

History and Class Consciousness in Post-colonial Hong Kong writings in English

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Abstract

Hong Kong writing, or writing Hong Kong, has been a textual creation of the cityscape and its people, including the selfhood of the author. In this transitioning period from a British colony to a Chinese Administrative Region, some citizens have shown their attitudes of disowning Hong Kong by migration, while the ones who stay often express an ambivalence about the cultural or political identities. “Identity” is a frequent re-visited issue in this genre. This displacement and sense of drift bring a prototype of diasporic literature into Hong Kong writings. Yet, other than cultural or political identities, the socioeconomic reality in Hong Kong is also concerned. Leo Goodstadt suggested that such a huge disparity of wealth in society and the impoverished livelihoods of people should be of historical reasons (Goodstadt, 2014). Hong Kong people, including the authors, are divided into different social classes. Professor Yee-lin Ho from University of Hong Kong argues that the English language has inscribed the privilege as a colonial language and therefore the language of educational advantage and elite social status. Then, Hong Kong writings could be more complicated with the factor of language. This loosely defined “privilege” is regarded as a socioeconomic factor, which determines one’s class. Seeing the weight of history and the severity of the city’s poverty, I would like to study the representations of Hong Kong’s social reality in post-colonial Hong Kong writings in English. I interviewed two Hong Kong writers, Kai-cheung Dung and Xu Xi, who write respectively in Chinese and English in the first place and are from a different cultural background. On account of these differences, it might incur a discrepancy in depicting Hong Kong’s social reality. This paper would give a textual analysis and comparison on the representation of history and class consciousness in *Cantonese Love Stories* by Kai-cheung Dung and *Dear Hong Kong* by Xu Xi, employing the theory of literary realism, and juxtaposing the films *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* by Peter Chan (1996) and *Chinese Box* by Wayne Wang (1997).

Reflection

As a literary student, reading through one's life makes myself more conscious of people's sufferings and my privileges. It is not only the English language which gives us the privilege for elite status, but also the position as students that provides us with more sufficient time and space to actualize an ideal society we desire for common good. The cruelty of "realism" is in our lives – the society where caged rooms and luxury houses, and tycoons and elderlies who scavenge for survival have been omnipresent and farmlands soon absent. I might feel powerless because of my incapability to change the status quo in reality. Yet, literature is a mirror that reflects the struggle of people, giving me determination to eliminate those struggles. From powerlessness to empowerment, we could share our knowledge, instead of being indifferent. At this moment, I would like to thank Professor O'Sullivan for guiding my research and most importantly showing his wholehearted support for my work. The 4-year experience as an English major cultivates my courage and empathy to be a better human being.