The ‘Home Affairs’ of Three Hong Kong-Based Shanghainese Writers

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1 Living and Writing Elsewhere

On December 22nd, 2008, one month prior to the official release of Wu Zheng’s 吳正 (b1948) short story collection Houchuang 後窗 (Rear Window), the publisher Shandong Literary Press held a symposium in Beijing to discuss and publicize the new book. What is noteworthy of this symposium is that by categorizing the author under Haipai 海派 (‘Shanghai school’), as opposed to previous general consideration of him as a foreign or Hong Kong writer, the discussants had made a home-welcoming gesture to and acknowledged social inclusion of Wu Zheng, who ended his thirty-year long migrant life in Hong Kong in mid-2008 and returned to mainland China for good. Such categori-

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1 The minutes of this symposium was compiled into an article by Xiaotian 晓田 and published in a magazine called Free Forum of Literature. See Xiaotian, «Wu Zheng xiaoshuoji Houchuang yantaohui jiiao» 吳正小說集《後窗》研討會紀要 [Record of Symposium on Wu Zheng’s Collection of Short Stories «Rear Windows»], Wenzue ziyoutan 文學自由談 2/2009, 145–160.

zation, moreover, reminds us of another important fact that Wu Zheng had devoted tremendous efforts to writing about his home city Shanghai, which is one of the defining characteristics of the writers of the 'Shanghai School', throughout his diasporic years in the south of China's border. To him, who has a life long weakness for Shanghai, Hong Kong is never home but forever 'elsewhere.'

Indeed, Wu Zheng was not alone in constant, or rather tenacious, representation of the Shanghainese experience from abroad. Fellow Shanghainese Cheng Naishan 程乃珊 (b1946) and Sun Shufen 孙树芬 (1933–2005) had also migrated to Hong Kong for more than a decade and associated themselves closely with Shanghai whenever they wrote and published. This unremitting love of textualization or literary production of Shanghai pronounces them the prominent few who present a sharp contrast to peers of the same origin, like Xi Xi 西西 (b1938), Nongfu 農婦 (Sun Danning 孫淡寧, b1922), Yan Chunggou 颜纯钩 (b1948), Jiang Yun 蒋芸 (dates unknown, migration to Hong Kong in 1969) and Li Chun’en 李纯恩 (dates unknown, migration 1979), who migrated to Hong Kong during the period between 1950 and 1979 and have been identifying with and writing more of the territory where they have settled themselves. Needless to say, such difference is even more apparent if compared to the local born writers. It appears that the time factor, i.e. duration of residence in Hong Kong, exerted no influence on the literary production by Wu Zheng, Cheng Naishan and Sun Shufen. On the one hand, it failed to draw these three Hong Kong-based writers closer to their host city. On the other hand, it offered them no assistance in reconstructing a contemporary Shanghai city back in the mainland, which was alienated to them. The result was a persistent re-imagination of Shanghainese experience, already in the past, either through poetic purification, or anecdotic excavation, or relengendization.

2 The Romantic Reduction and Poietic Purification of Shanghainese Experience

Among the three writers of this study, Cheng Naishan was the first to cross the border to become a Hong Kong immigrant in 1949, the year in which the Communist Party took power from the ousted Nationalist Party. She was followed by Wu Zheng in 1978 and Sun Shufen in 1993, thanks to the open up of mainland China. Nevertheless, I shall still regard Cheng Naishan as chronologically second to Wu Zheng since she was too young to write professionally
before taking her first leave from the British colony in 1958, not until she returned at the age of forty-four to pursue a working career in Hong Kong. As for Sun Shufen, he was the eldest among them, and the earliest to establish himself in the realm of creative writing. Yet he ended up last, both in joining the diaspora and in literary quality of work. It is out of this consideration that we first discuss Wu Zheng and his works.

Wu Zheng was nine years old when his parents left him in the care of his grandmother and migrated to Hong Kong. Educated as an accountant, Wu Zheng’s father taught economics in a college in Anhui province. In fear of the 1957 anti-rightist movement which oppressed intellectuals and academicians considered as detrimental to the socialists’ ruling, he left his profession and homeland to set up a textile mill (funded by some Taiwanese entrepreneurs) in Hong Kong. Through the remittance of child’s monthly maintenance, he had not only given Wu Zheng a relatively comfortable life back in Shanghai, but also prevented the son from being forced out of the city and exiled to the countryside like tens and millions of rusticated youth during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Wu Zheng continued to reside in his Shanghai family house, learned music and English and even began writing poetry. Eventually, he was allowed to join his parents in Hong Kong in 1978 when Deng Xiaoping initiated his economic reform policy and opened up China.

After coming to Hong Kong, the thirty year old young man worked in his father’s company briefly, and turned to teaching music and running a music shop at Taikoo City (a northeast district of the Hong Kong Island). In the next thirty years, Wu Zheng spent his free time writing, and was prolific in producing three collections of poems, two novels and one collection of short stories, two collections of essays, one collection of random remarks on the craft of fiction, as well as translations of three English novels into Chinese. Of all

3 These information were acquired through personal interviews I conducted with Chen Naishan in Shanghai on July 2nd, 2008, and with Wu Zheng in Shenzhen on Oct 17, 2009.


5 Wu Zheng has published in poetry Mengya de zhongzi 萌芽的種子 [The Budding Seed] (Hong Kong: Ledu, 1984), Ai de shi yuan 愛的詩園 [The Poetic Prairie of Love] (Changsha: Hu’nan wenyi chubanshe, 1988) and Xianggang mengying 香港夢影 [Pieces of Dreams of Hong Kong] (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 1991); in fiction, Shanghairen [Shanghaiese], in essay, Hei bai Gang Hu 黑白港湖 [Hong Kong and Shanghai in Black and White] (Hong Kong; Shanghai, Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1997) and Huimou Xiangdan yun qi shi 回眸香港雲起時 [Looking Back at Hong Kong as the Clouds Rise] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2000); in literary
genres, Wu Zheng is best at fiction. His first novel *Niguang zhong de Xianggang* (逆光中的香港; Hong Kong in the Backlight; thereafter retitled as *Shanghainese* in its ensuing editions) was published by Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House in 1987, second novel *Lijiao rensheng* (立交人生; Life at the Intersection; 2004) by Hong Kong Sunmoon Net, and *Rear Window*, as mentioned before, by Shandong Literary Press in 2008. What is striking about these works is that they all share the same subject matter Shanghai. Moreover, most of the time, the Shanghai portrayed by Wu Zheng is not one of the present affluent metropolis as portrayed by many Shanghai School writers, but one of the past—from the 1950s to the 1970s.

*Shanghainese* is an autobiographical novel. It tells the story of Li Zhengzhi 李正之 leaving Shanghai and living in Hong Kong. It begins with Li Zhengzhi and his girl friend breaking the news of his imminent migration to Hong Kong to their bosom friend Zhang Xiaodong 章曉冬. Surprisingly, Zhang moves ahead of Li Zhengzhi by marrying herself to a Hong Kong factory worker Huang Jinfu 黃金富. In Hong Kong, while Li Zhengzhi joins his parents and pursues his dream of running a music shop, Zhang Xiaodong seeks an independent life by finding herself a job and divorcing Huang Jinfu who moves north to seek business opportunities in post-Mao China. The novel ends with Li Zhengzhi and his wife helping Zhang Xiaodong to rescue Huang Jinfu from detention by mainland blackmailers, and the couple returning to Hong Kong in exclamation of disappointment with the speedily changing city of Shanghai in the post-Mao era.


6 Wu Zheng’s Hong Kong in the Backlight was renamed as *Shanghainese* (Shanghainen 上海人) when published by Taiwan Xidai Publishing in 1988, by Hong Kong Zhengzhi Publishing in 1991, and by Beijing renmin wenxue in 1995.
that “that is my homeland, I wanna take a glance at it.” What Yuan did not point out is that by delineating Li Zhengzhi’s emotional feeling, the author has actually struck a high note on the issue of identity, which faces or even haunts every migrant throughout his/her disporic life. This episode also offers a metaphorical hint to partly explain why Li fails to identify himself with the local people of Hong Kong but associates with fellow Shanghainese immigrants including his lover Zhang Xiaodong in most of second part of the novel.

As a locale, Shanghai is nostalgically remembered in the novel through constant comparison with Hong Kong. The protagonist heaps praises of Shanghai at the expense of dismissing Hong Kong. His vivid memory of the people and things from Shanghai studs the novel. Wu Zheng’s description of Li Shengqing, Li Zhengzhi’s father, even matches the image of a Shanghai laokele 老克勒 (literary ‘old color’, referring to one who maintained the Westernized bourgeoisie life style of the 1940s’ Shanghai):

He has meticulously maintained a neat outlook: beneath his morning robe reveals the hard collar of an “ARROW” brand double breast shirt, knotted in between is a slanted strips neck tie. Even at home, he will still wear stiffly, in a pair of dress pants with folded lines like the sharp blades of knife.8 This consistent ‘turning back’ to the old Shanghai confirms that the narrator/author has been psychologically displacing himself from the locale where he actually resides. Yet in so doing, he is assuming an identity which is stagnant, unchanging, merely a fixation of the past Shanghai. This is what I shall call ‘a romantic reduction of Shanghai’, for the contemporary facet of the city has been erased.

Such a ‘stagnant’ identity is also tenaciously maintained throughout Life at the Intersection and Rear Window. In Life at the Intersection, which is retitled Changye bansheng 長夜半生 (Long Nights, Mid-Life) in a later edition, the character Zhanyu 蕭玉 took her daughter Xiuxiu 秀秀 out to MacDonald’s for dinner. As she looks out from the large glass window of the restaurant, she sees Fuxing Villa on the opposite side of the intersection:

This is the famous alley of a upper class residential area. [...] At the entrance of the alley are a pair of large, painted black iron gates [...]. Again, she notices a grey haired, aged couple—must be what is called ‘old color’ household of this alley—as the street lights begin to glow in the evening, they return from Huaihai Road, the old Missies

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7 Yuan Liangjun 袁良敏, Xianggang xiaoshuo liupai shi 香港小說流派史 [A History of Schools of Fiction in Hong Kong] (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2008).
8 Wu Zheng, Shanghairen, 63. All English translation of texts in this paper are mine.
holding the arm of the Mister, walk in slow, a bit staggering steps to their home in
the alley, with plastic bags of food in their hands.9

What Zhanyu remembers of Fuxing Villa is that it was once a private dancing
school where she attended ballet lessons on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons
at the age of seven to eight.

In Life at the Intersection, the lives of two couples intermingle.10 The first
couple are Zhaozheng and Zhanyu, who are soul mates long before they are
married. They live in Shanghai as a writer and an editor of a state-run magazine
respectively. Yet both of them have secret admirers. For Zhanyu, it is her
classmate, the narrator ‘I’; and for Zhaozheng, his cousin Yuping. ‘I’ and
Yuping eventually move to Hong Kong. The former become a successful
businessman and the latter, his housewife. When China opens it door in 1978, ‘I’
travels frequently to Shanghai for business. He develops a relationship with
Zhanyu, whose marriage is falling apart, whereas the lonely Yuping in Hong
Kong thinks dearly of Zhaozheng, her unforgettable idol cousin.

The novel observes symmetry in narrative structure by having the two men
Zhaozheng and ‘I’ walking aimlessly on the streets of two different parts of the
world in the same long night. Zhaozheng is in Shanghai, and ‘I’ in Hong Kong.
Yet the focus is never on Hong Kong, but Shanghai, for both Yuping and ‘I’ are
missing their loved ones who are physically in Shanghai. As the lives of the two
couples intermingle, the narration mostly comprises their fond memories of the
pre-Deng Xiaoping Shanghai. It basically ‘looks back’ more than ‘glances
forward’.

Besides such nostalgic reduction, Wu Zheng never stops purifying poetically
the so-called Shanghainese experience in his fiction, and this, indeed, marks the
major difference between Wu Zheng’s writing and that of Cheng Naishan and
Sun Shufen. By ‘poetic purification,’ I mean the ‘downsizing’ of a particular type
of experience from the general level to one limited to arts and literature. In Wu
Zheng’s case, there is his trademark conscious endeavor in portraying his
protagonists as those who are versed in music, talented in creative writing, and
thus presenting sharp contrast to other characters who lack, or indeed are
deprived by the author of, such artistic qualities. Li Zhengzhi and Zhaozheng of
Wu Zheng’s first two novels are almost identical in their zealous pursuit of music

10 Wu Zheng, Changye bansheng 长夜半生 [Long Nights, Mid-Life] (Kunming: Yunan renmin
chubanshe, 2006).
and a writing career. We find no exception of such character in the short stories appeared in Rear Window. For example, Ailun Huang in »Ailun Huang« 愛倫黃 (Ellen Wong), Yang Xiaohai 楊曉海 in »Fenghua an« 風化案 (A Sex Scandal), and Ren Yin 任胤 in »Xushiqu« 故事曲 (The Ballad) are all Shanghaiese who are good at violin. The former two earn their living in Hong Kong as violin instructors; the latter meets up with Xiafen 霞芬 frequently in his house to »talk about music, painting, poetry, as well as Western literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries«. 11

Among the seventeen discussants who attended the symposium mentioned before, He Shaojun 賀紹俊 made two important comments, which help us sum up this section on Wu Zheng’s writing. First, He points out that Wu Zheng, who »migrated to Hong Kong rather early«, »had wrapped up his previous cultural memory into a bundle and brought it to Hong Kong, where he kept part of them intact, and then took them out to polish, as if they were cultural relic.« Second, he considers Wu Zheng’s treatment of Shanghai memory as out of »elitist awareness«, which has been absent in modern Chinese literature and triggers nostalgia. 12 In my opinion, Wu Zheng’s clinging to his cultural memories and feeling superior of being a Shanghaiese led him to purify what he considers as Shanghaiese experience, allowing nothing more than arts and literature to occupy the center stage of his writing.

3 Revisits: Anecdotic Excavation of the Old Shanghai

Both Cheng Naishan and Sun Shufen did not share Wu Zheng’s poetic purification but romantic reduction of Shanghaiese experience. They chose a different path by digging into the history 13 of the recent half century, searching for and reconstructing exciting anecdotes and legends of Shanghai prominent figures, be they celebrities, mafia or prominent leaders of enormous industries, or renowned relatives and friends whom they associated or were familiar with, or those nostalgic local seniors commonly known as the ‘old color’. In this respect, their writings constitute what I call ‘excavation of Shanghai’.

12 Xiaotian, »Wu Zheng xiaoshuoji Houchuang yantaohui jiyao«, 146.
13 In the Afterword of Jinrongjia 金融家 [The Financier], Cheng Naishan points out that what she had written was indeed »family histories of Shanghaiese«. See Cheng, Jinrongjia (Hong Kong: Qin + Yuan, 1993), 577.
Cheng Naishan was born into a prominent family of which the grandfather Cheng Muhao (1898–1991) was a renowned banker posted to Hong Kong as the deputy director of, and eventually advisor to, the Bank of China. This was the reason why the three year old girl and family first migrated to the British colony in 1949. Cheng Naishan’s second migration spanned from 1991 to 2002.\(^{14}\)

It was during this period of time that she, who worked as an office lady from publishing house to trading company, wrote from outside Shanghai. Indeed prior to that, in the 1980s, Cheng had already made her name known through publishing short stories in book form, such as *Tian’e zhi si* (The Death of a Swan; 1982), *Lanwu* (Blue House; 1984), *Dingxiang bieshu* (The Clove Villa; 1986), *Nü’er jing* (Girls’ Matters; 1988) and *Qianzheng* (Permits; 1988), as well as the novel *Jinrong jia* (The Financier; 1990). Also on her list of publication are two collections of essays *Xiangjiang shui, Hujiang qing* (Hong Kong’s Water, Shanghai’s Feelings; 1989) and *Ni hao, Pake* (Hello, Pake! 1989), and the co-translated *Shanghai shengsi jie* (Shanghai Life and Death) from Nien Cheng’s English memoir *Shanghai Life and Death* (1987). After she migrated to Hong Kong, Cheng Naishan’s productivity in fiction seemed to reduce drastically to only one novel, i.e. *Shan shui you xiangfeng* (Mountains and Waters Will Meet Again; 1999) and one short story *Shanghaijie qinghua* (The Love Story of Shanghai Street).

Intended as a sequel, Mountains and Waters Will Meet Again was supposed to recount from 1949 a half century’s happenings of Zhu Jingchen, the Shanghaiese entrepreneur protagonist of The Financier. Yet Cheng Naishan found the plot unable to contain the new stories she had in mind after moving to Hong Kong.\(^{15}\) She ended up abandoning her original plan and wrote a different and shorter novel about the two Shanghaiese Wang Tieru and Ye Baixiang who fare directly opposite in their business careers during the fifty years (1940s–1990s) that are divided into four periods in different cities across two continents—Shanghai, Hong Kong and New York. In the novel, Wang Tieru starts out as a Shanghai tycoon, yet he loses much of his assets and helplessly sees his weaving factory business going downhill after moving to Hong Kong. In contrast, journalist Ye Baixiang seizes every new opportunity brought

\(^{14}\) The date of leaving Hong Kong was confirmed by Cheng Naishan personally (Interview in Shanghai on July 2nd, 2008).

\(^{15}\) Cheng Naishan, *Xiebujin de Shanghai gushi* (The Endless Shanghai Story), in Cheng Naishan, *Shan shui you xiangfeng* (Mountains and Waters Will Meet Again; Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1999), 186.
about by the political changes and emerges as a tycoon, owning several huge companies in the three cities. What remains unchanged in this novel is Cheng Naishan’s making Shanghainese her main characters and leaving no room for Hong Kongers. Anecdotes of Wang Tieru’s mistress Fu Meiyi are purposely constructed out of those eminent historical figures like members of the first badge of Chinese airhostesses. They are interwoven in the text to relate the two Shanghainese tycoons as well as to complement their status. Moreover, Cheng describes in details the Mandarin Club located along Jing’ansi Road, the place where the American Chinese soldier Michael Mai met his lover Li Junyue. Even when the story moves on to the 1990s, in which Steven, son of Michael Mai, takes an official trip to China with his New York colleague Fan Jihong, a native of Shandong but who grew up in Shanghai, the author provides a long conversation between the two regarding their impression of Shanghai, saying nothing but praise of the Chinese metropolis in its old glory. Yet among the examples that display Cheng’s Shanghai nostalgia, nothing is more apparent than allowing the eighty year old Wang Tieru to retire to Shanghai to spend his remaining days at the end of the story.

First collected in *Shanghai tān’gē*,¹⁶ The Love Story of Shanghai Street was written in 2000. According to Cheng Naishan, her protagonist Master Xiaomao is modeled after a Shanghainese *cheong-sum* (a close-fitting women’s dress with high neck and slit skirt) tailor of the same name. The tailor was known to her grandmother and mother. He migrated to Hong Kong in 1959 and ran a *cheong-sum* shop at Shanghai Street of Mongkok District in Kowloon until he migrated to Canada in the 1980s. Having spoken to him personally when he took his vacation in Hong Kong in 2000,¹⁷ Cheng Naishan made good use of the information gathered to write this piece of work. Although the narrative setting is 1990s’ Hong Kong, the characters think and talk as if they were still living in 1940s Shanghai which the author dearly portrays. Hong Kong, after all, is abjectly absent in the story.

*Shanghai Tango* contains more anecdotes of the ‘old color’ which are stylistically similar to those essays Cheng Naishan wrote and published later,

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¹⁷ Cheng Naishan, Preface to *Shanghaijie qínghuā* 上海街情話 (A Love Story of Shanghai Street), (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2007). According to Cheng Naishan’s Preface, this short story was first written in 2000 and published on a Hong Kong literary magazine. Later, she sold its copyright to Hong Kong movie director Stanley Kwan 關錦鵬 (b 1957) who made it into a television series.
commonly known as *jisbi sanwen* 纪实散文 (‘essays of factual records’). Yet as argued by Chen Huifen, senior research fellow of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, these essays are not absolutely factual but a mixture of factual records and the author’s own literary imagination.18 I shall therefore consider these essays similarly to Chen Naishan’s fiction in demonstrating her anecdotic excavation of the old Shanghai. For instance, as part of the effort in ‘re-discovering’ the ‘old colour’ culture, »A Fei zhengzhuan« 阿飛正傳 [The True Biography of Playboys] delineates how middle age stylish playboys of the 1970s indulged in the pleasure of listening to records of Hollywood movie soundtracks, dancing, photography, playing tennis, bridge and mahjong. Another essay »*ARROW* xiansheng« ARROW先生 (Mr. Arrow) gives a vignette of Mr. Qian, who was a bank manager of one of the four largest banks in Shanghai before 1949, insisting on wearing his »Arrow« brand long-sleeve shirts even after he was assigned to teach English in the same school as Chen Naishan. In studying these essays, Chen Huifen comments:

Chen Naishan relies on her identity of a ‘Shanghai descendent’, exudes confidence and excavates and revives an ‘actual’, ‘real Shanghai’ [...]. Be it an ‘on-site’ interview, or evidence of old photos of figures of the past dynasties, her purpose is none other than providing ‘a sense of history’, so as to display the ‘reality’ and ‘liveliness’ of her narration.19

In my opinion, this nostalgic remembrance of ‘old colour’ culture came about mainly because the Hong Kong-based author faced double marginalization—neither was she able to associate herself with post-Mao modern Shanghai which puzzled her with its drastic socio-economic changes under the modernization current, nor could she identify with Hong Kongers who had been hostile to her as an immigrant from socialist mainland China. The old colourists’ penchant for exotic things (basically from the West) and their tenacious advocating of such a lifestyle during and after the Cultural Revolution had a great impact on diasporic writers like Chen Naishan and Sun Shufen. It seems that they saw in such persistence a sense of comfort and homesickness, as well as the possibility of resistance against the hostile environment in the host city Hong Kong.

19 Chen Huifen, *Xiangxiang Shanghai de N zhong fangfa*, 36.
Sun Shufen also came of good stock. Like Cheng Naishan’s forebears, his grandfather Sun Zhizhai (dates unknown) was a destitute native of Changshu 常熟, Jiangsu province, but later accumulated tremendous wealth from owning hotels, banks, ship companies and land properties in Shanghai. His father Sun Bocheng 桑伯誠 was also owner of bookshops and restaurants, and the founder of Huadong Commercial and Savings Bank. Unfortunately, the family suffered from a drastic downturn after Sun Bocheng’s bank had gone bankrupt and they had paid a huge ransom of sixty kilograms of gold to free Sun Zhizhai from kidnappers. Sun Shufen grew up in Shanghai. Although he graduated from the Huadong Political Science and Law College in 1954, he was only assigned a secondary school teacher’s post, and he suffered from many hardships during the Cultural Revolution because of his bourgeois family background.

Sun Shufen began to write in the late 1960s and his first novel Taba buaji 哑巴夥計 (The Mute Counterjumper) was published in 1977. In 1978, his second novel Gusu chun 姑蘇春 (Spring of Gusu) followed. Both novels write about how Chinese resist the Japanese invasion. Spring of Gusu sold particularly well with 550,000 copies. It did not only bring Sun Shufen fame, but also led him to take writing as a lifelong profession.

Among his family members, Sun Shufen was the last to migrate to Hong Kong in 1993, at the age of sixty. After his arrival in Hong Kong, he contacted the two most famous local publishers Cosmos Books and Crown Publishing House through some friends and secured contracts of publication quickly. Under the sponsorship of Cosmos Books, he published (1) Shengsi jie 生死劫 (A Life and Death Disaster; 1994), a biography of the Beijing opera master Zhou Xinfang; (2) the Shanghai Old Dreams series which includes Molu wangsun 末路王孫 (The Desperate Nobles; 1994), Zuoye fengyu 昨夜風雨 (Last Night’s Wind and Rain; 1994) and Yangchang langzi 洋場浪子 (Shanghai Prodigal; 1995); (3) the Dream of Prosperity series which includes Baofa shijia 暢富世家 (The Foreign Field of Wind and Rain; 1996) which is a biography of his grandfather Sun Zhizhai, and Baiizu zhi chong 百足之蟲 (The Centipede; 1997); (4) Hei xiao 黑貓 (The Black Owl; 1995), Hei dao 黑道 (The Dark Way; 1995), and (5) three collections of essays, namely Shanghai de fuhua suiye 上海的浮華歲月 (The Era of Shanghai Vanity Fair; 2002), Shanghai de chi be wan le 上海的吃喝玩樂 (Feasting and Entertainments in Shanghai; 2002) and Shanghai jiiumeng 上海舊夢 (Old Dreams of Shanghai; 2002). As for Hong Kong Crown, Sun Shufen has produced Shanghai sheng si lian 上海生死戀 (Life, Death
and Love in Shanghai; 1995), *Heping fandian zhi juebei zhi lian* 平和饭店之爵士之恋 (Love of Jazz at the Peace Hotel; 1995), *Wu guoji zhi lian* 無国籍之戀 (Love of No Nationality; 1996) and *Fengyu liren* 風雨麗人 (The Couple in Wind and Rain; 1998). Some of the above works were later reprinted in mainland China. Sun Shufen continued to publish in the mainland simultaneously. For instance, another collection of his essays *Haomen jiumeng* 豪門舊夢 (Dreams of the Nobles; 1996) and *Fengyu liren* 風雨麗人 (The Couple in Wind and Rain; 1998). Some of the above works were later reprinted in mainland China. Sun Shufen continued to publish in the mainland simultaneously. For instance, another collection of his essays *Haomen jiumeng* 豪門舊夢 (Dreams of the Nobles; 1996). The last publication of Sun Shufen was perhaps *Zuibou de Mazuka* 最後的瑪祖卡 (The Last Mazurka; 2005) which contains essays about Shanghai heiresses, jazz performers, the Paramount Ballroom, gentlemen and cigars—still a trademark of the 'old colour' writing. It was released before Sun Shufen passed away on his Shanghai sickbed on September 2nd, 2005.  

Apparantly, Sun Shufen's production at Cosmos Books mainly deals with three subject matters—espionage, the Shanghai secret societies and his family history. In all cases, the author places prime emphasis on elements of legend. For instance, in The Desperate Nobles, he describes how the protagonist Natasha 娜塔莎, a White Russian girl exiled to Shanghai during the World War II period, is surrounded by undercover spies of various foreign countries who try to benefit from their infiltration into China. The story is not merely replete with exciting intrigues and plots, but often set in casinos, brothels, bars and night clubs along Yuyuan 豫园 Road or the Bund. In other words, Sun Shufen reimagines the old Shanghai through its colorful entertainment industry. It is, therefore, ungrounded for writer cum critic Wang Anyi 王安憶 (b1954) to opine that Sun has from time to time portrayed the quotidian experience of his Shanghaiese characters in the novel.  

The legendary aspect of the metropolis is always in the limelight in Sun Shufen's works. As for the works published by Crown, they are all love stories. For instance, *Life, Death and Love in Shanghai* recounts a heartbroken love story from 1950s' Shanghai. The protagonist Wu Xiaofen 吳曉氛 is married to Zhu Guangyi 朱廣 quieres. Yet she gradually falls in love with Shen Ye 沈燁 who works as a personal assistant of her father. At the time, Shen Ye is perceived by many as one without a future, due to his politically incorrect family background. But his carefree attitude and lifestyle such as driving around on his Harvey motorcycle and

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21 Wang Anyi 王安憶, 《七月在野,八月在宇, In the Wilds in the Seventh Month, And under Shelter in the Eighth Month}, in Sun Shufen, *Molu guizu* 末路貴族 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2008), 27.
singing Western pop songs attract Wu Xiaofen even more. When Zhu Guangyi
learned about his wife having an affair with Shen Ye, he takes revenge. On the one
hand he accuses Shen Ye for being a rightist, leading to the latter's exile to a
remote, obscure village in Anhui Province. On the other hand, he arranges for
Wu Xiaofen to migrate to Hong Kong so that she has no chance of reuniting
with Shen Ye. Although he follows Wu Xiaofen to Hong Kong later, Zhu
Guangyi fails to save his marriage. Eventually, Wu divorces Zhu and migrates to
America where she lives with lasting regrets of never meeting Shen Ye again.
What is legendary about this story is that it is narrated from the viewpoint of
Pei Di'er, a UC-Santa Barbara graduate who takes up the job of personal
assistant offered by Wu Xiaofen in San Francisco. Based on the private journal
provided by the old lady, the young man, who has never been to Shanghai, is able
to construct piecemeal the metropolis of the past to fit the narrative plot.

Of course, one cannot fully understand Sun Shufen's re-legendization of
Shanghai if he does not include his nostalgic essays for discussion. Old Dreams
of Shanghai, for instance, maintains the element of legend throughout. Not only
does the author recall the glory of gambling industry such as horse racing and
dog racing at Jing'ansi Road, or of the grandest Western restaurants in Cathay
Hotel and other places, but he also describes in details in two essays how the
Japanese supported Chinese secret agents to set up their headquarters at Alleys
668 and 749 off Yuyan Road, how they assassinated or tortured to death a great
many anti-Japanese Chinese in order to assist the Japanese military in invading
China. Another example is Dreams of the Nobles. The book even bears a
subtitle—The Remembrance of a Shanghai 'Old Colour'.

Sun Shufen disagrees with Cheng Naishan's definition of 'old colour' which is part of the legendary
explanation of the term. To him,

the word *kela* is the transliteration of 'carat'. It is professionally used as a unit of
measuring diamonds and precious stones. One carat is equivalent to two hundred
grams. In present Shanghai people still employ the term to refer to those who
possess the knowledge of the 'nobles' life' of the old Shanghai. Since most of them
were born into powerful rich families, and had received 'Westernized' education,
they witnessed how Chinese and foreigners lived together in the 'ten-mile foreign
field', how debauchery, grotesque and gaudy the society was in a flood of red lanterns
and green wine. Yet even when they are all bygone now, many events and figures still
remain in memory. The author of this book is indeed such an 'old colour.' And all the

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eighteen pieces of notes come straight from his memory of what he had seen and experienced in the past. 23 That notwithstanding, Sun Shufen is in the same tune with Chen Naishan as they both stress the materialistic concern which characterizes the ‘old colour’. Sun’s work Dreams of the Nobles comprises essays that report his nostalgic discovery tour of cafés along Avenue Joffre (the present Middle Huaihai Road), the Siberian Fur Store, the Airline Night Club on Fumin Road and so forth, all of which no longer exist today but were famous locations where heiresses, party girls and esquires of the 1940s and 1950s squandered their time and money. The legends of this materialistic class are passionately retold to furnish Sun Shufen’s re-imagination of Shanghai from Hong Kong.

5 Shanghai Disappears Once More

During my separate interviews with Cheng Naishan and Wu Zheng, both disclosed that they knew each other and Sun Shufen personally. Sun Shufen’s elder sister was tutored by Cheng Naishan’s mother, and Cheng once approached Wu Zheng’s wife for help when she was looking for a job during her second migration to Hong Kong. As a matter of fact, Shanghainese who migrated to Hong Kong in early days tended to live in the North Point District, where the community of Shanghai origin was formed. Although Wu Zheng announced to me that he had no problem incorporating himself into the Hong Kong society, I find contradiction in his unconscious exclusion of Hong Kongers as characters whenever he wrote. The only exception is perhaps Huang Jinfu, the destitute factory worker we have seen in his first novel Shanghainese. Apparently, identity is the key factor to this reaction. Indeed, Chen Naishan even confesses in the preface to her Shanghai Tango that she had only lived within the Shanghainese circle during her two migrations to Hong Kong. The exclusion of non-Shanghainese is self-explanatory.

If we may examine Wu Zheng’s short story »Fenghua an« (A Sex Scandal) again, which I have discussed before, we will hear the narrator ‘I’ mentioning:

In recent years, I love finding time and opportunities to return to Shanghai, for I want to find and experience that kind of obscure and fleeting feeling of misplacement […] which excites as well as disappoints me, which is substantial yet empty. After all, it’s like dreaming. 24

23 See flyleaf of Haomen jiumeng.
24 Wu Zheng, »Fenghua an«, in Houchuang, 107.
Is this not the reason why two out of the three writers discussed in this paper had eventually moved back to Shanghai for good? And the remaining one, Sun Shufen, also chose to pass his last day of life in his home city instead of Hong Kong? Whether it was poetic purification, anecdotal excavation or relegendization of Shanghainese experience, they were all but ‘home affairs’ that help reconstruct the home city for these writers while they felt alienated outside Shanghai. Yet the home city they once lived had become an imagined one. It no longer exists, but only ‘revived’ in the text to prove their disappearance, the disappearance of home from the eyes of three diasporic writers in their mentally and psychologically remote Hong Kong.25

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25 For a detailed discussion of the three writers’ literary treatment of Hong Kong in their works, see Wu Yaozong 吳耀宗 [i.e. Gabriel Wu], 「從北角到九龍東：在港上海作家的香港想像」 [From North Point to Kowloon East: The Imagination of Hong Kong by Hong Kong-based Shanghainese Writers], Xiandai Zhongwen xuekan 現代中文學刊 no 17 (Shanghai, 2/2012), 64–71.