The "Futurings" of Hong Kong

Tony Fry

Trepidation comes in two guises when venturing into the space and time of an Other. First is that one never arrives at where one thinks oneself to be (among the few, Edward Said made this clear some time ago in *Orientalism* when he exposed the discovery of the East as an invention and export of the West); second, that one might unwittingly offend the very people to whom one wishes to show respect.

For me, Hong Kong was a port of entry into China as a history, thinking, and culture. As such, no matter what one learns, there is an overwhelming sense of just how little one knows, just how much there is to know, how much has been forgotten, AND how little those things that are of great value are valued. Against this setting, Hong Kong epitomizes a geography and history of ambiguity, richness and terror, limitation and potentiality. These figures are not binaries but unified opposites (a relation understandable through the Chinese concept of *Yin-yang*[1]). Ambitiously, I want to evoke Hong Kong's potentiality as both the local and the global. In so doing, I want to position readers outside Hong Kong as actively engaged with this communication of "glocal thinking." To that small, but very significant, design community in Hong Kong, "glocal thinking" hopefully will provide a new perspective on familiar issues of practical value. To do this is, to use an Australian term, a "big ask" for all concerned. However, there are lessons for all of us in this communication. This is because we still are lodged in an inadequate kind of thinking that makes clear dis-tinctions between "the local" and "the global," while we need to think "glocally" (in spite of this inelegant term sticking in our craw).[2]

This then is a glocal communication about Hong Kong and about design thought otherwise—which will be seen at the end of the essay when ancient Chinese structurally inscribed modes of design will be shown to have much to teach the future of "designing otherwise."

Although now touted as a material expression of one system of China's "one nation, two systems" philosophy, the new ideology has not displaced old Hong Kong images and habits. The place of course is one of the most image-saturated cities in the world. The fact that it now is a "Special Administrative Region" makes little difference to such cultural perceptions. Like London, New York, or Sydney, Hong Kong has been made instantly recognizable to itself and elsewhere because it has televisual presence. Its image is constituted by an amalgam of stereotypical figures: the Star Ferry crossing

1 The complexity of *Yin-yang* is discussed at length and in various ways in David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (New York: Suny, 1987).

2 As is often the case, theory trails events. "Glocal" products have been around for a long time, and long before "globalization" hit the airwaves. Certainly, from the 1920s, the way in which General Motors not only retained the local badging of car companies they bought up around the world, but also retained and played the local nationalist rhetoric associated with the badge is one example of this. This history is evident in the Australian example of the Holden Motor Company. Staying with the car industry, more sophisticated late-modern examples of this currently are evident in China, where increasingly locally coded product is "glocalised" by a design strategy that uses global automotive companies, design teams, components to create cars with which to build a massive local car market and to cater for local desires, perceptions, budgets, and conditions—the Lucky Star car is one example of this. The project was marketed (so promotional materials tell us) to synthesize a whole range of plural and sometimes contradictory messages to demonstrate: advanced global car technology and components; the best of Chinese wisdom, and the needs of the people; inspiration from nature; high style; comfort; a wide range of different models; economy and reliability; and "greenness." The design team for the car included Porsche engineering, Fiat, Renault, and Mitsubishi; and it has been produced by the Shenzhen Tint Dragonfly Industrial Company with "mature foreign components such as the engine and the chassis."

the harbor, garish toys, the opulence of the Peninsula Hotel, illuminated neon signs strung across the tourist-filled streets of Tsim Sha Tsui, The Peak, movies, and more. Overlaying and animating these stereotypical figures are numerous historically inscribed perceptions of one of the most densely populated pieces of real estate on the planet. This reality manifests itself in tightly knit communities, conveyor belt shopping culture, noisy restaurants, rampant capitalism, and a hyper-real sameness of difference. This contradiction is engendered by a now constant cycle of destruction and renewal of, for example, clothes, furniture, window displays, and buildings. In fact nothing escapes the ever-faster turning of this cycle of unsustainability.

The sound, the image of this city, where everything and nothing is designed, attracts and repels, captivates and captures. Underpinning the image, trade, tourism, and culture of Hong Kong has been another facticity of stereotyping, which is as a meeting place between East, West, modernity and its Others. Yet for all the complexity, televisuality, and material substance of Hong Kong, one still can see it as an unrealized project—a project in flux. This is because, in one direction, Hong Kong suffers from its authentic inauthenticity (coming from the nonexistence of any precolonial identity); and in the other from what historians of traditional Chinese garden design call "borrowing views" (which now would be designated as a "mimetic economy"), and then from an underdeveloped vision of what might be "otherwise." Rather than these very general remarks being marginal to a concern with design in Hong Kong they are, in their social, cultural, political, and economic particularities, at its core. This is because, historically, architectural, industrial, graphic, fashion, furniture, and other design practices in the territory all exist in an identifiable condition of auto-negation—the place has never been able to be simply local. The authentic inauthenticity of Hong Kong, its unsituated situatedness, actually is more than just a part of the global fascination with the place—it is its design opportunity. The ephemera and expendability, stylistic appropriation, the packaging (of) existing manufacturer (OEM) products in a local skin, and the Westernization of Eastern fashion—these are just some of the more widely acknowledged features of the Hong Kong attainment and negation. From such a history there are things to discard and things to nurture (learning "the what" and "the how" of this is one of the key learnings).

The vectors now directing the place are multiple in number and orientation. There is the rise of the competitor city, Shanghai, the shadow of the fate of Taiwan, the variably expressed political tension of living in the space of the political nexus between China's two systems as well as the more recent economic diminishment. Then there are current and somewhat incoherent attempts to reconfigure Hong Kong via the development of hyper-real projects to

Footnote 2 *continued*

At the time of this writing, the Lucky Star project has been completed to the design and prototype stage (approximately one hundred units are already on the road in Xian city as taxicabs). Although the Chinese Government has approved the project, it has not as yet moved into mass production.

make the place (by displacement) a center of tourism for the burgeoning capital classes of China, as well as for Asia in general.

Against this backdrop, there is the birth of a small design community who is starting to realize, by degree, that there could be another way or ways.[3] One possibility is of Hong Kong becoming a regional center for an emergent design community—one that goes beyond its past situatedness as a locus of exchange of objects, agencies, images, and people to become a glocal community of (ex)-change.

Thinking Design Potential in Context

Design thinking is not natural. It is learned in that unnaturalness we call culture. To introduce another kind of design thinking requires the denaturalization of the particular ways that "design" has become naturalized within "it" culture. To be between cultures is to be between "designings." So situated, between an old and new design thinking, the designer faces a question: "Which way to turn?" These remarks bring us to considering the distinction between a modern Western metaphysical/intuitive relation to design(ing) and the trace of ancient Chinese ontological design(ing) and its significance to the present in general, and to Hong Kong in particular.

Design's implication in the rise of China as a major global economy has been significant, yet it has been under-recognized, theorized, and documented both inside, and especially, outside China. The most recent evident manifestations of its role have been the hiring of architectural and industrial design expertise from around the world, the technocratic character of the development of architectural and design education within China, and the country's new found enthusiasm for links with design institutions outside China. Such developments demonstrate that design is not ideologically neutral. This non-neutrality can be registered (as a gradual rollout) politically, culturally and environmentally.

The primary *political* objective of China's regimes of rule always has remained the same—holding the enormous country with its great cultural diversity together. Fear of the disruptive force of difference is a political mindset that links the ancients to the moderns. Within China's "one nation two systems," distinctions can be drawn between the accommodation of Chinese "communism," repressed proto-democracy, Chinese "capitalism," and the power of an emergent commodity sphere. Not so long ago capitalism appeared, and was presented as, that difference that threatened the very being of the nation. Now difference has been made the same—the free market and commodity culture are viewed as supplementary agents of unification—one nation, one political ideology, one market, one consumerist desire, and one modern lifeworld as a mark of progress, and all via the guiding hand of the state. In contrast to capitalism, any idea able to de-unify the nation poses a danger to the state. In this setting, "democracy" evokes the specter

3 This very issue of the design journal *Design Issues* evidences this "fact."

of difference, as well as a challenge to the continuity of the exiting culture of power.

Against this backdrop, Hong Kong design culture has a potential as a very significant "import substitute" in terms of skills, services and education. However, realizing this potentiality is not just an economic question—it also is a politically strategic one. In all but exceptional circumstances, design is a quiet politics.

The question now becomes: How does the architect/designer think in this political context in relation to the fact that all design is ideological (there is nothing designed which does not carry an ideological value)? This question is all the more important because of (i) the displacement of "the political" (i.e., in relation to Hong Kong's fading position as an outpost of democracy and the lost impetus of the "democracy movement"' in mainland China, and the ongoing containment of "local outrage"); and, (ii) by the emergence of a culture of the "post-political" that trades political and civil freedoms for the freedom to consume. That this "freedom" rests on a fundamental unfreedom, the unsustainable, has not reached the elite. let alone popular consciousness. Contrary to a long tradition of concern with population, resources, and scarcity, what is now becoming very evident is that what threatens is the impact of excess. Although the world's population has increased from 1.3 billion to 6.0 billion people in a century, the really big leap has been the increase in the per capita impact of people which, in an industrialized country, can be move than forty times what it was in 1900. This means that population figures could fall, but impacts would continue to rise. This issue has a great deal of salience for China and the rest of the "industrializing world." As we shall see, it raises profound design, social equity, economic, ethical, and political issues.

Read from a Eurocentric perspective, design occupied a central position in the very formation and development of *Chinese culture*, the nation's political structures and economy. It is necessary to qualify this as Eurocentric for although design appears as a category that is universally transcultural, it is very questionably so. Our viewing "design" in ancient culture cannot be divided from the intent to establish the hegemony of a universal design culture (that is the rule of one understanding of design). This aim was, and is, structural to economic and cultural modernity ("globalization"), and it is still being pursued. Consequently, an induction into the globalized design point of view is a "back-loading" of a modern category of thought onto an ancient world. The fact that this world functioned within a very different lifeworld and conceptual schema thus is erased. This erasure of the original thinking is doubled when translating out of Chinese, producing an actual substitution of an ancient term with a modern one. However, a reverse process can be enacted. As will be briefly shown when commenting on the work of Lothar Ledderose, knowledge from the distant past sometimes can

be re-realized through its ability to contribute "practical wisdom" to a thinking and making out of which viable futures can be helped to emerge.

A critical distinction must be made between a metaphysical and ontological understanding of design. One cannot presume that another culture, at another place and time, named, theorized, and articulated what retrospectively gets designated as a design practice, as design/designing. Design does not necessarily have a status historically in an ancient culture that corresponds with a contemporary classification and expression of what it is. Conversely, from a contemporary understanding, the historicity of design can be seen to be ontologically present. This means that, retrospectively, a performative reading of design can be made, in contrast to making any identification of a design discourse (which is that which linguistically and practically articulates design as concept and labor).

The metaphysical and ontological distinction of design is, in fact, perpetually present. While one can say that all human beings design (because it is in fact part of the ontic *"existell"*of being human), and while it is the case that only some humans bring design/designing into presence as a praxis and acquire an ontology as designer, this is not design/designing in common. What we really need to recognize is while the "human" has been constructed as a universal condition, this is (a) an extremely recent, if now hegemonic, proposition, and (b) the essence of "being human" is nothing without "its" culture (implying a plural, rather than singular condition). We have little sense of the extensive plurality of humanness (while having been inducted into respecting cultural difference). This lack is testament to the power of political and cultural modernity. Ironically, those humanist agencies that promote and defend human rights are the inheritors of this trajectory—a trajectory that implicates them in the destruction (of form and recognition) of a fundamental difference of a being that is completely other.

The logic of what has been argued means that if there are fundamental cultural differences between modes of being-in-the-world, then the nature of the world itself is different, which in turn means fundamental ontological differences. These differences take material forms that are prefigured by projections of elements of the world to be made. If we bring this kind of thinking to Chinese culture, what we discover is a very different ground upon which "design" was constituted, which was through the inscriptive power of modularity as it was embedded in, and extended by, a system of writing.

In his remarkable book, Ledderose has made clear the way systemic modularity, stemming from the language, underpins many seemingly very different practices and products of Chinese culture.[4] But more than this, what systemic modularity reveals is a designing that breaks down the binary distinction between economic and cultural production inherent in Western productivism, as well as the

4 There is a direct link between elements created by brush strokes, the building of a modular element within a single character, stringing the characters into a series to make a text, and the mass of 50,000 characters of the written language. A school child uses around 2,000 symbols, an educated person 3,000 to 4,000, and a scholar around 10,000. On the Chinese language, see Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

centrality of the creative subject. Moreover, approached from language systems, the contrast between the foundations of the West and Chinese script-based East become very clear. The West has languages that center on the representational capability of an alphabet which, while it can be learned quickly, delivers rich but unstable language use. Western languages exist in a condition of constant change and depend upon considerable interpretative skills. So great is the change that trying to read the language as used say 1,000 years ago is like dealing with a foreign tongue (the examples of old English and German come to mind). This is not so with a symbol-based script. While it takes a good deal of time and effort to learn, it remains constant—an educated Chinese person can read a text written several thousand years ago. Chinese functions as an almost inexhaustible source of building a mass of complexity and difference —the modular construction of the language has designed a thinking enacted through modularity in diverse areas. Writing, ceramic production, bronze casting, printing, "factory art," the building of wooden structures, bureaucratic systems, the law, labor process, and many other things have emerged out of the same system of rules of organization and assembly that is found within the essence of modularity of Chinese script.

Viewing this material culture in the context of histories of institutions of civil society, practical sciences, industrial archaeology, architecture, and the arts, it is quite evident that not only was China in advance of European nations for thousands of years, but the whole history of Western industrial development is based on a very questionable narrative of progress. The life-work of Joseph Needham, based on the archaeology of a lost culture, was dedicated to making this clear.[5] The more one looks at Asian and Middle Eastern history, the more the Western account looks like the selective editing of Eurocentric fabrication. It is not only clear from Needham's work, for example, that mechanical, civil, mining, metallurgical, and agricultural engineering were all well advanced in China long before the West had even started to explore these areas, but also on a considerable scale. Mass production, a factory system, and work forces of thousands were all elemental to Chinese economic activity well over twenty-five hundred years ago.[6] This continued until at least the sixteenth century, when it was not unusual for factories making paper, textiles and ceramics to have workforces of a 1,000 people or more.

Many remarkable documents have been discovered in the not very distant past. One example is a text unearthed in the mid-twentieth century, the *Thien Kung Khai Wu (The Exploitation of the Works of Nature)* of 1637, which addressed agriculture and industry, and has been described as "China's greatest technological classic." This material is itself linked to a whole series of important primary texts such as the *Khao Kung Chi* (Artificers Record) which, in turn, contained a chapter of the *Chou Li* (Record of the Institutions of the

5 Joseph Needham's life-work, his massive, many volumed *Science and Civilisation in China*, published by Cambridge University Press over many decades, was characterized as an "archaeology of a disappeared culture." While sometimes criticized for its critical analysis, the project represents an extraordinary archive of objects, practices, and knowledge. It has to be one of the most under-recognized empirico-historical enterprises of the twentieth century.

6 Joseph Needham, *The Development of Iron and Steel Technology in China: Second Biennial Dickinson Memorial Lecture* (London: Newcomen Society, 1956). Needham cites, for example, the famed Ironmaster *Cho Shi*, who founded an ironworks in Szechuan in the third century, which had a highly organized system of production and employed nearly two thousand men.

Chou Dynasty). The original of this latter document was lost at the beginning of the Han Dynasty, and a substitute document was collected by Prince Hsien of Ho-Chien in the second quarter of the second century.[7]

These "design, technical and standards" manuals while providing a great deal of information assumed a logic of modularity. This left the fundamental ontological embeddedness of designing intact—both the texts and their users functioned with a sense of creativity based on small incremental transformations over a vast expanse of time. While this excluded notions of originality (and was not prejudicial toward reproduction), it embraced slow and constant change that over time could be considerable. Thus, the appearance of mimeses was always illusory. At the same time creativity was acknowledged, but as posited in "nature"' and outside of the human.[8]

One of the most important examples of these manuals was the *Yingzao Fashi*. This famous and influential manual was written in 1091, with a second edition in 1103 (no evidence of the first edition still exists). It was created as a design and technical manual of standards for the Master of Works, which was a section in the Ministry of Works—the government department responsible for the construction of palaces, temples, barracks, government buildings, moats, gardens, bridges, and boats.[9] The second edition text addressed the ordering of materials, building design, and construction details for all building types including the detailing of stonework, carpentry and joinery, wood carving, roofing, plastering, and finishes. One of the key features of the manual was its use of a modular standard of measurement (a *fen*) that, in many ways, prefigured systems building.[10]

The manual was produced in response to dealing with the massive expansion of building development in the first one hundred years of the Sun Dynasty. What is remarkable about the design approach is the way the modular design methods allowed for a new building to employ components taken from the disassembly of an old building of a different scale and use.[11]

While having enormous status as a document in Chinese architectural history, the significance of the *Yingzao Fashi* to contemporary design practice, in and beyond architecture, has not yet been comprehended. In terms of contemporary needs, it is an instruction in design for the conservation of materials and waste elimination, on design for disassembly, on movable buildings, on interchangeable components and, above all, on the value of a design-based tradition of construction standards. In modern terms, what it provides is a challenge to the thinking of adaptive reuse.

At this juncture, one can contrast this ancient thinking with the new. There is, for instance, the current contradiction of attempting to load "environmental performance" onto individually expressive, aesthetically overcooked, and style delimited building with often a restricted design-life. That ancient peoples could, with

7 Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 4, Physics and Physical Technology Part 2, Mechanical Engineering, Section 27, 18. Note that all dates specified are based upon a Western Judeo-Christian calendar– which itself makes a point of the non availability of a neutral point of reference.

8 Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things*, 7.

9 These departments, while subject to occasional changes of name, endured over many hundreds of years.

10 For an account of this measurement, see Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things,* 134.

11 Liang Sicheng, *Ying Zao ta Shi Zhu Shi*, Vol. 1:13 of a total of 34 sections (Beijing: Zhong guo Jianzhu, Gongye Chubabshe, 1983). This facsimile edition based on the first modern translation of 1925 was the product of many decades of research, and heralded the beginning of modern Chinese architectural history. The latest edition, with a new introduction, was produced in 1963. However, it was kept hidden during the course of the Cultural Revolution, and not published until the early 1980s.

considerable skill, construct buildings from simple materials and limited technology that stood for many hundreds of years, and in so doing provide a significant agent for the transfer of cultural traditions. Not withstanding the literature of archaeologists, anthropology, or the hype of tourism, there still is a failure to learn the lessons from the material past. Rather than securing a recognition of the importance of "creativity" in the face of the unsustainable, the dominant disposition of design culture displays its poverty and reduces the expression of the creative to mere appearance.

An enormous amount of *environmental* destruction occurs, by default, through a failure of design.

Design (as practice and product) has been both fellow traveler and active agent in the rise of the unsustainable. The unsustainability of the rate of "natural resource appropriation and environmental destruction," the creation of "consumer culture and its associated impacts," the "technologicalization of war," the "release of toxins into the environment," and the turning of "vast quantities of materials into waste" are but a few of the features of design-implicated destruction that I have named and examined elsewhere as the "defutured." [12]

The point being made here is basic: designers, be they linked to areas such as engineering, architecture, manufactured products, communication media, and the commodification of pleasure, have just not grasped how much they have been, and still are, implicated in the creation of the unsustainable. Obviously, few designers consciously set out to be destructive. However, they were, and still are, largely unaware of what is destroyed by the industrial culture's drive to create. For the main part, designers exist in a culture with a deeply embedded propensity toward productivism. As a result, this culture lives in, and is replicated by, their agency. To be a designer is to be inducted into this culture and to be designed by it. This culture has an extremely limited reflective capability, which itself limits its ethic of responsibility. In this situation, there is a fundamental imperative to transform/create another kind of design knowledge (as well as education, practice, and economics—but that's another story).

Historically, Hong Kong has been an iconic site for the defutured in Asia. It has been a major attractor for unsustainable modes of consumption and for the production of cheap, disposable, nonbiodegradable, and often-toxic goods. A strong desire for the locally made or imported unsustainable lives on—perceived as "the modern, the future, progress, and fashionable." Certainly Hong Kong has been one of the lenses through which mainland Chinese views a possible future.

12 Tony Fry, *A New Design Philosophy: An Introduction to Defuturing* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999).

Questioning Futures

We now need to bring the political, the cultural, and the environmental together and ask: Given how Hong Kong is now situated, what can "it" design? To answer this, four sub-questions will be posed and answered.

To whose and which future does Hong Kong attach itself?

There is no single determined future. The future is not a *tabla rasa* (although many futurists continue to treat it as such)—a great deal already is inscribed, thus there are major delimitations of what is and is not possible. So while one cannot gaze into a crystal ball and see what is coming, it is possible to gain an appreciation of the directive force of emergent material circumstances and associated imperatives. The most general and significant picture here is the already identified expansion of the impact of population, with all its attendant problems. Looked at from the geo-economic perspective of China, at least two very different futures can be contemplated. There is a continuity of the current trajectory of China's growth as a global economic power, with its productive output and level of internal consumption continuing to markedly rise. This model of "development" is largely based on a "catch up with modernity" mindset. In large part, it is about the past of the industrialized world still being thought of as a very significant part of China's future (in China). It also is about drawing more and more of its population into a higher level of impact. This future is both locally and globally unsustainable and, in the company of India, will take the defutured to new heights. We will briefly examine just one issue—global warming.

China's population of 1.32 billion is twenty-two percent of the world's population. According to the World Energy Council, the country is the world's largest coal producer and consumer and currently contributes 13.5 percent of global CO_2 emissions— making it, after the USA, the world's second largest emitter. On the basis of current trends of economic growth, and the fact that coal consumption has tripled in the last 20 years, China's share in global CO_2 emissions is expected to increase and is likely to exceed those of the U.S. by 2020.[13] In contrast, at present, with six percent of the world's population, the U.S. contributes twenty percent of global CO_2 emissions. But the real contrast comes when we look at life in China. According to an Asian Development Bank report, last year 230 million people in China (18.5 percent of the population) existed on less than one dollar per day, with 648 million people (fifty-four percent of the population) surviving on less than two dollars per day. In this context, the Chinese government says it is possible for people in rural China to have enough to eat and wear, and a place to live, on twenty-two cents per day. Additionally, as efficiency in the global economy drives internal economic policy, an enormous amount of "unproductive" labor is being shed, creating significant

13 Zhong Xiang Zhang, *Is China Taking Actions to Limit Its Greenhouse Gas Emissions? Past Evidence and Future Prospects* (www.weathervane.rff.org/refdocs/zhang_china.pdf). Note: China's gross domestic product grew at an average annual rate of about ten percent over the period 1978–1997. Currently, it is 7.5 percent.

levels of unemployed urban poor.[14] At the same time, retail sales are booming.[15] While a great deal could be said about this picture, the observation to make in the context of design futures is this: the ambition is to create a modern nation with a standard of living somewhere near a Western industrialized nation. In terms of the economic future of China, its destiny lies in how it manages the relation between the cheapness of its labor and the growth of a large domestic market. Thus, it has the expectation of constant expansion of domestic consumption for a protracted period. This is the scenario underpinning a long-term increase in GHG emissions. Now rather than these concerns being distant from Hong Kong and design considerations, they are central to its future.

As a political and economic power, or more specifically a global cheap labor manufacturer, as a proto-consumer society, and as both, China's global impact will go on growing. There is no moral argument to place in the path of this trajectory unless the question of equity and redistributive justice is broached globally. Three future China scenarios can be contemplated: (i) the most likely is a "business as usual" scenario via a continuation of action to increase the nation's standard of living and status, accompanied by ongoing and modest government and industry-led exercises in environmental responsibility which, nonetheless, still means China extends its ability to defuture; (ii) the very unlikely prospect of "enlightened correction" by "the free world" to substantially reduce its impacts to a level to allow for improvements in China, and industrializing poor nations; or, (iii) the leap-frog to a culture and economy predicated on sustainment (while this undoubtedly is a very tough option, it is the one able to deliver the greatest national and international benefits). However, the potential of this direction has to be dynamically conceptualized, materialized, and come from within. It requires science, engineering, design, industry, the arts, and government to have a much clearer view of problems, possibilities, and opportunities, and to have formed quite new structures of collaboration. Hong Kong is one of the few places in the world that has the expertise, the cultural capital, wealth, and entrepreneurial drive to be able to contemplate the absolutely essential and seemingly impossible—it could imagine itself into being a catalytic center of change. This could be the vision to fill the current void, and so transform the political landscape. However, as a culture, and as a locus of desire, on the outside of being inside China it has to find a new way to liberate itself from the only history it has known. This is exactly what "sustainment-capitalism" (constituted as new kinds of desires, dreams, relations, values, signs, services, and products) could dramatically be as a nonconfrontational, pragmatic, and affirmative progressivism—a viable future.

14 "China's Economy Set to Grow by 8 Percent in 2000," *China Daily* 11/21/00.

15 The Asian Development Bank Report indicated that retail sales grew by 9.9 percent in the first three quarters of 2000, compared with 6.8 percent in 1999.

How can Hong Kong figure in the conflict between sustainability and the unsustainable?

This question has been answered in part. Realistically, it would be utopian to believe that what has been suggested can be achieved by the power of reason, enlightened self-interest, or flashes of insight. If a beginning were to be made, what actually would be needed would be a first step. This step is to position Hong Kong as a "sustainment leader" on a path to well-being coming from environmental security (which is also the path to freedom).[16] The design community, building on an already existing cadre of educated and inspired thinkers, is uniquely placed to take on this role by design. What this actually means is initially coming together to structure a glocal (the locals plus Hong Kong diaspora) set of conversations, relations, events, messages, and images. While "the nature of things" has to be *seen* in very different ways, what arrives last is a retreat into conventional design practice and the design of "things." The dystopic defuturing negatives of existing utopias have to be met head on, and overwhelmed, by the excitement and gigantic creative challenge of realizing very hard but, in the end, realizable and practically grounded possibilities.

What does Hong Kong design culture have to learn?

Hong Kong does not have a future as what it was; it (the unification of its differences) has as yet to design what it might be.

Presumptively, and in common with design cultures everywhere, the view presented here is that an Other designing has to be learned. This would be a designing predicated on the mobilization of Hong Kong's cultural capital in the context of its "new" contexts (the dawning of the age of recognized unsustainability, a recognition of Hong Kong's contribution to the defutured, and the termination of a very limited access to a substantial manufacturing base—which was always cited as a major condition of limitation).

Who speaks for Hong Kong?

Clearly not this *gwai lo* so said, I know enough of its design culture to know there are voices who can and will.

Conclusion

Little has been said here to create a picture of the existing and pragmatic relation between design in Hong Kong and mainland China. This is because the bias has been futural rather than historical. Obviously, gaining a conjunctural understanding of the situation on the ground is important. However, unless there is a willingness to contemplate the new, as it stands on the ground of the past, the same can but constantly return. Being close to and far from Hong Kong, I venture to observe the place design could have in the realization of its potential to "give value." In a modern sense, "giving value to" can be written as: one cannot sustain what one values, as

16 We should note here that design-based environmental action is already on the agenda in Hong Kong. For example: *Hong Kong Environmental Building Assessment Method* (Hong Kong: Centre for Environmental Technology, 1999).

that worthy of value, without making an investment in "the world of value (the sustainable)" and becoming "human" in that world (which is the essence of *yi* [17]). Moreover, such action cannot be undertaken without gaining an ability to reflect upon the truth of one's self, among others, *performatively.* This is not just a matter of being "true to oneself" but understanding that one's "self" and one's world are a product of one's actions (this effectively indicates that ethics is what one does, rather than being a philosophical proposition and sub-discipline).

As said, Western culture has imposed the universality of "the human." Once, however, the Chinese understood "the human" very differently. Writing on Mencius, Hall and Ames put this very clearly: "For Mencius, strictly speaking, a human is not a sort of being, but a kind of doing, an achievement" [18] What "being sustainable" and "designing to sustain" then adds up to in sum is "another kind of doing and thus another kind of being." Designing, making things is world-making. Hong Kong *is* on the hinge of worlds. The odds on which way it will turn, is turning, are clear. But the other way, the "seemingly impossible" can and should be contemplated by design—the other design.

17 On *yi,* see Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius,* 89–110.

18 Ibid., 277.