertheless, here the narrator is not using the trope of granite to deny the hybrid nature of the city but is drawing attention to how the hybrid Sinophonicity is built on a strong sense of communitarianism. Only after we gain a clear understanding of what hybrid Sinophonicity truly represents can we begin to cultivate a sense of historical Sinophonicity about Hong Kong's past and history.

In brief, through the process of translation, maps are described, challenged and deconstructed in the form of writings that confound, supplement or renew our understandings of the historiography of the city. The establishment of such historical Sinophonocity will then consolidate the recognition of the values constituting Hong Kong's cultural identity that will help its people stand strong in moments of critical historical junctures. In the next section, I will further examine how such recognition of collective cultural values is acted out through the notion of linguistic Sinophonicity manifested in *Atlas*.

Translation as Reclaiming Linguistic Sinophonicity

The previous two sections have gauged Hong Kong on a macro level, from its hybrid Sinophonicity to the questioning of knowledge creation through historical Sinophonicity. In this section, my analysis will focus on the city at a micro level, in particular, its linguistic context, to see how the previous two large currents of thinking can find resonance in the daily aspects of city life. This attention to the languages used in the city is termed linguistic Sinophonicity. The primary object of study is the third chapter of *Atlas*, namely, "Streets." In this chapter, the author scrutinises the power relations between the colonial authority and the local Chinese community reflected through the translation of street names between two languages, English and Chinese (Cantonese). Notably, this translation is not done by the narrator. In fact, the narrator is still transposing what he gleans from the maps into his own dialectic writing. As a result, it is not the translation between Chinese and English street names but what such translation implicates that counts as the narrator's translating act.

To return to the third chapter, the juxtaposition of both English and Chinese characters on a street sign tends to emphasise a culture of hybridity, concealing the appropriation and resistance embedded in spatial politics because naming is an act of labelling, of taking possession of space. In the essay "Ice House Street," the name is given due to the establishment of an ice warehouse by foreign investment in the area. Its Chinese name derives from a literal translation from its English counterpart but with a tinge of Cantonese inflexion. The word "ice" in the standard Chinese context, Mandarin to be exact, is denoted by the word "bing"; however, in Cantonese, it is called "suet," meaning snow. As a result, the Chinese character for the street name is "snow factory." This addition of local flavour notwithstanding, the Chinese name still conforms to and participates in the colonial annexation of the city space by the English name. As the narrator says, "the advantage of 'snow factory' as a term … is that it actually comes closer to revealing the true nature of colonial society" (89). The stories surrounding the snow factory intimate how Europeans inculcate a new function in the divided space and change the local community's perception of it. The street name, in both English and Chinese, thus bears witness to the internalisation of colonial discursive power.

The translation of English names into Chinese names can sometimes also become a source of resistance. In the essay "Possession Street," the English name of the street insinuates the reality of British invasion, and the Chinese name is originally "a phonetic transcription of its English name" (104). However, as the

narrator writes, it is precisely this transliteration that allows local people to appropriate the purports of the Chinese word by highlighting its alternative and second meaning. Subsequently, "the word 'possession', apart from meaning ownership or control, also has the meaning of being possessed by spirits, or madness" (104). Buttressed by the life stories circulating in the local community, this second meaning "runs counter to the signifying mystique so often connected to naming, where a name is perceived as participating in a privileged type of signification that matches one specific referent with a signifier" (Bachner 338). Consequently, Possession Street loses its commemorative value of colonial glory but is haunted by the myths and legends generated from local people's lived experience. In this manner, the narrator indicates that local people can write over and ward off the colonial connotation of the original word. Furthermore, this new interpretation even extends its influence to the ruling class, as the narrator notes the anecdote of Professor S. Clark, who proposes changing the English name of the street according to the prevalent Chinese meaning. Quite ironically, the proposed new name, "exorcism," expelling devils, aligns with the local perception of foreigners, in which they are "referred to colloquially in Chinese as 'foreign devils'" (Dung 105). Through this act of deconstructing the English name, the linguistic Sinophonicity of Hong Kong is reclaimed by its local citizens.

The notion of reclaiming linguistic Sinophonicity is important in that each street, together with its Chinese and English names, is a bearer of the city's past. Furthermore, the tension so acutely felt through the two languages also echoes and informs what we are currently facing. The narrator exemplifies this point in the essay "Tung Choi Street and Sai Yeung Choi Street" (an English transliteration of the Cantonese pronunciation): "the mode of existence" once celebrated and thus insisted on by the older generations of local people is now being squeezed into oblivion by the developmental initiatives of the government, "effectively destroying what was left of the solidarity and unique sense of identity within the village" (111). Here, the worst outcome would be the loss of a crucial component of Hong Kong's culture. As the street names embody only an empty abstraction with the mass-scale of urban gentrification and reconstruction, the cultural identity of Hong Kong is in danger of becoming rootless.

Is there a way to prevent this rootlessness from happening? To answer this question, I would like to turn to the essay "Tsat Tsz Mui Road." Much like Tung Choi Street or Sai Yeung Choi Street, the predominance of Chinese over English in the naming of streets is championed by local myths about seven sisters who vow to marry together or die together. However, as the local stories appear to contradict each other or to be unfounded, the archaeologists actually act on their speculations, determined to uncover true evidence. In the end, "they unearthed from the separate sites seven wooden combs, each with a long lock of hair entwined in it" (96). The combs accord with one of the stories surrounding this street and thus validate the archaeologists' theory. Here, I want to draw attention to the highly metaphorical act of excavation. Bearing our previous discussion in mind, I find that the process of translation in the text is essentially similar to an act of unearthing the hidden past[2]. Simultaneously, excavation becomes a means of preservation by making the hidden past known to the public. The notion of linguistic Sinophonicity analysed in this section is exemplary of an act of preservation. By highlighting the linguistic complexity which has long existed within Hong Kong society, the text is in effect lending a strong voice to the language conflict faced by Hong Kong people today between Mandarin as the national language and Cantonese as their mother tongue. Certainly, this should not be an either/or situation, and the conceptual lens of the Sinophone as exemplified in *Atlas* has shown how we can push for new perspectives regarding what Hong Kong is facing today.

Conclusion

All in all, this article has proposed to use the concept of the Sinophone to understand Hong Kong's situation vis-à-vis Mainland China. What the Sinophone foreground, most importantly, is the processes of localisation of cultures of Sinitic language-speaking communities. Consequently, the people's sense of identity and

2 . The three levels of translation listed above have implicitly included an element of adding new (previously unknown) information to an existing knowledge system. Although each level has specific tactics, they can all be called an act of unearthing the past in some way.

their cultural traditions are not confined to the monolithic "Chineseness" and "Chinese" culture but vary in a network of Sinophone articulations. In view of this, Sinophone proves to be an effective conceptual lens in particular to analyse cultural production that depicts the city beyond the East-meets-West rhetoric. Dung Kai-cheung's *Atlas* is one of the most brilliantly written contemporary Hong Kong narratives that has endured the test of time in its almost two decades' shelf life. Through the lens of the Sinophone, this article has hoped to bring to the fore the aesthetic appeal and value of the novel. More importantly, through the combination of the Sinophone lens and the literary work, this article wishes to call attention to the brilliant literary activities happening currently within Hong Kong; and also how the discourse engendered from these activities can really shine a light on many nations or communities that are seeking new frameworks to understand their current situation better.

In discussing how *Atlas* writes a Sinophone Hong Kong that is familiar yet still fresh to the readers, this article has focused on the trope of translation used in the text. Here, translation connotes the form of the novel, as it consists of essays that are the narrator's interpretation of old maps about Hong Kong, which is set to have vanished in the distant future. The narrator, a future archaeologist, tries to put the puzzle of what Hong Kong looks like together using maps and stories he has excavated from the ruined site. Whether it is the act of translation or archaeology, the novel has all the necessary ingredient for a "scientific" study of Hong Kong. However, as the text actually shows, it is also as much a personal tale about a place where the author grows up. Here, because of Hong Kong as holding such an intimate place in Dung Kai-cheung's heart, it is impossible for the narrator to write an "objective" record of what he reads of the signs and the codes. Instead, the narrator uses his opportunity of translation to question, challenge and contest any existing theories about the city in official discourse. As the future/objective scholar narrator involuntarily merges with the native-born author, *Atlas* becomes Dung's love letter to Hong Kong.

It is with this emotional engagement that the translating act in *Atlas* gains new agency, playing on three levels of perception to draw a kaleidoscopic image of Sinophone Hong Kong. Whether it is on the issue of facing hybrid Sinophonicity, or acquiring a sense of historical Sinophonicity, or claiming the city's linguistic Sinophonicity, translation becomes a necessary means to bring to light the hidden aspects of Hong Kong. Throughout this process of bringing the hidden to light, the narrator keeps asking how much of the past we can know of a city like Hong Kong. Perhaps the narrator does not have an answer himself, but what his translation has shown is how it is important to keep in mind when writing the dialectics of "knowing and meaning, epistemology and ethics or more mundanely, experience and expectation" (White 47). This dialectic thinking of writing Hong Kong, I conclude, is the most important legacy that *Atlas* leaves us. Instead of prescribing a set of fixed ideas or notions of what Hong Kong is, *Atlas* showcases the epistemic gaps and absence and, hence, the potentialities in our existing system of discourses. This line of thinking Hong Kong is not exclusive the era in which *Atlas* was published. In fact, it can also extend its influence beyond the 1997 timeline and inform our current situation. Hong Kong as a cultural space registers more than a culture of hybridity between East and West. If we could conduct an in-depth examination of what constitutes this hybrid culture and its problematics, then we could understand and situate ourselves more clearly in the broader historical, cultural and global context and become truly rooted to this place called home. As the fiction tells us in the end, the city may disappear one day, but its unique cultural memory lives on, marking Hong Kong on the world map.

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