

背景 The View from 2010

IN 2010, THE SECOND MORNING of the Year of the Pig is the day after Valentine's. Hong Kong's in a good mood. On ATV Home, Harmony News broadcasts a senior citizen activity organized by a Christian social welfare group. Its goal—to reproduce past times by displaying personal possessions these seniors have preserved and staging pop songs and dances they perform, sporting makeup, wigs, and clothing from their youth. One woman could still wear her wedding dress.

Today, ATV no longer exists, this free-to-air television station with two language channels—Cantonese Home and English World. The station died on April 1, 2016, its license renewal denied by the Hong Kong government. Home couldn't compete with more commercially popular TVB Jade, though World gave TVB Pearl a run for its money. ATV World was perhaps too good at broadcasting all our news in English, the global language, news too readily rebroadcast worldwide, because by 2016, protests in my city had grown louder, and discontents simmered to a dangerous boil.

But on the second day of that Pig year, I am watching Home because mornings are when I catch up on local news, harmonious or contentious, in Cantonese, the language of my city's heart. Our minority language, English, has less to say locally in the mornings, and the Anglo channels—CNN, BBC, Australian Broadcasting, as well as France 24, NHK, Arirang, Al Jazeera, DW, all that foreign media—have fewer correspondents than in days of yore, when Britannia still ruled waves, and us.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, if not heretical, to consider my city today without that “view from behind” of our 背景, as Chinese articulates a background or backstory. In February 2010, I move home once again to live in my birth city; it's the last time I'll do so. My personal 背景 of courage, cowardice, and compromise is this insider's entry path to reflect on our chaotic present.

It takes courage for protesters to wave the British flag in 2019, when the world is witnessing the largest and most prolonged protests by the citizenry, some of whom perpetrate the worst violence in Hong Kong's

history. Nineteenth-century gunboat diplomacy—how unequal treaties were signed in favor of the colonizer—seems tame by comparison. Is it Dutch courage or true heroism Grandma Wong displays, this sixty-plus-year-old who consistently appears, wielding a large Union Jack? She will not compromise: Hong Kong under England, she claims, had a future. Many protesters do not agree; as a colonized people, we *were* second-class citizens. Likewise, the courageous minorities on different spectrums—those demanding independence, freed of Chinese rule; those resorting to violence, risking arrest, because only then will they not be ignored—they, too, cannot compromise. Most protesters disagree, but the more recalcitrant the local government's stance, in line with China's unwillingness to accede to demands for greater democracy, the more likely the protests and strikes will be prolonged, with perhaps more violence and even louder cries for independence.

The ball is in the Hong Kong government's court, more than it's ever been in the history of our city, and they must find the right compromise. It troubles me to see such outrage in our streets, grassroots courage, a courage that should have manifested much earlier in our short history. To mount a real revolution, as opposed to the polite tea parties¹ of Hong Kong's numerous protest marches. The Chairman knew: revolution was the Long March, bloodshed and sacrifice, something Hong Kong's youth are finally discovering late, too late.

Should I have had the courage to abandon my family and city when I was younger, as young as many of these protesters are today? In the journey of my private revolution, I, too, did not find courage soon enough to completely transform my life.

I LEFT HONG KONG for good in the fall of 2018. Since my first departure at the age of seventeen, it's been a lifelong shuttle, mostly between New York and Hong Kong, in my quest to live an independent, creative life as an English-language writer. My secret desire was to be a traitor to my origins, *especially* to acceptance of Confucian filial piety, to become “the writer” as a migrant to the West. It was what American author Ha Jin has named his own linguistic and nationalistic “betrayal.”

In November 2017, my mother died shortly before her ninety-eighth birthday. By then, my former position as writer-in-residence at a local university had also died. Meanwhile, my husband-to-be was still patiently waiting back home in New York after our seven-year, long-distance relationship, while I squatted “at home” in Hong Kong

with Mum's debilitating Alzheimer's. Our homes in Manhattan and northern New York beckoned. Clean air, space, affordable life, and love felt like the more desirable way to enter senior citizenship than perching, precariously, in the overpriced, overcrowded, overrenervated space that was my city. We were mortgage-free, and New York City still recognized my husband's rent-stabilized apartment in what was, by now, the fashionable Chelsea Meatpacking District in which he first squatted back in the 1980s, when few others would venture west. By 2019, I would even be eligible for Medicare. What more could a migrant writer want?

Then, summer arrived, and Hong Kong was besieged by another internationally newsworthy moment, shattering my optimistic calm.

It was 1989 all over again, when tanks rolled into Tiananmen Square on June 4. That was the last time an equivalent-sized crowd in Hong Kong marched in protest. I looked on from my home in Brooklyn, New York, glued to the news, weeping, frustrated, and helpless. We were not yet fully Chinese then but knew, within a decade, we would be. Yet despite Tiananmen, Hong Kong remained hopeful. To protest was still our lawful right, and in the years that followed, the annual vigils at Victoria Park ensured *luhk sei*, 6-4, our moniker for Tiananmen, would not be forgotten, unlike the revisionist history that prevailed on the Chinese Mainland. In 2010, it startles me how many young Mainlanders studying at our universities as "foreign" students will, for the first time, learn this history; even so, some remain skeptical, convinced as they are by the erasure of what they have *not* learned.

But from '89 onward, such amnesia would not be the case in Hong Kong, this soon-to-be-former British colony, one of the last postcolonials, and the first to be named a Chinese Special Administrative Region under our dubiously unique "one country, two systems" arrangement, with its own Basic Law. We would not and did not forget.

A few years later, in summer of '92, I moved back to Hong Kong to live. What hope we had then! The economy was thriving, the future was promising, and the dire predictions of PLA tanks rolling into the city on July 1, 1997, the day we were to be handed back to China was, as any local knew, alarmist reportage by misguided Western media. The West did misread that moment, as documented in my novel *The Unwalled City*. In the early years after the handover, things did not seem dire. We survived the Asian Economic Crisis that erupted a year later, because our city's culture is really *the economy, stupid*, an apt anthem to

our deeply pragmatic, mercantile nature. W. H. Auden poetically observed this of our city when visiting in 1938, noting that *Here in the East the bankers have erected / A worthy temple to the Comic Muse*. He did however conclude that *For what we (England) are, we have ourselves to blame*. The city's sheen, it seems, has long disoriented visitors: they fall in love with the surface but remain puzzled by our soul. Local scholar Stuart Christie elaborates on Auden's visit thus: "Hong Kong is not, in the end, where poets come to be remembered; it is a place of final retreat where, fleeing a reality they can neither fully transcribe nor fully comprehend, they must disembark."

And in 2010, whether or not we share Auden's particular disorientation, which Christie attributes in part to his gaze as a gay man, Hong Kong is still a disorienting space: cosmopolitan, glitzy, and frustrating for serious writers. Yet it's also safe, efficient, clean, and more accessible for literary endeavors in ways that would be harder in London or New York. A hybrid culture has evolved, one that is peculiarly apolitical but prescient in its view of the future of humanity. While much of our literature is naturally influenced by our Chinese origins, we are not completely tied to the history, culture, geography, or even language of our sovereign ruler. In fact, local writers look to the world, China included, for ideas, images, inspiration, while still retaining a deep-rooted sense of Hong Kong's own identity and nature. Which is why, in 2010, I agree to create Asia's first low-residency MFA in creative writing at a local public university. We are a space where writers of all ethnicities, origins, and native tongues can *choose* to express themselves in English, the world's lingua franca, even while questioning the imperialist influence of that language in global publishing.

I USED TO BE able to think in terms of a rod or furlong as units of measure and do sums in pounds, shillings, and pence. I knew how much a guinea or farthing was, and the correct pronunciation for ha'penny and thruppence. That was in the distant realm of a colonial childhood in Hong Kong, which, for me, is over half a century ago. Yet fifty years is as long as or even longer than five hundred in China's recent past, a country whose earliest recorded *written* history dates back to 1250 BCE. Its real history goes back even earlier.

So perhaps it's not so startling to learn that a kilogram is no longer what it used to be. On my fifty-seventh birthday, *The Economist* reports the kilogram is "the last bit of the International System of Units (SI)

to be tied explicitly to an artefact.” By 2010, I have begun reading *The Economist* to remind myself that in some of my world, “artifact” is spelled “artefact,” in part to counter the US-centric worldview that dominates the Anglophone world where I live, a not-always-happy resident in an America where my space is relegated to “immigrant writing.” I do not write immigrant narratives like Amy Tan or Maxine Hong Kingston, but in New York of the ’80s and ’90s, there was little space for a transnational or global Asian voice. Far more space was given to the white male writer who helicoptered into my city, who perpetuated every cliché and stereotype, who only articulated the surface and ignored our soul. By 2010, I no longer tolerate such nonsense and would rather contribute to broadening an Anglophone literary space with Asian, and Hong Kong, characteristics.

How did it happen, this time collapse?

Hong Kong has never been overly fond of its own history. For years, our history was recorded by the British, who told it from their perspective. Now, China will record our history, to ensure that the unequal treaty that gave birth to our city will never be forgotten. However, Chinese history has long been taught in local schools, even during the colonial era, a curriculum which local historian Flora L. F. Kan describes as “a Han-centered cultural view.” School curricula, she notes, “does not support theories of colonial cultural imperialism, in which colonial governments dictate the nature of school curricula in order to diminish the culture of the local population” (3). After the handover, Hong Kong history was even included “as an appendix to the official syllabus” (136–7). But she concludes that “at the classroom level, teachers have not given much attention to national identification” and that while the teaching “continued to adhere to Han-centered interpretations of Chinese history, moral and civic education seem to be taken less seriously” (137).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to grow up in Hong Kong and attend a local school without learning how Chinese you are. This was true even for me, a *wah kiu* whose overseas Chinese parents migrated from Indonesia, and whose identity was foreign because we had Indonesian, rather than Hong Kong British, citizenship as well as some Indonesian blood. Even though I did not study Chinese history beyond the primary level and defected to an English-only curriculum in secondary, as “foreigners” like myself did, I still understood, deeply, what it meant to be Chinese.

And part of being Chinese is to feel the pull of the motherland, no matter where in the world you live.

It's a false positive, this cultural heartstring, one the Chinese government propagates into a tyranny of nationalist love for the nation or 愛國. We never became truly postcolonial, because we were always too cowardly, or too compromised, to overthrow our oppressor. Picture a revolution in the 1960s for Hong Kong's independence, one begun by its own citizens. This would have been during the Cultural Revolution, when China had enough problems of its own. What would China have done if two million people marched through our streets, demanding the overthrow of Britain? What would Britain have done? Shortly after 2010, the world learns from documents released by the UK's National Archives, that Britain contemplated implementing self-governance as early as the 1950s, but that China threatened to invade if Britain did so, preferring the colonial status quo. Instead, our most significant 背景 are the 1967 riots, a leftist uprising against the British that erupted on our shores. Most Hong Kongers opposed the violence. The local riot police were sent to quell unrest and British forces defused around eight thousand homemade bombs. In the end, the bombings by the leftists were defused by then Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, who issued them an order to stop. It lasted eighteen months, but peace was restored.

The problem was, Britain was just not oppressive enough, and the locals just didn't care enough to foment revolution when there was work, education, and abundant opportunity, especially for those willing to sacrifice themselves for the next generation. Who really cared about snobbish Brits in their tony enclaves on Hong Kong Island, up on the Peak, say, or who hogged the south shore's seafronts? The rest of us teemed over on the peninsula of Kowloon and New Territories, relegating the white man to his ghostly realm, the *gueilo* who was not really human. Racism in a colony is a two-way street.

The *real* problem was, we were never Chinese enough, not the way over a billion Chinese in the motherland are.

Was it cowardice on our part to shirk independence and instead strive to become rich, gloriously so, by remaining second-class Brits? 致富光荣 *To get rich is glorious*, the phrase generally attributed to Deng Xiaoping may, after all, be fake news popularized by Western media (there is no definitive proof he actually said this), so we cannot claim that our future sovereign leader told us so. Was it cowardice the local elite displayed, buying their way out of a Communist future by securing passports from

Australia, Canada, Britain, and the United States, transforming their children into lost boys and girls? All those ABCs, BBCs, CBCs who would rather come home to cushy Hong Kong, with live-in maids to cook and clean for them, Mummy and Daddy to house them, friends to play with who live the way they do, code-mixing languages and cultures? Home where, above all, they need not feel displaced in their capitalist paradise? The exodus of foreign passport seekers became the rhythm of our history: after 1967, 1982, 1989, and 1997.²

The twenty-first century has seen fewer departures. Those who leave are likely driven more by the economic inequities that make the city unaffordable and the teeming population that has swelled to almost eight million, making the city a less desirable habitat in which to imagine a future. In the twenty-first century, some have moved north to the Mainland, unlike in the past, because opportunity, space, affordable housing, and schooling in Chinese, or readily available international schooling for the elite, beckoned. Speaking Mandarin was easier on the tongue than English, and at least you looked like everyone else. Hong Kong people, as the Chinese government likes to say, *are* Chinese.

But in 2014, the Umbrella Movement closed down the city, and the then CEO panicked, ordered police out with tear gas, was too cowardly to face the students. Instead he sent his deputy, Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, the current CEO who, in 2019, presides over a more disruptive and far more violent protest—one the Centre for Global Research, alongside Chinese media, says is sponsored by the United States. The world is enamored of fake news made to appear so real it virtually becomes real, this phenomenon invented and promulgated by the current American president.

IT'S THE COMPROMISES that trip you up. In 2010, I do not want to go home. Instead I'd rather continue dinging between New York and Hong Kong. I had left the city "for good" once before, in '98, to live with my lover in Manhattan. By 2010, we have a long history, and I teach at a college in Vermont where I've recently been elected faculty chair at a long-established low-residency MFA. Inhabiting flight paths has become my way of life.

It's the discontents of being transnational that trip you up. This unsolicited offer to start Asia's first low-residency MFA in writing promises more money than any college in the United States could match. Can I do it part-time, I ask, the way it is at all low-residency programs?

Can I continue my life between two cities? Can I, essentially, have the best of all my worlds? No, no, and no, they reply. I have never been a full-time academic, never desired that career, and the move is daunting. Yet the prospect of creating a writing program that speaks to the kind of writer I am—can I really turn that down?

Besides, Mum *needs* someone to live at home with her.

Thomas Wolfe warned: *You can't go home again*. Those who tried were rarely content. My private library bears witness to that truth, all those words by writers who shaped and influenced my own voice: Marguerite Duras, Han Suyin, Vladimir Nabokov, Doris Lessing, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, Lu Xun, John Cheever, Andre Dubus, Thomas Wolfe, Graham Greene, Gao Xingjiang, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Shirley Jackson, Anna Kavan, Katherine Mansfield, Janet Frame, Maxine Hong Kingston, Derek Walcott, Zhang Kangkang, Mo Yan, Ding Ling, Jonathan Swift, Shawn Wong. They, however, are already history, and recent immersion has been in writerly minds and hearts that speak more closely to my own lived experiences and musings: Sharmistha Mohanty, Pico Iyer, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ha Jin, Bino Realuyo, Tina Chang, Luis Francia, Robin Hemley, James Scudamore, Jill Dawson, Ira Sukrungruang, Sybil Baker, Tash Aw, Evan Fallenberg, Marilyn Chin, Yan Geling, Tabish Khair, Lasana Sekou, Kwame Dawes, Madeleine Thien, Jess Row, Rawi Hage, Rigoberto Gonzales, among others. Plus there's all that Hong Kong Anglo literary culture, of which I was an early pioneer, even coediting two anthologies of Hong Kong writing in English for a local university press in the early '00s. I became a reluctant scholar just to prove that, yes, a literature of Hong Kong does and *should* exist.

So shouldn't I also simply surrender to the Chinese obligation of filial piety and go home to look after Mum? By then her Alzheimer's diagnosis is definite. I am both eldest and 大家姊.³ My three younger siblings will only step in if I shirk my familial role. Mum's voice booms from my distant past, decibels louder than all the noise of my selfish literary past (a career path that is anathema to any Hong Kong parent): *You must be a good example for your younger sisters and brother*. If you're Chinese, truly Chinese, you just *know*—family responsibility outranks individual dreams, every time.

EVEN THOUGH you can't go home again, I went home to live at twenty, briefly at twenty-seven, again at thirty-eight, disappearing for the last time at the age of forty-four. So there I was, at fifty-six, vacillating

once again, trying to decide. What *else* could I do? I went home.

The young protesters today are not such compromised souls. It's the older generations—mine and those a decade or so younger—who juggled cowardice and compromise as citizens of Hong Kong. Financial security, and in some cases wealth, is the cowardly artist's pushback against "suffering" for art, suffering often celebrated in the West. Although when I look around New York publishing today, I doubt that was ever truly the case. Likewise, to have demanded independence from the British was our *least* likely path. In particular, we university-educated were catapulted into the privilege of good jobs, careers with futures, affordable domestic help (especially for families with children), property prices that soared in the decades ahead making us asset-rich. Even those "astronauts" of the '80s who landed in Vancouver and elsewhere, squatting long enough for a foreign passport, came home. Our city had become First World by the 90's, and elsewhere looked more impoverished, inefficient, crime-ridden, and unfriendlier by comparison. Although inflation shot property prices through the roof, our salaries kept pace. Most important, government and industries were rapidly "localizing"—the white man no longer reigned supreme. We had our moment and could nurture a belief in our Hong Kong identity and reality.

What surprised the world, and us, was the rapidity of the rise of China.

It is strange today to reflect on that surprise. After all, China's history is one of perpetual transformation from one dynasty to the next, and the only way for its economy to head was up. It also had a population hungry for change. In the early to mid '00s, I contemplated living in Beijing. The city was spacious and still affordable, I could improve my Mandarin, the ethos was less consumerist than in Hong Kong, and literature was rooted in its own worldview and aesthetic, without the obeisance to the West that still marked Hong Kong. China was opening up to the world and there was a curiosity, and openness, among people I met. A cultural heart that was missing in my own city, where money mattered above all else. Besides, China was huge, like America, and no one ethos really ruled supreme, while Hong Kong was tiny, insular, and too restrictively self-satisfied.

BY 2010, BEIJING is beginning to feel less attractive, but each time I go to the Mainland, mostly to Shanghai or Beijing, there's still enough to like. In fact, Hong Kong students who shun those from China seem small-minded, mean, and short-sighted.

However, the greatest shock to the system is when Hong Kong itself begins to change. It starts from within, and not just as a result of edicts issued by Beijing. Our elites—the industrialists, property magnates, academics,⁴ and government officials—the ones who earn the highest salaries and perch on the peak of the economic pyramid, they feather their nests and either fly the coop or nestle into cozier, lucrative nests up north offered by China, with little regard for Hong Kong's well-being.

As a full-time academic for the first time at a local public university, I witness the worst corruption and waste of my entire professional career. I have written elsewhere of this experience, centered on the program I directed, which was shut down in 2015 for the most frivolous of reasons.⁵ I realize my view from 2010 is distorted by rose-colored lenses: Hong Kong's future will not be nearly so rosy. Time doesn't heal *all* wounds, it only clarifies why you hurt in the first place.

IN 2014, A LEGISLATIVE MISSTEP launched the Umbrella Movement, further compounded in 2019 by a second legislative misstep.⁶ Hong Kong has become a cauldron of discontent, waiting to erupt if provoked.

Yet what shocked me most, when the Umbrella Movement derailed the city, was how *little* empathy there was for the protestors among the majority of Hong Kongers. Admittedly, the message was muddled, this tea party revolution that was, for the most part, civilized and peaceful, respectful of the rule of law. The outpouring by so many writers, artists, actors, singers, and photographers was heartening, even if it all felt too sweet and naïve. A jarring recall from '67—while watching the protests in the streets, I wondered why my city felt so precarious and temporary.⁷

Nothing much changed after the Umbrella protesters packed up and left, but what was palpable were the rumblings of discontent in the months afterward. A rise in crime. Property prices soaring to absurd heights. The further erosion of freedom of speech. A shrinkage of meaningful jobs and salaries for school leavers and college grads. Growth of a population living at or below the poverty level. The on-going battle between Mainlanders and locals, whether those from China were tourists, migrants, or wealthy investors.

It was like reverting to the '60s all over again, when I had edged into puberty and wanted nothing more than to leave the purgatory of home.

In 1965, I was eleven and published my first creative piece in the children's section of the leading English-language newspaper. Besides my immediate family, and one Danish school friend, no one remarked this achievement. In time, I would come to see my writing as a secret, underground activity, one that had no reality in Hong Kong because it was in the wrong language, and I had the wrong color skin. Through Girl Guides and other interschool activities, I would meet English school students who presented an alternative local world.

But Britain struck me as the wrong country to gaze at with much longing, despite its literary appeal. Instead, I trained my sights elsewhere. There was so much to distract—all that jazz, Motown, the Doors, Barbara Streisand, Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross, TV, movies, even some American literature, Mark Twain, say, or those nineteenth-century Gothics, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. Later, Woodstock, all that delectable noise, coupled with a moon landing. The promise of a country where many, many freedoms and possibilities unfolded, a young country, built by migrants from many nations.

Meanwhile, my city was filthy and crime-ridden, corruption was rampant (Mum was constantly bribing *someone*), the education system was stifflingly rote, leading to public exams, exams, and more exams, followed by suicides of those who failed to pass with high enough marks, bringing shame to their family. It was so disgustingly Chinese, this punishing class and value system where the elite—wealthy Cantonese and Shanghainese—ruled, alongside the Brits who wanted nothing to do with us less celestial folk. I craved a high school like Clark Kent's in Smallville and to jeer at the establishment the way *Mad Magazine* did. *Mad's* lyrics to *The Sound of Music*—*dough, means cash, for all of us*—such freedom to excoriate American capitalism, Hollywood, and mindless entertainment! Clark Kent appealed. He, like me, harbored a secret and was an alien who did not belong on Earth, just as I did not really belong in Hong Kong.

In 2018, as I watched my city eject a *Financial Times* journalist for giving Andy Chan Ho-tin, convener of the Hong Kong National Party, a forum to speak at the Foreign Correspondents Club, I did not regret my decision to leave for good.

IT'S AUGUST, and the summer of 2019 is sizzling the planet. I am grateful not to be in Hong Kong, where the heat would be unbearable amid overbuilt concrete. A notice for an arts event “back home,”

Consciously Unconscious, pings my inbox. This is apparently a series of interviews with leading artists in Hong Kong through images, insights, and reflections to take us to “the personal heart of creativity and its centrality in life.” Has Hong Kong been for too long consciously unconscious of its very self, in denial that its future is doubly and triply mortgaged? The violence, protests, and anger erupt weekly, even daily, while life (and art) goes blissfully on.

Recently, the BBC interviewed me on World Update⁸ about the protests, wanting the viewpoint of an insider who had spent the greater part of her adult life in Hong Kong. And once again I found myself sad, as sad as I was in 2014 when I watched my crying city protest in its courteous, restrained, magnanimous, and *futile* manner. A long banner that hung from an overpass read: 父母為我哭了 我為將來哭了 with the translation: *Our parents are crying for us. I am crying for the future.*⁹

I do not want today’s protests to also be for naught. I almost wish an independence party would emerge, in exile, even if independence is not what most people want. Opposition means the fighting spirit from my city will not die. Earlier this year, the Hong Kong government objected to Germany granting political asylum to two activists. History swaps one dictator for another, in its never-ending cycle of repeating itself. After all, America looks a lot less like the country I once admired from afar, in the innocence of my Hong Kong youth.

Despite my exit from the city of my birth,¹⁰ my extradition is likely not final. There is always hope that one may return, that home will somehow still be there, even if the decor has changed. From a once barren rock to a world city to a future as a Chinese city . . . in the end, will it take Hong Kong’s pragmatically mercantile soul, plus a hybrid form of courage that endures second-class citizenship, to shape its identity and ensure its survival?

NOTES

¹ “A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.” — Mao Zedong

² 1967: the leftist riots; 1982: the joint declaration between the United Kingdom and China to return Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty; 1989: Tiananmen; 1997: the handover.

³ Literally, “big sister of the family.”

⁴ Hong Kong university professors, in all disciplines, are among the highest paid in the world, their salary scale linked to that of the civil service. Notably, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong earns more than the president of the United States.

⁵ In my memoir *Dear Hong Kong: An Elegy for a City* (Penguin, 2017), I write about the controversial and bumbling closure of the MFA program, a move often viewed as politically motivated, despite the university's denial. Also see <https://savecityumfa.tumblr.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/SaveCityUMFA?fref=ts>.

⁶ In 2014, the decision by Beijing for proposed electoral reforms to achieve universal suffrage in the city was seen as undemocratic and restrictive, because the candidates would essentially be preselected and approved by the Chinese government. In 2019, a proposed extradition law was widely opposed because it meant China could extradite anyone in Hong Kong to the Mainland to be tried and sentenced under Chinese law.

⁷ See "Democracy," a short story set during the '67 riots in my collection *History's Fiction: Stories from the City of Hong Kong* 香港人的短歷史, Chameleon Press, 2001.

⁸ BBC World Update, July 30, 2019.

⁹ Xu: "The Crying City," *Bellingham Review*, Spring 2016, 53–61; also collected in Xu, *This Fish Is Fowl*, Nebraska University Press, 2019, 67–78.

¹⁰ The city I've described as the "pimple on the backside of China" in *Evanescent Isles: From My City-village*, Hong Kong University Press, 2004.

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