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Hong Kong is a Science Fiction

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Abstract

In the early 1980s, China's state leader Deng Xiaoping put forward the scientific concept known as 'one country, two systems' in an effort 'to realize the peaceful reunification of China', and this ingenious design was first applied to solve the question of Hong Kong.

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Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentine writer, once invented an ancient Chinese encyclopaedia titled *Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge* in which all animals in the world are divided into fourteen arbitrary categories such as 'those belonging to the emperor', 'the fabulous ones', 'mermaids', 'the innumerable ones', 'those that have just broken the water pitcher'. Borges did this to show that classification systems of any sort are inevitably subjective and full of conjecture, for 'we do not know what thing the universe is'.²

Hong Kong is a city, not an animal; and yet at times it feels like a trapped beast, at its tyrannical master's mercy, always careful but also spiteful. More often now than before, Hong Kong people find *themselves* behaving like animals, fighting jealously and fiercely for territory, food, swimming pools, dignity, fighting with one another and with the 'intruders' who write a different script but look almost the same as them. This animalistic city, this city of animals.

Just like the whimsically categorised animals in Borges's fictional encyclopaedia, post-1997 Hong Kong is absurdly defined. Its identity is at best puzzling and at worst frustrating. As Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, it is 'directly under the authority of the Central

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People's Government' but is also simultaneously promised 'a high degree of autonomy'. As any sane person with a conscience is able to point out, these two conditions are irreconcilable.

Indeed, Hong Kong exists in a highly contradictory state: the constant conflicts between the old and the new, Eastern and Western, obedience to the Chinese government and a deep-rooted yearning for democracy. In the 1980s, while writing *Fucheng zhiyi*, Xi Xi turned Hong Kong into a floating city balanced between earth and sky. The city is still floating but there is an immanent danger of it falling, weighed down by the energy it needs to remain afloat, to keep the status quo.

In his 1902 translation of Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*, Lu Xun wrote that science fiction in China was 'as rare as unicorn horns'. Now the Central People's Government has created the living science fiction that is Hong Kong. Typical of the genre, the story of Hong Kong under Chinese rule begins with the question 'What if ...': What if dictatorship and democracy can coexist? One country, two systems. Science fiction rather than a 'scientific concept'.

Notes

Tammy Ho Lai-Ming is an Assistant Professor at Hong Kong Baptist University and a Founding Co-editor of *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*.

- 1 This creative piece draws on the document issued by the Information Office of the State Council, The People's Republic of China, June 2014, Beijing *The Practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* reproduced in the *China Daily* http://www.chinadailyasia.com/special/2014-06/11/content_15139904.html
- 2 Borges' fictional encyclopaedia is well known. It is sourced from his piece, 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins'. If this were a scholarly article, I would cite it fully in a standard reference. As a creative piece, I will leave it up to the reader to imagine the text.