



## Foreword

This year's edition of *Halfway Home* invited fiction, non-fiction, poetry, photo essay and comic strip contributions from secondary school students, as well as from undergraduates across City University of Hong Kong. The theme of 'Home Kong', further widened (or narrowed) by the topics, shoes and colour, provoked a dizzying array of interpretations, from which the judges had to select what they thought were the best. The best? Placing discrete uniqueness into a hierarchy of not so good, good, better, best seems invidious, if not downright stupid. How would you rank an apple, a mango and an orange in any meaningful, let alone aesthetic, way? The process is almost completely subjective. Nonetheless, the judges have tried to assess each work as much as possible by taking into account the creative use of language and images, along with the originality of form and content.

It is always amazing to gain a glimpse into the hearts and minds through reading some of the offerings, of those brave enough to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings to the world. Seemingly blank, listless, distracted and unengaged faces often conceal a wealth of interior experience that makes a public forum such as *Halfway Home* so important to our perception of others and reminds us much of the individual experience – be it in Hong Kong or elsewhere – is at a fundamental level

shared experience. So, this is a rather long-winded way of saying that the selections we invite you now to enjoy are representatives of a far wider imaginative output. I hope that those who were not included this time will take heart and continue expressing themselves in their own unique way. A final word of thanks and appreciation must go to the dedicated Student Publication Team – Chan Yan Tung Janie, Lai Ming Chi Edwin, Lam Wing Yin Mark, Soo Lam Jobie and Leonardo David Tay – whose own creativity and enthusiasm went into the production of this colourful compendium of work. This year, one result of their efforts sees the innovation of two new categories of output – photo essay and comic strip – both reflecting the increasing interplay of text and image in today’s ever-expanding world of literature.

Dr Peter Edward Rees Jordan,

April 2019

## Preface

In late 2018, members of Student Publication Team (SPT) launched a massive campaign to conglomerate creative masterminds. Under the supervision of the Department of English (EN), City University of Hong Kong (CityU), the team took on the mission of coordinating two key projects for local young writers – English Writing Competition (EWC) for secondary school students and *Halfway Home IX* for CityU students.

This year, the SPT is committed to garner different creative forms of fiction or non-fiction literary works from like-minded students, covering short stories, poetry, photo essays and comic strips. Both projects employ a central theme of ‘Home Kong’ which inspires students to construct their own idea of ‘home’ and identity in relation to this dynamic city – Hong Kong. Writers are encouraged to expound on the seemingly familiar city through the scope of ‘shoes’ and ‘colours’, broaching brand-new angles and bringing in polychromatic lights and sides less known or associated with this metropolis. The campaign has achieved an outstanding success as it reached 156 top-notch schools and received over 230 submissions. These pieces were generated by young voices of enlightened minds, lively and exceptional. From their narratives, we see a new generation of young creative writers and a bright future for creative writing in Hong Kong.

Beyond *Halfway Home IX*, the SPT is calling out to you – write it your own, follow your flow. We will wait for you in next year’s *Halfway Home*.

Student Publication Team 18/19,  
April 2019

# **The Editorial Board**

## **Editors:**

Chan Yan Tung Janie

Soo Lam Jobie

Lai Ming Chi Edwin

Lam Wing Yin Mark

Leonardo David Tay

## **Advisors:**

Dr Peter Edward Rees Jordan

Dr Hiu Yen Klaudia Lee

Dr Joanna Gwen Mansbridge

Dr Eric Peter Sandberg



# Halfway Home IX

Hong Kong Writing

# Table of Contents

## Poetry

<i>Ladder Street</i> – Mandy Tsang	2
<i>The Wall</i> – Lau Mei Po	3
<i>At the Heart of the Famed Concrete Forest</i> – Matilda Law	4
<i>The Urban Kaleidoscope</i> – Yip Tsing Kiu Helen	6
<i>Instant Noodles</i> – Johanna Lim	8
<i>The Symphony of Hong Kong</i> – Tang Lam Ophelia	10
<i>Unapologetic Summeriness</i> – Fung Sin Man Connor	12
<i>Hiraeth</i> – Lai Ming Chi Edwin	13
<i>Soldiering On</i> – Leonardo David Tay	15
<i>Lost, then Found</i> – Elizabeth Kezia	17
<i>Neon Rain</i> – Eileen Nasert	19
<i>Hold Your Breath</i> – Soo Lam Jobie	22
<i>Prepackaged</i> – Choi Lok Yin	24
<i>The Colour of My Shoes</i> – Kwok Ka Hang	26

## Fiction

<i>Duality</i> – Ng Lok Ki	30
<i>A Fast-food Problem</i> – Kwok Siu Yau	35
<i>Road like Winding Dormant Dragon</i> – Matilda Law	39
<i>Jason the Employee</i> – Lam Wing Yin Mark	45
<i>Bound by Home</i> – Advani Melanie	52



## **Non-fiction**

*Godfather and Teochew* – Fung Sin Man Connor 60

*Velocity* – Leonardo David Tay 64

*Halfway There - One Day We Will Make It Home* – Tan Kai Shuang 68

*Choi Hung Estate* – Cheung Sze Ying Charlotte 74

*Narratives - The Unforgettable Taste of Cha Chaan Teng* 76

*Narratives - Memories of Lee Tung Street* 88

**Acknowledgements** 100



# Poetry

## **Ladder Street**

Mandy Tsang

Rusty red bricks, levels.

How long do they witness?

Stairs shrink afar.

Black balustrades searing tiny spaces.

Time overwhelms; crushes the cracks

Stairs split, up and down.

Lost souls meet and fade.

Footprints of thoughts,

A wanderlust follows the trail;

Beams of light, tiny sprinkles,

Morning, leaves and canopies,

The hundreds, conquers, conquers.

## **The Wall**

Lau Mei Po

Noises are blasting around me  
So I turn to the wall for my inner-peace  
I close my eyes to enjoy the tranquillity  
Since troubles feel distant when I cannot see

I live my life in this cycle on repeat  
The troubles creep in as they please  
One day, the wall no longer exists  
And I am there eternally asleep

## **At the Heart of the Famed Concrete Forest**

Matilda Law

Rummaging through my memory for that black and white image for  
cross-referencing

The one of the clock tower standing proud  
To think it once dwarfed all that surrounded it  
is comical now

Or was it always a trick of perspective  
The one standing before me looks suspiciously new  
Which reminds me of Lenin's corpse

23% Lenin, 77% wax and advance biochemistry  
With its bricks either replaced or aggressively power washed  
Its clock face sophisticatedly lit, not unlikely the glow effusing from  
nearby high-end store signs

I can't help but wonder how many % of the clock tower now  
is the clock tower then  
from the monochrome image

Both are from a bygone time that are supposed to still hold some meaning  
The corpse and the tower  
What, no one quite knows

Strolling between the two orderly parallel lines of palm trees  
With my back to the tower  
The signature curve of a palm tree that would surely remind you of a  
tropical locale is absent

Instead, the trees stand like soldiers to attention  
With tucked in stomachs and straight spines

Stabbed into, instead of sprawling from, neatly cut out squares of soil  
Spaced out at intervals  
in concrete

These bits of artificiality pale and are dim in comparison  
To the lightshow across the harbour  
That famous view on postcards and top 10 must-sees  
A star ferry is casually bobbing along  
Up and down  
On the ink black murky current  
Calm but unyielding  
Completing the picture  
The perfectly cliché composition

Even though the distance between us is great  
The lights stun and daze  
Force their way into my already squinting eyes  
The flaming ring that is the good-for-nothing Ferris wheel  
The zigzagging lines creeping up the BoC building  
The IFC leading the pack with its blandness  
A bunch of billboards  
Suspended  
weave together a LED tapestry

I tore myself away from the magnetizing but disorienting sight  
Disappearing down the steps  
Into a separate world that never sleeps  
Underground

## **The Urban Kaleidoscope**

Yip Tsing Kiu Helen

On a leisurely Tuesday,  
Amidst the springtime humidity,  
I gently swirl a cup of latte  
And sniff around everything in the city.

Behind the misted windows  
Are some familiar bustling shadows.  
Are the occasional roaring revs  
Asking them to hold their breath?

Boarding a ferry on a whim,  
I have two skylines in a glimpse.  
Some say it is like Manhattan  
that lives are in thrall to the banking heaven.

Away from the towering skyscrapers  
Is a secluded side of Hong Kong.  
Brooklyn suddenly comes to mind,  
As old and new equally intertwine.



Cities are kaleidoscopic,  
But there is no place like home  
That shields us immutably;  
Neither New York, nor elsewhere.

It is the strongest caffeine.  
It could be frantic; it could be fantastic;  
You may love it, you may loathe it.  
Just don't force anything now – not you, not me.

## **Instant Noodles**

Johanna Lim

The spiciness in my belly  
warms me, little by little,  
as I slurp on the slippery smooth  
texture of noodles.

The spices peppered all over,  
infused with the slight taste of  
salty chicken broth,  
tickle my taste buds.

It reminds me of the time  
when I was 4, and my mother  
would come home, stumbling, drifting  
in and out of consciousness before dinnertime.

It brings me back to the time when  
I was 8, and I came home  
to find an empty house, echoing  
the growing hunger in me.

The memories, they surfaced of  
when I was 12, and the orphanage  
closed, leaving me once more  
to find a place I could call home.

And now alone at 16,  
I make a home out of random parks,  
looking for change,  
that would allow me to  
buy the one thing that relieves me of  
all that haunts me.

# **The Symphony of Hong Kong**

Tang Lam Ophelia

## **1st Movement: Sunrise at Wan Chai**

HONK! HONK!

Here go the vehicles,  
following the moving serpent  
that crawls along the corridor.

Running along,  
big and little ants  
are on the path,  
rushing to their daily work.

Chirping and crooning,  
the morning birds chitter.  
They stay in a park,  
listening to the residents' chatter.

## **2nd Movement: Afternoon in Chai Wan**

BEEP! BEEP!

How is your day?  
Drivers call out cheerfully  
Along their way

Whistling along,  
the hardworking ants  
stop by the terminus,  
waiting for the bus

Gigging and laughing  
with smiles on their face  
The kids in the park  
Cheer for a football race

### **3rd movement: Night time at Yau Ma Tei**

VROOM! VROOM!  
With all its might,  
the motorcyclist  
dashes through the night

Busking loud,  
folks dance and sing,  
cheering and clapping  
at the dancing king

Snoring soundly  
without any yawns  
the street sleepers sleep  
until the morning dawns.

## **Unapologetic Summerness**

Fung Sin Man Connor

Once mingled, free-floating piano tunes and sun-harshed highway could be a match. The Light Rail took its time on the causeway, I am a passenger, safely guarded from the unapologetic summerness like tourists from the safari park. I am an outrageous punk, perching onto handrails lost in his romantic dream of an impossible summer. Romeo and Juliet in my hand. Vehicle garages rusting along palm trees lined railway. This is Yuen Long. This is the outskirts with gated dogs with feral barks, this is a compromise between bungalows and nature. Piano symphonies morphed into eighties tunes in the Call Me By Your Name soundtrack album, and the eighties synths draw the staining mystics, out from avenues that lead to villas similar to those I have sojourned. And the world as I see it, it is beautiful.

## Hiraeth

Lai Ming Chi Edwin

Humpin' and crookin' his back  
on the piano stool, shoes poised on pedals

*He heaves a sigh, he pants —  
on beat, he thumps his feet.*

In the lamp-lit street, Central, Peel Fresco,  
I ain't seein' no local count'nance  
dwellin' in the den, only off-work hepcats

*He scats his way through —  
the blues; the chords, back-to-back.*

Them outcast urbanites fidget to the dissonance,  
the crooning harmony from the black box; but never —  
to the cacophony  
of their smouldering boxes.

*His dexterous fingers glissade up —  
and cascade down, strike —*

So lonely was the piano man —  
who lives between the ebonies and ivories longin' —  
for his Mecca, his Taj Mahal that might have never —  
existed —

*His fingers dangling—*

*I'm pantin' —*

from five to one, the blues is done,  
cadence callin' lost souls back home —  
and the next standard has begun.



## **Soldiering On**

Leonardo David Tay

This is not an ode,  
This is not a dirge.  
Will you shoulder this load,  
For I am about to emerge.

This is not a song,  
This is not a speech.  
There is something wrong,  
And so my friend, of you I beseech -

Do you remember the fervency, the urgency  
Of our ceaseless incessant dreaming -  
The rush of night air, the cold air  
And the sky of stars seemingly teeming?

Do you remember your falling, your tumbling  
Into a sweet honeyed pit -  
A light laugh, the lingering love  
For a girl of wonder seemingly unrequited?

I beg of you,  
Be that child once again,  
As you sit on a commuting train,  
Life's orders to be fulfilled,

As you toil and often  
Find that you won't bear fruit,  
As you lie on a bed  
Dampened by your tears and hers  
Be that child once again  
And find it in you to soldier on.

I remember our promises, that like Ulysses,  
Our path will be true,  
Unwavering and passionate  
As we faced the seas endlessly vast and blue.

One promise.

We were always dreaming,  
And our heads expand and our hearts inflate.  
The future we're planning,  
With ketchup on a dirty greasy plate  
In a diner in our quaint little neighbourhood.

## Lost, then Found

Elizabeth Kezia

In this land of concrete and that field of skyscrapers  
Rainbows are disguised amidst spaces



I was a stranger, lost in translation  
Bound to be forever in the look-out  
Looking for reasons  
Who belong to the years to come



Through every blow of despair, every drop of tears  
Hope knows all too well how to fall  
Though by the time the sun sets,  
It will find its way to rise



## Neon Rain

Eileen Nasert

I am an ephemeral.

A voyaging seismograph of hopes - still green -

Adjusting my senses to the roots of this present place.

Witnessing its withering bloom, yearning for droplets.

This place suffused with the wafting white veil –



*Photo by Eileen Nasert*

Inevitably tinted red by the subdued neon glow.  
Barely, yet, unceasingly illuminated yellow painted lines.  
Reminiscent of star rays dancing beyond the quintuple -  
Always watching the weather.



*Photo by Dennis Isip*



Scorched.

Waiting to be watered.

Waiting to be walked on once again.



*Photo by Andy Yang*

## Hold Your Breath

Soo Lam Jobie

Head under water.

Why –

if this city is truly a promised land

that grants us

a stable job

a stable pay-check and

a stable life

– does it feel like we are chained to the deepest bottom of an ocean?

*bloopbloopbloop*

One bubble, two bubbles.

The first gasp is futile.

Don't let them out again.

Hold your breath, my friend.

Don't complain.

Head under water.

Why –

if what you said is true

that we should see the countless wonders about this city,

a home for us fools,



a land that was once British-ruled, the old-time glory  
should be enough to make up  
for its crooked system  
and its caged freedom  
now that they all seem fair  
– are some of us still desperately gasping for air?

*bloopbloopbloop*

Just hold your breath, my friend.

Head under water.

*bloopbloopbloop*

Count the wonders.

Don't complain.

*bloopbloop*

Everything would be fine

As long as we held our breath

*bloop*

Long enough till we flat-lined.

Don't compla –

Wait, answer me.

So what was life

And what was survival

If all we ever did was settle.

## Prepackaged

*The winning piece for Poetry in Home Kong Writing Competition*

Choi Lok Yin

bassinet box

you are very small

time is never time at all

spinning mobiles and teeny tiny socks

you gaze, enthralled

before long you are tying your laces

in batting cages and running bases

swing at the tee, the ball runs home

where you retreat into the formaldehyde embraces

of walls monochrome

apartment box

you spend your first paycheck on the mortgage loan

decent humble beginning, despite the slight asbestos undertone

mahjong clatters from subdivided blocks

lull you to dreams of kismet unknown

your battered sneakers loiter at the door

by the laundry hamper on the linoleum kitchen floor

the kitsch wooden slabs of Live, Laugh, Love

you spied in the discount pile of the thrift store

are haughty jeers from white-collars above

cubicle box

from 9 to 5 your world is grisaille  
tack boards, recycled air conditioning you inhale  
as you sigh once more at the clocks  
and face your computer fully stale  
such is the circumstance of the promising debutante  
daily the vista of social climbers sycophanting idiot savants  
surreptitiously fastidious  
from floor-to-ceiling windows flaunt  
their city so insidious

casket box

alas the thanatomania comes true  
as the void draws near, looms upon you  
you ponder what to write on your plaques  
yet the cloaked scythe reaps before the date due  
unmourned, your vessel awaits burial  
a lone soul lingers under the lacunar in the morgue  
corporeal, mercurial,  
nevermore

## **The Colour of My Shoes**

*Runner-up for Poetry in Home Kong Writing Competition*

Kwok Ka Hang

My shoes are blackandwhite.

Polished unworn pleather.

With double knots.

Rambling on the streets.

My streets are brickwoodbrown.

Structured and paved in stone.

With passersby from nations-wide.

Hallway of the businesses.

My businesses are goldenblue.

Tiny self-made stores of old.

With towers of blooming glass.

Striding alongside stalls.

My stalls are sunriseorange.

From my grandpa's times yet forever rushing.

With fusions of running time.

Rushing past pastillnow.

My past is swiftsteelgrey.

Tales my father told me.

With threads of woven history.

Flowing through the alleyways.

My alleyways are violetblack.

Cranny of sighs and tired yawns.

With strained backs and heavy bags.

Striding past locked gates through a door.

My door is laidbackgreen.

Back from a long days' stride.

With endless work undone.

Skipping out are my makers.

Asking about my rainbow tiring day.

My shoes are blackandwhite.

Stained creased pleather.

With untied strings.

On top is painted redorangeyellowgreenblueindigopurple.

Dipped in through the day.

My shoes are blackandwhite.

But not just blackandwhite;



## **Fiction**

## **Duality**

Ng Nok Ki

Can you say that you truly love yourself, when you hate the place from which you came?

You were born in summer, when summer was still summer. Your mother often sat with you on the balcony, you on her lap with your outstretched hands, watching sparrows chirping in senseless rhythm, dotting silhouettes of tree crowns chasing flecks on the pebbled pavement.

Sometimes you really liked summer. You liked the clouds framed in the azure sky, vapour gathered in masses of distilled white, full of promises for imagination and stories. You liked the rays of morning sunlight ruffled by the billowing curtains, a heat graduate on the windowsill like tides caressing the beach, as if it was asking gently all the moisture in your hair, your clothes, your books, to leave. You liked the smell of the green, its musky and paradoxically fresh scent, and wondered whether colours have smell, or if it was the smell of photosynthesis. You liked the snails munching on the concrete, and would put them back into the bush lest it got stepped on.

Sometimes you hated summer, the typhoons that always came in the midst of your dreams, rattling the window panes; rainwater bubbling up through the stiles to relieve the pressure, a hint of rust and iron. Or the breezeless afternoons stuck with yourself; they were hot, too hot. So you sprawled on the balcony, on the small wooden bench upon which sometimes you



would rest your turtle. You would close your eyes, to concentrate on the incessant chime of cicada, to stop that perspiration dripping down your every pore. But the sun is too bright it burns through your eyelids. You saw, from your closed eyes, a warm orange-red hue. “Is this how the sun is? Its true colour from raw human eyes?”

You never quite managed to figure it out, because by then your mother would have called you, to not look directly at the sun, to put back the books that you were reading, to give you a cookie, to let the beetle you caught go back to its home, to go ride the bicycle that your father had brought you; or your friends would have shouted at you from downstairs, to go with your brother to the park, to spin on the roundabout or help them push up their swings, to play an imaginary game of war with your imaginary artillery and spectre.

So you decided that you did like summer after all, you liked the heat, bombarding chime of insects, birds perching effortlessly on branches, mountain top obscured by murky fog, muddy footprint left behind on the white tile floors, termites stuck in the overhead frosted glass lamp shade, puddles on the uneven concrete sidewalk, blinding lightening slitting through violet skies, snails that house an entire universe in their spiral-patterned shells, eagles gliding air as black fading spots, and the occasional flutter of the wind chime made with all the metal bars gathered from your father’s workshop, a deep hollow sound of reverberation and silence. You had loved it all, and you had loved yourself.

Love, such an enigmatic little word, with such power. How is it different from like, from fondness, from hate? Still, you didn't care, because words were words, summer was summer, and you were not going to let something created by others to dictate your life. So you waited for summer to come, again and again, under the suspense of the unwaning moon, crisp leaves rustling underneath your sole, in the siege of surging gust you wait, even though summer would never be the same as the last, even though you had not learnt to understand that yet.

To your delight, summer did come, but it did not come back to you. Like a dream, you could not remember when it starts, or how would it end, only the middle. Perhaps you had started noticing it yourself, or perhaps they had revealed themselves to you, but you began to see people, in their insensitivity and delights, toppled over one another without regards; to smell the burning of gasoline and plastic, an odour branded into your lung so repugnant even a storm could not wash it away; to hear the ocean of voices tearing and fanning, slipping into every cranny of your being. You tried to run, against the irreversible current, dodging from the prying talons; but like a flock of moths attracted to the light, you cramped and got carried along, in a suffocating space towards an unknown destination, only that when you close your eye, there is no light seeping through your eyelids, merely darkness.

A lady puked right next to you once. You could almost hear the churning and clutching of her stomach, the gagging and retching before the content rushes out of her throat. You knew that you ought to help, but you watched stalely instead - the viscous saliva trailing down her chin, the

festering smell of raw acid, and the green lumps afloat the watery vomit as it crept along the car of the speeding subway. You thought of your turtle from a long distant past, its body in a plastic bag. Your tears rolling uncontrollably down your small cheeks, and you tugged and jerked the tip of your father's shirt; it creased, wrinkled and crumpled in your fist; but the rubbish bin closed anyway, and part of the bag peeked through the lid, trapped between freedom and abandonment, because there simply was no place to bury a pet. Summer was not summer anymore, neither was winter, nor all the other slowly morphing and blurring lines of time and seasons. You didn't know what to think, didn't want to think, so you didn't think, even when you leave summer behind. Where you came from is inevitably part of you, so when you have come to hate it, do you not also hate yourself?

The seasons changed, like the endless chime of cicada, perpetual and monotonous. You dreamt about destruction, chased by shadows, trapped in limbo, in a desert, naked, from a high place of vertigo, rotation, centrifugal, repetition. You woke up crying. You dreamt about having killed someone without knowing when, or how, or why, and woke up with only the knowledge of their bodies and your own act of murder. You woke up drenched in sweat, your shirt plastered against your back, hairs stuck halfway between your teeth. You woke up in roaring silence, wishing that the dreams were real, that you had died, that the world had ended. But the world did not end, and you were still alive. Instead, your parents came, patting your forehead and whispering comfort. Their palms chilled like breeze in relentless heat, voice incongruent. Your siblings came, leaving behind an assortment of sweets, books from the library, video games they

had borrowed. Your friends came, to the park downstairs from their faraway homes, shouting your name until you opened the window and showed them your face. It was like summer again, but not really. There was a dark place in your heart, like the eagle in the open sky, except that it did not know how to fly.

Summer comes again, but you no longer quite fit into that little bench on the balcony, you head dangling out of it, forcing your neck to twist in an awkward angle. You close your eyes, and try to peep at the sun, to smell the salt in the ocean, to feel the water droplets in the air; but then your mother calls you, to stop lounging around, to put your computer in a safe spot so as to not trip your father over with the wire, to give you a cookie, to go fetch your brother with his dog in the park; and your friends have texted, to make plans for the beach, or the bar, or the cinema, or their houses. It is different, it is difficult, it is strange, but you have decided, that after all, you still like summer.

Or do you call that feeling love? Is it not love, was it not love, has it not been love, all along, that despite all your hates, your tears, your fear, your aching, your scars, and above all else, the poignancy and fleeting beauty of this place, you till choose to live, to wait, to stay? Words are not just words, they are emotions, thoughts, they are part of you, the part of you that is bound to be dictated by what is created before you. You once tried to look to the world in the hope of finding an answer, but you know, you have always known, that despite all the answers that lay before you, you are not wholly defined by the world, but the answers you seek within yourself.

## A Fast-food Problem

Kwok Siu Yau

A small pack of French fries is placed in front of me. They smell so good.

I think of last time when I came here with Mum.

“Don’t you dare to finish them all!” she said, “They will make you even more disgusting!”

That’s what she always says to me, words like ugly, unpleasant and foolish. But now I would rather hear that violence. What’s wrong with me?

I look at our maid, May. She is squeezing a ketchup pack.

I usually do it myself when my mother is talking about the artificial flavour in that unnaturally red plasma, while May doesn’t even bother to stop me from swallowing the whole bag of fries like a whale. I can finally enjoy Happy Meal without any verbal attack. Isn’t that what I always wished for? But I feel empty.

What’s wrong with me?

“You can have as much as you want today!”

*Excuse me?*

Her voice is soft and gentle, but it is killing me with kindness.

“But promise me do not tell mum a word!”

“Err...okay.”

I try to conceal my disgust. It is not her fault. She is just being nice to me, isn’t she?

But I want to push her away. What’s wrong with me?

My fingertips start filling with grease and salt. My teeth are biting non-stop.

May is gossiping with her phone and bursts into laughter. The old man behind us is staring at her.

No one is watching me. Why isn't there anybody to stop me? Isn't that an adult's responsibility to stop a girl from eating unhealthy food as she still can't control herself? Because she should grow up decent, healthy and attractive or else nobody will love her, not even her own mother? What's wrong with them?

On my right, I see the vilest creature – trash bin. I hesitate, then chew as fast as I can.

According to my mother, this rectangular thing is uncle trash bin.

*“He is starving.* People are so selfish that they eat all the food and left nothing to him.”

“But Mum...”

“Now put that chicken wing down.”

“Doesn't he like vegetables?”

“SHUT UP AND PUT THAT DOWN! SPIT OUT THE FRIES TOO!”

Suddenly a loud cry in the cashier draws my attention.

“Mum! You said that I can have Grimace!” A girl in a pink dress is talking.

“I am sorry, honey. It's sold out.”

The girl screams, “What's the point of Happy Meal if I can't have my favourite toy? NOOO!”

*No, it's all yelling and shouting again. Why does everybody think that speaking loudly means that they are right?*

Her tremendous tears cannot help her to get the toy, but attention.

Chatters fade. Several people tut-tut.

However, the louder she begs the more patient her mother becomes. She keeps on comforting her using her soft, gentle, cotton-like voice.

Does she ever blame her daughter? Not even when she embarrasses her like this?

What's wrong with her?

My mother shouts at me sometimes. It is horrible.

She will use her utmost effort to tell me to stop eating junk food because I am already too short, dry and bony.

With her presence, this smell of beautifully dead fish and chicken here will rest in peace. I will need to eat every single thing as fast as I can before she thinks that I have enjoyed enough.

She tortures me every time I say I want some snacks. But I am too scared to fight back or to tell her that I hate her because I don't.

Now I feel guilty to eat the whole set freely. The fries, the nuggets, the sweetest fruit juice in the world, they all seem no longer tempting.

What if I don't like fast food?

What if I can refuse the soft hug of ice cream?

What if I am able to resist the lucrative fat in chips?

Can I exchange all these with her love?

*“Abbbbbb!”*

The girl is now shaking her mother violently. The staff’s eyebrow tightens. She reminds me of Veruca in Charlies and the Chocolate Factory.

*“I want a squirrel!”*

Then her song starts to play in my head:

*Who went and spoiled her, who indeed?*

*Who pandered to her every need?*

What if the French fries I am eating are made of sprouted potatoes? And the nuggets are not chicken but plastic? How do I ever know? Does everything correspond to its look?

How about my mother?

I don’t know. The only certain thing is that I don’t need this purple toy. So I take it and move to the cashier.

“Oh, thanks. My daughter really likes it.”

“You’re wel...”

“See, my dear little Bobo! I told you...”

Well, I am kind, aren’t I? My mother says so too.

Then what’s wrong with me?

Hmm, I have a fast-food problem.



## Road like Winding Dormant Dragon

Matilda Law

A skid mark was the welcome mat to my bright orange tent. The first few days were the worst. There was literally nothing between my back and the unforgiving concrete but a thin film of nylon. If I had ever seriously considered quitting, the microscopic rocks of the well-paved road digging into my back every night would have very well been why. About a week in, Kaylee next door - at the time I still didn't know her name - got me a yoga mat from her dance studio which, according to her, was apparently quite "supportive of this whole fight". Now I was revelling in luxury sleeping on a soft surface. But to be honest, we don't get much sleep. Every other night, there would be a tear gas or pepper spray scare. Or some territory to defend. Anyone with some sense knew that this was a losing battle. What had we got against the police when it really came down to it? But I guess you don't talk sense with idealists. This whole thing wouldn't have happened and been sustained without idealists.

My circle of stinking rich relatives was probably thinking: I am certainly glad that Timothy has finally run away and fulfilled his dream of living like a stray. If you are thinking that I am exaggerating, that was pretty much what they said to my face when I said I was going to Canada to study fine arts. I would have been living in a dorm room sleeping on a matted bed! But to them, doing anything less than "useful", whatever the hell that means, especially with my grades, was disgracing the family name. Our family had a very narrow definition of success. It's either inheriting the family business or becoming a doctor or something of the like. Really,

textbook rich family. My cousin had caught some flak for going into academia! And nearly got disowned. He was meant to be a lesson for us all. So you could imagine their reaction when I said I wanted to "go into the arts". Let's just say I felt less than welcome at family gatherings now. Now that I had gone and done this, this had truly marked the point of no return in their minds. How could the illustrious Suen family be associated with a thug? But trust me, when you grew up in this family, to be given up upon was the best possible fate. What they didn't realize was that far from being destitute, most of us here, especially those who were more or less "based" here, could afford to idle. There were students, golden age pensioners, freelancers. A small minority do have 9 to 5 jobs. Then, there is me, an in-betweeners. Not exactly a crowd of the richest 1%, but most of us here got time or money, or both to spare.

It was certainly a surprise when she came by. Early morning of course, she couldn't have fit it in in her schedule otherwise. Simply too busy. I would have slept in but it was late autumn. The wind was picking up and it got a little chilly. When you sleep that close to the ground, no amount of clothing is going to prevent you from being woken up by the howling, whistling wind.

First, I heard the sound of her stiletto heels. Although it's on concrete, a different surface than I was used to, I would have recognized it anywhere. All those nights, when I was supposed to be asleep, that was the sound that would inform me that she was home. Then, it was her figure silhouetted against the side of my tent. She bent down and knocked awkwardly on the opening of my tent. I just had to laugh. Who knocks on

fabric? But one must forgive her, living in a mansion your whole life does not equip you with the proper courtesy for visiting your son on the street. To be fair, this was a fairly new thing to us all; it required adjustment.

I got out my mini folding chair, which resembles the ones that directors sit on when they are doing outdoor shooting except mine was smaller. I unzipped the opening of the tent and was greeted by the skirt of a custom-made navy blue suit. My gaze followed the suit up and stopped short at those perpetually downturned thin lips. I had seen enough that I could confirm that it was her.

She didn't sit down on the chair perhaps out of practicality because she was wearing a skirt or perhaps she was too proud to. I stared at the concrete road to my right as she was standing to my left. She, on the other hand, stared at the top of my head. Not scornfully but not exactly kindly either. If she had any emotions, she hid them well.

“How did you find me?” I asked, like a guilty child being caught red handed but still refused to apologize.

“Kiki told me and I saw your pictures on Facebook,” she explained.

“But I blocked you on Facebook.” I wouldn't have made such a rudimentary mistake, exposing my own trails.

“On Kiki's Facebook,” she added.

I let out a disdainful grunt. That's what you get when you have a traitor of a sister. But I wasn't really mad at Kiki, of course. One never really gets mad at Kiki.

"Besides, that's the tent you camped in when you were a boy scout," she said, the corners of her mouth briefly turned up like she was nostalgic for the times when I was a little boy.

Like she was there when I was a little boy.

"Ha, really?" That came out sounding more dismissive than I had meant to. Or exactly as dismissive as I had meant to.

"I know you come home sometimes when I am at work," she said as if I had done some advance calculus just to avoid her.

The truth was, "you are always at work," and I told her as such.

"I thought this art school thing was your dream, so you are giving up now?" She had had enough of my attitude and she was stern now. She had a finite amount of time for everyone and anyone, her own child included, and she was running out of patience.

"What do you know about my dreams?" I said sarcastically. It wasn't that I was not sarcastic before but now I was looking up at her challengingly. I forgot to mention, the whole time I was sitting on the ground, on my yoga mat.

There was something bubbling up in my chest. I had to let it out.

“This. Is. History, happening right now, right before your eyes, don’t you see?” I immediately regretted letting my emotions get the best of me because she was the exact kind of person who wouldn’t be able to see.

“So what, am I supposed to be proud of you now?” A sneer.

“No, not for this. I had wanted you to be proud of me. For the longest time. But you never even noticed me. No, it’s too late for that now.” I looked down and focused on my breathing which was the only thing that could prevent tears from streaming down my cheeks. Tears I hadn’t known I had been holding back from time immemorial.

There was a silence. I couldn’t tell what she was feeling. Stunned, I supposed.

“Kiki misses you, you know.” An image of her clutching the stuffed penguin I got her when we went to Ocean Park floated in, catching me off guard. Growing up, we only had each other. That was the only certainty. Even the Jejes, the domestic helpers, who practically raised us came and went.

She knew this would work.

“It’s Kiki’s birthday next week,” she said softly and tentatively.

“I KNOW when Kiki’s birthday is!” How dare she tried to pretend that she could remember without the aid of her calendar on her phone.

She looked at her watch, it was 7:15. She had to get back to headquarters. There was no doubt that a car for her was waiting beyond the makeshift barricades we put up.

“Come home.” There was maybe a bit of longing in her voice. I couldn’t be sure. Anyway, if there was, it was brief.

She turned around and strode confidently towards the barricade as if she was walking in an executive meeting.

I nodded in response to her request.

You know, she really was quite optimistic about how long this whole thing would last. Harcourt Road was like a dragon. It simply couldn’t have rainbow-colored nylon tents for its ridges and scales for too long, when it was used to having streams of Cadillacs and Lamborghinis.

## Jason the Employee

Lam Wing Yin Mark

It's another day in the city. The sky has just received its first bit of light, turning from black to dark blue. A few boats crawl lazily across Victoria Harbour. Along the shorelines stand endless lines of high-rise buildings. The sky now turns brighter, moving from a darker shade of blue to a lighter one. Eventually, a golden-yellow ball, shining with illuminance, climbs out from the mountains and shines upon the city. It is time for the city to wake up.

It is time for Jason to wake up as well. It is 6:57, and Jason, a 24-year old young guy, is sleeping in his little room. As a result of tight budget, he can only afford a 100-square feet subdivided flat in Sham Shui Po, buried somewhere in Hong Kong's concrete jungle.

Daylight enters his little room. The alarm clock sits beside his pillow. A continuous rumble of snores can be heard. It is now just 4 seconds before 7:30, when - "ringggg!" - The alarm comes into action. Not surprisingly, Jason slaps on the SNOOZE button and continues his dreams. The clock rings again (and is silenced) every 5 minutes: 7:35, 7:40, 7:45, and 7:50. It is now 7:55, the clock, not willing to give up, rings for the sixth time. If Jason cannot get up now, he will risk missing his bus therefore being late for work. However, Jason is a loyal employee, and he gets up right at this moment. He does this everyday so as to use every bit of resting time.

It is 8:14. After a simple breakfast (a pineapple bun with a can of coffee), Jason hops on his 117 bus, and starts sleeping as soon as he finds a seat. The bus starts moving. It goes along Cheung Sha Wan Road, a 6-lane avenue, 3 lanes on each side. Jason's face sticks on the window. Outside, citizens from all walks of life, from students to street cleaners, rush in their own directions, to their own destinations, meeting their own deadlines. The bus turns into Nathan Road, then the congested entrance of the Cross Harbour Tunnel. The bus stops, starts moving, and stops again. Jason continues to sleep.

One may ask, will Jason sleep for too long and miss his stop? No - Jason is a loyal employee, and he will get up at the right moment. "The next stop is: Lee Theatre Plaza," the announcement comes from the speaker. Jason wakes up.

Jason walks into the office. 9:29 - right on time, Jason is so satisfied. His office is a typical one - full-sized glass panel windows, generic designs for tables, chairs, rooms and floor tiles. At reception, blue letters are craved on white marble: "Creative Writing Limited". This is his company's name.

He is about to sit down when a large, muscular figure with full business suit appears. "Jason," that middle-aged man bellows, "come into my room." Jason looks up and sees the grim face of his boss, David. He is bald and has a pair of eyes that compare to those of eagles. Jason has always feared him, as he never smiles or laughs. But that's fine, Jason thinks, because he is a loyal employee and he will obey his boss. Jason quickly puts on the most sincere, friendly and welcoming facial expression he can have, his smile so broad that teeth are seen and eyes are as narrow as two black lines. He greets



his boss with the most flattering tone, “Good morning, David! How nice it is to see you. Yes, I will come immediately, as you've told me.” He then stands up and goes to his master's dedicated room (while maintaining that cringe-worthy smile).

The two are in the room. The boss sits down first on his comfy, blackish sofa chair and orders Jason to “Stand and listen to me!” The grumpy boss, still refusing to let out a trace of ease, picks up a pile of papers (filled with paragraphs) and slams them on the table. “Jason, how many times have I told you? Your draft, for the millionth time, is full of nonsense! When I say ‘I want this’, you follow it and write what I want!” Jason, being a loyal employee, tries his best to calm down his angry boss. “David, perhaps I can explain...” “I don’t care what you are thinking about, I just want texts that serve our clients’ business needs!” “But boss...” “Now what?” “As you wish, boss.” This finally satisfies Jason’s boss. “Fine,” he says, “now get out and continue your work.”

This may be a stunning scene to many, but for Jason and many other workers in Hong Kong, it is just a part of a normal working day. Jason, knowing that he has to be a loyal employee so that he can get promoted soon, is determined to satisfy his boss. So one may ask: why does Jason keep being scolded despite this? Well, you are about to find out.

Jason walks out from his boss’ room, passes tables where colleagues glance at him, curiously asking what the boss had said. Jason automatically replies “just business matters” and goes on. He sits down at his seat. In the centre of his table is a keyboard and a computer monitor. To the right of the

computer monitor, a photo frame is seen. That photo frame, covered by a thin layer of dust, features Jason with his graduation robe. A caption comes with it: “One big step towards being a great writer!” Deep in Jason’s mind, he wants to be a professional and successful writer.

However, in Hong Kong, this is not easy to be accomplished. Jason looks at the photo and enters memory lane. It was 4 years ago, when he had a family dinner. “Jason, what do you want to do after graduation?” “A writer, of course - I am ready to write pieces filled with creativity, I can’t wait!” “But Jason, can you do this for a living? Think of your parents - they have spent so much money on you, now you want to be a poorly-paid writer?” Everyone at the dinner stared at Jason.

Jason, coming back to reality, sighs. He has been trying to incorporate his creativity into his products, and he has always liked them. However, his boss doesn’t think so. He cannot afford to keep offending the boss, as he needs his job so as to make a living for himself and his aging parents. A dilemma, so hopeless, faced by every Hong Kong youth, faced by Jason. He looks at the mini clock on his computer’s desktop - time to start his next task before missing the deadline.

Just before starting to write his next repetitive piece of writing, he notices an unread email in his inbox. “Presentation for University Students” - *interesting*. He clicks on it and sees this:

Dear Jason,

As one of the company's Graduate Trainees, you are asked to share your experience at this company with university students across Hong Kong. Your presentation title is "How to become a successful writer"...

His eyes light up. Finally a chance to share his passion of writing with others! After all, he is a loyal employee and he will deliver the best presentation with the best quality to his clients, no, audience. He continues to read:

...and you are kindly asked to follow a script made by us. Please see the attached PPTX and DOC files for details. Call me at extension 194 for questions.

Yours Sincerely,  
Jennifer Law  
HR Executive

*Wait, what? What kind of arrangement is that?* The excitement drains from his face. He is confused now. He opens the PowerPoint file, hoping for some nice points in his script:

- Satisfy your client's needs and keep them happy
- Always obey your supervisor
- Individual creativity is discouraged

Now he is horrified, staring blankly at the monitor. How can he betray his own passion, to tell lies like this? *I am no more than a tool, a small gear wheel in a*

*large machine.* There are two forces in his mind now, tearing him apart: one for his passion as a creative writer, one for his will to be a loyal employee. He sits back on his chair and looks up at the roof. A decision has to be made.

It is the day. A white Toyota Alphard moves along the 6-lane Waterloo Road. Buildings (mostly high-end apartments, tall or short) come and go at the sight of Jason who sits together with several of his seniors. Jason looks at the one sitting beside him, the grumpy David. David, not having a hint of joy as usual, does not look back. Well, Jason is “invited” in the first place as he is the only Graduate Trainee that has not resigned yet. The car turns several corners and stops. City University of Hong Kong.

Some dozens of undergraduate students sit in the lecture hall. “...and here are our company’s core values and business goals. Here I pass the time to Jason Wu, our graduate trainee. He will share his experience on how to become a successful writer.” Jason stands up and walks towards the podium. A round of enthusiastic applause. He takes the microphone over and looks at his audience. *What a pity.* He looks at his script and starts speaking, “Good afternoon, I am here to share with you some tips to become a successful writer...” For the first minutes, he follows the script. He keeps reminding himself: I am a loyal employee and I will obey my boss’ orders. However, as he is about to turn to the PowerPoint slide showing “Individual creativity is discouraged”, he doubts. To be accurate, he stops speaking. He wonders if he should betray his passion. He wonders if he should tell lies. He considers if he should shape these young students, full of potential, into small gear wheels in a machine. He stares at David, his dear boss. Everyone's gaze is on

Jason, waiting for him to deliver the next line. Jason springs to action. He puts aside his script. He looks around and says, “Despite all these, students, creativity is of utmost importance. Follow where your mind leads you, and create the most stunning stories you can imagine, write the best words you can think of, and deliver the most powerful message you can come up with.”

Jason's seniors all watch in shock. They find Jason's words so powerful that they become speechless. Now is their turn to stare blankly. The students, on the other hand, are all enlightened. As Jason's passion unfolds in front of them, they are blessed with an encouraging statement of creativity in writing. Jason, without the script, has not felt any more satisfied and relieved since the start of his career. After an uplifting speech of 15 minutes, Jason puts down his microphone. A true, sincere, and energetic round of applause. Jason, standing in front of the enlightened audience, is sure that his job is doomed. Loyal employee? No, he is not anymore, as he has finally got his priorities right. He has just saved a whole group of young writers from being distorted like him. He used to choose salary before passion. He is wrong. How can this city survive without passion? Hong Kong is built upon passion, made successful thanks to the groups of people willing to follow their passion. It may be tempting to chase after money, but one will quickly realize its meaninglessness when it is lost due to external factors. Passion, conversely, is priceless and can bring everlasting impacts. He has made the right choice. These writers will continue to pursue their passion in writing thanks to his encouragement. As long as they hold onto it, there is still hope. There is still hope for the city.

## **Bound by Home**

*The winning piece for Fiction in Home Kong Writing Competition*

Advani Melanie

Dog was about to give up. He slumped on the edge of the Border, a smear of blood along his flank. He wheezed, and scrabbled his paws helplessly against the metallic line. The electricity stung him, and his eyeballs rolled inside their sockets. He drooped his head miserably, and yet something made his blood curdle.

A shoe. Red. The tip just barely visible, sprouting out of the iron hedge.

Dog... He began to growl.

The first time he saw this shocking spurt of colour, he was still a pup, barely weaned. And yet he was strong. His mother-dog and litter-pups were torn apart by the Border Hounds, and this meant he had to survive in the outskirts of Kong all by himself.

After all, as long as tooth and claw are intact, survival is possible, isn't it?

It was dark, so dark Pup couldn't even see his own whiskers. His empty stomach grumbled, and his claws twitched at the prospect of sinking them into bird flesh. His ribs stuck out from his sides, and he couldn't help but shiver. This was not good. Prey was getting scared. As soon as he nestled himself in a heap of pines, something rustled behind him. Hackles erect, he padded forward.

Pup nosed his way through the screen of brambles. A figure was curled up on the ground, its pelt sleek and shiny with no fur. It opened its mouth, and gave a pitiful wail. Pup froze.

It was a Man.

Dog turned his head, ever so slightly. A pale silhouette loomed over him, and he let his tongue hang out. Was it Boy? Did he come back? In response, he gave a mournful whine.

The Man was new-born. A Man-pup, probably. But what made Pup so terrified wasn't this creature in the Territory. It was his shoe. It stood out from the others...Pup couldn't quite name the word for it. But he knew, this sight was called Red.

He whimpered. He had never seen Red before, even though he knew his mother-dog could. She could see Red. And one of their littermates were.

Pup poised himself to attack. It didn't matter that this Man-pup came from Kong. He was desperate. He didn't care what could be the consequences if the Border Hounds found his scent mingled with his. He darted forward, bared his fangs, and stopped.

Dog panted. He remembered this memory. And it was so long since he saw Red, he was convinced the sight was lost to him forever. He stretched out his paws, drooling. And he panted some more.

Maybe it was how vulnerable Man-pup looked. Maybe it was because Man-pup reminded him too painfully of his litter-pups. For some reason... Pup didn't attack. He licked him instead, and exposed his belly.

Red sight came for a reason.

Red... This colour was indescribable. It was the smoothness of the Moon, the beat of his heart, the glint of one's eyes, the core of Life. But then Dog looked at his blood.

Red was danger too.

His mother-dog explained to him, red only appears when it is time. Pup didn't understand what time, but he stood protectively over Man-pup anyway. Man-pup gurgled, and kicked his leg with the red shoe. It came loose, and flew over a blackberry bush. Pup darted forward to retrieve it. He needed Red.

Pup trotted happily back to the clearing where he hid Man-pup, dangling the shoe in his jaws. When he arrived, not two, but four pairs of eyes returned his gaze. A Border Hound was here, and he didn't look friendly. Dog curled his lip as he recalled the Border Hounds. Apart from Kong-Men, these were the creatures he detested the most. Systems were hardwired into their brains, to track down and kill creatures outside Kong, and to protect Kong and its Men inside the Border selflessly. They had no mercy.



Pup yelped as the Hound threw itself on top of him. Pup churned his hind legs desperately at his belly, hoping to damage the soft skin. Hound howled in fury, teeth snapping at Pup as he wriggled and dodged. Pup yipped, but failed to get away. He knew a puppy like him could never win a fight with a vicious Hound. Instead, his gaze fell on a nearby stick.

The Hound barely knew what happened when the stick was produced out of his throat. He gurgled sickly, blood bubbling in the hole. And down he fell, with stars in his eyes.

Pup widened his eyes. He couldn't believe it. He killed the Hound! Pride swelled up in him as he licked the Man-pup with affection. He truly felt like Alpha of the Pack now. And Alphas couldn't be Pups. From now on, he would be...

Dog.

Dog twitched his nose. He missed Boy. He was gone for too long. He lost the time. And he drooped his ears.

Man-pup grew. He towered over Dog, and was able to trample sticks under his feet. The Red shoe didn't fit anymore, even though Dog still made sure it never vanished from his sight. He wasn't a man yet, but definitely not Man-pup anymore. Dog knew his pup finally became a Boy. Dog was proud.

Boy never strayed from Dog's side, and served as a loyal Beta. They curled up together when they slept, and Dog would sigh in pleasure when Boy tickled him between the ears. But he noticed his eyes.

Boy knew he didn't belong outside. The creatures would look at him in amazement, and Boy would run to Dog, embarrassed. His eyes kept straying to the Border, and even though Dog had strictly forbidden him to go near it, he couldn't help but glance at it all the time.

Boy was a Kong-Boy. Kong was where his heart lay.

Dog didn't understand why Boy wasn't satisfied with Outsider-life. They had everything they needed. Dog was perfectly content, but Boy was not. He wanted to go in Kong, to see other Kong-Men, where he belonged.

His wish came true.

Dog couldn't find Boy. He growled in annoyance, and thrashed his tail. He scored the ground, but the rain washed away the prints. Lifting his nose, he tasted the air. They were both there.

Fear scent, and excitement.

Dog realized it too late. Heart pounding madly, he flew in pursuit. Boy, boy, boy...

How stupid he was.

Dog's thrumming of paws led him dangerously close to the Border. But he had to find Boy. Mustering all his courage, he slipped out of hiding. A moment too late.

Boy was atop a Border Hound, clutching his shoe. Red seemed to vibrate, but Boy couldn't see. Man and dog both vanished through the metal border, while Dog banged his forehead after running at it at full speed. He howled, but boy was gone. And the last glimpse of his face?

Happiness.

Dog snorted. What if Boy came back, now? It was too late. All of it. The second Boy chose to enter Kong, Dog's heart broke. He came across plenty of other Man-pups after that, but never bothered to save them.

Why Dog was here again, was because he had no choice. The Fierce Dog, updated programming version of the Border Hounds, was after his mate and pups. He had to protect them. What he did not expect was to see Boy again.

He was all grown up now, and he had fur on his face. He became a Kong-Man. Dog felt like a puppy again. One that liked this Boy... He had love. Wagging his tail, he braced himself for Man's warm hand.

It never came. Puzzled, Dog opened up his eyes again. Man was struggling with some invisible force, his face twisted in effort, hand stretched out. Dog thought he didn't understand, but he did. Man couldn't get out of

Kong once he got in. Like how Dog could never venture inside. He was bound by it.

It was his Home Kong.

Dog wagged his tail in understanding. They were never going to meet again. They couldn't. Man was shouting, but Dog turned away. They had their own lives now. He spread out on the ground as a sign of surrender. He was too hurt to move anyway, and the purpose was all gone.

That was why he didn't even flinch when the horrible reek of Fierce Dog filled his nostrils. He just waited for the snapping of teeth and the red hot pain that would end it all. When it did, eventually, he didn't hear Man scream. Just his own sigh.

Man? See you in the cosmos.

And Dog could swear a pair of pale red eyes would wait for him there.

## **Non-Fiction**

## **Godfather and Teochew**

Fung Sin Man Connor

I ate leisurely at this suburban open-air restaurant, flipping through pages of the Godfather fiction while scooping rice with fish into my mouth. I read about Michael's thought on his heritage while he hid in Sicily, and imagined summer days spent in Teochew. My parents were both born in Hong Kong and had spent their lives here, while I almost had no tidings of my grandparents' homelands. I had visited Teochew five to six times, mostly for weddings, sweeping graves, and for the sake of pleasing Nan. Since the visits were never mandatory I missed most of them and blamed the long car rides. The truth was I saw nothing in those towns, and the underdevelopment embarrassed me.

This was how I remembered Teochew: My nan's property, standing 6 floors tall, each floor a caged apartment that belonged to the siblings' family. Walking out of the alley a dusty road full of motorcycles and nothing else. Their taxis were rickshaws attached to, you guessed it, motorbikes. Down loops of roads without traffic lights were malls, occupied by stalls hanging up their overly modern signs with simplified Chinese, hardly blending in with the theme-less architecture nearby. Youths were confined in the very house or 10-steps-away distance from our guardians; because we never learnt how to ride the motorcycles, because of our parents' fear for human trafficking, and the jam-packed visiting schedule: Today we sat in this aunt's house as decorations, then that uncle's flat in the afternoon; the next day we bowed to graves up on the mountain, then visited three other homes, we youngsters would sit and

eat candy, smiling like brainless dolls, then we excessively thanked them for the red packets. Children were to be seen but not heard in Asian culture, after all. Grandparents would share anecdotes, a sophisticated word for gossips and pried privacy, in their Teochew dialects. Before we left, these families would ask about us in Mandarin, making sure we were doing well at school, before giving out their red packets. When we got home, we lined up for a shower... “Shower” was an overstatement; we poured buckets of water over our bodies. In our bedroom, our bed sheets were thin cloths printed with Sonic the Hedgehog, floral fairies or nameless cartoon characters in all the wrong colours. The mosquito net barely keeping the insects out during the night, canines puncturing quiet nights with their feral barks. That town a landfill filled with litter in broad daylight, an unknowing grave danger in the dark; or so my family described it. I remembered playtime with my three cousins upstairs when I was younger, their Barbie dolls made with cheap plastic, the doll faces could bend into a wrecked concave just by pressing with one finger. These girls were generous, however, gifting us visitors with the Barbie earrings, hair combs and silent stares of admiration. Three days in Teochew were enough to tire me out, and I avoided these trips as much as I possibly could.

Two months ago, I figured that as an adult now I could possibly make my trips there enjoyable. And maybe eventually I could fall in love with these visits. Bring your own bed sheets and pillowcases. Hang up a poster or two. Bring your summer reads. Bring Call Me By Your Name. Bring your Marlboro, or try taking trips down to the grocery stores. Decorate that apartment the way you couldn't in Hong Kong. Treat it like a summer

resort you could never have. Genuinely make friends with the cousins upstairs. Learn about motorbikes just for the hell of it. Visit somewhere interesting besides relatives' homes. Maybe Teochew could be fun. And I had been playing with these ideas in my head.

If Sicily reminded me of Teochew, Hong Kong would have been my counterpart of New York City. Luxurious hotels, with fronts lined with glowing light bulbs; modest looking taxicabs scattered all around the region, their homogeneous appearance made the entire territory feel as one. Standing beside the traffic light were swarms of solemn faces, well-mannered because the high density of population left little personal space to each individual, and the pressure domesticated us enough to live unbothered together. I supposed that in the end, there was no “right” or “wrong” way for cities to be, citizens merely settle for the one we find suitable. Did Hong Kong suit me, then? As I arrived at this thought, I passed by the refuse room on my way home. The nametag hung on the tin door was embedded and painted with both translations of our official language, and I began to wonder if the English row had ever been read before this very afternoon. The Cantonese names always carried certain emotions – When speaking of “lap sap fong,” our noses began to cringe at the thought of the repugnant smelling garbage; speaking of “tau ju zam,” we thought of the excitement and fortune the red-gridded tickets present, and the domestic disputes when the father lost a vast sum on betting; “nam ar lo,” one might, think of the profile of stout cheeks and coarse skin of the middle eastern man, standing in a stretched and yellowing polo shirt, soaked in a laborious day of sweat; my eyes rolled at this racial stereotype, feeling grateful for the diverse faces and conversations I had



seen in universities and online... Whilst “refuse room,” “betting branch” and “immigrant” prevailed so little upon our senses. And there I wondered if English contributed to our aesthetic consciousness at all. Indeed, much of Hong Kong makes me feel out of place, but I am too deeply rooted in this place (or it could be the other way around) to not feel for this city. I once said home is where I turn to when all things go wrong; and strangely, imagining myself being a tourist rediscovering this city, I’ve become more in touch with the sights and sounds, and wonders and opportunities it presents, and I’ve recognized at last that this is home.

## Velocity

Leonardo David Tay

My memories of Bandung were conjured out of magical air as I turned 16, sudden and sharp. They were breathed into my life-thirsty lungs in biting cold winds that blew through my hair as I rode the liminal, empty 12 AM roads in nights of angst and pure teenaged abandon with my best friends on motorbikes. I was always with good company, so we were never truly alone. We were always on these familiar, perpetually winding and dilapidated roads that hurt our rear ends and broke the bike's suspension. It was never clear what we were looking for, except that we often hurt and the city provided solace in its many pockets of solitude. Or sometimes, we rode on the highways of life, speeding through the Pasupati Bridge and became velocity itself. In those moments, we always liked to believe that the city belonged to us. That, I believe, is one of the symptoms of ravenous, all-consuming youth, and Bandung was shaped in our image.

Though I am certainly in my youth now, high school back home was the apex of living, a now distant time when I finally began to explore my city with a few fate-bounded friends who persuaded me to look up in the first place. I saw that Bandung indeed, had a face and soul. To give some context to the narrative, I have to clarify that I preferred to stay within the confines of my suburban complex, living comfortably, despising the outside world for so long. Up 'til then, I was called a foreigner by my friends and family for not remembering road names. Even my foreign friend had better knowledge than I did, but when he finally brought me

out of my suburban tomb, I was seeing Bandung, my hometown, with the fervency of a foreigner on vacation.

It started with an after-school homework help club, which was formed when a good five of us started to lose our grips on grades and we were trying to find an excuse to go somewhere every Wednesday. Initially held in a food court called The Kiosk overlooking Setiabudi Road, the environment was not the friendliest for sharpening our dull minds. Angkots - Indonesia's poorly maintained, manner-less, cramped, suffocating minibuses for public transport - piled on the pavement-less streets. Honks by agitated cars on the rear ensued. People poured out of its small green frame, like it had the magical dimensions of a miniature circus car containing 15 puffy-haired clowns. Cigarette smoke floated upwards from the level below, where personal drivers conversed on how their boss' kid keeps kicking their seat or how they played Justin Bieber over and over again at full blast, laughing their throaty and patchy laughs. Never mind the ruckus outside, the café itself was bustling with conversation and the clinks of clattering cutlery. Regardless of the pandemonium in which we poorly decided to settle down for our academic pursuits - and the failure of those pursuits - bonds were forged in the litres of oil that we ate our goreng from.

The adventures start after 6pm, with homework (partially) done and spirits itching for the thrill of a bike ride. Those early days, we simply looked for new places to eat and relished the winds that carried away the day's grime and load. I had the pleasure of riding behind the driver, since I was the only one of the bunch who couldn't drive a motorbike, and it just makes

sense considering that I'm the "foreigner" that the others lead the way. We often went to Cibadak, an apparently iconic street that seemed to be a prerequisite that you must have visited before if you were to claim Bandung-hood.

The first time I came to Cibadak, I was greeted by a road that led to the setting sun, strung with lanterns that dotted the skies yet were aglow and hung low. Victorian-esque lampposts line either side of the street, imbuing a regality in the buildings behind them. We could see carts of food that continued to the horizon, and there's no way of trying everything in one visit. No problem, I live in Bandung. Never has that realization filled me with elation to the brim, not before I found companions who showed me around my own home.

At 17 years old, I collected my driver's license, a couple of bumps to the family car, and memories of sadness and longing. By then our "foreign" friend has left for America with his family, breaking our hearts on top of cracks we collected after 1 year of unrequited love, broken love, a case of infidelity, jealousy, and a bunch of arguments that threatened to split the Homework Club. I was a sort of middle man at the time, and as I spent time accompanying their troubled minds, I encountered the lonelier places of Bandung where melancholy and longing lingers from souls who've been there before. Hidden away in nature or the darker hours of the night, bastions of ephemeral light and castles on hills such as a random telephone tower and a lone sate cart opened past midnight housed our weary souls in the damp city, healing us slowly and closing rifts. In the end we were healed, the city somehow showing us these hidden solitary sites to

breathe and reflect, in spite of all the festivity and awesomeness that it first displayed. We were reunited one day, and nowhere else in the world did it feel like home

Summer vacation, after 1 year in Hong Kong, I was back home and driving the family car down the Pasupati Bridge alone. On an overwhelming whim, I pressed my foot to the gas pedal and played Oasis' "Champagne Supernova," reminiscing days of brotherhood and finding my identity in the cluttered and loneliest places of the city, in the bulbs of passing, streamline lights. Like the others, it seemed like we were going nowhere fast, but in a city like Bandung, we knew that that was not true.

## **Halfway There - One Day We Will Make It Home**

*The winning piece for Non-Fiction in Home Kong Writing Competition*

Tan Kai Shuang

Let me tell you a story.

Seven years ago, there was a Malaysian girl. She was ten years old, wearing a pair of trainers. She didn't know a lick of Cantonese, and only spoke confused, accented English. She left behind her life in Malaysia, for a new alien life in Hong Kong.

She was not like the people there, obviously. She was from Malaysia. All the concrete grey, sleek blue, cream yellow and brick red of Hong Kong was not the same type of colourful Malaysia was. Unabashedly colourful, bright buildings in every colour imaginable, the flowers that fill up every corner of the neighbourhood she lived in, the people with their smiles, the people of different races letting their colours run free on a canvas, thus paint the beautiful picture of Malaysia. That was what she called home.

She was put in a new school. She had new friends. And slowly, self-hatred and shame gnawed on her. She was so different from her new friends. She spoke English with an accent that no one had. She didn't speak the local language. She sometimes didn't understand their jokes, if she even gets past the language barrier. And they'd laugh, and point. And tell her she was doing everything all wrong. And ask her why she was the way she is. She wished she was more like them, and perhaps, she would feel less out of place, and those feelings would leave her.

(One might say, in this situation, to be careful of what you wish for.)

And so she did. She became quiet, silently waiting for her accent to fade. She tried hard to learn Cantonese, to converse with others. Even if it meant that she'd continue to endure the shrill laughter she was met with, when the way she pronounced her words was strange, that her grasp on the language is not considered proficient. She would laugh with them, feeling the unease move through her like a snake. She replaced her ratty, fading trainers with newer branded ones, like the ones her friends would wear. She tried her best to forget what she was, and try to belong to the place she'd desperately want to call 'home'.

She wanted to belong. She wanted to be like everyone she knew. And so she did. All the bright colours she had, is hidden under painted skin. The brightness in her young eyes, dulled. In her mouth a foreign accent, instead of the sound of home. In her mouth, fluent Cantonese; she doesn't know how to speak the language of her old home. She was a new person, to try to fit in her new 'home'.

This took her several years.

Now, she has gotten what she wanted. She is a new person now, erased and painted over. She wasn't the girl she was before. She was a newer, shinier, better version of the prototype she hated.

Yet the unrest, the turmoil was still ever-present. And it consumed her monstrously.

So one night, in a little bathroom, she opened her eyes and looked herself in the mirror; something she would never do...because of her shame, because she didn't like her old self.

She studied herself in that mirror.

She was so different, from the ten-year-old girl that didn't know what to do with herself. She was older now. She was different now. Paler, sharper face, gone was the baby fat that softened her features; eyes tired, hidden behind glasses she got only after coming to Hong Kong, lacking the spark she used to have; her lips arranged in an automatic frown. She tried to smile; it was forced and unnatural.

Then, she looked down: her shoes were worn out. She looked back up: she was worn out. She couldn't remember how her first pair of trainers, the ones she wore to Hong Kong, looked like. She then stared at her reflection for a long time. She also couldn't remember how the little girl that first came to Hong Kong was like anymore.

That night, and for many nights, she would lay awake, wondering, heart heavy, with the deceptively simple question, that has found its way into her mind, wrapped around every thought she has, mingled in the air she breathes.

What is home?

Is home the place her childhood was?



Where she'd always been; where she first grew up in – the old ancient house where her grandparents are, where food is always good, the tiled floors are cool against her legs, where it is always loud and filled with people, where she learnt her first word – labels all over the furniture.

Where the sun will never leave for long, where it is hot and the best weather for ice-cream she was never allowed; where there's a backyard that she'd play all sorts of pretend games in, with her mother, having the best time of her life.

Feeling the wind in the evening as night closes in, the bright orange and pink against the graduating blue, vivid and impossibly enchanting, unreal; where the nights are scratchy from the pyjama fabric, cool from the air conditioning they'd never live without, soft from her blankets and her dreams.

Is home the place she lives in now?

Where she had been, since her teenage years, where she was shaped, polished into the person she is – in the rented flat where they, her family and her, would get used to the scenery out of their windows, the life they will lead there, the cold weather that will remind them that they are far from home.

Where the streets are crowded and the buildings are sleek and modern, look up and neon lights fill the sky, flashing, blinking, changing; where the streets were all the people who she'd pass by and never see again.

Where she learned to love, hate and grow, found people to trust and treasure; where she learnt to be herself and put her everything in everything she does; where the nights are for the sleepless; where the bleak, empty, dark sky will sing a melancholic song about nostalgia, about home.

And she would lie awake, listening to that tune. For many years, eyes wide; thinking, questioning, wondering. She still does, till this day.

There isn't a proper ending to this story. It is a story in the making.

This is my story.

Where is home? What is home? Good question.

Is it Malaysia? Is it Hong Kong?

Is it just the place? Or is it the people?

I will not lie, and tell you that I have miraculously worked it out in the past few years, all those nights, thinking about what could have been and what has happened to me; all the good, all the bad, all the things that the universe had lined up for me; that I would know what home is, at the age I am right now.

That is because it doesn't work that way. It's a complicated answer, because it is a difficult question, for someone like me. Home isn't a this-or-that answer; it is a place where you can kick off your worn-out shoes, to feel comfortable, to not need to hide your colours like they are something shameful; to let yourself come undone; it is somewhere safe, somewhere you can be with yourself and be content and be at ease. A place where you can be happy, truly happy. A place where you will feel entirely content; a place you can belong to, a place that is yours. Yet home isn't just a place; it may be a person too.

And I can only hope, one day, in my future, at a point in my life, that somehow I will know. The only thing I do know, at the moment, is that this is a good life I live.

I still don't know if I really know what home is – maybe I'll never get it, but I want to think that I'm halfway there.

## Choi Hung Estate

*The winning piece for Photo-essay in Home Kong Writing Competition*

Cheung Sze Ying Charlotte



*Photo by Florian Wehde*

Red, orange, yellow, green... all the colours of a rainbow appeared in front of your eyes once you raise your head. When you're standing in front of it, it is as if you're communicating with an elderly person who's over 80 years old – mature but warm.

Eight colours, 11 rainbows, 20 storeys, 7455 flats. This housing estate meant a lot to Hong Kong citizens as it was built by the Government to provide flats for low income residents. It was also the largest public housing estate at that time and even described as 'winning space from heaven' by the Government. Even some prominent visitors including

Richard Nixon, Princess Margaret and Princess Alexandra came and visited the Choi Hung Estate! It sure was and still is important to Hong Kong and has a special place in our heads.

As the giant wheels of time turn, we start to neglect this love day by day. This society is renewing its face and Choi Hung Estate has to follow too. The buildings are coated with brighter and fresher colours to cover the scars it suffered from storms and typhoons. Even though it looks newer and brighter, the estate lost something important – the warmth of the neighbourhood. During the old days, everyone was friends with literally every family living there. Laughter and greetings were heard almost every day. This shows one important thing – all the residents were like a huge family, caring for each other all the time. Yes, warmth is the thing that the estate lost. The bond between neighbours started to disappear, laughter turned into arguments and most importantly, the families were gone. The love started to fade away and eventually, all was gone away.

'Choi Hung,' meaning rainbow in Chinese, is colourful and bright and I hope the atmosphere in Choi Hung Estate will be like the old days, full of positivity and love. I understand as time passes, this city has become modern and advanced in technology. The flats that we called 'home' are only a living space. They have enough space but they will not replace the love of neighbours. As in Choi Hung Estate, the flat may be small, but you will experience warmth and love there. 'Home' to me is a place where I can feel happy and loved, and Choi Hung Estate is that place.

Choi Hung Estate – the definition of home – a place you should visit to find happiness and warmth, to feel the culture of Hong Kong.

## **Narratives - The Unforgettable Taste of Cha Chaan Teng**

*Victoria Medwin Martono*

I still remember the day when my mom came to Hong Kong and reunited with me after our 5 months apart. That time, we both wanted to eat snacks and we wanted to just catch up with each other. So, instead of choosing Starbucks or Pacific Coffee, we chose a Hong Kong style diner, which its name remains unknown because neither of us can speak nor read Chinese. I ordered an egg tart and an iced red bean drink, while my mom always preferred a pineapple bun and a cup of hot milk tea. The waitress could not speak English at all, so I pushed myself to remember the Cantonese words for each food. “Yat daan taat,” I said. The waitress gave me an immediate laugh. After that, I just pointed out what I was going to order because I lost all of my confidence.

My mom and I chatted and she asked me whether I like Hong Kong or not, how many friends I have, the comparison between Indonesian and Hong Kong people, whether they are nicer or meaner, and every single thing you could imagine of a deep daughter-mother talk. 15 minutes had passed too fast – our food was finally served. I took a bite of my daan taat, one of my favourite sweet delights, with a flaky crunchy crust exterior, smooth and sweet interior – it was bliss. Then, I drank my refreshing iced red bean drink – milk, red bean, and ice (what could be wrong with that combination) – forgetting all of the calories contained in that food. At that moment, I knew that I was so happy and excited to finally meet my mom, supported by the homey atmosphere in the Cha Chaan Teng and

accompanied with the simplicity of authentic Hong Kong snacks and drinks.

Every time I go to any Cha Chaan Teng, I remember my mom and her favourite menus, also the good times we spent there. Once, I went with my best friend, Gerald. I ordered the same thing (as I will always do) and surprisingly, he ordered the exact same thing. It was not like Gerald after all, because I know that his favourite is french toast with a hint of butter. We talked about everything – our struggles, our relationships, our endless complaints about everything in our lives. It made me realize that Cha Chaan Teng is a place that can draw us even closer and a place that we can cosily talk about any topic that we can think about.

During my childhood, I mostly remember yuenyeung as my first pick at Cha Chaan Teng. I recall a two-storey restaurant where I must order the children's yuenyeung when I was small. That is a mixture of Horlicks and Ovaltine, a variation of the original yuenyeung which has milk tea mixed with coffee which tastes so good too! Sometimes I would take a sip from dad's traditional yuenyeung. The staffs there were efficient but amiable. Within a minute, the drink would always be sent to my table. I particularly enjoy reliving the moments of a waiter standing around bantering with the customers. There was a customer dressed in dungarees who was extremely talkative. The cook chatted excitedly with those frequent eaters. I became accustomed to go to Mido Café with mum after school and earnestly begged her for french toast. Every Sunday afternoon, my family used to visit Mido Café near my home. My family consisted of five members, but we loved eating our meals in booth seats on the second floor though it was quite packed. Booth seats next to the window overlooked the Temple Street.

At a quarter past three, the Cha Chaan Teng was bustling with noise. During this peak period, staffs directly shouted out abbreviations from tables to the kitchen to shorten the production time. When the waiter had spare time, they would write the receipts for the kitchen and eaters. But the handwritten note of the staff was usually illegible. Mido Café was a part of my daily routine when I was a kid. I still remember asking mum about the meaning of "0T" written on the note. She said it meant lemon tea as the café took the Cantonese homonym of "zero" as "lemon". I was



deeply impressed with those snappy words and flexibility of Cha Chaan Teng.

Every time I stepped into the café, it was like getting into a time machine and travelling back to the 1950s. Mido Café was full of old Hong Kong style décor, the ceiling fan, the colourful mosaic tiles and green iron-framed windows were immensely nostalgic. The ambience of the 1950s was vividly displayed in this Cha Chaan Teng. Looking back, the menus of these tea restaurants were inserted under a layer of glass on every table. The glass layer reminded me that I had accidentally spilled the yuenyeung all over the table when I was tucking into my macaroni soup with ham. The staff immediately helped me to clean up the table. Luckily there was a glass layer on top of the menus, or else dad would have scolded me for messing up the place. I should note that they also made good use of the wall and hung up red boards with the handwritten menu. This arrangement utterly symbolized the hectic nature of the restaurant.

As time moved forward, the caffeine-free drink for kids was eventually eliminated by modern society. However, this Cha Chaan Teng remains static over the decades. This type of restaurant is emblematic of Hong Kong. It is quite sad to witness many old Hong Kong style cafés have been defeated by the power of time. The warmth of these traditional restaurants always runs deep through my mind.

*So Wing Shan Natalie*

I had been visiting the same Cha Chaan Teng every weekend with my family since I was little. We were living in To Kwa Wan, a place filled with small restaurants targeting the niche market. The name of the Cha Chaan Teng we visited was Jade View Restaurant. It was not one of those mainstream Cha Chaan Tengs that you can find in every district in Hong Kong. With no ornamental decorations, no fancy cuisine, it was the one and only restaurant that was full of hospitality. As I recall, it had a green and white design, filled with small tables and hard chairs without backrests. It was a cramped restaurant, so people had to sit very near to each other, sometimes sharing tables. It was this simple and crude environment that attracted me the most. I could dine here at ease, not worrying what I look like while I eat, not worrying about my etiquette.

Jade View was run by a family. The father was the cook, the mother was the cashier. Sometimes their sons and daughters, and even the mother-in-law would also come to help with serving and the cashier during peak hours. As we went there every weekend for lunch, the mother gradually recognized us. She started chatting with us, asking our names, and even remembering what each of us would like to order. For instance, I liked ordering Satay Beef Noodles in the constant set meal every time. She memorised this and even recalled I liked scrambled eggs and toast with butter and condensed milk. To be frank, their food was not really that outstanding. But it was only a Cha Chaan Teng, so what could we expect from it? We kept going back to the cafe because the hospitality was overwhelming. It almost felt like I was going home for a meal. We could

casually start a conversation with the staff there, and from that, I noticed they were concerned and cared about us, just as what a family would do. Besides, the price of their dishes was relatively low, so I suspected that they did not start this restaurant for money, but to offer a place for the residents to enjoy their meal comfortably.

Jade View has taken up a significant spot in my heart. This Cha Chaan Teng was more than a restaurant, it was a place where I could dine at ease, enjoy the amiable hospitality. It was a family to me. It was a pity that it closed due to the increase in rent, but I will always keep in mind how special this Cha Chaan Teng was. I am sure I will never be able to find any Cha Chaan Teng like this one in the future.

I recall stepping into the Cha Chaan Teng getting a whiff of toasted bread with a hint of sweetness from the classic milk tea; this smell always brings me into a good mood no matter how bad of a day it has been. This Cha Chaan Teng was located 15 minutes away from my home. Even though I had been living at my home ever since I was born, our family only discovered it when I was in secondary school. It was a very small shop, run by a small family, with only around ten tables filling up the space in the restaurant which made it extra cosy and homelike. I remember visiting the restaurant for the first time and ordering the classic combination – Hong Kong style french toast with a cup of hot milk tea and there weren't many other customers in the restaurant since it was a weekday. This gave us the opportunity to have a simple conversation with the staff. They were one of the nicest and most welcoming groups of people I have ever met. They spoke to us as if we were old friends, even though we only first met that day, making the experience there much more memorable. Their welcoming attitude was what brought us back to the restaurant, which soon became our family's go-to restaurant whenever we were hungry.

Some of the favourite orders for our family was Yangzhou Fried Rice, Curry Fried Vermicelli and Stir-Fried Rice Noodles with beef. This combination of dishes always filled us up without making us too full, and this order soon became a norm for us for every Cha Chaan Teng we went to for the first time. We began comparing these dishes for each Cha Chaan Teng we went to, trying to find the best ones. Although we have definitely found some favourites among the sea of Cha Chaan Tengs, something

always brings us back to the one near our home. Maybe it was the friendship we had developed with the staff, or maybe it was simply just nostalgia, either way, this particular Cha Chaan Teng will always have a place in our hearts.

As my brother and I went to university, we started visiting the restaurant less and less. When we decided to visit them again, we received the sad news that they would be closing soon. It ached my heart to see such traditional Hong Kong restaurants being unable to compete with larger chain restaurants and forced to close. I hope that these local restaurants can still receive support from the current and future generations, allowing the local culture to live on.

Back in the old days when I was small, my father and mother had frequent business trips and often travelled out of town. Whenever father was home, he always took my brother and me to Cha Chaan Teng for breakfasts, where he could take a break from work where communication was functional and superficial, while brother and I enjoyed listening to father's gags, childhood memories and life stories. Our favourite was the "Australia Dairy Company" which is widely known until this day, although my mother did not like it since it is too crowded and squeezey compared to the street food stalls and hawker centres in her hometown, Malaysia. Despite the crowded space, I have always liked the taste of its creamy egg, toast and chicken soup macaroni.

There you can also observe ways of life. I once brought my sketchbook, attempting to capture the food and culture that is so dynamically embedded in our daily lives. At first, I was afraid of being scolded by the staff with their speedy production and efficiency, but then the feeling was so strong that I convinced myself to sketch it, and the staff actually peeked over my work and smiled. On the contrary to what my mother thought, I found the taste in most of the Hong Kong Cha Chaan Tengs somehow familiar with that in Malaysia – flavoured with a personal touch and simplicity, alongside the shared history of people gathering at the table having affordable food.

Afterwards when mother had more holidays, I always asked her to accompany me for an afternoon tea in Cha Chaan Tengs. Even though she did not particularly like the food or ambience, she would watch me have my favourite club sandwiches. Those were moments of precious happiness I could share with my mother who used to be so busy. And I was glad that she did gradually get hooked with the yuanyeung (milk tea) there, of which I would get a sip, thinking someday I would probably change my taste and preference as I grow older too.

And I did.

As I have finally become a grown up, I found a simple, genuine man who likewise has a wild soul and free spirit, who resembles my mother in various ways, and most crucially, who always has a good appetite and eats like a horse. He liked to search on the web for fancy restaurants and takes me to try different cuisines in the city. Once we went into a restaurant which was crowned with a Michelin Award, looked at the pretty but expensive food on the menu, ordered two lunch sets and anticipated. Lamentably, served to us were cold, tasteless and “heartless” dishes as if they were packed in the “food factory” and put aside for quite some time back in the kitchen. Then we had a philosophical discussion on the food culture nowadays, like how we agreed on how the development of chain restaurants has dramatically changed the food culture. Food does not necessarily need to be good to get its fame whilst restaurant owners prioritize profits over the quality of food. We also went to famous Italian restaurants with handmade spaghetti, where we learnt to enjoy delicate dishes in a very refined portion, and he ate much slower than normal.

Until later when we had deeper acquaintances with each other, we played the “either-one” game and that time he asked me if I’d rather have expensive but small portions of food, or cheap and large-portioned food, and both of us opted for the latter. After that, upon several visits to Cha Chaan Tengs, I discovered that he literally loves to have club sandwiches as much as I do! I decided to take him to my “old place”, the Australia Dairy Company, which was packed with tourists attracted by its fame. He said the food was good, but he did not like the crowded place either.

Most of the time he likes to have breakfast at home, inviting me to his house and says, “my house is gonna be your tailor-made Cha Chaan Teng!” In the morning I would watch him stirring congee in the kitchen, so concentrated, so full of love – there I finally know the reason why the food in conventional Cha Chaan Tengs has always been so warm and delicious.

To me, Cha Chaan Teng is not only a place for affordable, delightful food, but also a symbol of personal touch, warmth, intimacy and lifestyle. And I finally found my favourite “Cha Chaan Teng” now. In the Cha Chaan Tengs I have always liked, even with the accretion of age of both people and the environment, the memories of love will last forever deep in my soul, just like how the taste of simplicity has never changed.



## **A Reflection - Our Memories**

As we have shared our childhood memories in the respective Cha Chaan Tengs, there are always some fragments that resemble each of our own experiences. We learnt that in every Cha Chaan Teng, there is one shared similarity – hospitality and simplicity. We believe that Cha Chaan Teng is a place where Hong Kong people can always recall their collective memory. A person should not identify himself or herself as a Hong Kong person if they have not been to any Cha Chaan Tengs. The Hong Kong style cafe has been dynamically developing as we grow up. From the nostalgic Bing Sutt, to the old school Cha Chaan Teng, and now chain restaurants. Of course, everyone loves spacious and more hygienic cafes, but they lack the hospitality and simplicity we very much value. These popular Cha Chaan Tengs definitely offer a glimpse of the ambiance of a Hong Kong style cafe to foreigners and new customers, and once you get to understand how a small, warm, familiar Cha Chaan Teng works, you will understand they can never replace the old school ones.

Apparently, Cha Chaan Teng is a prevailing type of restaurant in Hong Kong, with unique characteristics in each of them, notably its staff and food, the environment and decorations, and also the atmosphere. It is difficult for us to capture all the different sides of the respective Cha Chaan Teng. Therefore, we solely share particular memories that have left a deep impression on us. Reminiscently, we will always remember the simple yet delightful local signature dishes among the diversified food culture in Hong Kong.

## Narratives - Memories of Lee Tung Street

*Teresa Verzèri Li*

It was a breezy night in December 2018 when I visited a popular landmark in Wan Chai. I spotted an avenue from a distance because of the iconic and eye-catching Regent's Street *Spirit of Christmas* light display hovering right above the entrance. It was like an angel floating in mid-air. It looked splendid. I pulled out my phone and googled the location, it showed that we were at "Lee Tung Avenue." Then, it hit me. "Lee Tung Street" was refurbished into "Lee Tung Avenue." We walked along the avenue and sat down in this bar, where I ordered a passion fruit pineapple mock-tail and spent the rest of the evening winding down admiring the beautiful decorations. For the past two hours, I had observed over nine batches of foreigners taking selfies along the street. There was an elderly couple resting at the bench near the pole, staring at those foreigners and chit-chatting among themselves, holding hands. Lee Tung Avenue is not any ordinary street, there are benches placed along for people to rest. In fact, the ground is filled with artistic tiles, which are very different from the tiles we usually see on general government-owned pedestrian streets. I reckon Lee Tung Avenue has become part of a private ownership. Nevertheless, these fabulous Christmas light decorations evoked my memories of the numerous red lanterns with multiple neon light boards that used to hang high across the former Lee Tung Street, or should I call it "Wedding Card Street"?



Walking along this 200-meter tree-lined boulevard which is now a 24-hour vehicle free zone, I kept reminiscing a canny memory in my childhood. In front of me, I saw two blocks of imitated Tenement Houses (Tang Houses) that were three stories high. I still remember the very first time I walked through this avenue, when it was still called “Lee Tung Street”. These blocks were actual Tenement Houses that looked quite worn-out. There was nothing photogenic about it. I was here with my mother when I was eight years old, checking out wedding invitations for my aunt who was getting married. It was my first time assisting a wedding, but despite my small contribution, I still felt honoured. I thought picking wedding invitations was fun like buying stationery, at least until the noises from the street came to me. I was startled because of the rumble of loud machines operating and the noise of hawker stalls nearby. It made me anxious and

uncomfortable. I held my mother's hand and attempted to pull her away. I rushed her to finalise the invitation she wanted and leave. But she raised her voice at me and blamed me for being impatient. I was utterly embarrassed yet frustrated. The street was narrow, clumsy and parked with vans and trucks. There were bare-chested men pushing trolleys over-stacked with paper boxes and shouting. The stores were packed next to each other, selling various types of prints, such as envelopes, letterheads and business cards, wedding invitations, Chinese New Year couplets and even red packets.

They were all displayed beyond their store boundaries, as if half of the street were extensions of the printing stores. Being a girl who grew up in the rural areas of New Territories, I rarely travelled to the Central District, and not to say this dense yet thronged street. Nevertheless, the image of Lee Tung Street was deeply rooted in my mind. It left a somewhat disappointing impression on me. I disliked the place as it gave me so much stress and anxiety. I wondered how this old and non-prosperous street filled with industrial printing workshops existed in the middle of a busy, commercial, high-tech area of Wan Chai, surrounded by skyscraper buildings and being passed by many businessmen in suits. Shouldn't it be a high-class area? Lee Tung Street did not even integrate into the Central Business District. In fact, I thought it was such a down-grade from the area, ruining the atmosphere.

Standing in the avenue now, I could almost hear the hubbub just like back in the olden days. Instead of the clamour from labour and machinery, it was the sounds of visitors. This reminded me about the protest against the

reconstruction in 2005-2007. I was young and not aware of anything. Some people argued that redevelopment has destroyed the community, and that the new European-style stores that have come up are a misfit. Walking down the memory lane of Lee Tung Street, I stood in front of this luxury French cookware retail shop, I recalled its former appearance – a printing workshop that sold greeting cards. And if I remembered correctly, the store owner was called Luk.

‘Chi Shing Hot Blocking Co. LTD’ was the official name of Luk’s company, which made good use of the characteristics of the Tang House. The store promoted a one-stop sales service for the factories. The outer half of the shop was the showroom, sales area and the reception, while the inner half was the printing workshop filled with machines and papers. The conversation between Luk and the childhood I came across my mind; recalling the memories I had with him made me feel genuinely delighted and warm-hearted.

Back then when I was just a kid, I visited Luk with my mum where everything we passed by seemed aged and when we stopped by this shop, I did not go in right away. Instead, I hesitated and held my step before entering, standing right in front of the front door as I looked up and saw all the red packets being stored orderly on shelves that were as high as the ceiling. The sparkling gold and red packets amazed me and I could not stop staring at them.

“Wow,” was the only word that came across my little mind and all I could relate the red packets to was ‘Lunar New Year’.

“Is the shop owner rich, mum?” My mum gave me a smile and grabbed my hand but never replied to my question. Right before I was about to ask that question again, we entered the shop and with a glance at the owner, I could tell that he was not rich at all.

“Well, looks like I have my answer,” I murmured. He looked like any other uncle I knew – short-haired, perhaps with a little grey hair as well, in a short-sleeved shirt and I would say, he was a bit chubby. While I was ‘scanning’ him, unexpectedly, mum greeted him with not just an ordinary ‘hello’, but she grinned and leaned to shake his hands.

“Now, why don’t you ask Mr. Luk to resolve your puzzle?” said mum. Luk gave me a warm-hearted smile and handed me a candy which almost became the happiest thing that had happened to a little girl that day. I tore the wrapping paper after asking for permission and started to listen to his story.

From Luk’s long story, it is known that he established this company in 1980 with just five hundred dollars, which was nearly all the money he had back then. He risked his savings to start this company and it turned out to be a marvellous success. Having said that, with his years of experience in the paper printing field, ‘Chi Shing’ successfully became one of the most popular leading firms in Hong Kong some years after. Many couples visited it to order their wedding invitations cards where the designs were totally customised based on the couple’s preferences, like the fonts, size and even the texture of the paper. The sophisticated design was appreciated by a lot of couples and it contributed to a remarkably meaningful memory to their wedding, as it signifies the start of the couple’s married life where the two families were united as one. Including my parents, couples and families had developed an affectionate relationship with ‘Chi Shing’, no wonder mum greeted him with such a friendly smile!

However, when I mentioned him during my talks with mum lately, she told me a lot about where every shop owner had moved to after the urban renewal scheme of Lee Tung Street, where shops either had to be demolished or moved to let developers refurbish the area. Not being able to continue his work in Wan Chai, Luk moved to To Kwa Wan and continued manufacturing red packets and wedding invitation cards. After moving there, Luk claimed that his business declined sharply and people seemed to lose interest in the traditional printing arts. He suffered from the sudden change, without getting the compensation he deserved or the chance of moving back to Lee Tung after the renewal scheme. I felt sorry for him and other shop owners for being kicked out of a place where they once built effortfully and lovingly together.



What was once a cultural wedding custom to visit Lee Tung Street for soon-to-be newlyweds in Hong Kong has now become an ever-growing commercial hub in Hong Kong. Just like PMQ, which formerly used to be living quarters for married police, Lee Tung Avenue has been turned into yet another modern shopping hub for locals and tourists alike. With shops and restaurants from the West taking over the spaces of what used to be stores that sold “save the date” cards, Lee Tung Avenue still tries to hold onto its cultural value with lanterns hanging overhead. Moreover, their stores and restaurants are placed on the ground floor (and in some cases, the second-floor as well) of faux three-storey, cream-colored, Venetian-style buildings.

Most stores, due to their attractive exterior, have been used to hold events for influencers where their numerous fans and supporters come to meet them. This brings more visitors not only to the store, but Lee Tung Avenue in general especially since it is convenient to travel there considering the Wan Chai MTR station is nearby.

It is generally inevitable for tourists to visit Hong Kong Island, Wan Chai definitely being one of the stops of their trips. Wan Chai itself has plenty of restaurants and bars to visit. However, Lee Tung Avenue is what entices tourists the most. It is an alley of stores which leads visitors from one end of Wan Chai to another in the most scenic way. Tourists and locals themselves take advantage of the unique appearance of this walkway which distracts them from the less-scenic hustle and bustle of Wan Chai.

It is inevitable to see photos from this street on the Instagram pages of various Hong Kong people and obviously tourists.

The beauty of bright red lanterns and the tall, Italian-inspired buildings have garnered the attractions of both locals and tourists. Passing through Lee Tung Avenue, visitors are greeted by several stores and restaurants, some of which are high-end and tailored for the wealthier consumers. These stores include the famous French cookware and bakeware store, Le Creuset. Visitors can also purchase clothes from Vivienne Tam or makeup from the San Francisco-based cosmetics store Benefit. They may also grab a bite to eat or have a quick coffee break at Le Pain Quotidien. They may also visit the rustic restaurant-bar-lounge Ophelia or grab an artisanal tea at Cha Long.

The sights, and definitely the appearance of Lee Tung Avenue today significantly contrast with its purposes back in the day. Most locals feel distraught about the commercialisation of what used to be a very cultural area that engaged couples used to visit as part of tradition, especially considering how Lee Tung Avenue has now become a capitalist hub for big-name brands. Various family and locally-owned stores had to shut down their only means of income after the dawn of social media where engaged couples have resorted to posting their “Save the Dates” instead.

Nevertheless, other locals who used to visit Lee Tung Street before its recent renovation believe that it was done for the better and has given Wan Chai a much better appearance. These locals who believe so definitely have used their opportunities to visit Lee Tung Avenue not only

to pop by their favourite stores but also to spice up their Facebook or Instagram feeds with the avenue's gorgeous exteriors. However, to the people who have a rich history with Lee Tung Street, what it once used to be will always live in their minds and in their hearts. And to them, it is now just a mere memory of the past.

## **A Reflection**

This segment aims to explore Hong Kong people's memories of Lee Tung Street. Not only did we reflect on our impressions towards it, but it also deepened our understanding of how the Urban Redevelopment Scheme influenced the whole area. Previously known as Wedding Card Street, Lee Tung Street holds a lot of historical value as engaged couples would go there to buy "Save the Date" cards for their weddings, which has now been redeveloped into a luxury housing and shopping establishment. It was demolished in December 2007 as part of an Urban Renewal Authority (URA) project and many Hong Kong citizens see it as an irrevocable harm to the city's cultural background. The project has provided us a reason to revisit the street and deeply reflect on our first visits to Lee Tung Street. Undoubtedly, the URA has created a spacious and clean pedestrian area and has established a modern landmark in the downtown area in Wan Chai. In terms of luxuriousness and convenience, the renewal project is a success. However, it lost the originality and diversity of an organic community of Hong Kong.

Through exchanging ideas with various people who witnessed the decline of Lee Tung Street, we investigated their insights and got a clearer image of the former industries and environment there. It would be great if we got the chance to interview more affected residents and shop owners in the near future, so that we could get to know more about their whereabouts now and how their residential quality has changed. We would also hope to interview residents who currently live there, regarding

whether they acknowledge the controversial urban renewal scheme of Lee Tung.

We all understand the meaning of ‘no pain, no gain,’ but is it really worth believing in this saying? Some people struggled to earn a living in the past in Hong Kong yet they never lost hope and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to their businesses, no matter what kind they were running. It was all they possessed and they worked extremely hard, and with tremendous effort. Lee Tung Street was well known and became the talk of the city not merely because of their wedding cards, but also the harmony and love we could all feel within the neighbourhood. Luk always believed that harmony in a society is when everyone shared different values and relationships yet caring and offering loving hands to each other when needed. During his stay at Lee Tung, he always had faith in his belief and built affectionate relationships with everyone in the community by treating others with his kind heart. When the developers saw potential profit in the renewal scheme, they took away the pride and achievement that every member in the community possessed in the past and denied adequate support for them to go back to Lee Tung afterwards. They neglected the hard work of the previous members in the community, offering them promises that were never genuine. Now, we all know that they have had pain in their early lives, how about the gain they deserve? In a nutshell, the joy and tears under the red lanterns will never be forgotten.

## Acknowledgements

We are expressing our utmost gratitude toward the Department of English for the budget, and persons that have given guidance and help throughout the making of *Halfway Home IX*. The SPT could not have been able to curate this book without the assistance from the staff and faculty members involved. To extend our thankfulness, we would especially like to thank:

Dr Peter Edward Rees Jordan, Dr Hiu Yen Klaudia Lee, Dr Joanna Gwen Mansbridge and Dr Eric Peter Sandberg for their valuable support in the vetting process and professional literary advice;

Chris Li and Chris Leung (from EN General Office) for the liaison between SPT and other stakeholders, the access to essential resources, and their support on book design;

Local secondary school teachers for their generous on-campus promotion effort. Without them, many secondary school students would not have known about *Halfway Home*;

Last but not least, we appreciate the contributions of all contributing writers for their talented creative writing pieces and individuals who have made this project possible and successful.

*EN Student Publication Team 18/19*

Chan Yan Tung Janie, Lai Ming Chi Edwin, Lam Wing Yin Mark, Soo Lam Jobie and Leonardo David Tay

Copyright © 2019 by Department of English, City University of Hong Kong

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at the address below.

Department of English  
City University of Hong Kong  
83, Tat Chee Avenue,  
Kowloon, Hong Kong  
[www.en.cityu.edu.hk](http://www.en.cityu.edu.hk)