Preface

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In September 2020, when Eddie Tay and Michael O'Sullivan from the Department of English, CUHK, spoke to me about their plan to launch a new literary press devoted to publishing Hong Kong writing, I proposed an anthology featuring writers who are former residents of Hong Kong and have relocated or returned to their homes overseas—a gathering of reflections on how Hong Kong has changed over time, as seen from diverse and retrospective points of view. To me, this theme seemed like an obvious choice for curating an anthology of English-language writing about a city that has been home to many who find comfort, friendship and inspiration on and off the trains before they eventually depart for somewhere else. Those who are not *from* Hong Kong, but are *of* Hong Kong, as Viki Holmes describes herself and fellow poet Kate Rogers. Then there are various Hong Kong writers who live a diasporic or transnational existence, who we connect with when they travel 'back home' or when we travel to where they are. If there is a new opening for our literary voices, shouldn't we devote space to those who hold Hong Kong in their minds and spirits?

Over the past nine months, I have held in my mind the perspectives of the eighteen writers featured in these pages. If I was initially drawn to the idea of distance, the convergence of these writers' voices has brought me back to places and times that feel painfully close. In Xu Xi's Hong Kong of the 1970s, we encounter a cityscape of disparate economic, social, cultural and ideological intersections—the local locals, the foreign locals, the privileged, the hopeful, the migrants who nurse a complicated love for a homeland they fled or left; a multitude of languages/dialects and beliefs colliding in the same space, a space woven of contention, understanding and resignation all at the same time. Half a century later, to what extent do we still *accept* these myriad ways to relate to the 'Hongkonger' identity?

Madeleine Slavick, who feels she grew up in her twenty-five years in Hong Kong after her first arrival in the 1980s, identifies as 'Hong Kong Chinese' when she speaks to us from her Māori world in New Zealand. There was a time when Hong Kong was 'a liminal place for liminal people with no expectations of racial, cultural, or national purity', as is portrayed in Q.M. Zhang's recollections of her teaching life in the city in the 1990s. It was a time, too, when students were encouraged to debate the values on which *a future Hong Kong* should be based, against the backdrop of a resplendent university campus. Don't we recognise these shifting ideals, both pristine and ominous? It is a menace that we should have grasped much more deeply in the

past three decades. But perhaps the city turned into a submerged waterscape when we were not looking, as foretold in Mani Rao's flash from 2006.

Or perhaps we have been blindsided by the perception of Hong Kong as a transient place. A place that is often not as welcoming as it purports. Amidst the celebration of love in Club 7-Eleven, I hear tones of isolation in its multicultural coalescence and music. Elsewhere in the city, John Wall Barger's seer meets a skeleton requiring a future in a shopping mall. I wonder about the Bahasa-speaking woman, the reluctant bearer of a child in Nashua Gallagher's poem. Where is she heading with that unexpected twist of a life in her arms? In the end, Hong Kong is a singular loneliness. It is a memory that fades from the mind of a character who lands in the snowy landscape of rural Derbyshire, in search of community and a place where she belongs.

Do some people leave because they yearn for something better, and wrestle with a sense of guilt that never truly goes away, as the owner of Wan Chai Cafe does in Tokyo? In this unravelling Hong Kong story, guilt is a trespasser on the love that many diasporic Hongkongers feel for their hometown. Shui-yin Sharon Yam speaks of her struggle with survivor's guilt and imposter syndrome over not being on the streets of Hong Kong in 2019. Jennifer Wong and Pui Ying Wong evoke echoes of collision in their poetry. Hung Hung, a Taiwanese poet who experienced our city's rupture, still cradles the ashes of faith. Unlike the ones who immigrated to the dystopia of Convoy Wharfs, some people continue their fight against the wind because, in our reality, the concepts of 'geography' and 'allegiance' are preludes to erasure.

In this struggle against forgetting, we are smoke-stained souls dangling in the air. We are waving to one another, waving to the ones who are leaving because home is now the mouth of a shark.[1] Like many other Hong Kong people, I live in this city because of the circumstances of my life. At the end of each day, when grief flows out of me, I empty myself and wait for silence. I wait for the next day.

To our writers who have contributed your work to this collection—thank you for your generosity and your spirit. I would like to offer my special thanks to Louise Ho for sharing her voice with us again in these pages, and to Madeleine Slavick for contributing the cover image for the anthology. A debt of gratitude is owed to Xu Xi, who offered connections, advice and encouragement. I must also thank our associate editor Emily Hedvig Olsson for her support in bringing this to fruition. Lastly, I am deeply grateful to our series editors Eddie Tay and Michael O'Sullivan for their belief in this effort. Thank you for allowing us to create this space through which our voices can be heard.

1 Warsan Shire, "Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)", in *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* (UK: Flipped Eye, 2011), p. 27.