

**Xi Xi 西西, penname of Zhang Yan 張彥 (1938 –)**

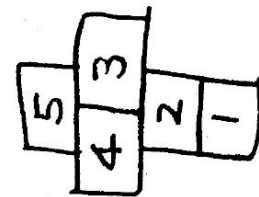
Xi Xi is one of Hong Kong's best-known contemporary authors. Her works have enjoyed critical acclaim in Hong Kong, mainland China, and Taiwan, where most of them were first published. Born in Shanghai, Xi Xi came to Hong Kong in 1950, when her family immigrated to the then British Crown Colony after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Xi Xi is a writer of tremendous versatility. Her prose ranges from social commentary and historical fiction to autopathography, but she is best known for her modernist chronicles of Hong Kong. In them she has been allegorizing the city and creatively engaging in a discourse on Hong Kong identity since the 1960s, when she first began her writing career.



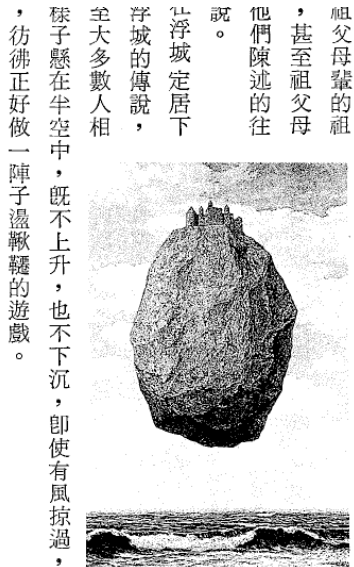
Xi Xi belongs to the first generation of authors for whom Hong Kong was more than a place of exile. Her writings have helped to reshape the city's cultural landscape. As an editor at the *China Student Weekly* (中國學生周報) and *Thumb Weekly* (大拇指周報) in the 1960s and co-founder of Plain-Leaves Publishing (素業出版) in the 1970s, she popularized Western modernist fiction, such as the French nouveau roman and Latin American magical realism. Following the publication of "Maria" (瑪利亞, 1966), a short story about a Belgian nun's harrowing experience in war-torn Congo, Xi Xi shifted her attention to Hong Kong and its people.

*My City: A Hong Kong Story* (1979) is a collage-structured chronicle that de-familiarizes the urban environment through the naïve point of view of the narrator, a young high-school graduate who works as a telephone repairman. His artless descriptions of his surroundings and the lives of his friends are complemented by hand-drawn images that accentuate the collage-effect of the novel. The unaffected narrative style recurs in later novels, such as *Beautiful Highrise* (1990), where corridors, staircases and an elevator are explored through multiple perspectives, reminiscent of both Cubist art and traditional Chinese painting scrolls.

大概是中  
友，被  
安裝電  
能否通  
柱上了  
方來。  
個人自  
有椒鹽  
了。  
只有草。最近，我們一夥人在這裏種



正如：逛街、看店、看小孩子跳造房



Xi Xi's interest in common people is carried over into her historical fiction. While the backdrop of *Deer Hunt* (1982) is a hunting party led by Qing-dynasty emperor Qianlong, the true protagonists are Wang Agui, a commoner whose tragic death is indirectly caused by the emperor, and his son Amutai, who dies trying to avenge his father. By using multiple narrative perspectives and blending history with fiction, Xi Xi deconstructs official myths, shedding new light on relations between rulers and the ruled. "The Story of Fertile Town" (1982) also blends legend with history and the present with the past. Conceived at the time when the fate of Hong Kong was being negotiated by China and Great Britain, the story reflects the anxieties of Hong Kong's inhabitants about their future and sense of belonging. Completed shortly before Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, *Flying Carpet: A Tale of Fertillia* (1996) is a chronicle of three generations living through 150 years of

dramatic changes in an imaginary cosmopolitan multiethnic port city. In "Marvels of a Floating City" (1986), Xi Xi invokes René Magritte's art, conjuring up "a city, floating in the air ; [...] people floating in dreams during the typhoon season".

In 1989, Xi Xi was diagnosed with breast cancer. The auto-pathographic novel *Mourning for the Breast* (1992) is an account of her battle with cancer, which transformed her views of the self, literature, and the Chinese society's perception of illness. Lamenting the gradual separation of body and mind, or, in her own words, the "signified losing its signifier", Xi Xi, through the exploration of various medical treatments and cultural representations of illness, strives to reacquire herself with the language of the body. The novel was turned into a movie entitled *2become1* (天生一對, 2006).



Xi Xi's later writings exhibit the kind of playfulness that was already evident in her early fiction and responsible for her choice of penname – a pictographic representation of a girl playing hopscotch. Her novel *My Georgian* (2006) is an imaginative history of an English dollhouse. Here again the lines separating history and fiction, past and present, reality and fantasy are fundamentally unstable. In her 2009 essay collection *Chronicles of Teddy Bears*, Xi Xi retells Chinese and world history through the biographies of teddy bears. In *Chronicles of the Apes* (2011), she continued her deconstruction of history and nation, and of conventional notions of race and ethnicity. In 2011, Xi Xi was named Writer of the Year at the Hong Kong Book Fair.

**Selected Bibliography:**

***Studies of Xi Xi:***

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Chen, Zhide 陳智德. *Dissecting My City: Hong Kong Literature 1950-2005* (解體我城—香港文學1950-2005).

***Works in English Translation:***

*A Girl like Me and othe Stories* (1986) (contains "Maria")

*MY CITY* (1993)

*MARVELS OF A FLOATING CITY* (1997) (contains "The Story of Fertile Town")

*FLYING CARPET* (2000)

**Novels:**

*MY CITY: A HONG KONG STORY* (我城, 1979)

*DEER HUNT* (哨鹿, 1982)

*THE BEAUTIFUL HIGHRISE* (美麗大廈, 1990)

*MOURNING FOR THE BREAST* (哀悼乳房, 1992)

*THE FLYING CARPET* (飛氈, 1996)

*MY GEORGIAN* (我的喬治亞, 2006)

**Short Story Collections:**

*Story of an Eastern City* (東城故事, 1966)

*A Girl Like Me* (像我這樣的一個女孩, 1984)

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*Handscrolls* (手眷, 1988)

*Stories within stories* (故事裏的故事, 1998)

**Essays/Poems:**

*My Scrapbook* (剪貼冊, 1991)

*Collected Poems by Xi Xi* (西西詩集, 2000)

*ANNALS OF THE TEDDYBEARS* (縫熊志, 2009)

*ANNALS OF THE APES* (猿猴志, 2011)