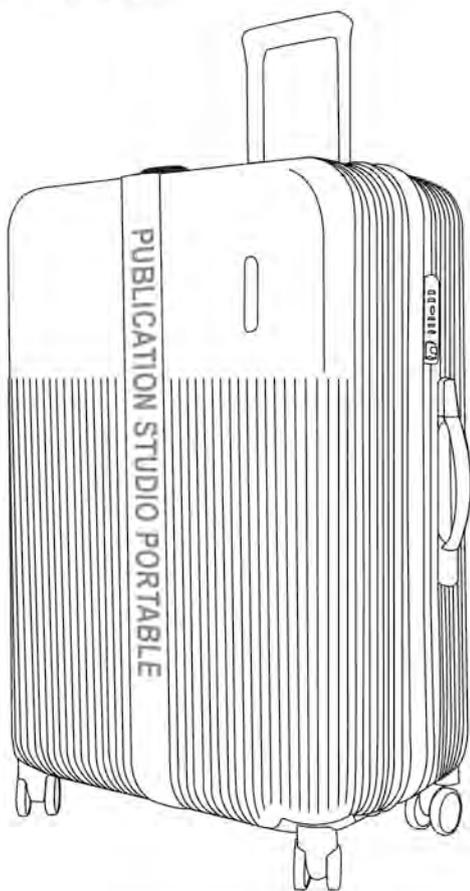


# PUBLICATION STUDIO PORTABLE

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A MOBILE PUBLISHING MANUAL

- Foreword
- The Baggage Handler
- Instruction Manual
- Getting Lighter, Still Labour-Intensive
- Operation Log





GETTING LIGHTER,  
STILL LABOUR-INTENSIVE  
by Elaine W. HO and Beatrix PANG



彭倩嫻 (阿B): 好正 [很棒] 啊, 只有你這裡才是這樣的。以前你在中環 [的店] 從來都是這樣的, 唔係嗎? [不是嗎?]

Beatrix PANG (BP): *Sifu* [Master], this is so great! Only your place is like this. When your factory was in Central [District] it was like this, too. Actually it was always like that, right?

黃師傅: 都係…… [也是的啊]  
WONG Sifu: Yeah...

阿B: 麻將的聲音跟印刷機的聲音混在一起。

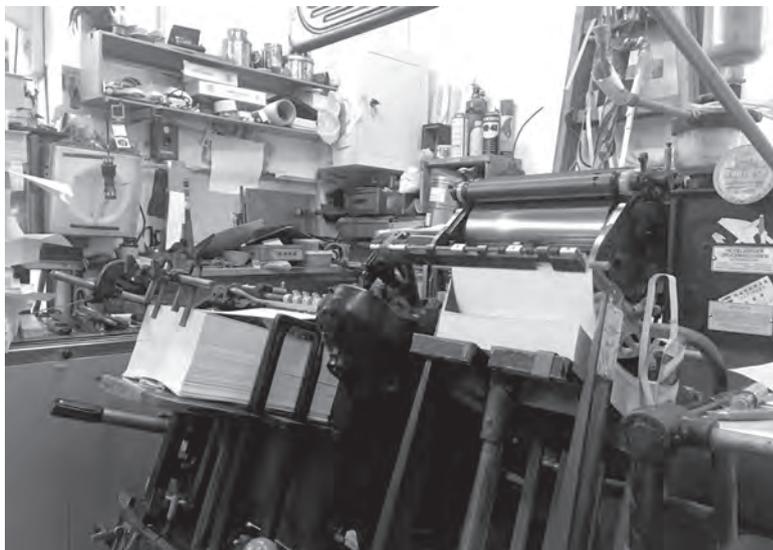
BP: It' s the sound of mahjong and the sound of printing machines mixed together.

黃師傅: 要有娛樂又有工作嘛!

WONG Sifu: You have to play and work!<sup>1</sup>

According to a 2018 text issued by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC), 'Hong Kong is one of the major printing centres of the world.'<sup>2</sup> While a long-standing and ebullient history of print and publishing may be one of the major reasons for such a worthy standing, the next sentence in HKTDC' s article reveals much more by virtue of a sideways glance: 'Thanks to its free flow of information and freedom of the press, a large number of local and international newspapers, journals, periodicals and religious books and textbooks are printed in Hong Kong.'<sup>3</sup> The virtuosity of such freedom is, of course, especially commendable with reference to the lack of such freedoms nearby. 'So near, yet so feared' is actually the title of a long-running column in Hong Kong' s major English-language media outlet *South China Morning Post*, and indeed, the simple aphorism basically sums up the problematic contradictions that define Hong Kong' s identity, economy and society. As a colonial outpost and gateway both into the mainland and out to the rest of the world, Hong Kong' s production capacity in nearly all of its industries has been defined by being a support to some Other, whereby local benefit is gained as a matter of surplus (either in access to export goods, or as factory bosses benefitting in good ol' profits generated from the surpluses of wage labour). The print and publishing industries are similarly familiar with such heteronomous relations and the

role of the ‘supporting act.’ The first printing companies appeared in Hong Kong in the mid-nineteenth century as Macanese-owned enterprises, which thrived through securing British colonial government contracts and serial work, such as printing lottery tickets for the Hong Kong Jockey Club.<sup>4</sup> And as a technology and media itself, print has ubiquitously served as a buttress for nearly every other industry, from packaging to user manuals to advertising, and this is perhaps why, despite its leading role, the publishing industry is often forgotten amidst other goods of pride. Nevertheless, high demand has ensured a great deal of competitiveness, which propels Hong Kong’s printing industry to this day. These factors contribute to the proud résumé of international agencies such as *The Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The International New York Times* and many more, being printed in Hong Kong and partially shipped to China for distribution.<sup>5</sup> Yet for however



34 glorious that may seem, many symptoms of the conflicted, colonised identity remain.

阿B: 你記得第一份印的 [印刷品] 是甚麼嗎?

BP: Do you remember the first thing you printed?

黃師傅: 當時候用的那部是手落機 [手搖機], 有摩達的那款, 印卡片 [名片], 信封, 那些東西。

WONG Sifu: We used the 960 series hand-operated letterpress machines, the one that ran with a motor, model 969. We were printing business cards, envelopes, those kinds of things.

阿B: 你當時有幾多人一起共事呢?

BP: Apart from you, how many other people were working there?

黃師傅: 那時候在中環時都有十多個人, 有自動 [印刷] 機的師傅, 也有手落機的師傅。

WONG Sifu: At that time there were more than ten working there. There were different masters for different machines, some automatic machines, some hand-cranked ones.

阿B: 在 [印刷業] 全盛的時期, 有多少部這款式的機器? 你當時的公司有多少部?

BP: During that golden age, how many of these machines did you have in your company?

黃師傅: 只有一部啊, 後來有兩部。後來有『綠簿』, 就會印得快些。

WONG Sifu: Only one, and later on we had two. We added another one called 'Green Book' that printed a bit faster.

阿B: 但你這部只有一部?

BP: But back then you only had one of those?

[Points to WONG Sifu' s letterpress]

黃師傅: 有不同的機器, 這是手動的。

WONG Sifu: They were different to these machines, this is manual.

阿B: 所以幾時有自動的機器呢?

BP: When did they start to have automatic machines?

黃師傅: 最早在六十年代…… 很難跟你解釋, 有英國 [生產], 也有德國的……

WONG Sifu: It was early on, in the 60s. There were many kinds, one British, one German...

Hong Kong' s trajectory towards becoming an Asian tiger city post-World War II, industrialised and hyper-modern, was made possible through the ironic collaboration between Britain' s neoliberal interests and the hordes of Chinese money fleeing the mainland' s civil war—meaning an increase in investment, technological production and a demand for labour-intensive manufacturing filled the need for jobs to develop Hong Kong' s economy. The golden age of Hong Kong manufacturing in the 1960s and 1970s made Hong Kong-made brands for textiles, plastics, toys and watches well-known to the rest of the world. But with increasing labour and land costs, China' s reform and subsequent opening up in 1979, as well as changes wrought by the 1997 hand-over, over 80% of Hong Kong' s factories had left

36 the territory by the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> The shiny landscape of skyscrapers marking the current Hong Kong postcard effaces such history, and we are now known much more so for the immateriality of tertiary offerings in the service or finance sectors. Industrial mobility and the versatile movement of goods set up the foundations for something we could call ‘national pride,’ yet these infrastructures rely upon an imagination of sovereignty that has quite possibly never existed.

Nevertheless, it is in the best interests of the HKTDC to report that the Hong Kong printing industry is doing well. As of 2008, the printing and publishing industry still made up 24.6% of the employment structure of the city’s manufacturing sector, ahead of the clothing, textile and electronics industries by which Hong Kong made its name.<sup>7</sup> Even if the ‘Made in Hong Kong’ label seems increasingly rare, HKTDC’s research reveals that overall growth in the export of printed matter was up 2.9% in the first half of 2018.<sup>8</sup> Such numbers are still due primarily to Hong Kong’s role as an entrepôt and strategic port city. Re-exports in the printing industry regularly outnumber local manufacturing fifteen to one, with the majority being of mainland origin. And this positivity insinuates, of course, something not necessarily ‘Made in Hong Kong,’ but rather ‘Managed,’ ‘Financed’ and ‘Registered’ in Hong Kong.

劉可莉：又講嘢又打牌，真好難。

Rachel LAU (RL): It’s really hard to talk and play mahjong.

And so, according to the 2018 HKTDC report, growth for the first half of 2018 became marked by a murky symbolism. Growth of Chinese mainland origin had become... an asterisk. Another heteronomous relation to an other, but to what Other? We are no economists, so please forgive the aesthetic reading, but does the asterisk appear more neutral than the reality of negative growth in Chinese re-exports from previous years? Is it really that there is less coming from the mainland—or that it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish between what is mainland and what is Hong Kong? Any exploration of this question lies in the grey zones of economic transaction, but like waving the flag of the ‘freedom of the press,’ it is fundamentally an ethical and sociopolitical matter.

The most recent Communist Party of China State Council announcements for the ‘Greater Bay Area’ power hub—bringing together technology, innovation and finance from eleven cities around the Pearl River Delta region, including Hong Kong and Macau—confirm that there will be less and less differentiation. Call it a certain fluidity, but at the level of the individual worker-subject, call it also a priming for ultimate productivity. So amidst the murky administration of shadow economies (exactly those which are so hard to calculate), what becomes blurred is our understanding of how to organise the public life of work and the private life of leisure, love and personal relation. Google and the slew of co-work and co-live spaces all over the globe have certainly capitalised upon this blur, employing the

38 realm of the 'affective' as a means to enhance productivity and, simply, to make a shitload more money.

工廠裡打牌的師傅：這種機器少一架就沒有了。好像照相機一樣，誰還會繼續生產呢？現在也沒有人生產電版了。

FACTORY MAHJONG PLAYER: There will be fewer and fewer until there's none. Just like cameras, who's producing them anymore? There's no more. Nobody's doing letterpress printing and plate moulding anymore.

阿B：現在再沒有人認識怎樣操作，真的沒有人呢。師傅，你有學徒嗎？

BP: Nobody knows how. Really, nobody. Do you have an apprentice?

打牌師傅：機器都賣掉沒有了，我們這樣環境還收學徒有甚麼用呢？我們連他都養不起。

FACTORY MAHJONG PLAYER: We're selling the machine already. If we take in an apprentice now, how can he survive?

阿B：認識一下，學習一下嘛。你向他們傳授，那群年青人會來學習的。

BP: But that's how you learn, right? If you could really talk to the younger people, they would come to learn.

打牌師傅：[柴灣] 青年廣場那邊有一部活版印刷機放置了很久，都沒有人來用。

FACTORY MAHJONG PLAYER: There is one letterpress machine installed in Youth Square [in Chai Wan]. It's just sitting there without anyone using it.



Yet as the sounds of machines quieten down and the factories of wealthy, capitalist countries move further and further from sight, we start to hear another rumble at play. It's the rumble of play itself. Work and leisure are not diametrically opposed, as in the example of the artist, and as in the example of domestic mothers bringing factory work home with them during the heyday of Hong Kong manufacturing—the city's own brand of 'cottage industry.'<sup>9</sup> So while this particular manner of monetising domestic life via a system of 'putting-out' work allowed a generation of housewives, their children and their neighbours to find a dynamic balance between affective labour and economic survival, where does that leave us today in the negotiations between the private and the public, between work and leisure—or between being worked and 'working it'?

李思瑩：我覺得做creative嘅人，個腦都會一路non-stop咁樣諗著同creative有關嘅嘢。但係，會劬，會劬啊 [會累的]。所以有時間暇個時候會特登唔去念D乜嘢咯 [特意不去想什麼事]。甚至係特登唔去睇 [看] 太多嘢，唔會有D咩沖擊idea，因為對我黎講我要care一樣嘢我就要認真做 [對我來講，我關心一件事的話我就要認真做]。「認真做」對於我黎講就係「工作」。

Kozaf LI (KL): I think that for creative people, the mind is thinking about their creative work non-stop. But this is wearying. So when I have some leisure time, I will specifically try not to think about much, to the point that maybe I don't even try to see too much in order not to be over-stimulated with ideas. Because once I care for something, I will treat it very seriously. And for me, treating something seriously is what it means to work.

Our souls have already 'descended onto the shop floor,' as scholars Stefano Harney and Fred Moten paraphrase Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, and it is no surprise then that the Hong Kong value-measure of 'time equals money' is indeed the ultimate spirituality.<sup>10</sup> Such a realisation puts the heteronomy of industry, the rhythm of the machines and the rituals of daily life into disturbing, systematised relation. But rather than becoming atheists or fleeing in illusory secession, Moten asks us to reconsider the predominant calls for sovereignty,<sup>11</sup> or as Clara Balaguer from the experimental publishing collective Hardworking, Goodlooking calls it, 'de-romanticising self-reliance.'<sup>12</sup> The term heteronomy, repeated a number of times here, purposefully counters autonomy, despite all of our desires for the latter.

There is a certain acquiescence to the totality of capitalism. But are there ways to reimagine and reappropriate such a totality to other ends? Or as Moten put it, ‘Are there other ways to imagine social relations outside of the framework of sovereignty and self-determination?’<sup>13</sup> How do we reconcile the happily exploited ‘putting out’ of work throughout the neighbourhood? These are questions of vector and scale, perhaps. The ‘putting-out’ system of domesticised labour and cottage industries are often described as a form of proto-industrialisation, but without trying to be nostalgic about what a new cottage industry could look like today (a Taobao village? The freelance coder tapping on the keyboard while doing squats before a height-extending desk?), the answers must lie somewhere in the rewriting of the work and leisure balance, a temporal renarration of *ikigai*, of finding reasons for being that must be reformulated in heteronomy.<sup>14</sup> Print is a medium that can say just about anything. But what do we want to say, and what stories should be left?

李：咩叫喜悅嘅先？[首先，什麼是喜悅？]

KL: What do you mean by happiness?

方韻芝：有喜悅係，嗰個就係你個work.

Vangi FONG (VF): What gives happiness, that’ s your work.

李：即係做嘢就唔分 [工作和閒暇] 囉。

KL: Meaning, while I’ m working it’ s not distinguished [between work and leisure].

何穎雅：即係一路覺得好玩，你好enjoy你嗰個process?

Elaine W. HO (EWH): Meaning, you think

it' s all play, that you enjoy your process?

葉啟俊（阿俊）：我覺得係知道係玩緊但係玩嗰個，我覺得係最終個目的。即係你最終個目的可以係工作，但係你最主要個目的係玩，同埋你玩但係你最終個目的係工作，係兩樣嘢黎嘅嘛 [是兩件事嘛]。咁我覺得我傾向係「玩」最終個目的係「工作」咯。我係咁囉。

YIP Kai Chun (YKC): I think it' s that you know it' s play, and I think the ultimate goal is play. Meaning, your objective: you can work but your ultimate goal is play. And if you play with the ultimate objective of making work, that' s another thing. So I think I am more inclined to play with the goal of making work. That' s how I am.

劉：碰！

RL: *Pung* [triplet]!

阿俊：唔係 [不是]，將「工作」當「玩」可能會開心過將「玩」當「工作」咯，係囉。即係我覺得大部分時候都係兩樣嘢都撈埋一齊嘅 [兩件事混在一起]，但係我會知道最終個目的係「工作，對我黎講。點樣呢？即係一個有purpose嘅嘢囉，係囉。個purpose係玩但係都係……唔係，個purpose唔係玩，個means係玩 [不是，目標不是玩，玩是辦法]。

YKC: Treating work as play is perhaps happier than making play into work. I think most of the time these two things are mixed together, but I know for myself that the final goal is work. Why? Because it is something that has a purpose. The purpose is play but... No, the purpose is not play, but the means is play.

劉：哦，you work to玩 [哦，你是為了玩而工作]。

RL：Oh, you work to play.

阿俊：哎呀，食了食了食了 [贏了]。

YKC：Oh, I' ve won, I' ve won, I' ve won!

- 1 Between December 2018 and February 2019, we held a number of conversations around the topics of work, leisure and the changing nature of industry in Hong Kong with WONG Sifu, a retiring letterpress craftsman who was in the process of selling his machine for good. Via the hypnotic hum of his letterpress, accompanied by the sound of idle, fellow workers engaging in a few rounds of mahjong, we happened upon the idea to stage another discussion during a mahjong game among four artists who have been involved to various degrees with publishing. The text generated from these dialogues will form the basis of the upcoming podcast series *correct me if I'm wrong*, to be published in the spring of 2019 by Verina Gfader and Ruth Höflich. For further information see: [www.echo-project.com](http://www.echo-project.com).
- 2 經貿研究 HKTDC Research, 'Printing Industry in Hong Kong,' 經貿研究 *HKTDC Research Online*, 16 August 2018, <http://hong-kong-economy-research.hktdc.com/business-news/article/Hong-Kong-Industry-Profiles/Printing-Industry-in-Hong-Kong/hkip/en/1/1X00000/1X0040C0.htm>, accessed 23 February 2019.
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 York Lo, 'Lee Yat-Ngok, the Local Printing Press Company and the Development of the Hong Kong Printing Industry,' *The Industrial History of Hong Kong Group*, 1 August 2016, [https://industrialhistoryhk.org/lee-yat-ngok-the-local-printing-press-and-the-development-of-the-hong-kong-printing-industry/#\\_ftnl](https://industrialhistoryhk.org/lee-yat-ngok-the-local-printing-press-and-the-development-of-the-hong-kong-printing-industry/#_ftnl), accessed 23 February 2019.
- 5 經貿研究 HKTDC Research
- 6 'Manufacturing in Hong Kong,' *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manufacturing\\_in\\_Hong\\_Kong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manufacturing_in_Hong_Kong), accessed 23 February 2019.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 經貿研究 HKTDC Research.
- 9 'Workers were often asked to work overtime. My mother worked in a garment factory, and she often worked overtime. But even when she was home, she could not rest. Actually, she was even busier. She would bring bags of clothing home with her. Well, she had to cook for the family first, but after dinner, she would ask the whole

family to cut loose threads and the labels of clothing. Sometimes we could not finish all the work, so we had to ask our neighbours to help. Then they would also get paid. All over the block, throughout the whole building, people were working at night after dinner. Since there was too much work, the boss would let the workers finish it with their families at night. Actually, I quite enjoyed the whole process. And you can also see how prosperous the manufacturing industry was then.’ As quoted from Simon GO, ‘Made in Hong Kong,’ in *Hong Kong Stories XIX: Our Classic Brands*, RTHK Podcasts, 13 March 2013, [http://podcast.rthk.hk/podcast/item\\_all.php?pid=463&lang=zh-CN](http://podcast.rthk.hk/podcast/item_all.php?pid=463&lang=zh-CN).

- 10 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson, Minor Compositions, 2013, p. 87.
- 11 Fred Moten, ‘History Doesn’ t Repeat Itself, but it Does Rhyme’ keynote lecture, *After Year Zero – Geographies of Collaboration: Writing History*, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 3 October 2013.
- 12 Clara Balaguer, *De-romanticising Self-Reliance*, lecture-performance, performed at Booked: Tai Kwun Contemporary’ s Hong Kong Art Book Fair, 13 January 2019.
- 13 Fred Moten, ‘History Doesn’ t Repeat Itself, but it Does Rhyme’ keynote lecture, *After Year Zero – Geographies of Collaboration: Writing History*, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 3 October 2013.
- 14 According to a 1972 report compiled by the city’ s former Resettlement Department, it was specifically a characteristic of cottage industries (also known as the ‘putting-out’ system or domestic system) to both temporally and spatially interfere and intermingle the activities of trade with those of the house. If we stretch the metaphor towards its connotations within American slang, are we to say that the worker has agreed to ‘put-out’ for the manager within their own home?



PUBLICATION STUDIO (founded in 2009 in Portland, Oregon) prints and binds books one at a time on-demand, creating original work with artists and writers they admire. They use any means possible to help writers and artists reach a public: physical books, an online library, eBooks and unique social events with writers and artists in many cities. Currently, PUBLICATION STUDIO stands as a network of twelve studios spanning four continents, who together share responsibility for the production and distribution of new titles in the PUBLICATION STUDIO catalogue.

→ [publicationstudio.biz](http://publicationstudio.biz)

Elaine W. HO wanted to be a writer when she was growing up and was always encouraged and told she could do so until one fateful failure at the age of eighteen. A piece of suspectedly ‘foreign’ flavoured writing cast her into the ranks of an elementary level English course, crushing her dream and changing her path from that point forward. She continues to struggle with lessons in failure on a frequent basis, though the counter to that is she now writes from time to time, in the most free and unlearned way ever.

→ [indexofho.net](http://indexofho.net) → [displaydistribute.com](http://displaydistribute.com)

Beatrix PANG is a visual artist and publisher of Hong Kong-based independent press Small Tune Press. She is also a co-founder of zinesters’ collective ZINECOOP and the Queer Reads Library, a mobile platform for archiving queer literature.

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→ [@zinecoop](https://www.instagram.com/zinecoop)

54 Isabelle SULLY works across art making, curating, editing and writing. Her work is anchored to a form of feminist institutional critique that has at its heart an identity crisis around the paradox at play in the solo act. In placing importance on the supporting role, how do desires for self-determination prevail, persist or garner spotlight given the behind-the-scenes nature of these so-called ancillary activities? Originally from Melbourne, she now lives in Rotterdam where she is the editor-in-chief at PUBLICATION STUDIO ROTTERDAM.

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