Of Kowloon's Uncrowned Kings and True Recluses:
Commemoration, Trace, and Erasure, and the Shaping of a *Hong-Kong-topia* from Chen Botao (1855–1930) to Tsang Tsou-choi (1921–2007)

Shao-Lan Hertel (Tsinghua University Art Museum)
E-mail: hertel@tsinghua.edu.cn

abstract

Whether as political exile for *yimin*-loyalists of the Qing dynasty, migrant destination for Chinese Mainlanders seeking work, or global hub for cultural exchanges—the *topia* of Hong Kong can be defined as both periphery and center; moreover: "The significance of Hong Kong art from the perspective of twentieth-century China is its identity as the exception" (Tsong-zung Johnson Chang). While the specificity of Hong Kong art lies in its intrinsically *heterotopic* condition, defying any fixed definition or essentialist narrative, an overarching recurrence within art discourse is a distinct sense of place and time; a consciousness that has shaped Hong Kong identity in the collective imagination over time. Against this backdrop, this essay explores the art-historical, -geographical, and -political landscape of Hong Kong through the lens of local artists active from the early twentieth century on, focusing on Tsang Tsou-choi (1921–2007), the "King of Kowloon," known for his once ubiquitous street *graffiti* calligraphy marking the public spaces of Hong Kong; and further, literati-poet Chen Botao (1855–1930), the self-proclaimed "True Recluse of Kowloon," who founded a loyalist tradition of "Exile Poetics" based on Song-dynasty poetry. It is argued that cases such as the ones introduced provide significant discursive fragments in assembling the larger collage, or *topia*, of Hong Kong's art landscape; moreover, that it is precisely these artists' status as "uncrowned kings"—outsiders operating on the margins of society—that has gradually bestowed rightful recognition upon them. This crucial year of 2019, which sees Hong Kong in a critical situation of social unrest voiced through ongoing anti-government protests of unprecedented scale yet to find resolve, provides all the more impetus for the present essay to place emphasis on the particularity of Hong Kong's historically grown space-and-time-specificity, and its related issues of cultural consciousness, national identity, and territorial claim—all of which lie at the very heart of the discussed case, and their language of resistance.

Introduction

The remarkable modern history of Hong Kong as global trade port, migrant destination, colonized territory, and Special Administrative Region has continually engendered complex forms of artistic production of geopolitical, cross-cultural, and translingual relevance. The place—or *topia*—of Hong Kong can be defined as both periphery and center, interstice and enclave; or, in Hong Kong art critic and curator Tsong-zung Johnson Chang's words: "The significance of Hong Kong art from the perspective of twentieth-century China is its identity as the exception."[1] While the specificity of Hong Kong art lies in its intrinsically *heterotopic* condition seeming to defy fixed definitions and essentialist

narratives, a red line running through art discourse is a distinct sense of place and time: a consciousness that has shaped Hong Kong identity and its historicity in the collective imagination of artists over times—not least inspired by the magic of Hong Kong's eclectic topography as romantic harbor, glittering panoramic skyline, and labyrinth of steaming back-alleys; likewise, as insular idyll of misty peaks and rural fishing villages.

Against this backdrop, this essay[2] aims to map out art geographical fragments of a larger Hong Kong landscape by addressing individual local artists whose time-and-space-specific work has significantly shaped Hong Kong identity and art discourse throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. Of idiosyncratic nature, the individualistic hallmarks formulated by these artists have gained something of iconic status, both in the collective mind of the Hong Kong people and internationally. Sparking representatives that readily come to mind are, for example, in the twentieth century, painter-pioneer Luis Chan (Chen Fushan 陳福善, 1905–1995), designated "King of Watercolor" (水彩王), known for surrealist-fantasy portraits like his 1970s *Fantasy Island Landscape* series inspired by the

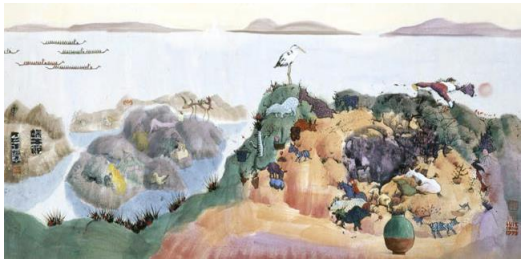

Figure 1. Luis Chan (Chen Fushan 陳福善, 1905–95), *Dragon Boat Festival*, 1970s, ink and watercolor on paper, 69 x 135 cm, Hong Kong Museum of Art (Hong Kong Museum of Art [online], no. AC1977.0008, https://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/Arts/en_US/web/ma/collection08a.html [August 23, 2019]).

geography and natural scenery of Hong Kong (fig. 1)[3]; further, active in the latter half of the twentieth century through the first decade of the 2000s, Tsang Tsou-choi (曾灶財, 1921–2007), the "King of Kowloon" (九龍皇帝) who became widely known for his once ubiquitous street *graffiti* calligraphy marking the public spaces of Hong Kong both hidden and overt (fig. 2)[4]; or, continually active in

Figure 2. Tsang Tsou-choi inscribing a utility box with his calligraphy *graffiti*, Kowloon Bay, Hong Kong, 1996–97. Photograph by Lau Kin-wai (Spalding 2013, p. 153).

the twenty-first century, contemporary Kwok Man-ho (郭孟浩, 1947–), known as the self-proclaimed "Frog King" (蛙王) for humorous and critical, socially engaging interventions, performances, and multimedia installations such as *Frogtopia-Hongkorucopia*[5], chosen to represent Hong Kong at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011.

The incidental yet notable common designation of the above-mentioned artists as "kings" can serve as a perspective lens: on the one hand, to draw attention to the "hetero-topic" nature of Hong Kong art discourse as illustrated through their (part-way) simultaneously "reigning kingdoms" of art; seemingly disparate microcosms of sorts that, however, share common ground precisely on the basis of their scaping of a shared, greater *Hong-Kong-topia*. These artists' status of *kingness*, expressed through the chosen royal terminology carried in their respective aliases, crystallizes the larger territorial contexts of art discourse, which sees these so-called "eccentric" artists as kings claiming their individual positions among Hong Kong's multi-centered spaces; moreover, as true-to-the-word "ex-centrics" given their peripheral situatedness on the historical and geographical

margins of "Greater China's" "ex-clusive," that is, non-inclusive (art) historical discourse; therein pointing towards their status as off-center, *uncrowned kings*.

While the above three artists here provide an introductory context, in the following, this essay centers on one representative—Tsang Tsou-choi, the King of Kowloon—whose case is carved out more in-depth. The choice of Tsang's subject is grounded in several reasons: for one, in the author's personal academic specialization in the histories of Chinese calligraphy and contemporary ink art, and thereby the interest in Tsang's working practice based on the written word and traditional Chinese brush-and-ink. More significantly, this study can be considered a continued discussion of the theme of landscape inscription and cultural inscription in a broader sense; and, in a specific context, the act of inscribing natural environments through written words, therein signifying forms of site-specific historical commemoration, trace, and erasure, as investigated in the essay "Texturing the Landscape: Stone-Engraving Traditions in China as Human Refinement of Self and Nature."[6] The initially pursued theme is now expanded and contemplated from a different perspective, shifting focus onto the act of inscribing *urban* environments through written words, therein, likewise, signifying forms of site-specific commemoration, and collective cultural awareness for history, time, and place.

In line with related ideas of *commemoration, trace, and erasure* in (art) history, a further aspect accounting for Tsang's work as chosen subject matter was the historical date of the workshop, undertaken on June 30 and July 1, 2017, upon whose paper presentation this essay is built.[7] As it were, this date coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the so-called Hong Kong Handover, a.k.a. the Hong Kong Return, denoting the transfer of sovereignty from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China, whose official ceremonies took place on June 30 and July 1, 1997. How far this anniversary presents a felicitous occasion to be celebrated be left to ponder;[8] rather to be discussed is the event of the Handover as historically significant in Tsang's context: following this introduction, the reader shall become acquainted with his "Work and Workings as Artist"; upon which the phenomenon of *Hong-Kong-topia* is discussed as to its meaning as "Place of Exile, and History of Commemoration, Trace, and Erasure." Here, the connection to Chen Botao (陳伯陶, 1855–1930), whose name constitutes part of this essay's title, is elucidated. Offered in conclusion is a critical reflection on the "Uncrowned Place of Hong Kong in Chinese Art History."

Tsang Tsou-choi's Work and Workings as Artist

In his essay "Art and Culture: Hong Kong or the Creation of a Collective Memory," Gérard Henry, Deputy Director of the Alliance Française Hong Kong,[9] recounts an incident he happened to witness on June 30, 1997, the day of the Handover:

> […] on the day that the antique Rolls Royce of the last governor departed for the final time from the governor's residence, taking His Excellency Chris Patten and his family past walls that had been painted pure white all along the route, […] this author saw Tsang Tsou Choi, 76 years old at the time, the most famous graffiti artist in Hong Kong, who calls himself the "King of Kowloon," hobble about with a paint brush and bucket in hand towards Hong Kong's last governor to demand, as he had done repeatedly for 40 years, to be recognized as the Emperor of Kowloon and to demand the return of his land which, in his view, the British Crown had stolen. Without

> a doubt, it was the most poetic gesture marking the last moments of the British Empire in Asia in what was otherwise a day of pouring rain.[10]

The scene described by Henry, which we can only imagine since it is not otherwise documented, is one that many a Hongkonger will be able to retell from his or her own personal experience and memory, since the omnipresence of Tsang Tsou-choi, moreover, the presence of his calligraphic inscriptions left on nearly every street corner of the city—amounting to an approximate 55,000 texts rendered in an idiosyncratic robust and unadorned writing style of squarish regular-script characters[11]––marked the urban landscape of Hong Kong over the course of around half a century, beginning in the mid-1950s up until Tsang's death in 2007, the year that Henry published his essay in contribution to what he designated "Hong Kong, or the Creation of a Collective Memory."

The reception and construction of the King of Kowloon's public figure can be further traced through the art critical voices that have variously described his person in terms ranging "from mysterious crackpot to folk hero" (David Spalding),[12] to "a wandering beggar-king caught in the latest zeitgeist" (Hans Ulrich Obrist), [13] to "probably the most unique and outstanding creative mind that Hong King has ever contributed to the world" (Hou Hanru). [14] Here, the citation of internationally renowned art critics is not to suggest an idolization of Tsang's persona; it serves, moreover, to illustrate the extraordinary attention it has received over time, considerable as inextricably related to both the locale and rationale of Hong Kong, and to Tsang's heterotopic vision of this city.

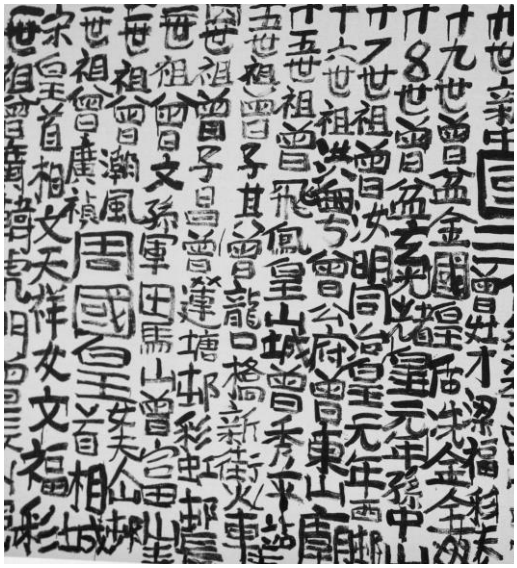

Figure 3. Tsang Tsou-choi, *Ink Record*, 1998, ink on canvas, 152.5 x 152.5 cm (Spalding 2013, p. 35).

Born in 1921 in Liantang, Guangdong Province, Tsang dropped out of school at age eleven and, in face of the Chinese Civil War, fled to Hong Kong in the late 1930s, where he first lived with an uncle and worked as a farmer, then as a laborer of a building materials company, and later for the most part of his life as a garbage collector. Around 1956, in his mid-thirties, Tsang began undertaking calligraphy *graffiti* interventions[15] in the urban spaces of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island, purporting to be the "King of Kowloon," and stating a hereditary territorial claim on the land of Hong Kong. [16] Among Tsang's inscribed texts, the most prominent story—indeed, Tsang's lifelong obsession—is arguably the meticulous documentation of his "family tree," or "family genealogy" (家譜) borrowing from the historical tradition of a generational numbering system, and the recording of his relatives' names, marriages, and land holdings (exemplified in fig. 3); supporting Tsang's claim that the Hong Kong regions of the Kowloon Peninsula (九龍半島) and New Territories (新界) as well as an area he designated "New China" (新中國, presumably the Mainland), and occasionally, England too, had belonged to his ancestors, and were thus rightfully

his; further demanding that the government owe him tax for the privilege of administering his birthright.[17]

Possessing an "acute sense of topography of power," as observed by David Clarke,[18] prior to 1997, Tsang had planted his illegal inscriptions in significant places representative of the British crown authority: for example, near the Central Government Complex in Admiralty, or by the Queen Victoria statue in Victoria Park in Central[19]—never too close, yet always close enough to establish a spatial connection, thereby landmarking the margins and borders of these demonstrative power sites. Due to the relative scarcity of graffiti in Hong Kong, Tsang's own resulted in a high degree of visibility and efficacy in the public space. Moreover, through his adopted subject matter and verbal rhetoric, Tsang appropriated, indeed, *usurped* the authoritarian text of an imperial genealogy.[20] Formally, he likewise appropriated the traditional Chinese writing medium of brush-and-ink—a powerful signifier of the Chinese scripted word, whose effective dimension historically interlocks aesthetic calligraphic traditions with social functions, serving as a cultural technique and regulative instrument of politics and society.[21] At the same time, Tsang's script defied the canonical calligraphy tradition—not only aesthetically, but also semantically: his poetics of text did not cater to the typical 'lofty' art historical commentary conventionally found in 'high-minded' Chinese literati discourse. Rather, as noted by Obrist, "Tsang's poetic, enigmatic, irreverent, serious and humorous messages have offered a living commentary on life and change in Kowloon for half a century […]".[22]

Though Tsang's subversive practice, which made use of the surfaces of street pavements, lampposts, building walls, and vehicles, had gained infamous reputation long before the 1990s (with local newspaper features dating back to at least 1970)[23], mainstream recognition for Tsang's work only came about during the last decade of his life, from 1997 to 2007. Indeed, it was 1997, the very year of the Hong Kong Handover, that marked Tsang's first solo exhibition *The Street Calligraphy of the King of Kowloon*,[24] sparking public debates about Tsang's status as an artist. After the demise of the British colonial regime, Tsang continued his protest writing, henceforth often targeting the vicinity of the Bank of China Tower rising up over the Government Offices—a Hong Kong landmark skyscraper that had become a new symbol of the Mainland Chinese state authority.[25] Up until around this time, Tsang's ubiquitous inscriptions had been mostly viewed negatively by the Hong Kong population as a madman's vandalization of public property. Then, initially evolving from the artistic community, increased active attention for Tsang's work could be registered, and its positive reception as a symbol of the Hong Kong locale was channeled through the media. In his final years, Tsang's productive output also saw collaborative works with various Hong Kong creatives, including photography artists, fashion designers, and graphic designers;[26] and further, the promotion of his work under the designation "contemporary calligraphy" (當代書法).[27]

***Hong-Kong-topia*: Place of Exile, and History of Commemoration, Trace, and Erasure**

As noted, the extraordinary reception of Tsang must be seen as inextricably related to his Hong Kong locale, respectively, *rationale*—his *heterotopic vision of the city*, indicating the element of place-and-time-specificity inherent to his workings: prone to weather, neglect, and the natural deterioration of surfaces over time, but also due to the willful removal and over-painting of his vandalistic writing by the local authorities, Tsang's works were transient structures that anticipated and

embraced their own decay and destruction (fig. 4).

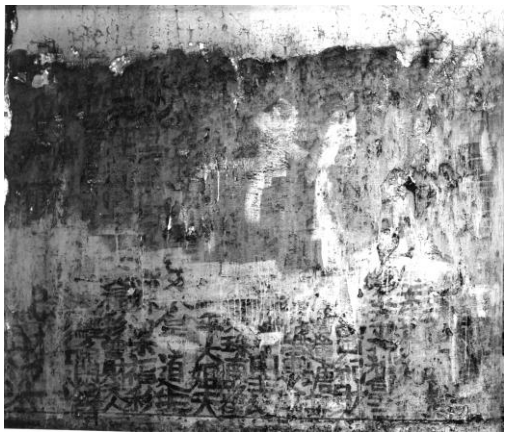

Figure 4. Deteriorated wall inscribed with Tsang's calligraphy *graffiti* (detail), photographed by anothermountainman (又一山人, a.k.a. Stanley Wong 黃炳培, b. 1960), 2007, Kennedy Town, Hong Kong (Spalding 2013, pp. 11–12).

While the content of their texts unveiled their meaning as records, or traces of an obscure family history, the physical presence of their form dissolved with time, to remain tangible, moreover, in memory (or documented in photography). Often, Tsang in turn overwrote the erasures undertaken by the authorities—"A Protest Against Forgetting," as phrased by Obrist, who further elucidates:

> As Ackbar Abbas has explained, Hong Kong, while ancient and historic, is also a culture of transience and disappearance: "The sense of the temporary is very strong... The city is not so much a place as a space of transit... everything is provisional, ad hoc; everything floats—currencies, values, human relations." […] Tsang's chosen medium perfectly fits this culture of transience […].[28]

Elucidated here is something that can be subsumed under a larger narrative of the *Hong-Kong-topia*: indicating, also, Hong Kong, and particularly Kowloon in its specific significance "as a place of exile in Chinese history," as has been discussed by Ko Chia-cian; one that harks back to the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) and became an important point of reference in the Chinese post-imperial era following 1911.[29] Among the incurred flow of migrants from the Mainland were Qing *yimin* who found refuge in Hong Kong and were able to assert a loyalist tradition of "exile poetics" in form of literary societies based on Song-dynasty poetry. A representative pioneer was the literati-official Chen Botao, who as one of the last Chinese emperor Puyi's 溥儀 (1906–67) personal mentors fled to Hong Kong, later calling himself "The True Recluse of Kowloon" (九龍真逸, figs. 5–6).[30]

Figure 5. Chen Botao (陳伯陶, 1855–1930), *Poetry Couplet in Regular-Script Calligraphy*, 1930s, ink on gold-sprinkled paper, 130 x 31.5 cm, Hong Kong Museum of Art (Chang 2012, p. 336).

Figure 6. Photograph of four Beijing Mandarins during Emperor Guangxu's (1871–1908) reign, 1905, showing Chen Botao, the self-named "True Recluse of Kowloon," on the far right. Chan Siu Nam Collection (Chang 2012, p. 337).

His Kowloon-based poetic consciousness for time and place, or rather *displacement*, was nourished by and further nourished a long-standing local cultural tradition of leaving traces in abandoned places; a prime example here being the historic relic of the Terrace of the Song Emperors (宋王臺), respectively, the site of its Ancient Ruins (宋臺舊址) erected in 1916 (fig. 7):

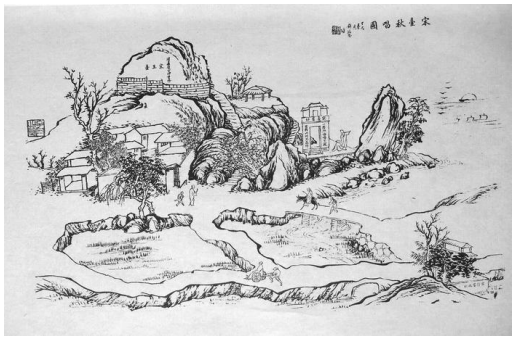

Figure 7. *Autumn Chants on the Terrace of the Song Emperors* (宋臺秋唱圖), illustration showing the site of the Ancient Ruins of the Terrace of the Song Emperors (宋臺舊址) erected in 1916, documented in the *Collected Works of the Song Terrace* (宋台集) compiled by Chen Buchi (陳步墀, 1870–1934). (Old Hong Kong Photo/ 香港舊照片 [online], http://oldhkphoto.com/sungwongtoi2/ [August 23, 2019]).

Originally a 45-meter-tall boulder standing on top of Sacred Hill (聖山) above Kowloon Bay, believed to present a memorial to the final residence of the last two emperors of the Southern Song dynasty who had fled to Hong Kong and lived there in exile between 1277 and 1279. After the Song dynasty was overthrown by the Mongols in 1279, local residents inscribed the words "Terrace of the Song Emperors" (Song Wong Toi 宋王臺) on the large rock, thereafter and up into the twentieth century serving as a place of commemoration for local expatriate literati including Chen Botao, "thus creating a 'heterotopia' out of Song history in Kowloon," [31] as noted by Ko. Here, it appears in place to (re)quote Stephen Owen, who had been referenced in my afore-mentioned preceding article on cultural inscription of natural spaces:

> Hills may still outline the terraces of fallen places, and worn stones may be steles whose inscriptions are just barely legible. Time covers things over, effaces detail, blurs form. 'What was' becomes invisible except to those who know how to look for it. It is that disposition to look on the world in a certain way which bears the full weight of our relation to the past.[32]

With the Kai Tak Airport construction in the 1940s, Sacred Hill was flattened, and the giant stone of Sung Wong Toi was abandoned and left to ruin; its inscription is now re-erected as a memorial tablet in Sung Wong Toi Memorial Park west of the airport.[33] As evident from the *graffiti* calligraphy he left on a lamppost nearby,[34] Tsang, sure enough, did not fail to miss the significance of this airport site.[35]

Despite its elements of transience and deterioration, when considered comprehensively in terms of a life work, through its relentlessly performed repetition, Tsang's work likewise contained elements of persistence and (self)renewal. Indeed, Hou Hanru notes that Tsang's inscriptions stood out remarkably in Hong Kong's urban sceneries, "which were all packaged in

commercially designed visual kitsch"[36], and that

> […] in a totally non-violent manner, [Tsang] managed to impose his own city map over the official one by connecting the dots of his urban calligraphy, which spread across every street corner. Tsang's work represents a personal utopian vision of the city, one that overrides the official picture of the city that is imposed by political and economic powers […].[37]

This vision was seen and shared by parts of the Hong Kong population, especially post-1997. At first in artistic contexts, then in a wider way, Tsang became one of the most established symbols of Hong Kong cultural identity and signifier of the Hongkonger locale. Hou Hanrou further assesses that Tsang's "historic narrative" recounts the conflicts of an "urban existence coupled with a certain nostalgia for China's past glory," and that his "'history' exposes the oppressed collective unconsciousness of Hong Kong's population, which is eternally haunted by the deep crisis of their souls, having been colonized by multiple hegemonic powers in the past and the present.".[38]

Concluding Remarks: The Uncrowned Place of Hong Kong in Chinese Art History

It is hoped that through this essay, attention can be drawn to the ambivalent status of artists like the King of Kowloon, who though gaining recognition within certain frameworks of art historical discourse in fact remain on the margins of the *grander narrative*; therein occupying, rather, the heterotopic, uncrowned realms of art history. As pointed out by Anton Schweizer, *heterotopia*, in the meaning of "other place," denotes the concept of a place that is different from the established and familiar centers of human society and action: society *needs* these *other places* in order to establish a valid concept of "us" and define a central constitutive notion of what "we are" (as nation, culture, sub-culture etc.).[39] Following this understanding, it is precisely this heterotopic condition of Tsang's work that has constituted significance within the Hong Kong art world.

To be sure, as art historians, in discussing Tsang's case, our foremost question must not be "Is this art?"; even less so, "Is this *good* art?"[40] Instead, we must register and ascribe significance to the given fact *that* his works had a tangible impact on contemporary art critical discourse, and inquire, rather, into their context and reasoning: *why* and in *what way* has his work shaped the creative landscape of art production and reception in Hong Kong (and beyond)? As was argued, the thought figure of *Hong-Kong-topia* proves useful for this inquiry, in carving out the art geographical place and time of Hong Kong as a relevant case in point. In the context of "Greater China," forms of creative production as represented by figures like Tsang counter the hegemonic nationalist agenda pursued by "conservative-nativist"[41] art historians and historiographers aimed at establishing a *grand narrative* of "Chinese art," among which Hong Kong *actively fulfills* a marginalized role, and whose historiographical inclusion moreover serves to feed this narrative, as standard published histories of Chinese art go to show.[42] As Frank Vigneron sharply observes: "[…] the practices of a very small number of Hong Kong artists seem to be included only to provide an appearance of exhaustivity to this history of Chinese art."[43]

Against this background, the aim of the present contribution lay in showing how *heterotopic*—i.e. "other-worldly"—visions of Hong Kong such as those of Tsang Tsou-choi the King of Kowloon, and Chen Botao the True Recluse of

Kowloon, or, likewise, the King of Watercolor Luis Chan, and Frog King Kwok Man-ho—who, though not discussed in-depth provide significant references as further cases in point—can be collaged and considered in terms of a larger *topia* of Hong Kong including its specific spaces, places, and times of art production and reception; moreover, in terms of the larger *topia* of art history into which "Hong Kong" is variously embedded. Operating on the culturally hybrid peripheries of the established art world, contemporary examples like those of Tsang, Chan, and Kwok gained wider recognition only gradually, indeed, to some extent on grounds of their very status *as* eccentric outsiders—thus also considerable in their here-chosen designation as uncrowned kings. May the field of art history welcome more inclusive discussions of the respective positions, aesthetics, and practices connected with their *locales and rationales* of creative production, enabling a more differentiated perception and critical understanding of "Hong Kong art"—or, for that matter, "Chinese art."

Indeed, this crucial year of 2019, which sees Hong Kong in a critical situation of social unrest and precarity voiced through ongoing anti-government protests of unprecedented scale yet to find resolve,[44] provides all the more impetus for the present essay to place emphasis on the particularity of Hong Kong's historically grown space-and-time-specificity, and its related issues of cultural consciousness, national identity, and territorial claim—all of which lie at the very heart of the above-investigated cases, and their language of resistance.

Notes

1) Chang "The Full Remainder": p. 19.
2) Based on my paper presented at the international joint workshop "Landscapes in Art, Theory, and Practice across Media, Time, and Place," hosted by the Art History Institute of Freie Universität Berlin in cooperation with the Art Research Center of Ritsumeikan University and the Faculty of Intercultural Studies, Kobe University, June 30–July 1, 2017.
3) For further examples, see under the *Fantasy Sceneries* in Hanart TZ Gallery 2012: pp. 77ff.; and Chang 2012: pp. 348f.
4) For further examples and a rich chronological documentation of Tsang's calligraphic *graffiti* inscriptions, see the numerous illustrations in Spalding 2013. While Tsang's English-language alias is known as "King of Kowloon," the original wording of 九龍皇帝 in fact is more accurately translated as the "Emperor of Kowloon."
5) For installation views, see Kwok's official website, http://www.fotop.net/frogkingkwok/Venice_Biennale_2011 (page accessed August 23, 2019).
6) See Hertel 2017.
7) See note (2).
8) Hong Kong's precarious status within the increasingly questionable One-Country-Two-Systems (一國兩制) has never been more tangible than in this current year 2019 seeing Hong Kong people's ongoing protests of unprecedented scale initiated by the extradition law that was announced to be passed by the Beijing-controlled government. As an in-depth discussion is not in place here, I refer to the *China Heritage* online journal of The Wairarapa Society for New Sinology, which, as ever, is at the forefront of dedicated coverage; see the related entries collected under "Hong Kong, The Best China," The Wairarapa Society (online).
9) An eminent long-time cultural insider who has also been denoted as "Hong Kong's Quiet Observer," see Dewolf (online).
10) Henry 2007: 82.
11) For illustrations, I refer again to the rich visual documentation of Tsang's calligraphic *graffiti* inscriptions in Spalding 2013.
12) Ibid.: p. 18.
13) Ibid.
14) Ibid.: p. 121.
15) While *graffiti*, denoting writings or drawings that have been scribbled, scratched, or painted illicitly on a wall or other surface often within public view, are commonly associated with the materials of spray paint and marker pens in contemporary urban culture, Tsang's *graffiti* borrowed from the Chinese

calligraphic tradition based on brush-and-ink (筆墨). I italicize the commonplace term "graffiti" typically used in Tsang's context to draw attention to its originary meaning and multiple interpretations, and inasmuch as "graffiti" only represent certain aspects of Tsang's work.

16) The art and life of Tsang Tsou-choi is discussed comprehensively in Spalding 2013. For Tsang's biographical timeline and exhibition history, see ibid.: pp. 236–242.

17) Tsang's records also referenced contemporary individuals, institutions, and places, such as the Queen of England, the Hong Kong Government, and the Fu Shan Estate public housing complex in Kowloon where Tsang lived. For an analysis and elucidation of Tsang's inscribed texts, see ibid.: pp. 26–42. Despite the present author's specialization in the art history of Chinese calligraphy, following the incentives outlined above, a formal-aesthetic and stylistic analysis of Tsang's idiosyncratic brushwork is not the focus of the present article. It may, however, be pointed out that Tsang's calligraphy scripts and styles would provide ample material for a study of art historiographical value, as had been elucidated through the rudimentary analysis undertaken in the paper presented at the 2017 workshop.

18) Clarke 2001: p. 176.

19) As documented by Clarke, see his photograph of Tsang inscribing a utility box near Victoria Park on September 24, 1996, reproduced ibid.: p. 178.

20) Cf. ibid.: pp. 176–181. Here, Clarke speaks of Tsang's "language of resistance," through which Tsang "articulated his sense of powerlessness by making an imperial claim, by mimicking the rhetoric of those whose power he has so publicly contested." Ibid: p. 180.

21) For discussions of this phenomenon, see e.g. Kraus 1991; Ledderose 1986; Yen 2005.

22) Spalding 2013: p. 4.

23) See e.g. the front page of the July 12, 1970 issue of the *Ming Pao Evening News* (明報晚報) with one of the earliest known articles on Tsang Tsou-choi, reproduced ibid.: p. 207.

24) Curated by Lau Kin-wai, Agfa Gallery, held at the Goethe Institut, Hong Kong (April 24–May 17, 1997).

25) See Lau Kin-wai's photograph of 1996–97, of a utility box bearing Tsang's calligraphy *graffiti* with the Bank of China Tower in the background, ibid.: p. 75.

26) Cf. Clarke 2001: pp. 180–186. Following Tsang's 1997 first solo exhibition, further exhibitions included *Cities on the Move*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru, touring various venues internationally between 1997 and 1999; *Power of the Word*, curated by Tsong-zung Johnson Chang, touring Taiwan and the USA between 1999 and 2002, and *Z.O.U.—Zone of Urgency* curated by Hou Hanru, held at the 50th Venice Biennale (April 14–November 2, 2003).

27) As seen in the caption of a 1998 advertising campaign for the Hong Kong Arts Centre, reproduced ibid.: p. 185.

28) Spalding 2013: p. 5.

29) See Ko 2016..

30) For an in-depth discussion of Chen and the loyalist tradition of "Exile Poetics," I refer to Ko 2016; further to Chang 2012: pp. 336–351, where Chen is discussed among the "Historical Masters as Pioneers."

31) Ko 2016: p. 28.

32) Owen 1986: p. 17.

33) Cf. Ko 2016: p. 468, note 51.

34) As documented by Fung Lohon, see the photograph reproduced in Spalding 2013: p. 47.

35) On the note of airports and the theme of *inscribing local collective memory*, the residents of the island Chek Lap Kok (赤鱲角) may be referenced as a further example, who when they were displaced to make space for Hong Kong International Airport in 1991 left behind calligraphic inscriptions on their abandoned homes, voicing protest against their forced removal and the destruction of their community, cf. Clarke 2001: p. 177; p. 182.

36) Spalding 2013: p. 117.

37) Ibid.: p. 123.

38) Ibid.: p. 124.

39) Schweizer 2017.

40) To which Tsang, incidentally, has provided his own simple answer: when asked in a rare interview of 1997 whether he saw himself as an artist, Tsang replied, "If you think it's art, then it's art." Cf. Spalding 2013: p. 16.

41) A term borrowed from Hong Kong-based art historian Frank Vigneron, see Vigneron 2017: p. 93.

42) On this matter, see particularly the section "Art History from the Mainland: the Marginalisation of

Hong Kong Art" in Vigneron's very timely, highly informative critical article (2017).

43) Ibid.: p. 111. Indeed noteworthy, while Tsang's works—in their original contexts as street *graffiti*––under no circumstances would have been tolerated in the public spaces of Mainland China, they pose no problem when depraved of their original context and meaning, e.g. as seen and documented by Shanghai-based writer Josh Feola on August 26, 2017, where Tsang's reproduced inscriptions reemerge adorning the walls of an upscale noodle joint in Beijing Sanlitun, see Feola (online). Fulfilling the trivialized, flattened function of decorative tapestry—and yet therein significant in its very meaning as "eccentric" art—Tsang's calligraphy here aptly feeds the dichotomous notion of centricity/ex-centricity. I thank Peter Sommerfeld for drawing my attention to this source.

44) See note (8).

Works Cited

Chang, Tsong-zung [Johnson] (ed.). *Hong Kong Eye: Hong Kong Contemporary Art*. Milan: Skira, 2012.

Chang Tsong-zung [Johnson], "The Full Remainder: Art from Hong Kong." *Hong Kong Eye: Hong Kong Contemporary Art*, Chang 2012: pp. 15–19.

Clarke, David. *Hong Kong Art: Culture and Decolonization*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2001.

Dewolf, Christopher. "Hong Kong's Quiet Observer." *Zolima Citymag* (online), https://zolimacitymag.com/gerard-henry-hong-kongs-quiet-observer/ (accessed August 22, 2019).

Feola, Josh. "Photo of the Day: Kowloon King Bootleg in Beijing." *RADII* (online), https://radiichina.com/photo-of-the-day-kowloon-king-bootleg-in-beijing/ (accessed August 22, 2019).

Hanart TZ Gallery (ed.). *The World of Luis Chan*/ 陳福善的世界. Hong Kong: Hanart TZ Gallery, 2012.

Henry, Gérard. "Art and Culture: Hong Kong or the Creation of a Collective Memory," *China Perspectives*, vol. 70, no. 2 (2007), pp. 79–8.

Hertel, Shao-Lan. "Texturing the Landscape: Stone-Engraving Traditions in China as Human Refinement of Self and Nature." *Ritsumeikan Studies in Language and Culture, International Institute of Language and Culture Studies, Ritsumeikan University*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2017), pp. 21–31.

Ko, Chia-cian. "Song History in Kowloon and Loyalist Classical Poetry: Chen Botao, Sung Wong Toi, and Autumn Chants on the Terrace of the Song Emperors." *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2016), pp. 448–470.

Kraus, Richard. *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Ledderose, Lothar. "Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function." *Orientations*, vol. 17, no. 10 (1986), pp. 35–50.

Owen, Stephen. *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1986.

Schweizer, Anton. "Constructing 'Other Spaces' in Edo Period Japan," paper presented at the Sixth Forum of East Asian Art History, Freie Universität Berlin, June 16–17, 2017.

Spalding, David. *King of Kowloon: The Art of Tsang Tsou-choi*. Bologna/Hong Kong: Damiani/Vermilion Art Collections, 2013.

The Wairarapa Society for New Sinology. "Hong Kong, The Best China." *China Heritage* (online), http://chinaheritage.net/the-best-china/ (accessed August 23, 2019).

Vigneron, Frank. "'Ink Art' as Strategy for Hong Kong Institutions." *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2017), *Special Issue on Art, Society, and Contemporary China*, pp. 92–117.

Yen, Yueh-ping. *Calligraphy and Power in Contemporary Chinese Society*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2005.