

Series Editor's Preface

From its first controversial founding as a British colony in 1842, Hong Kong has been a unique place of refuge for immigrants, protected from the turmoil of the Mainland, a haven in which this free-thinking, free-wheeling child of China's great literary culture has been able to survive and flourish, unimpeded by political struggle and the heavy hand of ideological dogma. In the tender core beneath this modern city's deceptively hard and glittering surface lies a world of fine literature, visual and performance art, music, theatre and film. It is one of the great civilised cities of the world. This new series of six books proudly presents that civilisation, giving evidence of the defiant and distinctive character of Hong Kong's imaginative literature, which marks it off from the other parts of the Chinese-speaking world. Like the better-known cinematic work of Wong Kar-wai, the literature of Hong Kong combines a timelessly Chinese palette of colours and flavours with an exciting acceptance of cosmopolitan modernity. It is as authentically Chinese as the very best Cantonese cuisine, and yet at the same time, having issued from a place which is so permeable and volatile, it is also infused with an effortless sense of fusion. It is an alchemy of Hong Kong, but *for* the world.

Liu Yichang, an immigrant from Shanghai in 1948, was for several decades, until his death in 2019 at the age of 99, the father figure of the modern Hong Kong literary scene. As editor of the journal *Hong Kong Literature*, he was widely respected for having nurtured younger talents such as Leung Ping-kwan and Xi Xi. His 1962 stream-of-consciousness novel *The Drunkard* vividly portrays the Hong Kong of the early 1960s, chronicling the struggle for survival in the jungle of the city of a dissolute but thoughtful and literate Chinese man of letters. It captures the quintessential spirit of Hong Kong, its magnificent, often squalid, splendour, its contradictions, its chaotic and irrepressible energy.

Leung Ping-kwan, who moved into Hong Kong with his parents from Guangdong province as a small child in 1949, was a prolific and supremely gifted poet, critic, and writer of fiction. *Lotus Leaves* is the most complete anthology to date of translations from his poetic oeuvre, and shows the sheer range of his writing, from celebration of the everyday in Hong Kong life, to deeper meditations on the human condition, and playful pieces written for performance in the lively cultural scene in which he was so active a participant. His two tales in the companion volume *Dragons*, with their roots both in Latin-American Magical Realism and in the age-old Chinese tradition of tales of the supernatural, demonstrate his accomplishment as a storyteller.

Xi Xi also immigrated as a girl to Hong Kong from Shanghai, in 1950. Over the past five decades she has created a large and uniquely personal body of work, as a writer of both fiction and poetry. She is widely admired for her great stylistic elegance and for the poignant and haunting, almost melancholic, mood of much of her writing. *The Teddy Bear Chronicles* is a quirky and original work, cleverly bringing together her passion for the making of teddy bears with a number of short essays about colourful figures from Chinese history. It is a charming album, both instructive and entertaining, leaving the reader with a feeling of pure delight.

The memoir *Ordinary Days* by the scholar and critic Leo Ou-fan Lee and his wife Esther brings to this series an intensely personal touch, consciously

echoing that great sentimental memoir of the late eighteenth century, Shen Fu's *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*. With disarming candour, Leo and Esther lay bare their hearts and share with us their story of love and suffering. Set partly against the backdrop of some of Hong Kong's most turbulent years, partly in the far-flung diaspora of the Chinese intelligentsia, this is a remarkably revealing record of the inner life of a highly cultivated modern Chinese couple.

The Best China, an anthology of Hong Kong essays from the past 170 years, records the intellectual ferment that has always characterised the city, sometimes restless and questioning, sometimes meditative and lyrical, always civilised, and buoyed by an all-pervasive spirit of freedom.

To borrow from the title of one of Xi Xi's works, we could perhaps call this series *Six Chapters from a Floating City*: a tribute to the indomitable spirit of the people of the special world that is Hong Kong.

John Minford

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Featherston, New Zealand

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In the autumn of 2012, a year after the 2011 Symposium at which the idea was first put forward by my friend PK, or to give him his full title, Professor Leung Ping-kwan, fifty or so graduate students at The Chinese University of Hong Kong enrolled in a semester-long course on translating Hong Kong literature. Professor Leung came along towards the end of the semester and took part in an impromptu workshop at one of our seminars. He was already very ill, but his dedication to the cause of Hong Kong literature always remained in the forefront of his mind, to his dying day. His talk that day inspired us all, and ultimately his passion has been the driving force behind this project.

Over the years many young translators have generously contributed their talents to the various books in the series, working from Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, inspired by a shared love of Hong Kong,

a shared admiration for the spirit of the place, and a determination to show the world the depth and fascination of its literature and of its unique culture.

Finally, I wish to thank the enthusiastic and dedicated team at The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press. The Press Director Ms Gan Qi, and the Acquisitions Editor Ms Ye Minlei, welcomed the project with open arms, and over the past few months their editors 'on the ground', Ms Winifred Sin and Ms Rachel Pang, have toiled with enormous professionalism on some complex manuscripts. Throughout the often challenging process of bringing this project to fruition they have been a most congenial team to work with, many times expressing to me the pride they feel in helping to create this tribute to their city and its great tradition of freedom.

John Minford

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