DUNG Kai-cheung**董啟章** (1967--)



Figure image taken from http://www6.cityu.edu.hk/hkaics/intraviews/dkc.html]

One of Hong Kong’s most celebrated authors, DUNG Kai-cheung is known for his intricately metatextual works. Inspired by European modernist writers such as Marcel Proust and Italo Calvino, Dung’s stories and novels frequently reflect provocatively on their own fictionality, while at the same time exploring issues of history and temporality, writing and representation, gender and desire. His works reveal a fascination with textual traces, material objects, family history, and the socio-symbolic space of Hong Kong. Dung publishes the first editions of his novels in either Hong Kong or Taiwan, and has won major literary prizes in both regions. In addition to his fictional writings, Dung also has regular columns in Hong Kong newspapers, and has published his essays in several collected volumes.

Dung Kai-cheung was born in Hong Kong in 1967, and received his Bachelors and Masters in literature from Hong Kong University. He began publishing fiction in 1991, typically writing in a style that alternates between Mandarin and Cantonese. Dung’s writing career has straddled Hong Kong’s historic 1997 return to Chinese control, and a recurrent theme in many of his works concerns the history and fate of the former colony, which typically appears in his writings in the form of its own fictional double, known as *V City* (Victoria).

Dung’s first published short story is “Cecilia” (1991, and reprinted in his 1997 collection *Rose of the Name*). The story describes the eponymous protagonist as being bald, naked, and armless, and it is gradually revealed that the reason for her peculiar appearance is that she is actually a department store mannequin, with whom the male narrator has become infatuated. The narrator emphasizes that his obsession with Cecilia is not due to his failure to understand that “she” is merely inanimate object, but rather is result of his conviction that he may be able to animate her through a sheer force of will. The story ends with four separate conclusions, including one narrated in Cecilia’s voice, in which she ironically laments the fact that she has no voice with which to inform the narrator that she is, in fact, not “real.”



Dung’s first three fictional volumes, *Souvenir Album* (1995), *Homework Album* (1996), and *Xiao Dong’s Schoolyard* (1996)—which in 2003 were reprinted in a single volume, entitled *Practice Album*—use a nostalgic attention to everyday objects in order to reconstruct the youth of a character named Xiao Dong, who also appears repeatedly in many of Dung’s later works.

In 1997, Dung wrote and published his novella *Atlas: Archeology of an Imaginary City*, which is also available in English translation. Composed and published in the year of Hong Kong’s return to Chinese control, *Atlas* is structured as a series of short essays ostensibly written by researchers belonging to a fictional cartographic association that—at an unspecified point in the future—is investigating a set of historical maps of a city that the novel refers to as Victoria, or “V *cheng*,” but which in reality closely mirrors Hong Kong itself. In addition to using old maps (both real and fictional) to reflect on the history of “Victoria,” the novel also reflects more abstractly on cartography and practices of representation.

Figure Cover of the English translation of *Atlas*. Image taken from http://www.cup.columbia.edu/media/7936/dung-atlas-blog.jpg

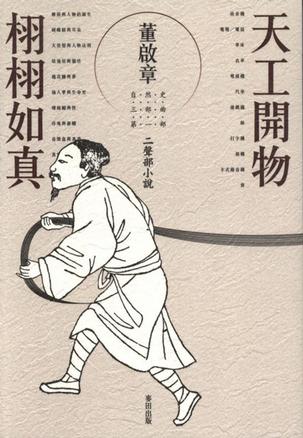
In 2005, Dung published *Works and Creations*, the first volume in his “natural history” trilogy. The novel, which was awarded the Jury Prize for the prestigious *Dream of the Red Chamber Literature Award*, opens with a description of a seventeen-year-old female figure named Xuxu, who wakes up naked one morning with no memory of her past. It turns out that she is merely a fictional character created by the narrator in his “writing workshop,” and who inhabits a “figure world” surrounded by other fictional characters. The novel alternates between odd-numbered chapters that narrate Xuxu’s fictional existence, and even-numbered chapters consisting of a series of letters addressed to her by the narrator, who is simultaneously compiling a history of his family and a material history of Hong Kong. In the latter portion of the novel, Xuxu crosses over from the figure world into the object world in search of her companion, Xiao Dong, who turns out to be a displaced version of the narrator himself.

Figure Cover of the original edition of *Works and Creations*. Image taken from http://book.douban.com/subject/1439406/]

**Album-style Novels:**

*Souvenir Album* (*Jinian ce*紀念冊) (1995) [Dung’s first full-length novel]

*Homework Album* (*Jiake ce*家課冊) (1996) [A quasi-sequel to *Souvenir Album*]

*Atlas: Archaeology of an Imaginary City* (*Dituji* 地圖集)(1997) [Written and published the year of the Hong Kong Handover]

***Novels:***

*Androgyny: Evolution of a Nonexistent Species* (*Anzhuozhenni*安卓珍尼) (1996) [Won a literary prize from *Unitas* literary magazine]

*Works and Creations* (*Tiangong kaiwu: Xuxu ruzhen*天工開物．栩栩如真)(2005) [The first volume in Dung’s “natural history trilogy”]

*Histories of Time* (*Shijian fanshi: Yaci zhi guang*時間繁史．啞瓷之光)(2007) [The second volume in Dung’s “natural history trilogy”]

*The Age of Learning* (*Wuzhong yuanshi: Beibei chongsheng zhi xuexi niandai*物種源始．貝貝重生之學習年代)(2010) [The third volume in Dung’s “natural history trilogy”]

**Short Story Collection:**

*The Rose of the Name* (*Mingzi de meigui*名字的玫瑰) (1998) [Includes Dung’s first published short story, “Cecilia”]

**Essay Collections:**

*Discourses and Essays: Interviews with and Readings of Ten Hong Kong Authors* (*Jianghua wenzhang—Fangwen, yuedu shiwei Xianggang zuojia*講話文章 - 訪問、閱讀十位香港作家) (1996) [Volume two released the following year]

*On Writing* (*Shuoshu ren*說書人) (1997) [Collection of essays on literature]

*Writing in the World, Writing for the World* (*Zai shijie zhong xiezuo, wei shijie er xie*在世界中寫作，為世界而寫) (2011) [Collection of essays on literature and other topics]

**Recommended Reading:**

Bachner, Andrea “‘Chinese’ Intextuations of the World.” *Comparative Literature Studies* 47: 3 (2010).

Chen, Lingchei Letty, *Writing Chinese: Reshaping Chinese Cultural Identity* (2006) [See chapt. 4]

Wang, David Der-wei. "A Hong Kong Miracle of a Different Kind." Tr. Caroline Mason. China Perspectives 1 (2011).