

formation of Hong Kong's unique postcolonial situation: although the British colonizers are now gone, some of Hong Kong's institutional setup remains colonial, but it will be increasingly difficult to practice decolonization.

In this light, this collection of essays will be useful to a wide range of scholars and students who wish to consider how Hong Kong's colonial history continues to shape the city's intriguing post-Handover situation.

***The Hong Kong Modernism of Leung Ping-kwan.***

By C. T. Au. Langham, M.D.: Lexington Books, 2019. 216 pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781793609373.

Reviewed by Sarah Lee Sze-wah

“Modernism” has been a notoriously difficult term to define. As traditionally understood, its nature can be largely ascribed to Enlightenment and rationalism, and more specifically concerning movements in the arts and literature mainly in the West taking place from *fin de siècle* to around 1950s as an academic category of study. There has been many attempts to stretch the boundaries of such definitions; a recent bold attempt would be Susan Stanford Friedman's *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (2015), which expands the term “modernism” to a much broader range of cultural and historical contexts, including the poetry of Du Fu (杜甫) in Tang Dynasty China alongside canonical modernists (for example Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf) and postcolonial writers from various nations.

Compared with such broad-sweeping approach, C. T. Au's book on the late Hong Kong writer, poet and academic Leung Ping-kwan (also known by his pen name Yasi/Ye Si 也斯) and Hong Kong modernism might seem a straightforward inquiry. However, Au points out that “Hong Kong modernism is not yet clearly defined” (4), complicated by factors such as historical context and periodization: its dates remains debated, with scholars proposing its beginnings either in the 1930s or 1950s, and

its end either in the 1960s or 1970s, during which Hong Kong was a British colony. As Leung self-identified as a modernist at a 2009 book launch despite working well beyond the period (1), Au sets to analyze the modernist traits in Leung's works, firstly to enrich the definition of Hong Kong modernism, and then to explore the relationship between Leung's modernist aesthetics with Western modernisms (19), where the plural ending is increasingly adopted in academic discussions to reflect the expansion of the term.

Au suggests that although Leung has been regarded by some as a postmodern or postcolonial writer, the recent expansion of "modernisms" allows him to be situated as a modernist writer. Au cites John Minford who delineates Leung's modernism as "home-grown (if European- and U.S.-educated)" versus "the more tormented trajectory of mainland Chinese modernism, reborn from the ashes of the Cultural Revolution" (qtd on p. 7), although Leung himself also acknowledged "the close relationship between mainland Chinese modernist poets of the 1940s and those of Hong Kong" (8). From such a mixed lineage, Leung made use of various approaches to capture in his oeuvre "his own and other Hong Kong residents' identities as fluid, hybrid, unstable, and fragmented" (175).

In discussing Leung's modernism and connecting it to modernisms at large, Au's comparative project makes an ambitious attempt on a monumental task, covering vastly diverse scopes and aiming to address how Leung in his works built upon and responded to both Chinese and Western influences while being uniquely Hong Kong. Au's careful reading of an impressively wide range of Leung's creative and critical works spanning different periods and genres, along with her analysis supported by an equally diverse collection of critical studies, made this a penetrating investigation into Leung's oeuvre and aesthetics with innovative perspectives.

Following the introductory chapter in which Au lays out the theoretical aims and principles of her approach of Leung's Hong Kong modernism, she discusses in Chapter 2, "Revisiting the Chinese Literary Traditions," Leung's

engagement with the lyrical and “*yongwu*” (詠物) traditions. The latter is described simply as “things,” although the concept can be explained more clearly, especially for Western audiences. Perhaps the closest equivalent would be an ode to an object, which acts as a vehicle of the sentiments expressed, for example Ezra Pound’s rewriting of the Tang poem “Fan-Piece for Her Imperial Lord” in *Cathay* (1915): “O fan of white silk, / clear as frost on the grass-blade, / You also are laid aside.” Au regards Leung as more successful in both continuing the *yongwu* tradition and reflecting “modern object-subject relations” (59) in his novels such as *Postcolonial Affairs of Food and the Heart* (《後殖民食物與愛情》, 2009), rather than in his poems about food or objects such as “Liaozhai Poetry” (〈誌異〉) in *East West Matters* (《東西》, 2000), which are more focused on the subject rather than the objects.

Au then follows the recent discussions of modernism and the ordinary in Chapter 3, “The Invention of the Ordinary,” to argue for a different conception of the quotidian in Leung’s perspective. The colonial situation of Hong Kong severed connections to heritage, causing people to find their identities and even their daily lives “unstable” due to their uncertain surroundings and future. Many “locals” were actually themselves immigrants from the Mainland, particularly during the influx after the Second World War – Leung himself included – and “home” to Hongkongers has never been easily defined. As such, Au highlights Leung’s aesthetic belief that “Hong Kong modernists have to invent the ordinary out of an extraordinary colonial situation” (65), for example via ordinary objects and daily life like home, medicine, clothes and food in his works. Au offers insightful reading of these themes, particularly on mental illness, or “colonial disease” (91) as a trope for “placelessness” (90) in *Paper Cuts* (《剪紙》, 1982).

Different from many other colonies, Hong Kong’s economy took off after the Second World War, enabling its citizens to prosper and travel, resulting in a distinctive

Hong Kong diaspora by election, for example to study or work abroad or emigrate. Leung himself also completed his graduate studies in the US and travelled widely, which influenced his travel writing. Au explores Leung's magical realism and travelogues in Chapter 4, "Celebrating Multiple Perspectives," and suggests that works such as *Cities of Memory, Cities of Fabrication* (《記憶的城市，虛構的城市》，1993) and *Postcards from Prague* (《布拉格的明信片》，2000) innovatively cross genres by "incorporating prose, criticism, fiction, and odes into travel writing" (142); the mixing of travelogue, autobiography and fiction, the use of techniques such as negation and fragmentation to destabilize authenticity (143), and the various types of travelers presented altogether give rise to accounts with "multiple perspectives on the colonized as travelers" (139). Au sees Leung's works as a special kind of "countertravel writing" (136, 174), although her discussion would benefit from further explanation of the term (despite a reference given) and its connection with Leung's works. (It is also rather confusingly misspelt as "coutertravel" in much of Chapter 4.) Nonetheless, Au's exploration of Leung's magical realism is generally novel and insightful, arguing convincingly for the presence of the "real" in the "magical" and vice versa.

In the relatively shorter concluding chapter "Returning to the Beginnings," Au discusses Leung's relationship with translation as a reader of translated literature, translator of foreign literature into Chinese, and as a poet-translator of his own works in collaboration with other poet-translators such as the American poet Gordon T. Osing. To enrich the discourse on modernism and translation, the author can consider discussing further about Leung's translation as a modernist mode of writing both more broadly and specifically concerning more of his translations or translated works, potentially carving out a space for the engagement between Chinese literature/subjects with modernism, besides the notable examples of Pound's *Cathay* and Amy Lowell's translation

of Chinese poetry with Florence Asycough in the early twentieth century.

Given the broad scope of this book, establishing a valid methodology is indeed a Herculean task. Au rises to the challenge and is generally meticulous in laying out the topics discussed, including canonical modernism, modernisms and Leung's Hong Kong modernism. However, occasionally there remains certain aspects which can be established more comprehensively. For example, although Leung's contribution to Hong Kong literature is widely recognized and this book is a titular exploration into his works, the author at times assumes an equivalence between Hong Kong modernism and Leung's aesthetics without overt support. For instance, Au readily equates "Leung's modernist features" with "the major traits of Hong Kong modernism" (12), and concludes that "celebrating multiple perspectives and inclusiveness," as expressed in Leung's oeuvre, are also "the uniqueness of Hong Kong modernism" (175). It would be helpful to give further justifications of how features of Leung's works can be seen as reflective of Hong Kong modernism with more substantiation and elaboration, especially for (Anglophone) audiences who might not be familiar with the local literary context or Leung's works, as much of his oeuvre remains untranslated. That said, Au often details the plots of his fiction works and provide translations for the poems discussed, which can at times be cumbersome at the cost of more in-depth analysis. This is particularly notable in the discussion of Leung's early short story collection *Shimen the Dragon-keeper* (《養龍人師門》, 1979) in Chapter 4.

Regarding attempts in field-crossing and defining Hong Kong modernism, I would suggest in the following a few potential directions for the author as well as other scholars who are in the process of establishing the field, especially in connection with other (particularly Western) modernisms. Firstly, more "modernist" traits can be highlighted from the works discussed. For example, when analyzing Leung's poem "Cocklebur" (〈卷耳〉) from

“Shijing Exercise” (〈詩經練習〉), from *Chinese Poems from Provence* (《普羅旺斯的漢詩》, 2012), Au describes the female protagonist thinking about her husband: “her hands stop in mid-air. This is followed immediately by the episode about the man’s hand.” (40) Au does not discuss the montage nature of this shift in perspective, which is a signature modernist trait found in literature and visual arts besides films, for example the stream of consciousness in the High Modernism of James Joyce and Woolf.

To further situate Leung’s (and other Hong Kong writers’) works in modernisms, more comparative analysis with a wider range of references to other (canonical) modernist works can also be conducted. Given the thesis, the Western (post-)modernist traces (if not influences) in Leung’s works can be further explored. For example, Au sees Leung’s use of “repeated words, phrases, and even whole lines and sentences” as a means to “create a rhythmic and lyrical element” in the Chinese lyrical tradition (36), although the use of repeated words and phrases with alterations have been experimented since Gertrude Stein to the Language poets and beyond, where the works of the latter group bear remarkable imprint on Leung’s poems. In *Travelling with a Bitter Melon: Selected Poems (1973–1998)* (2002), certain poems such as “Onion” (1997) and “Bronze Mirror” (1996) seem to have precedents in shape/concrete poetry. The “multiple perspective” in Leung’s travelogues can also be fruitfully compared with the multiple voices in modernist narratives such as T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Cubism’s fragmented perspectives and collages.

Finally, to enrich the discussion on modernism and objects, besides Anglophone and/or literary conceptions, comparison with Continental European culture and the visual arts can also be made. For instance, regarding the radical treatment and potential of objects, Leung’s magical realism and defamiliarization approaches, as in the example of his “Clothink” poems (〈衣想〉, 1998), might be more in line with the use of ready-mades and

transformation of objects in Cubism, Dada and Surrealism as well as Kafkaesque metamorphosis, rather than Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* which Au parallels in Chapter 3. Identifying more diverse modernist referents can potentially open up comparisons with more modernisms, which in turn help define Hong Kong modernism.

Overall, this book is a commendable contribution to the study of Leung's works and Hong Kong modernism at large not only to Sinologists and Chinese literature scholars, but also to a much wider audience in the Anglophone world by connecting Leung's works to modernisms, allowing valuable access to his large oeuvre, mostly yet to be translated. It is a laudable venture and is of immense value to scholars and readers of Hong Kong literature near and far, who are encouraged to consult Au's contributions and to further validate her findings with the writings by other Hong Kong (modernist) authors.

***Found in Transition: Hong Kong Studies in the Age of China.*** By Chu Yiu-wai. Albany, State University of New York Press, 2018. 296 pp. Hardback. ISBN: 9781438471693.

Reviewed by Pinky Lui Chung-man

Moved by the torrents of the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the ever-shifting momentum of Hong Kong politics, Chu Yiu-wai's book, *Found in Transition: Hong Kong Studies in the Age of China* (2018), presents a continuous effort in dissecting Hong Kong as a place of memory and culture. It is a timely update on Chu's previous book, *Lost in Transition: Hong Kong Culture in the Age of China* (2013). Amidst the trajectory from lost to found, Chu asks about the fate of Hong Kong in relation to its intricate position historically, culturally, and theoretically. Inspired by the transition found in the artistic media of films, television, and popular music, Chu regards Hong Kong