

Futures in Flux: Imagining Cities Through Water in Hong Kong Science Fiction

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Abstract

This essay applies a hydrofeminist lens to Hong Kong Sinophone science fiction. Drawing on Astrida Neimanis's aqueous phenomenology, it analyzes aquatic imaginaries in *Dark Fluid: A Science Fiction Experiment*, edited by Hong Kong visual artist Angela Su, an experimental science fiction anthology that reframes Hong Kong's precarious sociopolitical conditions through a generative blue ecology. Focusing on two of the short stories, 'Epidemic Investigation' and 'The Examination,' the essay shows how water destabilizes normative boundaries of kinship and the human. Hong Kong's blue imaginaries, this essay contends, open a site for imagining alliances across human and more-than-human bodies that resist both extractivist and authoritarian paradigms.

Introduction: Toward a Blue Hong Kong

Dark Fluid is an experimental science fiction anthology that asks a deceptively simple question: how might Hong Kong imagine its future when its political ground feels increasingly unstable? Edited by visual artist Angela Su and initiated in 2015, the project brings together writers, artists, filmmakers, architects, journalists, and activists to explore science fiction not as escapist fantasy, but as a practical and imaginative tool for thinking through crisis. Rather than presenting a single, unified vision of the future, *Dark Fluid* assembles a series of short speculative narratives that reflect the city's fragmented political realities and the uncertainty of everyday life in contemporary Hong Kong.

What distinguishes *Dark Fluid* from conventional science fiction collections is both its method and its ambition. Contributors were invited not only to write stories, but to experiment across media and disciplinary boundaries. The anthology includes work by an experimental sound artist, an architect, a photographer-activist, and an independent filmmaker, alongside journalists and fiction writers. This diversity of perspectives results in stories attentive to the social, emotional, and bodily consequences of how people live and relate under conditions of expanding authoritarian control. Together, they form what might be described as a collective speculative archive of Hong Kong at a moment of profound transition.

Questions about urban futures are, at their core, questions about constraint: who gets to imagine the city's future, through what frameworks, and under what conditions of possibility. This essay proposes hydrofeminism—a mode of thinking developed by feminist philosopher Astrida Neimanis that takes water's porosity, unpredictability, and relational force as a model for understanding bodies, environments, and power—as a productive lens for approaching such questions (2017). Where futures studies and urban planning often privilege stability, projection, and control, a hydrofeminist perspective draws attention to what exceeds those logics: the leaks, the ruptures, and the fluid solidarities that emerge precisely when official visions of the future fail.

Dark Fluid itself is a product of precisely such a moment of failed official futurity. The project emerged in the aftermath of the 2014 Umbrella Movement, a mass pro-democracy protest sparked by proposed changes to Hong Kong's electoral system. For many Hong Kongers, the movement marked a turning point, when it became widely apparent that the political promises made at the 1997 handover, particularly the guarantee of autonomy under the 'one country, two systems' framework, were increasingly fragile. Although *Dark Fluid* was published in 2017, its concerns have

only intensified in the years since. Two major events—the 2019–2020 anti-extradition protests and the COVID-19 pandemic—have radically reshaped the city’s political and social landscape, lending the anthology an almost prophetic quality.

The 2019 protests began in response to a proposed extradition bill widely seen as threatening judicial independence and exposing activists and dissidents to political persecution. As protests escalated, they evolved into a sustained confrontation between Hong Kong citizens and the Chinese state, culminating in Beijing’s imposition of the National Security Law in 2020, leading to widespread arrests, the dissolution of opposition parties, the closure of independent media, and a wave of emigration (Ma 2019; Luqiu 2021).

The arrival of COVID-19 compounded this climate of repression. Bans on public gatherings were repeatedly cited to prohibit protests on dates of particular symbolic importance—the annual June 4th vigil commemorating the Tiananmen Square massacre, long the only public memorial of its kind on Chinese soil, was banned in 2020 and remains suppressed to this day (‘Heavy Police Presence on Eve of Tiananmen Anniversary’). Pandemic technologies such as contact-tracing apps raised further concerns that public health infrastructure could be repurposed for political monitoring (Kwan 2021), making the boundary between safety and control increasingly difficult to discern.

It is against this backdrop that *Dark Fluid* takes on particular urgency. Across both protest and pandemic, fluidity emerged as a recurring strategy of survival. During the 2019 protests, demonstrators adopted the slogan ‘Be Water,’ inspired by the philosophy of Bruce Lee and Daoist notions of adaptability (Holbig 2020; Ting 2020; Yam & Ma 2023). Protesters organized in decentralized, mobile formations, appearing and dispersing quickly to avoid arrest. During the pandemic, fluidity became a psychological necessity as familiar structures—workplaces, homes, borders—were disrupted or dissolved, and the virus’s ease of transmission exposed how fragile the imagined separations between inside and outside, self and other, truly are.

Reading *Dark Fluid* through a hydrofeminist lens, I situate the anthology’s aquatic imagery within a much longer history in which water has structured how Hong Kong negotiates precarity and constraint. Cultural works such as Chan Tze-woon’s *Blue Island* (2022) and Olivia Martin-McGuire’s *Freedom Swimmers* (2021) recall the mid-twentieth-century phenomenon of ‘freedom swimmers’—men and women who risked their lives swimming from mainland China to British Hong Kong in search of political refuge and economic survival. Read alongside the protest mantra ‘Be Water’ and the pandemic’s exposure of porous borders, this genealogy situates *Dark Fluid*’s aquatic imaginaries within a deeply sedimented political imagination that

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understands motion, adaptability, and risk not as temporary responses to crisis, but as enduring conditions of life when solid ground proves unreliable.

To ground this discussion, I focus on two Sinophone short stories from the anthology. ‘The Examination,’ by Cally Yu—a writer, playwright, and community artist—unfolds as a near-future dystopia in which a rigidly controlled public examination determines who is entitled to a future, narrated through the eyes of a cyborg teacher caught between institutional duty and emergent solidarity. ‘Epidemic Investigation,’ by Tse Pakchai—a photographer, local historian, and social activist—takes the form of disaster realism, following the aftermath of a covert government experiment that liquefies most of a working-class Hong Kong district, producing an exclusion zone that becomes, against all official intent, a site of collective survival and alternative community. Both narratives mobilize water to unsettle familiar ideas about kinship, reproduction, and the boundaries of the human, suggesting that survival under conditions of crisis depends not on purity or stability, but on adaptability and mutual responsiveness—recalling the freedom swimmers, whose survival relied on fluid movement amid shifting currents.

By reading *Dark Fluid* through hydrofeminist theory and the emerging field of the Blue Humanities, which studies oceans, rivers, and aquatic environments as cultural and political spaces, this essay argues that Hong Kong’s future imaginaries are rooted in aquatic ways of thinking. These stories do not offer utopian solutions. Instead, they dwell in ambiguity and contamination, proposing modest but meaningful ways of imagining life amid ruins. In doing so, *Dark Fluid* contributes to broader conversations about future cities by showing how urban survival increasingly depends on fluid modes of belonging, solidarity, and resistance—forms of life forged not in permanence, but in movement, mutation, and flow.

Theoretical Framework: Hydrofeminism

This essay draws on hydrofeminism, a strand of feminist theory developed by philosopher Astrida Neimanis, to rethink water not as a passive backdrop to human activity but as an active, relational substance that connects bodies, environments, and histories. At its core, hydrofeminism begins from a simple but powerful premise: human bodies are largely made of water, and so are deeply entangled with the planet’s oceans, rivers, rain, and atmospheric systems. From this perspective, water does not merely surround us; it moves through us, linking individual lives to broader ecological and political processes. As Neimanis argues, imagining ourselves as “*bodies of water*” challenges assumptions about human separateness, reminding us that boundaries between self and environment, present and past, human and nonhuman are far less stable than we often assume (2017, 4).

Building on feminist philosophy and phenomenology, with its attention to embodied and situated experience, hydrofeminism treats the body not as a sealed container but as a porous form embedded in planetary systems of circulation. In this view, vulnerability is not a weakness to be overcome but a shared condition of life. Water becomes a site of both intimacy and resistance: it exposes how power operates through bodies, while also opening possibilities for connection, care, and collective survival. These ideas resonate strongly in Hong Kong, a coastal city shaped by humidity, monsoons, and rising environmental risk, where the forces of nature and the reach of state authority loom over everyday life. Here, water functions simultaneously as resource, threat, and connective tissue, demanding analytical tools that can account for its instability and political significance.

Hydrofeminism aligns closely with the Blue Humanities, an emerging interdisciplinary field that examines oceans, rivers, and aquatic environments as cultural, historical, and political spaces (Gillis 2013; Mentz 2009). Rather than treating water as a neutral stage for human history, scholars in the Blue Humanities emphasize its role in shaping migration, empire, labor, climate change, and collective memory (DeLoughrey 2017). From this perspective, seas and waterways are not empty surfaces but dynamic ecologies marked by colonial extraction, forced migration, and environmental transformation. This ‘oceanic turn’ encourages us to rethink how cultural narratives, artistic practices, and political imaginaries are shaped by life in and around water—a reorientation that finds a productive parallel in the growing body of ecocritical SF scholarship, which has examined how speculative fiction functions as a medium for environmental and political reflection, from the genre’s engagement with imagined ecologies and planetary futures (Canavan and Robinson 2014) to what Chris Pak describes as its capacity for “*disciplined thought experiment*” on questions of environment, ethics, and habitation (2016, 8).

To complement this material and ecological focus, this essay also draws on sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) concept of liquid modernity, which describes how the stable structures once associated with modernity—secure jobs, stable identities, enduring institutions—have largely dissolved, leaving individuals to navigate uncertainty with few reliable anchors (2000, 136). While Bauman uses liquidity as metaphor rather than environmental concept, his framework helps articulate the emotional and political experience of living in constant flux—one in which liquidity can feel threatening, but can also become a strategy for endurance.

Posthumanist theory further deepens this framework by questioning the idea that humans are the central or sole agents shaping the world. Thinkers

such as Karen Barad (2007) and Stacy Alaimo (2010) argue that life emerges through complex interactions among humans, nonhuman organisms, materials, and infrastructures. Barad's theory of agential realism, developed through the concept of *intra-action*, holds that entities come into being through their relations rather than preceding them (2007, 33; 178). Alaimo's *trans-corporeality* similarly insists on the inseparability of human bodies from their environments (2010, 1). Water, in this sense, becomes a key medium through which bodies and worlds are continually remade.

Positioned at the intersection of these intellectual traditions, this essay uses hydrofeminism as a focal point to analyze how Hong Kong's speculative fiction imagines life in conditions of political repression and ecological uncertainty. Water is approached as operative political infrastructure—a medium through which governance is enforced and contested, kinship dissolved and reconstituted outside sanctioned forms, and urban futurity imagined otherwise than through the logics of control, purity, and managed development. As Neimanis suggests, thinking with “*bodies of water*” offers an “*alternative to dominant imaginari[es]*” grounded in control, separation, and extraction (2017, 170)—attuning us to what such projections suppress: the leaking bodies, the flooded zones, the fluid solidarities that exceed the state's capacity to contain them, and that Hong Kong's speculative writers make visible.

Contextualizing Dark Fluid

Hong Kong has often been described as a ‘floating city,’ a phrase associated with renowned Hong Kong writer Xi Xi and later taken up by poet-scholar Tammy Ho Lai-Ming (2014). The image evokes a city suspended between ground and air. This sense of suspension reflects Hong Kong's lived condition: a place defined by political uncertainty, layered histories, and unresolved questions of belonging. Once a British colonial outpost made up of scattered islands, and now a Special Administrative Region of China with limited and gradually eroded autonomy, Hong Kong occupies an in-between position that resists easy classification. Its archipelagic geography mirrors a broader sense of cultural and political liminality.

This condition of precarity has become more pronounced in the years following 2019. The anti-extradition protests that erupted that year marked a decisive turning point. What began as opposition to a proposed law allowing extraditions to mainland China quickly grew into a mass movement against authoritarian governance and the erosion of civil liberties. Police violence, mass arrests, and the 2020 National Security Law transformed Hong Kong's politics and introduced pervasive surveillance, censorship, and control into

daily life. In this climate, protest slogans such as ‘Be Water’ functioned not only as tactical advice but as expressions of a deeper political sensibility. Protesters embraced mobility and adaptability, organizing fluidly across the city in ways that echoed Hong Kong’s own fragmented geography and history.

Alongside these political pressures, Hong Kong faces mounting environmental risks. As a densely populated coastal city, it is highly vulnerable to rising sea levels, typhoons, and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns linked to climate change. Its vertical urban form, consisting of high-rise buildings stacked against steep hillsides and pressed up against the sea, intensifies these risks. Environmental threat and political repression thus unfold simultaneously, shaping how the future is imagined and felt. In this context, water cannot be understood as a purely symbolic element. As Neimanis reminds us, the movement of water between bodies and environments is “*never synecdochal or metaphoric; it is radically material*” (2017, 86). Rain, humidity, flooding, and ocean currents are lived forces that shape urban experience and political possibility.

It is within this overlapping terrain of political constraint and environmental uncertainty that *Dark Fluid* takes on renewed significance. Although the project began before the 2019 protests, it anticipates many of the conditions that now define Hong Kong’s present. Under the curatorial direction of Angela Su, *Dark Fluid* treats science fiction as a critical practice rather than a genre concerned with distant futures. Su frames science fiction as a way of questioning “*fundamental concepts that we take for granted*” (2017, 19). The anthology’s form reflects this ethos. Rather than presenting a unified narrative, *Dark Fluid* moves fluidly between short stories, essays, visual artworks, and fragments of workshop discussion. This hybrid structure resists traditional genre boundaries and mirrors Hong Kong’s own sense of fragmentation. The collection blurs distinctions between art and activism, documentation and imagination, analysis and affect. Su has described her approach as embracing the *erratic* nature of art, a stance that foregrounds uncertainty rather than coherence (Guthrie 2017). As cultural critic Andrew S. Guthrie (2017) has observed, this experimental energy recalls the effervescent atmosphere of Hong Kong’s 2014 street occupations, when public space briefly became more playful, open, and more liveable.

Within this framework, science fiction functions as a method of subversion. Darko Suvin defines science fiction as a literature of “*cognitive estrangement*,” in which the ‘novum’—some new, estranging element—defamiliarizes the everyday in order to reveal its constructedness (1979, 7–8). Su’s comparison of speculative writing to an “*anthropologist’s experiment*,” a way of stepping outside the familiar to observe social norms from

a critical distance, maps closely onto this logic (2017, 19). Likewise, scholars such as Chan Kit-Size Amy have noted that science fiction enables this kind of defamiliarization by projecting alternative futures that cast the present in a new light (2017, 30). For Hong Kong—a city frequently framed through rigid binaries such as East and West, capitalism and socialism, colonialism and nationalism—science fiction offers a way to disrupt simplified narratives and make room for complexity.

Indeed, Hong Kong has often been described as inherently speculative. Scholars Euan Auld and Casper Bruun Jensen have called it “*a living science fiction*” (2023, 469), while writer Albert Tam characterizes the city as both politically disillusioned and hyper-capitalist (Karacs 2017). Writer Jeannette Ng (2019) famously described Hong Kong as “*the most cyberpunk city in the world*” in her 2019 Campbell Award acceptance speech. These accounts point to a shared sense of suspended futurity, in which the present feels saturated with fear, loss, and uncertainty. *Dark Fluid* engages directly with this affective atmosphere. Rather than depicting the city as passively adrift, the anthology reimagines Hong Kong’s floating condition as an active and strategic mode of existence. By drawing on the language of water, the project frames instability as a condition that can generate new forms of relation and resistance.

Watery Kinships in ‘The Examination’

One of the central ideas behind hydrofeminism is that human bodies are not sealed, autonomous units but are deeply entangled with the world around them. Neimanis encourages us to think of bodies as watery: porous, leaky, and shaped by circulation rather than containment. As she writes, “*this watery gestationality is [...] decidedly posthuman, where human reprosexual wombs are but one expression of a more general aqueous facilitative capacity*” (2017, 3). From this perspective, reproduction, care, and survival are not confined to the biological family or the womb, but are part of broader systems of material exchange. Bodies generate and sustain life not by remaining closed but by being open to transformation.

This understanding of embodiment comes sharply into focus in ‘The Examination,’ a story set in a future society governed by extreme forms of standardization and control. The narrative centers on a high-stakes public exam designed to determine who is worthy of a future. To take the test, candidates must submit to what is called a 裸考 [“bare exam”], meaning they are stripped of anything not deemed part of their original biological bodies; implanted organs, technological enhancements, even cultivated hair or skin are prohibited; only those classified as 純人類 [“pure humans”] are allowed

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to compete (Yu 2017, 76).¹ The story's vision of high-stakes assessment as a mechanism for determining who belongs to the future finds a pointed real-world echo in Hong Kong's overhaul of its university entrance curriculum: the former Liberal Studies subject was replaced by Citizenship and Social Development, a subject whose marking guidelines reward answers that affirm government narratives on the National Security Law, leaving, as one veteran teacher observed, "*no room for the students to think critically*" (Yiu 2021).

In Yu's story, however, the stakes of failing to conform are taken to a dystopian extreme. The lowest-scoring group is exiled into space, discarded after the state has deemed them a poor investment. As the story bluntly puts it, 像垃圾一樣被丟下黑洞 [*"like garbage, they are discarded into a black hole"*] (Yu 2017, 78). The exam thus functions as more than an educational assessment; it is a mechanism for managing population, value, and futurity—structured around what Lee Edelman calls "*reproductive futurism*," the symbolic logic that ties the meaning of the future to reproduction and to the figure of the child as its privileged embodiment (2004, 2). Who gets to live, reproduce, and belong is decided through a regime that equates purity with worth and contamination with disposability.

What begins as a tightly controlled testing environment soon unravels. The disruption starts when a student known as the Red-haired girl suddenly bursts into uncontrollable laughter. She calls the examiners 偽善 [*"hypocrites"*], and her laughter spreads rapidly through the room (Yu 2017, 79). The story describes this outbreak in aquatic terms: laughter moves like a contagion, flooding the hall and undermining the solemnity of the event. Attempts by authorities to suppress it only intensify the effect, as laughter grows louder and more collective, 淹滅 [*"engulfing like waves"*] (Yu 2017, 79).

This emotional overflow sets the stage for an even more radical rupture. Another student, the Black-haired girl, stands up as a milky-white fluid pours from her body. She moans in pleasure, and then her body cracks and explodes in slow motion. The exam hall becomes a scene of spectacular breakdown. But it is also politically charged. Black-haired girl's body literalizes Neimanis's notion of posthuman gestationality; her explosion enacts a hydrofeminist rupture, where containment gives way to overflow. The body's refusal to remain closed or orderly directly challenges the state's insistence on purity and control.

In this scene, water becomes a force of revolt. The fluid released from the Black-haired girl's body cannot be neatly classified as either healing or harmful. As Red-haired girl notes, "生命水可怕的地方。是要人冒險的，因為不是每次塗在身體，都有回春的效果，如果水細胞遇上的不是有機的良性細胞，它會反過來咬死對方，促成對方死亡。因此是一場身體的賭

博 [“*The frightening thing about the fluid is that it requires taking a risk, because applying it to the body does not always result in rejuvenation. If the water’s cells encounter inorganic or malignant cells, they will turn against and destroy the body, leading to the person’s death. Therefore, it is a gamble with the body*”]. (Yu 88).

This ambiguity destabilizes the categories the regime relies on to sort life from waste, health from illness, and future from failure. Rather than offering a clean alternative to state power, the fluid exposes how fragile and contingent such classifications are.

The story makes clear that reproduction itself has become a site of governance. Early on in the story, the state announces the dissolution of the family unit. In this context, the exam determines not just individual success but access to futurity itself. The explosive laughter and leaking bodies of the two girls thus represent a refusal of this tightly controlled vision of the future. Their spectacular failure can be understood through what Jack Halberstam calls “*the queer art of failure*”—the insight that failing, unmaking, and not knowing can offer more creative and cooperative ways of being in the world than docile conformity to a depleted social order (2011, 1). In failing the examination in a spectacularly grotesque manner, the girls reject the state-managed production of futurity and expose the violence of its demand for purity and order.

This idea is reinforced through the story’s narrator, a cyborg Teacher who oversees the examination. Designed to look and behave like a human, the Teacher occupies a precarious position. She is tasked with caring for and disciplining students, yet she herself is monitored and denied recognition as a fully sentient being. As Steven Shaviro argues, sentience—whether in humans, animals, or artificial entities—is less a matter of cognition than of what he calls “*discognition*”: something that disrupts and exceeds the limits of cognition while also subtending it, and which SF is uniquely positioned to dramatize (2015, 10–11). The Teacher’s affective life—her growing discomfort, her attachments, her eventual act of dissent—registers precisely as this kind of excess that the regime cannot account for within its own categories. Her role as both nurturer and instrument of the regime also mirrors feminized forms of emotional labor that tends to be nurturing, attentive, and essential, yet structurally undervalued and easily abandoned (Hochschild 1983; Illouz 2007)—a dynamic that scholarship on of the female cyborg figure, or the gynoid, has shown to be a persistent feature of how science fiction constructs artificial femininity: as a form of labor and service that is simultaneously indispensable and disposable (Cox-Palmer-White 2021; Jones 2025).

When the state dissolves the family unit, the Teacher's longtime robot companion, Alpha, chooses to leave her. Although both are machines, their relationship is emotionally rich, blurring the line between programmed behavior and genuine attachment. Before departing, Alpha tells the Teacher, “你有慾望想成為人類那刻，已經成為人類了 [“*The moment you have the desire of becoming human, you are already human*”]” (Yu 2017, 93).

This line reframes humanity not as a biological status but as the capacity to desire connection and care, a capacity reflected in the Teacher's relationship with Alpha.

The Teacher's trajectory across the story, from compliance to dissent, can be understood as a series of widening relational attachments that ultimately exceed her programming. The Teacher becomes increasingly aware of the violence embedded in the system she serves, and her growing discomfort culminates in a public act of dissent, when she defends a group of underground youth wrongly blamed for the fluid explosion in the exam hall. This moment marks an ethical rupture that reflects what feminist theorist Sara Ahmed describes as a “*snap*” (2017, 189)—the point at which accumulated pressure makes compliance no longer possible. For Ahmed, the “*feminist snap*” is a *reorientation*, “*the way in which we collectively acquire tendencies that can allow us to break ties that are damaging as well as to invest in new possibilities*” (2017, 162). The Teacher's solidarity with the scapegoated youth and *failure* to act according to her programming gesture toward two related posthumanist frameworks. For Rosi Braidotti, “*multiple belongings*” describes a mode of subjectivity that is not anchored to a single identity or allegiance but is constituted through layered, sometimes contradictory attachments—a condition the Teacher embodies as a cyborg who is bound simultaneously to the state and to the students she has come to care for (2013, 49). Teagan Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman's concept of ‘queer kinship’ (2022), meanwhile, names the relational bonds that form outside biological and legal norms. Together, these frameworks illuminate what is at stake in the Teacher's act of dissent: a refusal of her prescribed belonging and an improvised attachment to those the state has deemed disposable.

Through its cyborg narrator and its spectacular scenes of bodily overflow, ‘The Examination’ imagines kinship beyond bloodlines and biological reproduction. Community forms through exposure, risk, and mutual responsiveness rather than genetic inheritance. These watery kinships resist state legibility and refuse stable identities, offering instead a model of relation grounded in permeability and transformation. The story suggests that futurity might be forged not through purity and control, but through the messy, unstable work of caring for one another amid systemic collapse.

Leaking Solidarities in ‘Epidemic Investigation’

In ‘Epidemic Investigation,’ water once again functions as both a destructive and transformative force. The story begins with a sudden rainfall over Sham Shui Po, one of Hong Kong’s poorest districts—a neighborhood historically shaped by working-class labor, successive waves of refugee and immigrant settlement, and chronic housing precarity, with a long history of government-driven redevelopment and displacement. The rain has catastrophic effects: most residents are liquefied, their bodies dissolving into water, and the area is immediately sealed off as an epidemic zone. What appears at first to be an unusual natural disaster is later revealed to be the result of a covert government experiment.

Yet the rain’s effects are not uniform. While the vast majority perish, a small number of people survive. These survivors are rejuvenated, transformed into teenagers, and in some cases gain clairvoyant abilities. The state responds by quarantining the district, framing the zone as a site of contamination rather than state violence. Water here becomes a biopolitical tool: engineered, weaponized, and managed in the name of public safety.

One of story’s central figures, Juman, embodies this ambiguity between contamination and transformation. Juman enters the zone with her husband Kasa in a desperate attempt to cure his Alzheimer’s disease. While Kasa is instantly liquefied, Juman survives and is transformed. She eventually becomes a leader among the survivors, helping to organize life within the quarantined zone. Like the ambiguous rainwater itself, her contaminated body embodies uncertainty and possibility at once. In Butler’s words, “[N]one of us is fully bounded, utterly separate, but, rather, we are in our skins, given over, in each other’s hands, at each other’s mercy” (2005, 101).

As the narrative unfolds, the rainwater reveals an unexpected capacity: it can store and transmit memory. Juman is able to reconnect with her perished husband, Kasa, through the rainwater. As one character observes, “政府和財團沈迷於趨童作用，卻忽視了在水化症中顯現出來的另一種自然現象。那就是水能傳遞和保存記憶。那是我們社會最後的希望。它比長生不老更加重要 [“The government and corporate conglomerates are obsessed with the rejuvenating effects of the epidemic water, yet they ignore another natural phenomenon that has emerged from the condition of liquefaction: the water’s ability to transmit and preserve memory. That is our society’s last hope. It is more important than immortality”]”. (Tse 2017, 120).

This revelation reframes the epidemic water as an archive rather than a mere agent of mutation. Memory is no longer housed solely in human minds but is dispersed across material processes. The rainwater becomes a medium through which the past continues to speak. This aligns with theories that

understand memory as embedded in landscapes, infrastructures, and matter itself. In ‘How the Earth Remembers and Forgets,’ Bronislaw Szerszynski (2019) suggests that memory can be encoded in physical systems such as energy, matter, and spatial configurations, even in the absence of human consciousness. And as scholars such as Malcom Ferdinand (2022) and Christina Elizabeth Sharpe (2016) remind us, watery spaces are neither abstract nor universal but *thick* with colonial, racial, and environmental histories. To listen to water, the story suggests, is to attend to histories that official records have erased or refused to acknowledge.

At the center of the epidemic zone, a striking transformation occurs. Where one might expect decay, a dense forest emerges. Human, plant, and microbial life intermingle in new, vibrant configurations. Read through Neimanis’s rethinking of gestationality, this space is not simply regenerative in a biological sense but relational in an ontological one: it becomes a site of “*what allows another being to be, and that which connects beings to one another*” (2017, 100). The forest materializes Neimanis’s concept of “*interpermeation*,” the recognition that bodies, waters, and environments are not discrete entities but participants in a shared continuum (2017, 99). This contrasts sharply with the militarized perimeter surrounding the epidemic zone, where surveillance and barricades enforce rigid boundaries and separation. Against this logic of containment, the forest models an alternative social organization grounded in mutual care, co-constitution, and shared vulnerability rather than extraction and control.

Knowledge about the zone is fragmentary and unreliable, circulating primarily through rumors and second-hand accounts. As one report notes, “由於公務人員全面撤出，我們並無官方紀錄可依，去了解疫區內的狀況。我們對疫區的了解，一直是依靠以訛傳訛的口述資料，其可信程度令人存疑 [“*Due to the complete withdrawal of government personnel, we have no official records to rely on for understanding the conditions inside the epidemic zone. Our knowledge of the zone has always depended on secondhand oral accounts, the credibility of which remains highly questionable*”]”. (Tse 2017, 102).

In response, the survivors build walls to protect themselves, asserting autonomy against a state that once sought to exploit them—a reversal of power that challenges conventional paradigms of public health, revealing how care can emerge outside institutional authority.

Five years later, the government plans to reclaim the epidemic zone for redevelopment. The same water that once justified quarantine is now hailed as a miracle substance to be patented, commodified, and marketed for hydrotherapy hospitals and profit-driven medical treatments. Publicly, the state casts this intervention as a humanitarian effort to reintegrate

the infected survivors. In reality, its aim is to extract value from the same biopolitical event it once worked to contain. This arc, from emergency containment to commercial reclamation, maps closely onto the logics that shape urban futures more broadly: crises are managed not in the interests of those who suffer them, but in the interests of those who stand to profit from their aftermath. In Sham Shui Po, a district already marked by cycles of displacement and redevelopment, the epidemic zone becomes simply the latest site to be cleared, rebranded, and opened to capital. This duplicity shapes the mandate of the government's investigation team, dispatched into the sealed-off zone five years after the disaster.

The story's ethical stakes crystallize through Sze Ma Zak, a government investigator whose loyalties erode as his complicity becomes clear. Gradually, he learns that the disaster was deliberate and must choose between facilitating state-backed reintegration—which would subject the survivors to renewed exploitation—or protecting the self-governed isolation of the survivors. His shifting loyalties mirror the story's larger concern with leakage: how health and contamination, nature and design, human and non-human bleed into one another, resisting neat division.

Through water that dissolves bodies yet preserves memory, 'Epidemic Investigation' imagines solidarity beyond individual survival. The epidemic water, capable of both destruction and renewal, becomes a medium for deep entanglement—dissolving the boundaries between life and death, self and other, past and future, while nurturing alternative ecologies of care, memory, and resistance beyond dominant paradigms of knowledge and control.

Conclusion: Aquatic Poetics of Resistance

Across the two stories examined here, water operates as a force that unsettles political order and redefines how life might persist under conditions of control and collapse. In 'The Examination,' the eruption of an unclassifiable fluid from a student's body disrupts the state's biopolitical machinery, exposing the violence behind its obsession with purity, discipline, and managed futurity. In 'Epidemic Investigation,' torrential rain liquefies much of a working-class district while unexpectedly rejuvenating others, producing an exclusion zone that is simultaneously a site of state abandonment and speculative regeneration.

What unites these narratives is a distinct aquatic poetics of resistance. Both stories emphasize leakage, instability, and transformation. Resistance takes shape through apparently messy solidarities: a cyborg teacher who breaks with her state-programmed role to defend scapegoated youth; a

“In this climate, protest slogans such as ‘Be Water’ functioned not only as tactical advice but as expressions of a deeper political sensibility.”

woman whose contaminated body becomes a medium for communal healing and collective resistance. This ethic is reinforced at the level of narrative form: both stories rely on destabilized points of view that refuse clear moral resolution, mirroring the thematic instability.

What does it mean for a city to imagine its future through water rather than through blueprints? The readings offered here suggest that a hydrofeminist approach to urban SF reframes what future-thinking can look like under conditions of constraint. Where dominant paradigms of urban futures—smart city planning, infrastructure investment, resilience frameworks—tend to project forward from positions of control, *Dark Fluid* proposes something fundamentally different. Its resistance to utopianism is a deliberate epistemological stance directed specifically at the top-down, state-administered utopianism that has governed Hong Kong's urban transformation under the PRC.² In this sense, the anthology makes a genuine contribution to the discourse on future cities by insisting that the most urgent question is not what the city will look like, but who gets to survive its transformation and on what terms, attending to the solidarities forming in the flood zones that official futures leave off the map.

Taken together, 'The Examination' and 'Epidemic Investigation' do not offer solutions or closures. Instead, they propose a reorientation of how survival, resistance, and relation might be imagined in futures shaped by political repression and authoritarian control. Survival here is not a return to order, but an immersion in new and fragile modes of being. Kinship is forged not through sameness or inheritance, but through shared risk and mutual exposure. Through their blue poetics, these stories invite readers to consider what it means to live and act in a world already saturated with fluid instability. If hydrofeminism asks, as Neimanis suggests, "*what do we owe, and how do we pay?*" (2017, xx), *Dark Fluid* responds by imagining forms of accountability attuned to our shared, liquid world.

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Endnotes

- 1 All translations into English of the short stories from *Dark Fluid* are by the author.
- 2 This resistance targets coercive, blueprint-driven utopianism rather than the utopian impulse as such. For processual and relational accounts of utopianism more consonant with *Dark Fluid*’s speculative ethics, see Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*; Levitas, *Utopia as Method*.

“The rainwater
becomes a medium
through which
the past continues
to speak.”