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REVIEW: PING-KWAN LEUNG. *CITY AT THE END OF TIME*. TRANS. GORDON OSING AND PING-KWAN LEUNG. HONG KONG: HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2012. ISBN 962-7495-04-2

City at the End of Time stands in refreshing contrast to the works of recent literary prize winners, Mo Yan from the People's Republic of China and Yang Mu from Taiwan. What distinguished Leung Ping-kwan (also known by his pen name, Ye Si) from most Chinese-language writers was that he spoke and worked primarily in Cantonese, not Mandarin.

Along with writers such as Liu Yichang, Jin Yong (Louis Cha), Xi Xi, and Li Bihua (Lilian Lee), Leung introduced Hong Kong literature to the Chinese-speaking world and beyond. As a Hong Kong poet, writer, critic, and scholar, he was all the more important for giving voice to his city's everyday life, cultural heritage, and linguistic milieu. He published over thirty volumes of poetry, fiction, and prose and was recognized with literary awards in Hong Kong as well as an honorary doctorate from the University of Zürich, Switzerland. Reissued by Hong Kong University Press 20 years after its original publication in 1992, this poetry collection invites a retrospective look at Leung's oeuvre and a contemplation of Hong Kong's evolution since its 1997 Handover.

The dual-language volume collects 40 poems written by Leung from 1974 to 1992. Gordon Osing translated the poems in partnership with Leung, when Osing was in residence at the University of Hong Kong on a Fulbright lectureship from 1989 to 1991. In addition to the poems, the reissue carries a new introduction by Esther Cheung, the original introduction by Ackbar Abbas, and the original preface by Gordon Osing, all available bilingually. Three interviews with Leung are included as appendices: one in English, one in Chinese, and one in both languages. The additional materials constitute a significant and useful update to the original publication, which has gone out of print.

One cannot overlook the importance of translation in Leung's works. The negotiation between the written Chinese and the spoken Cantonese is internal to his writing. Although his poems are written in the Chinese script, their sound, rhythm, and tone are uniquely Cantonese, uniquely Hong Kong. The gap between Chinese dialects (or "languages" as some would argue) cannot be overstated: if a Mandarin speaker were to listen to a Chinese text read aloud in Cantonese, she

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would not comprehend it any more than a Berliner would Swiss German or a Parisian would Portuguese. Nevertheless, what brings speakers of different dialects together is that they are able to read the text on the page. Leung sought to balance the particularities of his native dialect with the conventions of the written language.

Leung's Chinese is also in dialogue with English and other languages. For the translation project, Leung described the poems to Osing in English through conversations and rough drafts; meanwhile, Osing, who spoke no Chinese, rendered the materials into English in negotiation with Leung. That Osing spoke American English, as opposed to the British English that Leung was taught in Hong Kong, adds a layer of complexity: the poets were not writing back to Great Britain from the colony. In fact, Leung's cosmopolitanism took his works far beyond the English-speaking world. He dedicated travel poems to Tokyo, Berlin, and Prague, and his works have been translated into French, German, Japanese, and Portuguese.

No translation can fully reflect the idiosyncrasies of Hong Kong society and culture. The English title, for example, is completely different from the Chinese title, *Xingxiang Xianggang* (literally *Image Hong Kong*). Nonetheless, the title *City at the End of Time* echoes the uncertainty that overwhelmed Hong Kong people in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They worried that their culture, way of life, and economic competitiveness would come to an end with the Handover. As the title of Mabel Cheung's film, *City of Glass*, suggests, Hong Kong people lived on borrowed time, as though their world would shatter on its expiration date. In this sense, the English title is more explicit than the Chinese about the hopes and fears regarding the Handover at the time and the nostalgia that Leung's poems now evoke in hindsight.

At the same time, such a choice inevitably renders invisible certain nuances. The collection shares its Chinese title with one of the poems, "Images of Hong Kong." There is a *dun* (a pause similar to a caesura) between "Images" and "Hong Kong," which Osing replaces with "of." The genitive gives rise to at least several possible readings: (1) images as part of Hong Kong (synecdoche); (2) images as stand-ins for Hong Kong (metonymy); (3) images originating from Hong Kong (cultural heritage); and (4) images produced by Hong Kong (economy of signs). While these possibilities add to the overall interpretation of the poem (which is, indeed, laden with images), they also negate the sense of parataxis represented by the *dun*. The Chinese does not explicitly state the relationship between "Images" and "Hong Kong." If any, it suggests that images *equal*

Hong Kong: images produced by the British, the Hong Kongers, the Mainlanders, the Taiwanese, and so forth. Hong Kong appears—and disappears—precisely among these images fostered by Orientalism, self-Orientalism, cooptation, and self-fashioning. Hong Kong is at risk of being, in other words, a mere intermediary between cultures and worlds.

From this standpoint, Hong Kong is never “Western” or “Chinese” enough. In “An Old Colonial Building,” Cantonese functions as a stepping stone between the Chinese script and the English translation. The poem begins with the description of a beautiful colonial-era structure under renovation, the Main Building of the University of Hong Kong: “Through sunlight and shadow dust swirls, / through the scaffolding [*pengjia*] raised-up around the colonial office edifice...” (89). “Scaffolding” is translated from the Chinese characters *pengjia*, but the term is used much more frequently by Cantonese speakers than Mandarin speakers. The English translation reveals none of this tension: it is as if Cantonese were the scaffolding, dispensable once the transformation was complete. Cantonese disappears, while the poetic edifice remains.

Therefore, it is all the more important to remember the non-monumental facets of Hong Kong. “In Ap-liu Street” conveys precisely the type of everyday experiences that constitute the collective memory of Hong Kong people. Named after nearby duck farms before the area’s urbanization, the well-known street boasts a vibrant market that sells everything from cell phones and audio equipment to electrical components and used goods. Items with conspicuously Cantonese names such as *chasu* (electric sockets) and *aotu de pingdihuo* (a dented pan) populate the poem. In Osing’s alliterated diction, the street is “a packed arcade” and “a paradise of accessories” (93). However, the original is closer to “a shopping mall for humans” (*ren de shangchang*) and “a heaven for spare parts” (*lingjian de tiantang*). The street contains stores and kiosks where humans do their shopping, while spare parts find the place to be a heaven of sorts. The parallel construction in the original suggests that both humans and spare parts are elated to be there. (In fact, Leung’s poems are known for treating objects as though there were human.) Under Leung’s pen, even mundane, squalid things exude a sense of Hong Kong identity.

Leung Ping-kwan was proud to be a Hong Kong poet. Cantonese is integral to the substance and style of his poetry. He once told Osing in an interview: “I do not believe in the purity of the Chinese language” (204). By his own admission, some of his poems “probably sound better in Cantonese” (225). Leung’s poetry reminds us that the Chinese language is not equivalent to Mandarin and that other dialects can play

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important roles in producing literary works of value.

It is often through bilingual editions and translations that underrepresented works are brought to the forefront of scholarly attention. This volume is a superb example. Gordon Osing has given us a highly readable, accurate, and skilled rendition of *City at the End of Time*. As a speaker of Cantonese, Mandarin, and English who is bound to notice the gulf between these shores, I have no objections to the quality and success of his endeavor. My discussion above serves merely to illustrate the inherent challenges of working with Chinese and the social and cultural significance of a regional dialect such as Cantonese. Osing's translation offers a valuable occasion for scholars to pursue these issues. He has also done a great service to poetry readers worldwide by making accessible poetry from a city known primarily for its finance industry, kungfu films, and shopping malls. With no reservations, I welcome (once again) this volume to the body of Chinese-language literature translated into English.

(My acquaintance with Professor Leung was all too brief. He passed away on January 5, 2013 at the age of 63, after a long struggle with lung cancer. This review is dedicated to his generosity and work.)