

did not win, titled *Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time*, Law Yuk Mui 羅玉梅 (born 1982) wanted to explore what has often been a preoccupation of artists from Hong Kong in the Chinese world. We have already seen how, even though no one would any longer reject the notion that Hong Kong artists have a clearly defined cultural identity, it is often the case that this identity is not seen as stable (or even acceptable sometimes), especially in the mainland, but also by a number of local plasticians and art workers (I have heard Lee Kit, for instance, complain that Hong Kong is “too hybrid”). These questions are addressed by Law Yuk Mui in the remarkable sound project she describes in her proposal (she is now working for Hong Kong’s sound art collective soundpocket):

*Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time*  
(6 months project)

Having been a Beijing-based artist for nearly two months, I often get asked whether I am a Taiwanese every time I meet local people. When I say I come from Hong Kong, they ask if all Hong Kong people speak English. In fact, I am a Hong Kong-born Chinese, mainly working on experimental poem/video/sound, I am now occupying an interesting position as a “traveler immigrant” to explore three steps of a concept 1) Home 2) Imagined Autonomy 3) Self-governing. With Hong Kong’s political link to China, and economic connection to the United States, I want to start my project in these two countries. “Traveler immigrant” is an identity for living. Exploration of a “second home” is a process to solidify or re-interpret the concept of nation, culture, distinction and power. “Home” is a feeling of belonging. “Autonomy” is freedom, “Self-governing” is power. Power is the ability to control or to survive. Actually, “traveler immigrant” is not a

radical idea against control, but a way to widen a space for living and our perception of the world.

For me, art practice is the true reflection of how daily living embodies society structure. Below is a sound project I am working on. Every time I take the metro in Beijing, there are provincials, teenagers, old couples and blind people singing for a living. Hearing their voice mixed with the enormous noise of the train, I could not help pressing the record button on my cell phone. It is a sound of human beings standing against present society. It is a song of reality which is true to me.<sup>17</sup>

To pursue these interrogations, she wanted to take the natural step of becoming, albeit briefly, another diaspora Chinese in the United States, a place where questions of identity and self have to be construed in an even more profound sense of alienation. The three concepts she would have liked to explore in this project (home, imagined autonomy, and self-governing) are a perfect representation of the ever-changing questions one has to answer to find one’s place in lives where migration has become a necessity. There is no single way to answer these questions since they would be addressed differently by people from different cultures and in different circumstances. Law Yuk Mui, a Hong Kong-born Chinese, would have liked to try to answer them from the three different backgrounds of Beijing, Hong Kong, and somewhere in the United States. It is also with questions about what it means to be a Hongkonger that she devised a double project that took the shape of an eBook and video.

Law Yuk Mui is a plastician who has extensively studied the domain of the books made specifically as plastician research by practitioners.



**Figure 5.21** Law Yuk Mui, 2010/2/11, *Nanhai Sunset* 南海太陽. Pages from *Disabled Novel* 殘話小說 (<http://www.lawyukmui.com/?p=126>). (Photo courtesy of the artist).

One of her works of 2011 also explored ideas related to, among other things, the postcolonial situation of Hong Kong. In *Disabled Novel* 殘話小說, in reality a collection of texts and images coalescing into an extremely personal narrative about the context of Hong Kong and the life of the artist at the end of the first decade of the millennium, Law mixed moments of visual emotions with positions that can only be seen as political in regard to space, construction, and many other elements. One page, for instance, was dedicated to a space “found” on the campus of The Chinese University of Hong Kong where the artist wanted to enact performances; after a couple of weeks, this area located under a tennis court had already been altered to eventually receive the offices of the estate management of the university. Even though the artist was not directly interested in looking into the idea of lack of space at the time, some pages still treat the real estate bubble. This was just before the real estate

market became truly mad. Although Law chose the expression “disabled novel” for the English translation, there are many subtleties to the understanding of this title’s connotations that were no doubt part of the artist’s intent. *Canhua* 殘話 could also be rendered as “cruel words,” “wretched words,” or simply “bad words,” the term *can* 殘 being synonymous with something utterly unwanted. *Xiaoshuo* 小說 is the translation of the English word “novel” and, although it has now lost that connotation and simply refers to fiction, it literally means “small say” and refers to the fact that until late in the nineteenth century, fiction was not considered to be a form of high art in Chinese culture (only poetry, philosophy, and essays were). In any case, discrepancies between the Chinese and English titles chosen by Hong Kong artists are extremely frequent and have been an endless source of interest for bilingual art lovers.

The ambiguity of language, so clearly a part



of a culture relying on multiple tongues for everyday life, also occupied an important place in *Disabled Novel*. For instance, the plastician asked her friends to translate into Chinese the English sentence “You’ve lost,” and the results were revealing not only of the instability of language itself and the boundaries between different tongues, but also of the psychology of the translators and their choice of wording. Translating translations in order to show the vagaries of meaning is a risky endeavor, but it would be possible to retranslate the expressions thus chosen as, for instance, “You have lost [as in losing a game]” (你輸咗, this sentence is in Cantonese, the Putonghua would be slightly different: 你輸了), “You have lost [something]” (你已經失去), “You have lost your way” (你已迷路), and so on. *Disabled Novel* is also the title of a 19-minute video, where the artist, using only subtitles to reproduce the text of the novel, shows the original moving images she made to create her work:

The film script of *Disabled Novel* is based on my novel which has the same title with the video. *Disabled Novel* is a silent film, 95% of the script are the interior monologue. “Lost” is the starting question of the vague feeling of melancholy in city life. Its content is an alternate between reality, memory and imagination. The fragmented segment is tracing human’s psychological trajectory in the city. For example, “Nanhai Sunset” (05,37) is the expression of the political position of Hong Kong. The incident of building collapse in Ma Tau Wai Road (01,18), and the play of the marketing theme “Light/Air/Space” of “Lohas Park” (03,02) is questioning the property bubble.

“Disabled Novel” is not only an art work, it is also my methodology of creation.<sup>18</sup>

The collapse of a building on Ma Tau Wai Road in 2010 revealed how some of the structures built in the 1950s had become fragile due to lack of maintenance and initial shoddy construction. Such substandard construction no longer exists (or so one would hope), but the discrepancies between the marketing campaigns created to sell these homes (advertising showing vast parks full of beautiful people under blue skies) and the reality of these housing projects (minuscule and badly designed apartments in giant skyscrapers) was particularly jarring in the case of Lohas Park, a project owned by the Mass Transit Railway Corporation and built not far from a landfill that generates intensely bad odors. But these specific issues related to the, in 2011, already painful situation of real estate in Hong Kong was also contextualized in *Disabled Novel* by the new forms of nationalism that appeared in the SAR. Many pages of the novel are precisely about the ambiguities of life in Hong Kong, some of them treated also by very young artists like Lee Chi Ho, and the unusual post-colonial situation of Hong Kong also addressed by Law Yuk Mui. Four pages were dedicated to photographs of a flag ceremony and titled *2010/2/11, Nanhai Sunset* 南海太陽 (Figure 5.21): “6:00, nightfall at the Golden Bauhinia Square. Recording the flag lowering ceremony, I discovered that there are many palm trees in Hong Kong. But why have I never felt the mood of leisure? Flag-lowering ceremony with the scenery of palm trees, a few South-Asian melodies came out of my mind. Like the sun, flag-raising and flag-lowering is going on time every day.”<sup>19</sup> Flag-raising also found a place in works by Luke Ching Chin Wai in an exhibition a little before the events of the Umbrella movement.