

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

香港城市大學

To Be Rooted:

Pluriversality in

Wang Chau's Struggle

扎根：橫洲抗爭中的多元世界

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assumptions, hidden value judgements, and often downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or to perpetuate ignorance.⁴¹² This is why Ding felt that their essay was incomplete. They had no time to write with Mrs Liu's orchard garden, ask Mrs and Mr Hung why they chose Wang Chau, and ask Ms Cheng how her home, that was first made of wood, became a two-storey village house with a balcony (a very unique feature).⁴¹³ Maybe there will be future possibilities, or perhaps Ayla's architecture students will explore further. Ding learnt through a social movement film festival that architecture students can play an important role with their documentation that reflects different perspectives back to the community.⁴¹⁴ Ding wants research to do exactly that: positively affect and benefit those that face injustice.⁴¹⁵

Ding's message, that linked to their essay, received several replies in the forms of emojis—hamsters, frogs, Teletubbies and the usual emoticons. When their dad was frying the last dish in the kitchen, Ding quickly checked their phone. A few of the replies were from villagers. One was from Ms Cheng, who they were sure would read it soon, and make corrections if necessary, before sharing a stream of useful links and documents—even hardcopies which supporters appreciated and always gave back to her.

Rapid Publishing (to Find Each Other)

The following months, all the way to the 2018 Lunar New Year, the villagers remained determined and continued what they had usually done before the inaugural Jackfruit festival: demand a meeting with the government; set up street petition stations that communicated the Win-Win-Win Development Plan to the public; continued village tours which had an increase in participants; repaint the Democratic Planning floor mural that became faded; make tape art banners together with children who lived in the village; and collectively paint a large mural on the outside of the Lau family's wall.

⁴¹² Ibid., 176.

⁴¹³ 'The villager [Ms Cheng] and her family have lived in Wing Ning Tsuen for more than half a century. When she was young, in the 1980s, her parents applied to the government for a licence to rebuild a new house because their house became dilapidated. Their application was accepted and their rebuilt home was registered as a licensed structure on the edge of city and on a green belt. They never imagined that their home would be taken away one day.' Ms Cheng, *A Piece of Floor from Home* (Seoul: Wang Chau Tin Yuen, 2022), 9.

⁴¹⁴ Mats Eriksson Dunér, director. 2015. *It Was a Time When Everything Was Possible – All Power to the Imagination!* Produced as part of the Artistic Research Programme at Malmö Art Academy, Lunds Universitet. 1 hr., 3 min. <https://www.filmform.com/works/4783-det-var-en-tid-da-allt-var-mojligt-all-makt-at-fantasin>.

⁴¹⁵ 'At the heart of Indigenous research lie issues of who benefits, how, and to what purpose.' Makere Stewart-Harawira. "Challenging Knowledge Capitalism. Indigenous Research in the 21st Century," *Socialist Studies / Études socialistes* vol. 9 no. 1 (2013): 44, DOI: 10.18740/S43S3V. See also, NYC Stands with Standing Rock Collective. 2016. "#StandingRockSyllabus." <https://nycstandswithstandingrock.wordpress.com/standingrocksyllabus>.

At the Shatin petition station, a woman that lived nearby, spoke to Ms Cheng, who was at the foldable table, and said, “The government is mindless for not picking up your proposal.” Pointing at all the leaflets, banners and placards, she said, “You’re all doing the work that the government should do!”⁴¹⁶ Ms Cheng thanked the woman and she added her signature to the clipboard, before taking a leaflet.

The large mural involved the villagers and those present were invited to stand by the wall, and Frank, a supporter, would paint the villager’s outline in white paint and add some details which would be painted by other people. Some of the concern group members and supporters were invited to be in the painting, which showed a line of people opposing a bulldozer that was coming from the right side, the direction of the village entrance. Above the mural hung two white banners with red calligraphy, separated by a vine on the fence, that read 無良政府欺壓村民 and 未安置先拆屋 (The Shameless Government Oppresses Villagers. Pushing Eviction Before Allocation).⁴¹⁷ Tammy thought that she might have seen similar banners in photographs in her supervisor’s personal copy of the government leaflet *Kowloon Thirteen Villages Committee*. She had always preferred the more accurate translation of ‘Kowloon Thirteen Villages Committee’ which is ‘Kowloon Thirteen Villages Alliance for Supporting Chuk Yuen Villagers’. The latter has an origin, a place to first gather and organise, and express solidarity—a collective history. Tammy recognised that so much has been lost through mistranslation and using terminology that was on and is still on, the government’s terms. She recalled a book about punctuation by Lynne Truss, which came with stickers—one stuck on her laptop, below the function key on the keyboard. There was a part in the book about the ‘tiny tricky hyphen’, and Truss described the hyphen being used ‘to connect (or separate) individual words’.⁴¹⁸ Coupled with the ‘non-’ prefix, assigned to “non-indigenous villagers”, Tammy thought to herself, “Wouldn’t it be more just for people to describe themselves and not be assigned—on their own terms.”

There was a Lunar New Year gathering on 24 February 2018. Villager Mrs Kam brought a stainless steel pot with a lid to the gathering. Mr Kam unintentionally shocked the vegetarians for the first time that night by unveiling a whole roasted pig on a pre-prepared foldable table, that was covered with a white plastic tablecloth. The second time was when he thought that *lap cheong* wasn’t meat and put it into a vegetarian stew and served it first to the vegetarian dinner table. When everyone protested, even

⁴¹⁶ For Tammy, this echoed something that Fernando Cheung Chiu-hung had said in a Legislative Council on meeting 13 December 2016. He picked up a green book made by the Pang Jai Concern Group and to paraphrase he said, “This book does what the government should be doing.” Legislative Council, “Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene,” <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr16-17/english/panels/fseh/minutes/fseh20161213.pdf>. See also, Pang Jai Concern Group. “簡單報告昨日 (2016年12月13日) 立法會.....” Facebook, December 14, 2016.

<https://www.facebook.com/PangJaiHK/photos/a.1672608662952300/1836963023183529>.

⁴¹⁷ Translation by Nanxi Liu.

⁴¹⁸ Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* (London: Profile Books, 2005), 158.

the meat-eaters, Tammy—a vegan—thought how beautiful it was that even in these moments, we can all laugh together.

The next several months were busy for some of the villagers and the concern group who were working on the 200-page book, called 何處是吾家—橫洲 (*Where is My Home? - Wang Chau*), that documents the villagers' resistance to the government's development plan. The book 'focuses on both emotions and rationale' of the movement and includes the villagers' stories and their pets, and old photos.⁴¹⁹ The book displays handwritten letters that the villagers sent to the government in June 2017; some photographs even showed villagers holding their letters in their homes.

Unique species, all with their own stories, feature in the book too, such as the Queen of the Night (*Epiphyllum oxypetalum*) originally from Central America and Northern South America.⁴²⁰ The flowering cactus blooms one one night for only four to five hours, and is grown by Mrs Liu.⁴²¹ The Hong Kong Herbarium's website sheds the flower's medicinal uses and states that the Queen of the Night is 'ornamental' and 'usually cultivated as a pot plant' in Hong Kong.⁴²² In Wang Chau, the cactus is on a path in Yeung Uk San Tsuen that spans towards the Cheung family's home, its aerial roots sensitive to the environment and probably those who pass by. Mrs Liu uses the flowers in a jelly dessert that aids heart conditions and 'shortness of breath.'⁴²³ When she told this to Mrs Ko, Ms Cheng, Tammy and Kin, Kin wondered if the flower could mend his broken heart, from the first year of his MFA.

Where is My Home? - Wang Chau tells this story too, not of broken hearts, but a day in November 2017, when the four of them responded to Mrs Liu's message to come and see the 13th Queen of the Night bloom in Yeung Uk San Tsuen.⁴²⁴ When everyone arrived at 9 pm, a vanilla lemon scent was in the air and the two layers of white petals were already opening slowly with the flowers bending 90 degrees—and more—from being vertical, being fully appreciated, smelt and photographed on everyone's phone. From a distance, 20 flowers looked like stars—the outer thin petals resembling

⁴¹⁹ ECOARTASIA research team, "Wang Chau Green Belt Development Concern Group," May, 2022, https://ecoartasia.net/WCG/WCG_eng.html.

⁴²⁰ T.K. Lim (2014) *Epiphyllum oxypetalum*, *Edible Medicinal And Non-Medicinal Plants*, 7, 638, DOI: 10.1007/978-94-007-7395-0_43.

⁴²¹ 知築常落，廖家雞舍史（香港：聖雅各福群會藍屋創作室，2018），51. See also, Wang Chau Green Belt Development Concern Group, "橫洲的曇花又開花了," *Facebook*, May, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/wangchaugreen/posts/pfbid0yZv51higz1VsQd2KdtLKl5A6w4YRkXgThmkTYhLr2sDfPqbokPXCCi3L9TvAg969l>.

⁴²² Hong Kong Herbarium, "*Epiphyllum oxypetalum* (DC.) Haw.," <https://www.herbarium.gov.hk/en/hk-plant-database/plant-detail/index.html?pType=species&oID=8320>.

⁴²³ T.K. Lim (2014) *Epiphyllum oxypetalum*, *Edible Medicinal And Non-Medicinal Plants*, 7, 640, DOI: 10.1007/978-94-007-7395-0_43.

⁴²⁴ Wang Chau Green Belt Concern Group, *何處是吾家—橫洲* (Hong Kong: Bleu Publications, 2018), 34.

radiant beams of light. However, these stars only shine once a year, and Mrs Liu harvested them in the morning, after the bats and moths enjoyed them, so that later friends and families could feast on them too—in their soups and jellies.⁴²⁵

The 1,000 books, that were rapidly published⁴²⁶ during an ongoing eviction, have photographs of village architecture similar to the wood and metal chicken houses that are documented in meticulous detail by architecture group Made-to-Measure, who document ‘non-architect buildings and self-built architecture’.⁴²⁷ The Wang Chau book shares stories about small-scale poultry farming, co-managed by Ms Lam, which she says is more ethical than today’s poultry industry.⁴²⁸ During the research for the book, villager Ms Ko was excited when she heard that a professional photographer would come to her home. She presented her garden in great detail and even lifted the lid of a box next to her pond, that the frogs made their home inside. She said to the photographer, “This place is rich with ecological value. How dare the government turn our home into a road that takes cars to the New World luxury apartment blocks?”⁴²⁹ In Ms Ko’s chapter, the editor concludes by writing, ‘The value of a city shouldn’t be defined by visible luxury properties, it should be defined by the people who live in the city.’⁴³⁰ Harry, the photographer, agreed but stayed silent, as his past jobs included clients such as Henderson Property, New World Development and the MTR—those who continue to acquire and concretise agricultural land amidst a ‘climate emergency’.⁴³¹

On 22 July 2018, *Where is My Home? - Wang Chau* was shown to the public for the first time at the Hong Kong Book Fair, organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council. The concern group prepared stickers and postcards by supportive artists, and the book was available for purchase to the public. Mrs Au and Ms Cheng both wore the movement’s green T-shirt, and members of the concern

⁴²⁵ At the time of writing, the author left his studio to go to the toilet. Ingela Ihrman was outside her studio, which is next door to the author’s, and was mixing some natural glue for her artwork. After the author described what he was writing about, Queen of the Night, Ihrman had a huge smile on her face. Her 4.3-metre-long sculpture that she was making shares the same common species, Queen of the Night. They continued speaking about their relationship with the Queen of the Night for several minutes, and the coincidence that they are both working with the same species next door to each other. Ihrman’s performance with costume/sculpture can be seen here: <https://www.ingelaihrman.com/work/nattens-drottning-queen-of-the-night>.

⁴²⁶ ‘Rapid publishing’ was a practice shared in the following conversation: Iswanto Hartono and Reza Afisina (ruangrupa), Giulia Rossini and Joachim Granit, ‘Composting Knowledge and Networking in Turbulent Times’, (Conversation, Stockholm, 2023). <https://fargfabriken.se/en/pa-gang/composting-knowledge>.

⁴²⁷ 知築常落，廖家雞舍史（香港：聖雅各福群會 藍屋創作室，2018）。See also, @stair.city.hk, “stair.city.hk,” *Instagram*, August 25, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/stair.city.hk>.

⁴²⁸ Wang Chau Green Belt Concern Group, *何處是吾家—橫洲* (Hong Kong: Bleu Publications, 2018), 15.

⁴²⁹ This echoes with land struggles elsewhere in Sápmi. “I wonder why they [the government] always have to build roads right where we have our best pastures,” said Helena Carlsson. Gabriel Kuhn, *Liberating Sápmi: Indigenous Resistance in Europe’s Far North* (Oakland: PM Press, 2020), 9.

⁴³⁰ Translation by Nanxi Liu.

⁴³¹ Seth Klein. “A Genuine Emergency Response.” In *The Climate Book: the facts and the solutions*, compiled by Greta Thunberg (UK: Penguin Press, 2023), 120.

group and supporters, as well as the book's editor Samuel Lai Kwok-wing, dressed in their own clothes. They brought their unironed Wang Chau *furoshiki* cloths, which were sourced and sewn in Pang Jai fabric market and silkscreen printed by the villagers in the home of Michelle, one of the supporters. The centre of the screenprint read 扎根 (to become firmly rooted) with an outline of the proposed destruction zone.

That day, they sold many books and received a lot of support from members of the public, some of whom even wanted to have photographs taken with the villagers, concern group and supporters. Everybody was exhausted after the seven-day book fair and thanked the publisher profusely for giving them a very public platform.

On the 968 bus home, Mrs Liu looked out the window inside the Western Harbour Crossing and thought about her interview in the book. She said that these types of evictions have been repeating in different villages in Hong Kong for many years. She hoped that next year at the book fair, there wouldn't be another group of villagers sharing their struggle with another book—and that the government would listen to people.

Big House

The second Jackfruit came almost one-year-and-one-month later in 2018. The 2017 festival was expected to be the first and the last, but today the villagers are now setting up the second rendition, not in the public park in Wing Ning Tsuen, but in the Lau family's home in Fung Chi Tsuen.

Following a threatening phone call in 2016 and events in the past year, the Wing Ning Tsuen village leader Lam Ho-sun decided to disband from the larger villager group and concern group, and pursue a “pro-establishment path.”⁴³² This meant negotiating privately with the government, with a group of villagers following his lead. Under the existing system and Article 40 in the Basic Law, Lam has limited land rights, being “non-indigenous”. To the person who threatened him, Lam may have been seen as opposing the government's development plans, land development plans by New World Development, and/or plans on nearby land that is owned by indigenous villagers. This change in strategy, and side by Lam, echoes land relations in the ‘Yuen Long plain or the Sham Chun River

⁴³² ‘According to Chan, the unidentified caller told him: “stay out of the business, or you will be in trouble too.” He said he was not sure if it was a threat or well-meaning advice, but that he decided to report the incident to the police.’ Ellie Ng, “Village rep. told by anonymous caller to stop opposing Yuen Long housing plan,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, September 20, 2016, <https://hongkongfp.com/2016/09/20/village-rep-told-anonymous-caller-stop-opposing-yuen-long-housing-plan>.