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The Culture Ambivalence of Hong Kong: A Walled City of Miscellany in Xu Xi's The Unwalled City

Submitted by

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Declaration

I, *Cheung Wing Yiu* declare that this research report represents my own work under the supervision of *Dr. Chang Tsung Chi,* and that it has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institution.

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The Culture Ambivalence of Hong Kong: A Walled City of Miscellany in Xu Xi's *The Unwalled City*

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Abstract

Featuring the eve of the Hong Kong handover between 1993 and 1997, Xu Xi's *The Unwalled City* (2001) vividly captures the cultural ambivalence and identity dilemma in Hong Kong. Xu Xi is an Indonesian Chinese who was raised in Hong Kong and pursued her higher education in America. Unlike most Hong Kong literature, cultural hybridity is highlighted in *The Unwalled City* through code-mixing and multidimensional characterization. The multidimensional characterization of the two female Hong Kong protagonists Lee You Fun (also known as Andanna) and Gail Szeto embody the cultural hybridity in different ways but reflecting a similar aim– make a home out of Hong Kong. The social alienation and identity dilemma on their journey of pursuing their happiness in Hong Kong similarly unfold an ambivalent culture position of Hong Kong people that makes the representation of Hong Kong a somewhat 'walled' city that contradicts to the openness implied by the novel title *The Unwalled City*. This paper will examine how code-mixing and multidimensional characterisation are used to unfold the cultural ambivalence and identity dilemma in Hong Kong through the representation of the city in *The Unwalled City*.

Keywords: Hong Kong literature, Hong Kong identity issue, Xu Xi, code-mixing, characterisation, cultural-schizophrenia, ethnocentrism, social alienation

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Introduction

The co-existence of multicultural characters presented in the novel together with the base language English (which is used internationally) may make the representation of Hong Kong a welcoming city for outsiders and non-Hong Kong readers. On the other hand, the complexity of code-mixing and the unconventional characterisation of the novel may also reveal an exclusive side of Hong Kong towards outsiders (Christopher 53). Such an embrace of multiple culture can also be considered Hong Kong people's subtle rejection of conforming to a singular culture and a particular cultural identity which dictates the use of language and characterisation (Christopher 48).

Despite the potential exclusiveness mentioned previously, the unconventional choice of code-mixing and characterisation in the novel have provided an alternative perspective for readers to reimagine the representation of Hong Kong as an 'unwalled city' (Christopher 51). Ever since *The Unwalled City* has been published, it has been reviewed and studied by two scholars. Yet, little has been discussed on how code-mixing and the connection between Cantonese insertion and identity formation represent Hong Kong and identity of Hong Kong people. In the light of the ambivalent cultural position of Hong Kong in *The Unwalled City*, this paper will examine how the use of code-mixing and the multidimensional characterization serve as the implied indicators of Hong Kong as a 'walled city' which goes hand in hand with a miscellaneous Hong Kong identity to non-Hong Kong readers.

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Literature Review

Very few studies have been conducted to analyse Hong Kong English literature and the Hong Kong English novel *The Unwalled City* is no exceptional (Christopher 49). Despite the scholarly inattention, the unconventional language choice and characterisation in *The Unwalled City* have been reviewed and can be coined as the indicators of 'linguistic-cultural schizophrenia' that Hong Kong people suffer from (Christopher 51–52). Also, the representation of Hong Kong as a cosmopolitan in *The Unwalled City* has been challenged and reshaped in a sense that subtle boundaries exist among different characters at different levels in the novel (Li 73-82).

Unlike most Hong Kong writers, Xu Xi does not stick to one particular language to narrate Hong Kong in *The Unwalled City*. Instead, she sprinkled different Cantonese colloquial and some Putonghua phrases on the base language English throughout the novel. This is one significant breakthrough of the mainstream Hong Kong literature that heavily relies on Sinophone (Christopher 40). Among the different types of code-mixing, insertion is mainly used in the novel and will be further discussed.

Apart from the use of code-mixing, the multidimensional characterization in *The Unwalled City* also illustrates the 'linguistic-culture schizophrenia' (Christopher 52). This paper will further examine how characterization is given through physical, social and psychological dimensions to project how both the writer and Hong Kong people reject coining the characters and themselves a single identity, which makes Hong Kong a 'walled' city which subtly excludes non-Hong Kong readers and outsiders (Vidhya and Arjunan 77).

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The use of code-mixing and characterization unfold the identity dilemma of Hong Kong people in the novel. Echoing to the miscellaneous nature of code-mixing both inside the novel and in the real life setting in Hong Kong, the identity of Hong Kong people has not been re-orientated from simply 'Hongkongese' to simply 'Chinese' when the handover in 1997 was coming closer inside the novel and in reality (Ma and Fung 174). Instead, Hong Kong has gradually formed an identity that raises beyond absolute 'Chinese' nor 'Hongkongese' but a mixture from these two together with the cosmopolitan qualities through the western influence cast by the colonization (Li 311). Similar to the Cantonese term 'jaahjung' given in the novel, Hong Kong people can be considered a community without a pure cultural inherence or a root. 'Jaahjung' was used repeatedly to illustrate how a female Eurasian Hong Kong character has been labelled because of her non-Chinese ethnicity background or say a non-pure ethnicity background (Xu Xi 104). Meanwhile, the culture of Hong Kong can be considered as a non-pure 'jaahjung' owing to the mixture of both Chinese and Western elements inherited from history - a pure Chinese community nor pure English subjects- a group of people who are caught in between and has gradually create a mingled identity by themselves beyond a singular or static cultural identity (Choy 52). This ambivalent form of culture position and identity may have turned Hong Kong to a 'walled city' that is not truly accessible to non-Hong Kong readers.

A form of subtle rejection to the label of 'Chinese' among Hong Kong people can also be found in Hong Kong newspaper. This echoes to the 'jaahjung' identity and qualities depicted by the novel (Zhang and Mihelj 523). For example, how some Hong Kong newspaper companies identify Hong Kong people vary from simply 'Hongkongese' to simply 'Chinese'. A wide range of identities are provided to local readers and this kind of non-absolute identity reference of Hong

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Kong people suggest the same sense of miscellany and rootlessness carried by the Cantonese term 'jaahjung'. Such a miscellaneous quality of identity owned by Hong Kong people can create an invisible wall for non-Hong Kong readers to comprehend the identity of Hong Kong people in the novel – an exclusiveness to outsiders despite the welcoming book title *The Unwalled City*.

Code-Mixing and a 'Walled' City of Miscellany

Unlike most Hong Kong literature which heavily relies on standard written Chinese, the code-mixing applied by Xu Xi in *The Unwalled City* challenges readers' perspective and provide them a new perspective to reconsider the reality of Hong Kong. Although Xu Xi uses English as a base language to construct the representation of Hong Kong in the novel, the high frequency of Cantonese phrases insertion and the low frequency of Putonghua insertion echo to how Hong Kong people communicate differently from typical English speakers and mainland Chinese (Li 307).

Code-mixing is a phenomenon when lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence (Muysken2). Three basic process of code-mixing are identified, namely insertion, alternation and congruent lexiclisation. Among these three processes, the use of insertion will be highlighted in the following discussion as Xu Xi mainly makes use of this process to apply code-mixing in the novel. Insertion refers to the process of inserting 'lexical items or entire constituents from one language' into another (Muysken 3). In particular, how insertion is applied in the novel can be considered an identity marker and solidarity marker for Hong Kong readers and the Hong Kong characters (Gibbons 116). From the view of an ethnographic approach,

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a ‘secular linguistic’ approach and a social-psychological matched guise approach, the Cantonese insertion into English has a several key functions in different aspects (Li 306):

	Aspect	Function
1	Identity Acknowledgement	‘a marker of group and ethnic solidarity’
2	Cultural/ Social Order	‘strong sanction against using English for intra-ethnic communication’
3	Level of Formality	`MIX' was preferred in informal settings

The use of Cantonese insertion in *The Unwalled City* echoes to function 1 and function 3 to a large extent but it breaks the convention of function 2 throughout the novel because English serves as the base language among intra-ethnic communication (shared by Hong Kong characters whose mother-tongue is not English) in this novel. How the novel has performed the function as ‘a marker of group and ethnic solidarity’ (function 1) will be further explored below.

Among the thirty two chapters in *The Unwalled City*, only eight chapters do not include any insertions of Cantonese phrases. As for most of the chapters which are inserted with Cantonese (which is the dominating mother tongue for most Hong Kong people), the Cantonese insertion is diverse, ranging from simple Cantonese words or phrase to a complete Cantonese clause, which can be considered a solidarity marker to most Hong Kong readers but an alienating reading experience to non-Hong Kong readers who do not understand Cantonese to a certain extent.

In other words, such a Cantonese-English code-mixing choice can be taken as a Hong Kong-oriented or even a Hong Kong-bias choice of language which excludes non-Hong Kong readers. Three languages are used in the novel-English (the base language), Cantonese (highly frequent

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insertion) and Putonghua (very low frequent insertion). However, only the Hong Kong characters can fully understand all three languages and express themselves in these three languages while some non-Hong Kong characters cannot communicate in these three languages. This echoes to the Hong Kong language phenomenon which drives Hong Kong people to master all three languages to survive in the postcolonial era when the English speaking countries are still the key commercial counterparts of Hong Kong and Putonghua speakers have ultimate sovereignty over Hong Kong (Li 308-315).

While the kind of code-mixing illustrated in the novel is a part of daily life to most Hong Kong readers, non-Hong Kong readers may find it a linguistic 'wall' or a type of 'schizophrenia' that hinder their understanding. With the highly frequent insertion of Cantonese phrases, neither the English speakers nor the Putonghua speakers will find the reading experience of *The Unwalled City* a highly comprehensible or a friendly one. Right from the beginning of the novel, an offensive Cantonese nickname referring to the English-speaking Westerners is given in the prologue:

> New Year's Eve is a non-Chinese "gwailo" celebration.

The Cantonese insertion 'gwailo' (鬼佬) means 'ghost man' which dehumanizes the Westerners. What makes this form of Cantonese insertion even more exclusive and discriminative to Western readers (who are mainly English readers) is that the meaning of this Cantonese reference is totally absent in English lexis. The English readers can hardly understand how Hong Kong people position themselves until they check the glossary list attached to the end of the novel. Even though the writer use an English phrase 'devil folk' to somewhat echo to the Cantonese insertion 'gwailo' afterwards in the prologue, it does not completely translated the meaning construed by the

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Cantonese insertion ‘gwailo’. Hence, the writer somewhat double-dehumanize the Westerners in an exclusive way in terms of language use.

To the contrary to the offensive Cantonese nickname given to the Westerners, the writer uses the Cantonese insertion ‘yan’ which means ‘human being’ to address Hong Kong residents in the prologue meanwhile:

Here in Kowloon where *yan* lived, the tripped alarm sang to the dark.

This Cantonese insertion is ‘Hong Kong-biased’ in a way that only reader who understand the Cantonese insertion ‘yan’ can be addressed and be coined as a type of real ‘human’. Those who can comprehend this Cantonese phrase will again be Hong Kong readers mostly and non-Hong Kong readers are excluded and dehumanized in a way that they are not allowed to truly comprehend the essence of the Cantonese phrases because of the incompatibility between English and Cantonese. Geographically speaking, unlike the western district of Hong Kong island, local residents do not have a large scale beer-drinking count down celebration at New Year Eve in Kowloon in the way the Westerners do on Hong Kong island. This kind of ‘human’ (yan) activity is mostly comprehensible to Hong Kong readers because of the local convention that is not familiar or highly accessible to non-Hong Kong readers or Westerners (gwailo). Below is a table to illustrate the implication construed by the two Cantonese insertions:

Language	**Phrase**	**Implication**	**Comprehensible to**
Cantonese (insertion)	1.gwailo	Dehumanization of the westerners	Hong Kong readers
	2. yan	Acknowledgment of the human identity of Hong Kong residents	
English	devil folk	Dehumanization and demonization	Readers who can read English

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As for the Putonghua speakers, both English and Cantonese are non-native languages to them, which makes the representation of Hong Kong a distant one or incomprehensible one to them (Wong 563). Although the Cantonese colloquial can be interpreted to standard Chinese characters which are comprehensible to Putonghua speakers, the different word choice and grammatical structures will become a barrier for Putonghua readers to truly comprehend the content of the novel (Wong 565). Some examples of Hong Kong-specific Cantonese insertions are given along with the translation in English and in Putonghua at three levels below:

Lexical and Phrasal Level		Clausal Level
Reference to Objects	Reference to People	Colloquial
1) Siuyeh '宵夜' (10) In English: late night snack In Putonghua: Yèxiāo '夜宵' 2) Laisee '利士' (11) In English: lucky money In Putonghua: Yāsuìqián '壓歲錢'	1) leng leui '靚女' (199) In English: beautiful girl In Putonghua: Měinǚ '美女' 2) tohngsaimui '堂細妹' In English: younger female cousin on the father's side In Putonghua: Táng mèi 堂妹	1) *Gamaah heui wet haih mhaig?(232)* '今晚去wet, 係唔係?' In English: Have fun tonight, right? *The word 'wet' means 'have fun' instead of 'wet' in English. In Putonghua:Jīn wǎn qù wán, shì ma? '今晚去玩, 是嗎?' 2) Yumbui! '飲杯!' In English: Cheers! In Putonghua: Gānbēi '乾杯!'

The examples above illustrate the comparisons and big difference among the three languages used in the code-mixing. Such high level of linguistic miscellany creates a wall for readers to understand Hong Kong rather than really open a door for them to deeply understand the city. Contradictory to the strong sense of openness suggested by the book title, the representation of Hong Kong can only be 'unwalled' when readers can master the code-mixing that dictates the narration of the novel. English readers will find themselves excluded if they skip or misinterpret the implication of Cantonese and Putonghua insertions, Putonghua readers will also find

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themselves excluded if they perceive the Cantonese insertions from the perspective of Putonghua linguistic features and Hong Kong readers will also miss the complete representation of Hong Kong if they only stick to the perspective given by Cantonese insertion.

Comparatively speaking, this linguistic complexity is more friendly and somewhat an intra-group communication marker to Hong Kong readers who are mostly trilingual because of the British colonization and the present sovereignty of the Putonghua speaking China (Boyle 36). The code-mixing linguistic feature can be considered as an embodiment of Hong Kong-oriented communication phenomenon and citizen's qualities. Yet, it is a barrier for most non-Hong Kong readers to unfold the 'unwalled city' Hong Kong meanwhile. Non-Hong Kong readers may find the representation of Hong Kong a 'walled city' which they can hardly be accessed to at a linguistic level because of the highly miscellaneous nature of code-mixing in the novel.

To a large extent, the readers (especially non-Hong Kong ones) may have discovered the subtle but rooted prejudice and exclusion in this so-called 'unwalled' city and found it a 'walled' city in which an individual can hardly connect to it because of the unique hybridity of Hong Kong culture which does not conform to a particular side. This form of miscellany echoes to the ambivalent identity of Hong Kong people which is not defined by simply 'Hongkongese' nor simply 'Chinese' (Ma and Fung 174).

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Rejection to an Absolute Cultural Identity in the 'Walled' City

In this section and the next section, the female protagonists Lee You Fun and Gail Szeto will be examined to illustrate the cultural schizophrenia in Hong Kong and the ambivalent Hong Kong identity. Accordingly, the challenges experienced by the two female protagonist will show the contradiction and ambivalence of how Hong Kong people position themselves in terms of culture identity. Similarly, both female protagonists were born and raised in Hong Kong but receiving their education in English-speaking North America countries (America and Canada). Both of them tried hard to pursue their careers and wished to gain a sense of belong to the local community in Hong Kong. Despite the similar desire to root in the same city, their experiences illustrate Hong Kong as an unwelcoming 'walled' city rather than an 'unwalled' city in two forms of rejection - a reject to the embrace of a particular culture in You Fun's case and a rejection to the mixed-race identity in Gail's case.

To illustrate how the multidimensional characterization of these two heroines reflects the cultural ambivalence and identity dilemma, the discussion of characterization will be given on top of these three dimensions (Vidhya and Arjunan 77):

1. physical
2. social
3. psychological

The spiritual dimension will not be discussed in the following as the characterisation of the two heroines are not highlighted in the novel.

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The multidimensional characterization of Lee You Fun reflects how culturally schizophrenic Hong Kong people are upon the social and psychological dimensions in particular. Like the ethnicity of most Hong Kong citizen, You Fun is a Chinese. In terms of physical dimension of her characterisation, You Fun is a beautiful 20 something girl who worked as a model and a part-time jazz singer at the beginning of the novel. Yet, the social dimension and the psychological dimension of her characterisation illustrate how You Fun was unwelcomed among her colleagues who discouraged her passion to be a Hong Kong-oriented singer and rejected to let her discard the mixture of music with Western elements and Putonghua elements, which reveals an invisible exclusiveness that walls individuals embracing local culture from the majority in the music industry.

As for the social dimension of characterization, You Fun underwent a different education path outside Hong Kong. Despite spending her childhood in Hong Kong like most Hong Kong children did, You Fun completed her secondary education in Canada and lived with her parents there before working as a model and jazz singer in Hong Kong during her early 20s. Then, because of her passion for Cantopop (a popular Hong Kong Cantonese music genre), she was unwelcomed and discouraged by her music manager and some other local music investors at the beginning and the midway of her pursuit of Cantopop. The difficult start of her music journey unfolds her psychological struggle back to an unfulfilled and lonely chase of a butterfly in Hong Kong during her childhood:

> She had run east down one of those paths once, in pursuit of a butterfly, thinking that eventually, she'd come to an end. But the path had gone on, seemingly forever, until she was forced to give up and turn back.'

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Although You Fun was not that little girl who chased after a butterfly anymore when she was chasing her music career as an adult in Hong Kong, such a narration very much echoes to the little social support and the bitterness of social exclusion her suffers from in her music career at the beginning. The social struggle Yon Fun suffered will be highlighted below and this will explain her psychological restlessness.

Owing to the upcoming yet unforeseeable social anxiety of Hong Kong upon the 1997 handover, You Fun's Hong Kong-based music career is more than a simple career. While You Fun was strongly desiring to be a Hong Kong artist who mainly uses Cantonese (which is the mother-tongue of most Hong Kong residents) to sing and to promote the local culture, her embrace of Hong Kong culture and the identity as a Hong Kong singer is unwelcomed and somewhat denied by different key stakeholders in her career either from the West side or the Chinese side (Li 76). First of all, her music manager who comes from America did not appreciate You Fun's dedication to be a highly localized Hong Kong artist who mainly sing Cantonese songs as many other Hong Kong artists did in the 90s. She strongly suggested that You Fun should add elements of Western music genres like jazz into her Cantopop music to create a gimmick that make her music stand apart from the local artists. On the other hand, some of the Hong Kong music investors wanted You Fun to perform more Putonghua songs along with Cantopop songs so as to attract more audience from mainland China as the handover is getting closer. These unexpected requirements pushed You Fun to fulfil a series of social interests that she had never experienced before. These social dilemma in her music career leads her to a schizophrenic state according to the psychological dimension of her characterization in the novel.

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The unwelcoming attitude of both her music manager and investors had also turned You Fun into a culturally schizophrenic Hong Kong singer (Christopher 52). You Fun was somehow forced to conform to the 'neither completely Western nor Chinese' music taste in order to survive and thrive in Hong Kong music industry. When facing her Americanized music manager, You Fun had to struggle how to produce mixed-cultural music but then she had to push herself to add on Mandarin elements to her Cantopop which she really wanted to embrace deep down. Her mind was torn between the manager who wants gimmick and the investors who want to echo to the social change that will be brought in because of the handover. From such characterization upon the social and psychological dimensions, the novel illustrates an ambivalent cultural position of some Hong Kong people which conform to neither completely the West side nor the Chinese side but not even the local side. However, when an individual who wanted to fight for promoting local culture like You Fun, she suffers from social exclusion and denial in her music career. An invisible exclusion comes and not only walls her from the majority but also some non-Hong Kong readers off from completely comprehending how Hong Kong people position themselves in culture.

Such culturally schizophrenic state can also be found through the social and psychological characterization in a Hong Kong wedding setting. Her psychological struggle is depicted as follows according to the characterisation given in the novel:

> Unfurled before them was a swath of red paper for guests to sign and write their good wishes. Ballpoint pens and Chinese brushes were both available. Andanna selected a brush, held it up a moment, and put it down again. Being out of practice-she seldom wrote Chinese anymore-she'd make a silly mistake for sure. It would look too shameful. Picking up a pen, she scribbled a message in English for the newlyweds.

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What made this table a cultural schizophrenic corner for You Fun was that both a traditional Chinese calligraphy brush and a Western ballpoint pen were provided for comers to write the blessings. With both a Westernized education background in Canada and some Chinese calligraphy training in her childhood, You Fun (also known as Andanna) hesitated for quite a while to pick up the 'best' tool to leave a greeting for the new couple in this significant cultural setting (Davis and Friedman 34). Such a struggle goes beyond a simple choice of stationery but the sense of belonging to a certain culture of the character. First of all, the brush is a traditional Chinese calligraphy tool for people to write and especially a tool to present earnest greetings in culturally significant occasions like the Lunar New Year and wedding (Yim 2015). Raised up by a pair of Hong Kong Chinese parents and equipped with some training Chinese calligraphy, You Fun understood and appreciated the implication of using a brush to write a blessing for the new couples but still she had little confidence to perform this significant cultural practice decently meanwhile. Her hesitation in this setting not only projects her little confidence on conforming to an absolute cultural practice but also points to an underlying rejection or fear of being an absolute Chinese nor a completely Westernized Hong Kong citizen. This kind of culturally schizophrenic state of the characterisation through social interaction and psychological dimension may again wall some non-Hong Kong readers off from unfolding an absolute cultural identity of Hong Kong people who reject to define themselves by purely 'Hongkongese' nor purely 'Chinese' again.

Jaahjung **and the 'Walled' City**

While the characterization from social and psychological dimensions of You Fun illustrates how her Hong Kong counterparts reject to subject to a Hong Kong music genre and a particular

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cultural identity in music industry, the multidimensional characterization of Gail Szeto illustrates the identity dilemma and cultural ambivalence of Hong Kong at an ethnicity level. Unlike most characters presented in Hong Kong literature, the ethnicity of Gail Szeto is not a complete Chinese but a Eurasian women who was abandoned by an American father and raised up by her Hong Kong Chinese mum in Hong Kong. The physical dimension of Gail's characterization suggests that she has appealing and a sort of non-Chinese complexion:

> High cheekbones; a nose like Princes Di (Princess Dianna); the shape of Chinese eyes with Western contours; coal-black hair cut short…In profile, she might have passed for Caucasian if her hair were just a shade lighter.

The physical beauty of Gail' characterisation is very different from the type of typical beauty owned owned by You Fun – not a pure Chinese. Although Gail is born with a beautiful face, her unique type of beauty brings her curses rather than blessings to her life in Hong Kong where ethnic minority (or non-Chinese) are not considered as Others while Hong Kong seems to be an open and inclusive international city (Christopher 57). Her suffers can be found through the social and psychological dimensions of her characterisation below.

From the social dimension of her characterisation, Gail is a victim of her discriminative Hong Kong colleagues. Although Gail was an executive working in a Hong Kong international bank and had been living for most of her lifetime (except the university days) in Hong Kong like most of the local residents do, her mixed ethnicity background made her a victim of ethnocentrism and social exclusion by some Hong Kong people. The social exclusion Gail had been through can be taken as a discrimination to her in Hong Kong which is overly family-oriented and blindly worship the 'purebred' Chinese population according to the novel –whoever cannot be defined by

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the conventional family structure and ethnically Chinese standard will become a second class individual Others as ‘jaahjung’:

> Miscellaneous, assorted species. Jaahjung. Not like anyone else, never belonging inside the species, at least, not the species as defined by the respectable, family-obsessed Hong Kong yan, the “real Chinese” the only “humans” who counted.

The above narration highlights the negative label that both Gail and other Hong Kong people put onto herself because of her incomplete Chinese descent – ‘jaahjung’ is a humiliating Cantonese label to discriminate people of mixed-race background as non-purebred animals (Li 77).

Despite the high level of co-existence of multiple culture in Hong Kong both inside the novel and in the real life setting in Hong Kong, residents of biracial background are excluded and devalued from Cantonese-speaking Chinese who are the dominating ethnic group in Hong Kong, the gossip of her colleagues can best illustrates the underlying dehumanization and social exclusion in the mind of Hong Kong Chinese:

> “That Szeto bitch makes me want to throw up.”
>
> “Yeah, I know what you mean.”
>
> “It’s that ‘A-merican’ experience of hers. She’s not Chinese anymore. Thinks she’s ‘better’ than us.”

From the discriminative conversation above, the writer Xu Xi used a telling approach to form the characterization of Gail through a social dimension. In terms of the social interaction of Gail’s characterization, this example projects how some Hong Kong people unjustly labelled Gail as an arrogant Americanized outsider because of her Eurasian ethnicity background inherited from her American father who abandoned her and her mum in her childhood.

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The conversation also unfolds how contradictory Hong Kong people see the identity of themselves. While the music manager and music investors in You Fun's career wanted her to mingle the Cantopop with both Western and Chinese (Putonghua) elements, the Hong Kong colleagues around Gail despised the mixed-cultural background of Gail. To the contrary to the rejection of conforming to culture identity and position of 'neither Western nor Chinese' in You Fun's characterisation through the social dimension, Gail's Hong Kong colleagues mentally segregate Hong Kong people (like Gail) into a lower class because of the impurity of her ethnicity.

Such social exclusion also paves way to the characterisation of Gail through a psychological dimension that echoes to the ethnocentric Cantonese label 'jaahjung'. She suffered a deep self-denial of her Hong Kong identity because of that discriminative conversation made by her Hong Kong colleagues. Here the writer's narration that reflects Gail's self-denial:

> Did they still see her as one of 'them' not 'us'?

The 'they' refers to those Hong Kong colleagues who called Gail 'bitch', 'her' refers to 'Gail', 'them' refers to those arrogant American counterparts and 'us' refers to the common identity which Gail and her Hong Kong colleagues should have shared – Hong Kong people as a whole.

What Gail experienced in her workplace is a contrary to the experience of You Fun. Gail is excluded because of her impure ethnicity background while You Fun is unwelcomed because of non-mixed music genre. Hence, whether Hong Kong people would like to construct their identity by following a single cultural basis or a multiple cultural basis remains a question til the end of the novel. This form of ambivalence caused by contradictory and hostile attitude towards different

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cultural preference of individuals challenge the openness implied by the novel title *The Unwalled City* once again.

Hence, in *The Unwalled City*, Hong Kong people define their identity and position themselves in an ambivalent way that raises beyond 'neither Western nor Chinese' and 'neither simply Hongkongese nor simply Chinese'. A variety of definition of Hong Kong people identities are unfolded to readers through the characterisation of You Fun and Gail. Such an unique ambivalence of cultural position and identity may once again wall some non-Hong Kong readers or even Hong Kong readers off from the representation of a real Hong Kong that can hardly be defined by a single cultural or identity after all. In addition, the open and inclusive image Hong Kong has been reshaped through the multidimensional characterisation of the two female protagonists in terms of physical, social and psychological dimensions.

Conclusion

The Unwalled City has provided readers another perspective to consider the 'unwalled' quality of Hong Kong and the identity dilemma of Hong Kong people through unconventional code-mixing and characterization. While the representation of Hong Kong is manipulated by a particular cultural perspective governed by standard written Chinese in most Hong Kong literature, *The Unwalled City* reshapes the representation of Hong Kong by mixing three languages (English, Cantonese and Putonghua) used frequently among Hong Kong people in real life to vividly mimic the cultural schizophrenic state of Hong Kong in which its citizen have to switch their cultural

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preference from time to time and how ethnic minority is alienated to not only Hong Kong readers but also non-Hong Kong readers.

Instead of echoing to the highly accessibility implied by the book title *The Unwalled City*, the cultural struggle both You Fun and Gail experienced projects a 'walled' Hong Kong at different levels. The cultural ambivalence which leads to the social and psychological struggles of You Fun in her characterisation unfolds how Hong Kong people reject to embrace local culture only because of their identity. To the contrary, the plight of Gail through the physical, social and psychological dimensions of her characterisation illustrates the underlying ethnocentrism of the most dominating ethnic group (Chinese) in Hong Kong and how narrow-minded Hong Kong Chinese are when they address the identity issue of local residents.

The ambivalent attitude towards identity, culture and ethnicity rewrite the implication of the 'unwalled' quality suggested by the novel title to a large extent. A reflection of a 'walled city' where cultural and identity miscellany collide has been found in *The Unwalled City.*

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