Chapter 12

Who’s the Egg? Who’s the Wall?

Appropriating Haruki Murakami’s “Always on the Side of the Egg” Speech in Hong Kong

Michael Tsang

At first sight, Haruki Murakami may escape the usual definition of a political thinker and may have little to do with politics or “being political.” It is the intention of this chapter to dispute this impression and argue that Murakami has produced political thoughts, loosely defined, and that these thoughts have made an impact in other contexts beyond Japan. Specifically, I will study how Murakami’s “wall-versus-egg” metaphor has been appropriated by the ongoing pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. From this study, I argue that when a political thought extends its influence beyond its original context, it will not be able to address all the intricacies of the new context adequately and must be adapted creatively in its new life.

In conducting the following analysis, Bakhtin’s ideas regarding the terms “dialogism” and “appropriation” have served as useful guidance. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin (1992: 294) writes that language is always “overpopulated” with the intentions of others, and in order to make it one’s own, the speaker must “populate it with his own intentions, his own accent . . . adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention.” In other words, the term “appropriation” in this chapter refers to the act of reinterpreting a word, a concept, or a metaphor to serve not the original author’s intentions, but the appropriator’s. In the meantime, different individuals’ appropriations of the metaphor would constitute a cacophony of different voices and interpretations, which may sometimes agree with, criticize, or respond to each other. Such responses in turn create new interpretations of the original word or metaphor.

In International Relations (IR), Bakhtin has only received emerging attention since the 1990s. Because Bakhtin’s main tenet is that words and texts
“carry on a dialogue with one another across time and space” (Neumann 1998: 14), this allows IR scholars to examine how dialogues “interact with other practices, and how they are suffused with power relations” when concepts are appropriated into other social contexts (Neumann 2003: 140). As Xavier Guillaume (2010: 102) concludes, the political then should be understood as a realm where such dialogues, challenging and conflicting with each other, form a “constellation of power relations.” The works of Neumann and Guillaume indicate an important theoretical direction for this chapter, allowing me to explore how we may see Murakami as a political writer, and to study how new meanings of his wall-versus-egg metaphor are created through dialogue between the many-voiced nature of Hong Kong’s protest movements.

THE WALL VERSUS THE EGG

Murakami, one of the most popular novelists worldwide and one of the top one hundred global thinkers listed by Foreign Policy in 2012, enjoys great fame globally, with East Asia being the most receptive to his works (Hillenbrand 2009: 718). His recent books have received wide acclaim upon publication, are translated quickly into other languages, and have sparked the publication of “study guides” in Japan that explain how to read his novels—a unique phenomenon unparalleled by other Japanese novelists.

Murakami’s novels have long been commended for their depiction of a postmodern humanity, characterized by a vague mood of alienation from society and a severing of communicative bonds between characters. His novels rarely depict actual political events in Japan—an anomaly that, according to Auke Hulst’s (2011) article in New Statesman, reflects Murakami’s “ambivalence towards student radicalism” of the left-wing student movements in the 1960s. However, for many Japanese readers his works are highly connected to Japanese society and actual political incidents in postwar Japan. This is the stance taken up by the Japanese critic Kazuo Kuroko (2007: 2), who criticized some Slovakian fans of Murakami for “overlook[ing] the relationship between the reality of Japanese society and Murakami’s literature.” Hulst (2011) also interviewed Murakami’s Japanese fans, who fell for the Murakami spell as a way to escape the stifling “social and professional expectations” of Japanese society. One fan claims that “‘Murakami’s work has to be understood in the context of the student movement’ and the ensuing dissipation of and ‘ambivalence towards student radicalism.’”

Here, then, are two different but interrelated definitions of political. The first is Politics with a capital “P,” which refers to organized political
movements, protests, political structure, and institutions. Yet, there is also politics with a small “p,” which registers the affective impact of social structures, cultural values, and political ideologies on the individual. As such, to be political is to interrogate and problematize how our society is organized and how human relationships are constructed. This aspect of “political” seems to be captured by Murakami’s Hong Kong readers, as studies on his fandom show that these readers connect the experience of reading Murakami with their own reflections on individuality in a modern, advanced, capitalist society (see Tam 2014). This is an important prerequisite for the appropriation of Murakami’s political thought in Hong Kong—as will be shown in the rest of the chapter—meaning that Murakami is not purely read for his trademark postmodern mood, but also for his influence on Hongkongers’ perceptions of their sociopolitical surrounding.

In fact, both Politics and politics feature constantly in Murakami’s works; they may not take center stage, but they do hum in the background. The 1960s student movements receive numerous acknowledgment in many Murakami novels, such as *Hear the Wind Sing* (2016); *Norwegian Wood* (2001); *South of the Border, West of the Sun* (2000); the *IQ84* trilogy (2012); and *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2015a). Since the Great Hanshin earthquake in Kobe in 1995, Murakami has displayed a more socially engaged tone in his work: memories of World War II appear in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1999), while the dark side of Tokyo’s nightlife is explored in *After Dark* (2008). Then there is also *Underground* (2003a), the reportage journalism he wrote on the Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack, and *After the Quake* (2003b), a short story collection in response to the Hanshin earthquake. Finally, one should not miss Murakami’s increasing outspokenness on sociopolitical issues that have taken place in recent years, as seen in his acceptance speech at the twenty-third Catalonia International Prize in 2011, where he makes his antinuclear stance explicit following the Fukushima nuclear incidents (Murakami 2011), or his acceptance speech at the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award ceremony, where he warns against ignoring a society’s dark side (Flood 2016). These examples suggest that there is reason to identify a much stronger social and political engagement in Murakami’s recent works and thinking.

To the international audience, the turning point of such political engagement from Murakami may be his acceptance speech in 2009 for the Jerusalem Prize on the Freedom of the Individual in Society. Considering the public protest against his acceptance of this prize—a prize about individual freedom but awarded by a country that also oppresses Palestinians—Murakami (2009) responds in his acceptance speech by sharing the now-famous “wall-versus-egg” metaphor, which he claims is his philosophy of novel-writing:
Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg.

Yes, no matter how right the wall may be and how wrong the egg, I will stand with the egg. . . .

What is the meaning of this metaphor? In some cases, it is all too simple and clear. Bombers and tanks and rockets and white phosphorus shells are that high, solid wall. The eggs are the unarmed civilians who are crushed and burned and shot by them.

This is not all, though. . . . Each of us is, more or less, an egg. Each of us is a unique, irreplaceable soul enclosed in a fragile shell. This is true of me, and it is true of each of you. And each of us, to a greater or lesser degree, is confronting a high, solid wall. The wall has a name: it is “the System.” The System is supposed to protect us, but sometimes it takes on a life of its own, and then it begins to kill us and cause us to kill others—coldly, efficiently, systematically.

In a more recent acceptance speech for the 2014 Die Welt literary prize, Murakami elaborates that there are many kinds of walls in the world, such as “a wall of ethnicity, of religion, a wall of intolerance, of fundamentalism, a wall of greed, a wall of fear.” Ultimately, he says,

For me, walls are a symbol of that which separates people, that which separates one set of values from another. . . . A wall eventually becomes a fixed system, one that rejects the logic of any other system. Sometimes violently. And the Berlin Wall was certainly a striking example of that. (Murakami 2014)

From these words we can deduce a few attributes about the wall and the egg. They are binary opposites, with characteristics that are completely different and impossible to reconcile. If the wall is high and solid and evokes a sense of strength, totality, and exclusivity, then the egg is fragile, individual, and weak. Moreover, the egg is seen to be pitted against the system, so that while the wall aggressively kills us, the human soul, shelled in an egg, must confront the wall or the system.

While Murakami has previously shown political engagement in his novels, it is the genre of acceptance speech that has helped propagate his political thoughts worldwide. Acceptance speeches are short, but they are newsworthy. The use of one simple metaphor to address the broader dynamic of human conflicts—against the background of the Jerusalem Prize controversy and Israel-Palestinian politics—becomes an iconic formula for Murakami’s ensuing acceptance speeches, where he uses the bite-size nature of speeches to make a clear stance on sociopolitical issues such as the Fukushima nuclear incident. These being speeches at international awards, his ideas then get picked up by international media, easily reaching both his fans and non-fans outside Japan. When considering the impact of Murakami’s
political thoughts, then, this caveat about the genre of acceptance speeches must be noted.

The wall-versus-egg metaphor is the political thought to be examined in this chapter. Because it is not contextualized in any national or cultural context, the metaphor has become a rather famous trope for civil resistance, dissent, disobedience, and social activist movements against governments that are deemed establishmentarian and oppressive. It is no wonder why the metaphor gained currency during the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. The movement began in September 2014 as a series of demonstrations and school boycotts against China’s decision on August 31 to deny Hong Kong residents universal suffrage for the 2016 Legislative Council and 2017 Chief Executive Elections. On September 28, 2014, the demonstrations escalated into an occupation of key business districts for seventy-nine days until mid-December. Such a sustained and lengthened movement for a political cause was unprecedented in Hong Kong’s history.

It is not difficult to see why the wall-versus-egg metaphor became popular among protesters in the Umbrella Movement. Obviously, the protesters identified themselves with the egg, and Hong Kong and Chinese governments as the high wall. But the metaphor also became popular after Murakami voiced his support for the Umbrella Movement on two occasions. The first was his acceptance speech for the Die Welt Literary Prize in November 2014, in which he specifically mentioned and encouraged “the young people of Hong Kong, who are struggling against their wall at this moment” (Murakami 2014). The next was in March 2015 when a girl from Hong Kong called Miffy wrote a letter to Murakami’s agony-uncle column expressing how disappointed she felt that nothing had changed after the Umbrella Movement. In his reply, Murakami (2015b) expressed that the protesters’ efforts would not go to waste even if nothing changes: “But I think what you lot have done for [the] democratization of Hong Kong] will definitely not be wasted. While at first sight one may see that nothing has changed, surely something has changed under your soles.” Both gestures testify Murakami’s endorsement and more importantly his effort to spread awareness of the movement to his fans and readers internationally (through the acceptance speech given in English at an international literary award) and domestically (through his reply penned in Japanese for a project mainly directed at his Japanese readers).

The wall-versus-egg metaphor continues to enjoy huge popularity even after the Umbrella Movement formally concluded in December 2014. For one, the metaphor is relevant because the struggle continues. It now becomes a default trope for any sort of opposition between the pro-democratic people and the establishment. An example is presented in Figures 12.1 and 12.2 (Goethe Institut 2016). These examples are taken from a promotional flyer for a German film festival in Hong Kong in 2016, sponsored by the Goethe Institut.
While the English name of the film festival is not related to Murakami, the Chinese title (Figure 12.1) reads: “There is no high wall that won’t fall”—a direct reference to the metaphor. This is combined with a still from the 2012 film *Hannah Arendt*. On the overleaf (Figure 12.2), the English version includes Murakami’s original quote from the 2009 acceptance speech, followed by a description of the theme of the festival.

This flyer demonstrates the malleability and continuing impact of Murakami’s wall-versus-egg metaphor on Hong Kong. The metaphor began as a literary metaphor that conceptualizes the organization of human society (i.e., politics), but has been spread, exported, and drawn upon as inspiration for actual political action in another context (i.e., politics).

However, the flyer is also symptomatic of the many ways the metaphor gets appropriated in the movement—and sometimes not only by pro-democracy protesters, but by the pro-establishment camp as well. There is a need, then,

![Figure 12.1 German Film Forum Hong Kong (2016). Source: Goethe Institut Hong Kong. Reprinted with permission.](image-url)
to analyze these appropriations in depth. Before I do this, in the following section I will first provide an overview of Hong Kong’s political development since the Umbrella Movement.

HONG KONG SINCE THE UMBRELLA MOVEMENT

Rather than viewing the Umbrella Movement as a radical break in Hong Kong’s democratic activism, it is more accurate to regard it as the culmination of a long period of social movements and protests. Since the march on July 1, 2003, in which five hundred thousand people protested the introduction of anti-treason laws, peaceful demonstrations have been a common scene in Hong Kong, leading to the moniker “City of Protest” as termed by some (Garrett 2014). Before the Umbrella Movement, people had already started to reflect on the efficacy of peaceful demonstration. A brand of radical localism, propagated by the highly controversial scholar Horace Wan Chin, have been criticizing social activism in Hong Kong as being complacent in a repetitive, moderate mode of demonstrations and marches that failed to gain substantial achievements. These radical localists assert that Hong Kong should prioritize the development of its own democracy before China’s, and should uphold its autonomy even if it means remaining segregated from China. To achieve this autonomy, they argue that Hong Kong should not excessively open its border to Chinese tourists and consumers, as well as to new immigrants from China who settled in Hong Kong through a daily quota of 150 one-way permits. Many believe that Hong Kong has enough bargaining power to negotiate a less one-sided reliance on China and should prioritize permanent Hong Kong residents in government welfare policies. Above all, in the face of China’s increasing pressure of assimilation, more people were intent on using force.

Figure 12.2 A Man Can Make A Difference. Source: Goethe Institut Hong Kong. Reprinted with permission.
and other tactics to fight back police suppression or any kind of perceived injustice.

Overall, radical localism has enjoyed even more popularity, especially among the younger generation, after the Umbrella Movement. Therefore, it may be accurate to consider the Umbrella Movement as a watershed moment which exacerbated many of the conflicts and contradictions that had already existed in Hong Kong society, and after which social movements have shown clearer signs of radicalization (Ma 2015; Kaelding 2017). The following three events are relevant to the rest of the chapter.

a. Protests against Parallel Trading: Residents in the northern part of Hong Kong (where it is closest to mainland China) have suffered from the overwhelming practice of parallel trading, that is, mainland visitors traveled to these northern districts many times a day to buy daily necessities at local pharmacies and bring them back to mainland China, either because some of the products were unavailable in China, or because the products in Hong Kong might not be manufactured in China but imported from elsewhere (such as baby formula), or because those products are more expensive in China due to customs tax and levy. Protests of parallel trading have continued intermittently since 2012. In March 2015, protesters kicked at some mainland visitors’ luggage, leading to vehement debate between moderate critics and the radical activists, where the former did not approve of such assaults on innocent visitors.

b. The Incident of Youhuai Xiao (Huai-zai): In May 2015, twelve-year-old Xiao Youhuai (also known by his pet name Huai-zai), born and orphaned in China, was discovered to have been living illegally in Hong Kong for nine years. After being reported by the media, he was issued documents for temporary residence in Hong Kong, but the media also discovered that his tragic background was fabricated. Netizens also found a YouTube clip showing Huai-zai using profanities and hitting a child in a housing estate. In the clip, the child could be heard saying that he could gather one hundred gangsters with a phone call, to which Huai-zai retorted that he knew one thousand gangsters. Public opinion was divided between those who believed that Huai-zai should be allowed to live in Hong Kong based on humanitarian grounds, and those who believed that granting residence to illegal immigrants would become a bad precedence.

c. The Fishball Revolution: The momentum of radicalization eventually culminated into another major event, the so-called Fishball Revolution in early 2016. The direct trigger of the Fishball Revolution was a crackdown made on February 8, 2016, the first night of Lunar New Year, by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department on unlicensed street food hawkers. Supporters flocked to defend the hawker stalls, and through the night
protesters resorted to throwing bricks dislodged from roadside pavements, causing one policeman to fire two warning gunshots into the sky to regain control, the first time in many years.

With these recent developments in mind and without intending to reduce and flatten the many stances on Hong Kong politics, this chapter focuses on critics, intellectuals, and bloggers, who in one way or another occupy one of the three major standpoints in the aftermath of the Umbrella Movement: pro-establishment (i.e., anti-Umbrella Movement), moderate pro-democracy, and radical pro-democracy. Individuals in all three positions have engaged with the wall-versus-egg metaphor in their writing—discussing, critiquing, and appropriating it for their own purposes. I argue that while the metaphor has found resonance in the protest scene in Hong Kong, the ways in which Murakami’s political thought gets appropriated have stretched the malleability of the metaphor to tailor the conflicts and contradictions surrounding the movement.

**EGG AS FOOD OR AS LIFE?**

Here I identify four types of appropriation patterns. In the following two sections I begin with positive appropriations, where positive, forward-driving meanings are derived to help the prodemocracy movement. Afterward, I will move on to negative appropriations—appropriations that are based on misconstrued interpretations of Murakami’s metaphor.

The first type of positive appropriation is to imagine the outcome of the egg. An egg either becomes a chicken or food for humans. This bifurcated outcome is imagined as the fate of the prodemocracy movement as a whole. On September 22, 2014, that is, even before the actual occupy movement on September 28, the Hong Kong political commentator Ivan Chi-keung Choy (2014) wrote the following in the local newspaper *Apple Daily*: “Historically, no ‘iron gate’ would not rust, but the life brought about by the eggs will grow in endless succession.” Here, the process of a chicken hatching from an egg represents the long-term hope for the ultimate but ever imminent success of Hong Kong’s fight for democracy. Note also how Choy evokes a different but similarly sturdy metaphor of the iron gate in place of the wall.

Choy wrote this article just prior to the Umbrella Movement, at a time when the schisms between the moderates and the radical localists had already existed but were not as profound. Choy, overall, seems to sympathize with the moderates, and perhaps he could not have predicted the eventual radicalization in recent years. Interestingly, the same imagining of the egg as life is taken on with a different spin by a localist. After the Fishball Revolution, the
blogger Jiksiting (alias) published a blog post titled *On the Battle of Fishball*, elaborating on the future of the egg once the shell is broken, as a way to defend radical protest methods:

To fight is our only way out, because they were the ones who started the war, not the localists, not those who call for Hong Kong’s independence. . . . The saying often goes, “the government is the wall and the people are the eggs,” but as far as the egg is concerned, it becomes food when broken from without, but it is life when broken from within. The more chaotic Hong Kong becomes, the more I would want to stretch my limbs like an egg, and live on with a proud head held high. (Jiksiting 2016)

Jiksiting ascribes to the egg some additional attributes absent in Murakami’s original formulation. The egg for Murakami is an ontological metaphor for humans because of its fragility. For Jiksiting, however, the egg is not ontological, but an intermediary form of being. A positive or negative future awaits when the eggshell is broken, depending on whether it is from within or without. Combined with Jiksiting’s choice of words—to fight and the war—this binary outcome of the egg is mapped onto the two blueprints for the future of Hong Kong: either to stick to the more moderate form of protest but become somebody’s food eventually, or to take up a more radical manner of protest and proactively create one’s future.

**AN EGG, AND SO MUCH MORE**

Both Choy and Jiksiting work within Murakami’s original terminology, that is, the wall and the egg. They merely suggest a future *life* for the egg but do not imagine a specific form into which the egg will eventually evolve. In contrast, scholar and journalist Joseph Lian (2016) writes after the Fishball Revolution that:

Recently, certain critics have lamented that the “eggs” have become “bricks” in the Fishball Revolution, a move which might result in losing the people’s support and sympathy to those who fight against the wall. This metaphor may seem to be very pertinent; however, while it is admirable to sympathize with the eggs no matter the conditions, a more important question awaits: should the “eggs” be forever willing to be “eggs,” out of a satisfaction with the natural sympathy they gain from the others? The answer is obviously no, but such a danger indeed exists. Looking forward, the “eggs” must make themselves tougher, so that defeat is not the only awaiting fate when clashing with the wall. Now, whether they are to become “bricks,” or “wood blocks” (on the soft side), or even “rocks” (on the hard side), is something to be discussed among social activists widely.
What Lian is doing here constitutes the second pattern of appropriation, namely, that critics invent new but related metaphors that both allude to Murakami’s original ones and address the ongoing development of the pro-democracy movement. Lian seems to be more sympathetic to radical ideas and affirms the importance of the egg’s transformation into something “tougher.” In this vein, Lian valorizes the act of brick-throwing and posits it as one possible stage of evolution for the egg. In the meantime, he stresses the importance of dialogue and discussion, leaving an open question as to whether it is best for the egg to transform into something as hard as a brick.

However, as I have noted, moderate critics tended to condemn the violent tactics used by radical protesters in the anti-parallel-trading protests. In a similar fashion to Lian but for different purposes, some moderate critics have also invented new terms based on Murakami’s metaphor to criticize radical activism. Consider, for instance, this quote from an opinion editorial by Tak Shing Lee (2015), a computer studies professor:

But when a chicken egg is in conflict with a duck egg, where should we stand? In the incident of the parallel traders, the high wall is the Hong Kong Government, and chicken egg refers to the [radical] protesters against parallel trading. Therefore, if the chicken eggs are confronting the high wall, we would support the chicken eggs no matter how wrong they are. However, now we have a situation where the chicken eggs do not confront the high wall, but confront the duck eggs instead. The duck eggs refer to mainland visitors under the Individual Visit Scheme and parallel traders and the shop they frequent.

Lee sets up a creative duel between the duck egg and the chicken egg to dramatize the feud between the radical protesters and mainland visitors. For Lee, mainland visitors are also eggs—only different kinds of eggs; hence, these different egg types should not fight against each other, but should rather confront the wall collectively. In other words, mainland visitors are innocent individuals and should not be the target of radical protest tactics. However, while Lee emphasizes the commonality between the eggs, he still designates mainland visitors as different kinds of eggs. This raises several further questions: What is the “wall” that the duck eggs (mainland visitors) are fighting against, and is this wall the same as the one that the chicken eggs (Hong Kong prodemocracy protesters) are fighting against (i.e., the delayed democratic prospect by the Chinese regime)? For if they are both fighting against the same wall, does not the very distinction between chickens and ducks exacerbate or deepen the distinction and segregation between Hong Kong and China? Lee’s creation of a separate category of the duck egg here requires clarification, lest it is interpreted as an act that already reifies the radical belief of segregation.
The new terms discussed in this section are creative adaptations of Murakami’s original metaphor that are used to respond to a topical debate in 2015. However, this—together with the fact that further clarification is often required (as in the example of the duck egg)—reflects how Murakami’s simple metaphor cannot entirely correspond to the complexities of a Political movement. The limits of this political thought will be further explored in the sections below.

WHO’S THE WALL?

I now turn to negative appropriations and study two types of misconstrued interpretations of the metaphor. The first type consists of textual misreadings, which refer to the ways critics or commentators make blatant factual errors in their understanding of Murakami’s wall metaphor. While Murakami makes it clear that each human is an egg and the wall refers to a symbolic system that alienates people from one another, this is not always correctly captured when critics adopt the metaphor for their own purposes.

The first example comes from the pro-establishment side, who were not supportive of the Umbrella Movement due to, among other reasons, the lawbreaking nature of the occupation and the detrimental effects it brings to Hong Kong. In his opinion essay *The Wall, The Egg, Education, Anti-education*, Hon-kuen Ho (2014), vice chairman of the pro-establishment teachers’ union Education Convergence, challenges Murakami’s egg versus wall metaphor and questions whether it is reasonable to see the protesters as fragile eggs:

> When the heads of government departments condescended to engage in a serious discussion with the student [protesters], only to be shouted at and reprimanded by “the eggs” relentlessly—how does such a weak government deserve to be determined by Mr. Murakami as ‘the wall’? . . . If the wall commits a crime, no plea bargain is allowed. But should the eggs be tolerated for whatever unruly things they want to do?

In the first statement, Ho insinuates that the weak government officials do not deserve to be labeled as the wall, because there is a reversal of power relation, where the student protesters’ unprincipled and disrespectful actions put them in a more powerful position. Notice also how he uses the word “condescend,” as if to say that government officials were doing a huge service to listen to the demands of the people. In the second statement, he sees the wall as individuals that could possibly commit a crime—and therefore should be treated fairly by law.
However, Ho’s association of the wall with people in powerful positions in the political establishment is a misattribution. Contrary to what Ho writes, Murakami never had the leisure to designate specifically Hong Kong government officials as the high wall. The wall is a metaphysical and ontological metaphor, referring to a system of thoughts rather than to individuals, and is therefore not capable of breaking the rule of law insofar as the law is part of that system.

This textual misreading reveals the modus operandi of Ho’s logic. He sets up a strawman by mistaking the wall as individuals—who are just cogwheels in a gigantic system—and attempts to nullify the connection between protestors and eggs simply because of the protestors’ aggressiveness. But Ho also avoids touching on the core issue that triggered the Umbrella Movement in the first place; that is, Beijing’s decision to deny universal suffrage in Hong Kong. The government officials are not the real problem; the problem is that China has repeatedly denied electoral democracy to Hong Kong. Unlike Murakami, who champions the egg’s confrontation of the wall, Ho steers attention away from the real target of the eggs, and leaves the real wall intact.

Unfortunately, the pro-democracy side is not immune from such misreading on a textual level. After the Incident of Youhuai Xiao, a China-born, Hong Kong-based internet blogger called Niu Chen (2015) comments in his blog post titled “Madness under a Grand Era” that:

In front of a person protected by one hundred gangsters, even if Huai-zai is a little fat, he is only a plumper egg at most. A high wall formed by one hundred gangsters versus a slightly fat egg—which side do you stand on, Hongkongers? Don’t you always like to quote Murakami Haruki’s famous line? . . . Now, the egg resists the high wall, throws a few swear words at it, shoves it a few times—isn’t it a continuation of the spirit of the Umbrella Revolution? But if he is treated like a bully, an enemy, that is because there is only one reason for it: He is not a Hongkonger; he is not one of us.

Like Ho, Chen makes the mistake of misattributing the wall to the one hundred “gangsters.” This is on top of the fact that these gangsters might not have existed, since all we know from the video clip is that the bullied child claimed to have known them. After all, the two children’s argument contains many tall claims, and both sides—not only the bullied child, contrary to what Chen insinuates here—have claimed that they knew gangsters. Simply by virtue of these imaginary gangsters, Chen even sees the bullied child as the wall when he says “the egg [i.e., Huai-zai] shoves the wall [i.e., the bullied child] a few times.”

In the meantime, Chen’s accusatory tone (“which side do you stand on, Hongkongers?”) elevates the matter to the level of the China-Hong Kong
conflicts: because the clip was discovered amid Huai-zai’s visa controversy, Chen believes that Hong Kong people unfairly directed their dissatisfaction with mainland Chinese immigrants at Huai-zai. What this blog post aims to criticize, then, is the internet bullying directed at Huai-zai by Hong Kong netizens, and represents a more moderate position in the prodemocracy spectrum. However, to dramatize this position, Chen has mistaken an individual as the wall, contrary to the literal meaning of Murakami’s original words.

The final example in this section comes from the pro-democracy commentator and game-design entrepreneur Lap Cheng. In an online column published on Taiwan’s United Daily News in 2015, Cheng notes that Hong Kong’s social activists frequently mention Murakami’s wall-versus-egg metaphor. He goes on to elaborate that:

The egg and the wall are but metaphors. The egg refers to the underprivileged in society who are unorganized, fragile, poor, and easily broken. The wall refers to the privileged class, those who are highly organized, rich, well connected and have lots of alternative plans and fixed interests. (Cheng 2015)

Once again, we see Cheng interpreting the high wall as *people*—the privileged class with access to financial and symbolic capital. He does so because later he goes on to ask this philosophical question:

This is because, there is a question within Murakami’s quote that has no answer. Where do you stand between an egg and an egg? And what if a layer of egg is lined up on the side of the high wall? (Cheng 2015)

He then illustrates how capitalists (i.e., the wall in his interpretation), use mortgage as a way to create conflicts among the poor (the eggs), so that some eggs want the property price to drop while others with a mortgage to pay want it to go up.

This philosophical exploration on the limit of Murakami’s metaphor carries a distinctly Hong Kong bent. While mortgage problems exist in all big cities, Hong Kong is particularly (in)famous for having the most expensive properties in the world, a result of the scarcity of flatland and the recent influx of mainland Chinese speculators. “Coffin” homes or “shoebox” apartments, still sold at exorbitant prices, have made international headlines (e.g., Haas 2017; Stacke and Lam 2017). In this regard, Cheng may have (mis)interpreted the metaphor and launched his interesting philosophical discussion to raise awareness of a plaguing social problem in Hong Kong. However, this does not alter the fact that his was a misinterpretation. In fact, his arguments would still have been valid had he realized that the real wall was not the privileged class, but free-reign capitalism *as a system*, which ultimately made the rich exploit the poor for endless profit-making.
In all three examples, the person who appropriates the metaphor missed the fact that Murakami is careful not to refer to the wall as humans, but as systems of thoughts. Instead, they all operate on the simple logic that the wall equals people in power. But the definitions of power are different, so that when some individuals are perceived as carrying more power—such as students who shout louder, netizens who write fiercely against Huai-zai, or the richest echelon in society—they are categorically classed as the wall. The fact that people’s interpretations of the high wall can be so different and depart so much from Murakami’s original designation, shows that, like Bakhtin states, appropriations are always conducted to suit the needs of the new context, rather than the original intention.

ON TO ONTOLOGY

The previous section notes how critics and bloggers misread the wall metaphor on a textual level to criticize or discredit those not on their respective sides. In this final section, I turn to a more ontological/philosophical discussion on Murakami’s metaphor. Such discussion draws attention to Murakami’s philosophy of novel-writing as a whole, rather than on the categories of the wall or the eggs alone.

To let the examples speak for themselves, blogger Robin Wilde (alias) comes to the defense of the radical protesters after the antiparallel trading demonstrations:

> Intellectuals like Lo Fung often mention the famous quote, “always on the side of the egg.” . . . However, do Hong Kong’s public intellectuals really stand on the side of the egg no matter how wrong the egg is? Even if protesters show inappropriate behavior in their anti-mainlander demonstrations, their voices still deserve to be heard by everyone. . . . We should stand on the side of the oppressed, the side of those who have been deprived of living space, the side of those bullied by the nouveau riche; in other words, us Hongkongers. (Wilde 2014, emphasis mine)

Clearly sympathetic to the radical localists, Wilde’s words stand out because he reminds us of Murakami’s much-neglected elaboration on the metaphor: “Yes, no matter how right the wall may be and how wrong the egg, I will stand with the egg” (Murakami 2009; see also above). Reading beyond Murakami’s first line (i.e., “Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg”), Wilde notices the absolutist stance in Murakami’s philosophy, and uses it to reflect on the schisms in Hong Kong’s social movement. This way, Wilde criticizes the moderate democrats for taking from Murakami’s speech what is convenient to them,
rather than showing tolerance to radical protest methods even if they do not agree with such practice. For Wilde, the fault lines within the democracy movement—and the splits and factions created as a result—has barred some critics from understanding why people turned to more radical ways of protest.

The same criticism can be seen from the writings of the aforementioned controversial scholar Wan Chin. An influential figure within the radical localists, Chin has condemned social activists for quoting from Murakami’s speech without studying it closely. Five months before the Umbrella Movement, he writes in his syndicated blog on Yahoo Hong Kong that it is “laughable” for Hong Kong democrats to keep using Murakami’s metaphor and “comparing themselves to eggs that perish upon hitting the wall” (Chin 2014). According to him, Murakami declares that he will always stand on the side of the egg, but he is not saying that he will become an egg himself. He pities the heroes that have failed in their struggles, and stands on their side, but he does not mean that he would rather fail. Many leftist and democrat protesters should carefully study Murakami’s speech again, and then admit that they are illiterates who can read. (Chin 2014)

One can see why Chin’s rude attitude has made him unpopular and controversial. However, what he writes is consistent with the radical localist thoughts he preaches: in the same article, he criticizes some moderate protesters for devouring food in front of cameras right after a staged hunger strike was over. He argues that any protestor should not bow to a defeatist pattern of protest for the sake of media exposure, but should use tactics and strategies wisely to achieve substantial gains. Chin appeals to the fact that Murakami was speaking as a novelist, not as a social activist. Indeed, before introducing the wall-versus-egg metaphor, Murakami (2009) says that this “is something that I always keep in mind while I am writing fiction.” In a certain sense, the philosophy, then, applies to Murakami the novelist, and him only. Chin pays attention to the context Murakami was speaking and the role he was assuming. As a result, he identifies an important prerequisite to Murakami’s use of the metaphor and problematizes the way Hong Kong democrats facilely borrow the metaphor for their own purposes.

However, in focusing so much on this prerequisite, Chin, too, commits a misreading, and forgets to finish reading Murakami’s speech. For Murakami (2009) goes on to stress that, “Each of us is, more or less, an egg. . . . This is true of me, and it is true of each of you. And each of us, to a greater or lesser degree, is confronting a high, solid wall.” In fact, Murakami differentiates between two roles: as a novelist, where he will always stand on the side of the egg; and as an individual, where he, too, is an egg confronting the system. Chin seems to have pigeonholed his puritan reading of Murakami to fit
his criticism of the moderate democrats, without noticing this ambivalence. Ultimately, should the protesters and democrat politicians identify with Murakami the novelist, or Murakami the individual? Perhaps the answer will only come to light when Hongkongers continue to adopt Murakami’s metaphor in their various resistance.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that Murakami’s wall-versus-egg metaphor has made an impact in Hong Kong, inspiring activists and critics to appropriate it in their own ways. Some of these appropriations have sharpened the existing schisms between the pro-establishment, moderate pro-democracy, and radical pro-democracy standpoints. Other appropriations creatively invent new derivatives that expand the metaphor to suit the situation of Hong Kong. When these appropriations are analyzed under Bakhtin’s idea of appropriation and polyphony, they reveal how the Umbrella Movement (or, by the same token, all social movements) is more than a monolithic protest.

It is not the point of this chapter to support any one side on Hong Kong’s political spectrum. Given that Murakami was ambivalent about the radical student movements in 1960s Japan, it is also unclear whether he will condone the gradually radicalization in the Hong Kong protests. However, this is beside the point. At the end of the day, Murakami’s metaphor only consists of two concepts, namely, the wall and the egg, and so it only communicates a reductive, binary worldview—even though this binary itself contains much philosophical depth. When a political thought is so conceptual in nature, it can be malleably applied onto another sociopolitical context, but the particularities of the new context will mold and adapt the thought in uniquely different ways. It is in this microscopic appropriation of political thoughts that, we are reminded, each sociopolitical context is full of its own irreducible complexities.

NOTES

1. Except for Murakami’s acceptance speeches, all other translations from Japanese and Chinese in this chapter are mine.
2. All of Murakami’s advice appears in a collection afterward. Murakami’s response to Miffy did not make the print version of the collection, but it is available in the complete ebook version.
3. While there is certainly a double allusion to the Berlin Wall as well, the reference to Murakami is stronger, as the Chinese word on the flyer means high wall
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(goucoeng 高牆 in Cantonese), whereas the Berlin Wall is usually rendered as a “surrounding/enclosing wall” (waicoeng 围牆).

4. It may also be noted that this level of influence and popularity in Hong Kong is rare among overseas celebrities. Compare Murakami with, for instance, the Japanese musician Ryūichi Sakamoto, who also wrote a supportive statement early in the Umbrella Movement but which has been forgotten.

5. I cannot stress enough that localism here is a multifaceted term. It has no agreed definition, nor is it easy to pinpoint its beginnings. The brand of radical localism discussed here follows a more moderate stream of localist thoughts established after 2003, which focused on the preservation of cultural memories and landmarks in Hong Kong. Even within radical localism, there are multiple standpoints that differ in degrees of radicality (e.g., self-determination, autonomy, and independence). However, the appropriations studied in this chapter do not directly engage with these positions.

6. The original link is now unavailable. A backup has been uploaded: http://ow.ly/mEXi30gotnj (available as of April 2018).

7. Clearly, the fact that chickens may also become nourishment for humans is beside the point here.

8. In Chinese: 逆嘶亭. In this chapter, Cantonese words follow the Jyutping Romanisation system, except in proper names. Mandarin words follow the Hanyu Pinyin system.

9. Lo Fung is a frequent contributor to Hong Kong’s largest pro-democracy Chinese newspaper, Apple Daily.

10. I thank Tetsuya Toyoda for drawing my attention to this elaboration in Murakami’s speech.

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