

CHAN Chi Tak

Boat and Home

I remember a windless night
and your home on the waves
you spoke of bitter sea water, the stink of fish
and the way you rock from side to side
as you sleep

at times you returned to the calm of the typhoon shelter
with a full catch
saying you wanted to go out again, into that life
with its dangers, vast waters
but this night as the yellow bulb gently swayed
you too savoured this serenity
in the cabin then each novelty stowed in its place
granted that it was a moment to hold dear



Fishing Activities.
Collection of the Hong Kong Tourist Association.

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Fishing Community—Activities.
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radio played pop tunes, news reports and
the stories behind the news
divulged variations in temperature and wind velocity
on deck, books and magazines you've skimmed their
miniscule, unsteady words
distorted radio waves harsh TV images
this too seemed a world that reeks of blood

what did the grownups below deck discuss, their
voices ponderous, great events or small?
all beyond our grasp
at the last you signed a Christmas card for me
later sadly lost in moving house
faulty memory has let slip your name just this remains
on the card no hackneyed Hong Kong junk returning in the sunset
but a home
a boat
braving the elements, making a living

12 March 1995

Translated by Janice Wickeri

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CHAN Chi Tak**Flag**

You're motionless then flutter
 Is it the wind that stirs you
 or do you unfurl your being at the wind

Hanging from the window
 of that pre-war Canton-style building
 Another is raised over the colonial dormitory that faces it
 Article for burning or veneration
 Now mass-produced stuck in lapels
 Now imprisoned liberated whereabouts unknown
 Though you wave above the multitude
 You cannot give voice to their aspirations

Centre frame: a toast
 You in the background
 How long will you have to suffer this dubious role

The people's century the buried years
 Impulse to war sole perfection
 "Landlords and capitalists justify themselves through you"*
 without thereby gaining peace for the multitude
 The wind does not subside
 But you just want to hang your head in despair
 as if everyone had retracted their anger and their joy
 sparing not even a cold glance for you
 Even if x day x year these earnest words were spoken:
 You're still young students

Dusk bids you lie down
 So you gently descend but change your mind
 Determined to halt at half mast

5 November 1995

Translated by Janice Wickeri

*Mu Dan, *Flag* (Shanghai: Wenhua shenghuo chubanshe, 1948).

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CHAN Chi Tak

My Paper-Cut City

This used to be sea
 Workers coming off the docks
 Spilling into the dark street
 Now it's a park, a shopping mall
 Road workers start their drills in the blazing sun
 Out runs the sound turning into words read every day
 My teacher said
 in the past every day
 had a little hope like a dim star
 Time goes by
 filling up new buildings and ways of speaking
 Coming back from abroad
 Opening up an old book again
 Here in Hong Kong on the Pearl River estuary in south China
 It's the end of 1995
 Throngs of people hurry through the streets
 Bustle everywhere
 Exit the station cross the street pass by the shops
 see what this holiday might bring
 "Two bamboo slips fell the first time
 A-sha picked up the divination slips
 put them back in the holder, shook again,
 This time, he shook out only one.
 —What did you wish for everyone asked
 —God save my city he said"*

*Quoted from Xi Xi, *My City* (Taipei: Yunchen, 1989), p. 160.

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Dark blue clouds overhead
Blot out the dim stars
I'm on the street
It's the end of 1995 here in
Hong Kong on the Pearl River estuary
Who's that?
It's you on the tram
childhood friend I haven't run into for years
passing right by me
just passing by? going home?
You wave to me
and then merge into the multi-coloured rainbow of
decorative lights that materialize briefly at holidays
I saw you make your historic appearance
asked the tram for the temporary loan of an old friend
then waited tranquilly, respectfully, for sincere dialogue
Words on the page make allowance for vast ideas
await the eventual re-emergence of song out of silence
"What are you laughing at, Qiao? Is this another of your pranks?
Look at you, the way you laugh . . .
Look at you, choking with laughter.
Are you tired? Want to go to sleep?
I see you tossing and turning again as you lay there.
Please get better, Qiao."*

*Quoted from Ye Si, *Papercuts* (Hong Kong: Tianyuan Publishing House, 1988), p. 284.

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Where are you getting off?
Wan Chai's already behind us
This is the end of 1995 here in
Hong Kong on the Pearl River estuary in south China
—is it a picture postcard sail returning in the sunset
or a basic law of the way people live?
What station is this? Then we must say farewell
You still think communication is possible?
Even though friendship is like an old house a star
all hauled away mountains moved for reclamation
The scene changes rapidly
opportunities for the taking
still put zest into my city

28 December 1995

Translated by Janice Wickeri

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David Clarke 祈大衛

Gloucester Road, Looking Towards Causeway Bay, From the Walkway to the Sun Hung Kai Centre.
24 November 1995.

The Metropolis, Visual Research into Contemporary Hong Kong 1990-1996.

CHAN Chi Tak**Recycled**

A kid flips through a picture book
Beside him two long-haired youths appear
Their book is all words
The kid doesn't know what book it is
but he's seen even smaller words, yellowing pages
in the corner second-hand bookstore
Each in their own corners
they browse and read

Adults in the neighbourhood shop gather round the TV
Now what's happened?
They gather to watch the sensational seventies
a world of relentless movement
that subsides then surges up again
Along the streets posters one after another
Remember May Fourth Boycott Japanese Goods
Oppose Fare Increases
The MTR is completed and
roars into an eighties of increased passenger traffic

What did you hear?
Cheers and wails
A racket
along with music I've never heard before
What's all the fuss out there?
All that racket that can even be heard inside
Is it Christmas? or New Year's Eve?
Is something coming to an end?
Memories of nights when the symbolic curtain fell come clearly to mind
and the songs we sang in chorus at school assemblies
Stout of heart and forward go with sincerity and hope
It's like reliving the end of some stage in life, say
the final class of middle school and university

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The clock's hands are about to draw together again
we're even closer to the end of the century
At this point there's no feeling downcast, no jumping for joy
People curb their ecstasy, their hesitation as applicable
Voices break off and gradually fall silent
The light dims and goes out
Curtain's set to rise on another act of history

In the room they're aware of the hubbub outside
But they keep silent
Sensing the gentle pleading through the din
the casual call for a dissenting voice in our daily life
And how will you dress for the occasion?
Gather up nostalgia and a little sentimentality
Put on a windbreaker
Take up an umbrella
All set to go outdoors

March 1996

Translated by Janice Wickeri

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