



East/ West Political Allegories: Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" and Ye Si's "Transcendence and the Fax Machine"

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Abstract

The world is witnessing the devastating consequences of historical injustices, misinformation, and the erosion of democratic institutions. As we navigate through a complex sociopolitical landscape, it becomes essential to recognize the power of allegory in reflecting upon and critiquing our society. One such allegory is Franz Kafka's short story "A Hunger Artist." This story is the perfect shidduch between themes of alienation, modernism, psychology, philosophy, and politics. The authoritarian and repressive nature of the Chinese communist government is the focus of the allegory "Transcendence and the Fax Machine," by Leung Ping-Kwon, who writes under the pen name Ye Si. In this essay, we will delve into the multidimensional aspects of Kafka's and Si's work. By placing the stories into a contemporary context of Florida and Hong Kong, we will uncover the inherent societal critique embedded within Kafka's and Si's narratives.

In the aftermath of World War II, the world witnessed the devastating consequences of historical injustices, misinformation, and the erosion of democratic institutions. Today, as we navigate through a complex sociopolitical landscape, it becomes essential to recognize the power of allegory in reflecting upon and critiquing our society. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "allegory" as a "story, picture, or other piece of art that uses symbols to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one." One such allegory is Franz Kafka's short story "A Hunger Artist." This story is the perfect shidduch between themes of alienation, modernism, psychology, philosophy, and politics. The authoritarian and repressive nature of the Chinese communist government is the focus of the allegory "Transcendence and the Fax Machine," by Leung Ping-Kwon, who writes under the pen name Ye Si. In this essay, we will delve into the multidimensional aspects of Kafka's and Si's work. By placing the stories into a contemporary context, we will uncover the inherent societal critique embedded within Kafka's and Si's narratives.

At its core, Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" explores the theme of alienation. The third-person narrative of this story is presented by an omnipotent narrator who understands and conveys the thoughts and emotions of the characters in the story. The protagonist, the Hunger Artist, experiences physical, emotional, and social isolation throughout the story. Physically, the Hunger Artist is confined to a small cage, voluntarily starving himself for extended periods of up to forty days. Some of the viewers, who pass his cage, occasionally question his artistic ability to abstain from food. After some time, people lose interest in his skills. Eventually, his cage is relocated to the back of the tent along with the animal cages. However, people rarely come to watch him any longer. They rather admire the actual animals. The social alienation experienced by the Hunger Artist is perhaps the most pronounced. Considered a mere spectacle, he is reduced to an object of curiosity and entertainment for the crowd. The indifference and apathy of the audience create a stark division between the Hunger Artist and the rest of society. Even those who attempt to comprehend his art view him through a lens of pity,

perpetuating his isolation. This theme of alienation resonates strongly today, as individuals often find themselves marginalized or misunderstood in various aspects of their lives. Eventually, the artist dies, and his body is removed from the cage and replaced by a crowd-pleasing panther. Kafka's choice of a panther evokes Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Der Panther." Kafka and Rilke were both marginalized as Czech, born in Habsburg Prague but German speaking. Rilke's panther looks out of the cage inquisitively, eventually leaving the cage and Prague behind. Kafka's Slavic and Jewish identity kept him in a metaphorical cage, preventing him from expressing his religious and ethnic identities freely. Consequently, the Hunger Artist's inner thoughts and emotions are rarely understood or acknowledged by those outside of the metaphorical cages of Judaism and Slavic ethnicity. He is constantly misunderstood, dismissed, or pitied, further deepening his sense of isolation. This self-imposed isolation reinforces his separation from society and the norms of everyday life. Kafka's writing is often associated with the literary movement of modernism, characterized by its exploration of the individual's struggle in an increasingly fragmented and nonsensical world. In "A Hunger Artist," Kafka employs elements of absurdity to highlight the futility and meaninglessness of the Hunger Artist's endeavor. The act of starving oneself as a form of artistic expression challenges societal norms and expectations, pushing the boundaries of what is considered rational or logical.

The absurdity is further heightened by the Hunger Artist's longing for recognition and understanding, which is consistently denied by the crowd. The contrast between the Hunger Artist's genuine passion and the audience's indifference creates a sense of absurdity and existential angst. This portrayal of the human condition resonates with the modernist tradition and invites readers to question the arbitrary nature of societal norms and the pursuit of validation.

Traditionally, critics, such as Ufuk Baykent for example, have read the theme of alienation into the story, but Kafka's story also explores the concept of psychosomatic illness, as scholars like Ofrit Shapira-Berman and Naz Bushra have noted. The Hunger Artist's physical deterioration can be interpreted as a reflection of his inner psychological turmoil. As the audience loses interest and moves on to other spectacles, the Hunger Artist's mental state deteriorates further, leading to his ultimate demise. Psychological elements play a significant role in Kafka's "A Hunger Artist." The Hunger Artist's self-imposed hunger can be seen as a manifestation of psychological distress, reflecting the complexity of human emotions and the desire for control. The artist's ability to

endure physical suffering while simultaneously longing for recognition suggests a deeper psychological struggle within him. This psychological dimension adds depth to the story, highlighting the intricate relationship between the mind and the body.

Kafka's works are often the subject of philosophical analysis, and "A Hunger Artist" is no exception. Scholars, such as Rebecca Schuman and Walter Benjamin, have explored the philosophical implications of Kafka's texts. Schuman, drawing upon Ludwig Wittgenstein's theories, suggests that the very act of seeking meaning in Kafka's works presupposes a delusion that such questions can be answered definitively: "The problems and illusions we portend to uncover, the important questions we attempt to answer" in seeking meaning in Kafka's texts themselves presuppose a bigger delusion: that such questions can be asked in the first place" (5). Benjamin, on the other hand, argues that Kafka intentionally avoided clear interpretations of his texts: Kafka himself "hat [...] alle erdenklichen Vorkehrungen gegen die Auslegung seiner Texte getroffen" (422). Marie-Laure Ryan suggests that fictional texts reflect their worlds outside the reader's experience. Finally, Jennifer Geddes invites the reader to approach Kafka's texts fresh and unassuming. She writes: "Kafka's texts do not avoid or resist interpretation; they invite it, but they do so in a way that reveals the fantasies of definitive interpretation and desires for completion with which we often approach texts" (6). These viewpoints invite readers to question the nature of interpretation and the limits of human understanding. Kafka's works challenge the notion of definitive meaning, encouraging readers to embrace ambiguity and the inherent complexities of life. This philosophical underpinning adds layers of intellectual depth to "A Hunger Artist" and invites readers to engage with the story on a philosophical level. While "A Hunger Artist" is often read as an allegory for the human condition, it also contains political undertones that resonate with contemporary societal issues. Kafka's portrayal of the Hunger Artist's isolation and the crowd's indifference can be interpreted as a critique of authoritarian and repressive regimes. The Hunger Artist's confinement, both physically and socially, mirrors the suppression of individual freedoms by oppressive governments.

To read Kafka fresh means to place "A Hunger Artist" in the United States of the 2020s. Optimists might think that much has happened since Kafka's oppressive 19th-century Habsburg. Historians and political scientists, however, are beginning to draw parallels between the two periods. Josie Levy Martin, a Holocaust survivor from Santa Barbara states in the Los Angeles Times: "Prior to 2016, we respected each other's differing political views, even joked about it. This changed dramatically after I said

to her [a neighbor], 'But Trump lies.' That was the end of the conversation, and she and her partner retreated to their capsules of collusion, for it is a form of collusion when normal, ordinary people look away from facts. It was the same collusion as when teachers, lawyers, and ministers went along with the Nazi lie that in a pure Germany, Aryan supremacy must be returned to '*das Volk*.'" Moreover, the scenes that occurred on January 6th, 2022, in the Capitol brought to light how fragile and volatile democracy truly is in the United States. Then there is Ken Burns' PBS series "The U.S. and the Holocaust" which reminded the viewer that Hitler's segregation and ghettoization of the Jews was a copy of the American Jim Crow reality.

To fully understand the contemporary relevance of Kafka's "A Hunger Artist," we can examine the political landscape of Florida. In recent years, Florida has witnessed a series of controversial legislative actions that have raised concerns about democratic principles and individual liberties. From censorship in public schools to restrictions on academic freedom, Florida's political climate has become increasingly restrictive. The passage of CS/CS/CS/SB 266, known as the Higher Education Act, is one example of the erosion of democratic ideals. This law grants unprecedented power to the Board of Governors, very similar to the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, allowing them to dictate curricula and restrict academic programs that challenge systemic issues like racism and inequality. The law also prohibits the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion, stifling political and social activism within educational institutions.

Furthermore, Florida's recent educational reforms have faced criticism for distorting historical events and promoting a biased narrative. The rejection of a high school Advanced Placement course on Black studies and the censorship of gender and sexual identity in school materials further highlight the suppression of diverse perspectives and the limitation of intellectual nourishment. Since 2022, over 450 books have been banned, each public school has a censorship office, and state-appointed advisory boards tenure only anti-woke and anti-diversity faculty. Veterans can teach in Florida public schools without the proper degrees or qualifications. Since January 1, 2023, citizens of China, Cuba, Venezuela, Syria, Iran, Russia, and North Korea are banned from purchasing property in Florida. Since July 1, 2023, Florida has become an open-carry weapon state without any license or background checks. Physicians can discriminate against patients based on their religious convictions, in a political system that does not separate church and state anymore. As a stand-your-ground state, one can shoot anyone in one's own car or house without any repercussions. The death penalty does not need a unanimous jury verdict anymore. Abortion is illegal after

six weeks, and minor transgendered people cannot obtain medical treatment in Florida any longer. The pedagogic coup d'état are the new social studies standards approved by the Florida Board of Education on July 19, 2023, following a law passed by the legislature in 2022, known as "Stop Wrongs Against Our Kids and Employees Act" or the "Stop W.O.K.E. Act."

The law forces schools and public institutions to teach that no one must feel guilt based on their race because of actions by others in the past. Not surprisingly, Florida rejected a new high school Advanced Placement course on Black Studies and AP Psychology. Particularly distorted in this 216-page document are the standards for grades six through eight, stating that "slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit." The law was passed unanimously by the Florida Board of Education. Previously, Florida had passed the Parental Rights in Education Act – Don't Say Gay bill, eliminating positive references to gender and sexual identity. After having legislated new reeducation standards from Kindergarten to High School, Florida eventually addressed higher education in the Senate Bill: CS/CS/CS/SB 266: Higher Education. This new law, which went into effect on July 1, 2023, dramatically undermines and negates the principles of any university education, namely, to think freely and critically. This bill gives the state unprecedented power. It allows the Board of Governors "a directive to each constituent university regarding its programs for any curriculum that violates s. 1000.05 or that is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, and economic inequities" (p. 5 lines 121-131). Moreover, any public institution of higher learning in Florida "may not expend any state or federal funds to promote, support, or maintain any programs or campus activities that: (a) Violate s. 1000.05; or (b) Advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion, or promote or engage in political or social activism" (p. 11 lines 309-316). Finally, it addresses the content of general education core courses which "may not distort significant historical events or include a curriculum that teaches identity politics, violates s. 1000.05, or is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, and economic inequities (p. 20 lines 556-561). Moreover, the current Israel-Palestine conflict shows the fragmentation of societies, and the organization Student's for Justice in Palestine has been banned from Florida's state university system. The abuse of power by the Florida legislature and its governor does not end with education. On August 9, 2023, Ron DeSantis

suspended Florida's Ninth Judicial Circuit judge Monique Worrell. The governor based his decision on his "woke" ideology, claiming that the African-American state attorney is weak on crime. This is the second time that DeSantis has taken executive actions against an elected state attorney. Where are the protests, the objections, the demonstrations, the outcries on university campuses? Jonathan Maynard argues that "extremists capitalise on precisely those conventional justifications for violence and state coercion with which we are all too familiar." The political landscape in Florida echoes the themes of alienation and authoritarianism present in Kafka's "A Hunger Artist." The silencing of dissenting voices and the imposition of ideological conformity mirror the crowd's indifference and the Hunger Artist's isolation. Kafka reminds us that the watchmen, a group of men who monitored the behavior of citizens, such as the Hunger Artist, were butchers by trade: "Aside from the spectators, who made up the ever-changing crowd, here were also permanent watchmen, chosen by the public—oddly enough, usually butchers" (87). Kafka's story serves as a cautionary tale, reminding us of the importance of vigilance in protecting democratic values and individual liberties. The nation, which was born out of a revolution against inequality, has turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the systematic demolition of democracy, abroad and at home. Today, there would be no demonstration protesting British taxation in the Boston harbor. Probable members of the Boston Tea Party would stand around helplessly and speechlessly. Alan Itkin presents a political imperative by asking: "Do characters experience their lives as defined by the constraints they face, or by their freedom to take actions of their choosing" (496)? Cassandras in America remain silent.

In *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag suggests a "formal analysis," or close reading, to add to a critical, literary discourse. It is this apathetic world that Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" describes: "Whereas earlier it was very profitable to stage independent productions of such grand performances, today that is completely impossible. Times were different then" (56). Independent, or as Kafka's German reads "in eigener Regie," echoes one of the fundamental values of American democracy, however, such independent thinking "is completely impossible" in the current political climate in Florida. The "permanent watchmen, chosen by the public—oddly enough, usually butchers—whose job it was, always three at a time, to watch the Hunger Artist day and night so that he did not, perhaps in some secret way, manage to take nourishment" (87) remind critical contemporary readers of Florida's vigilante groups such as Florida Citizens Alliance, a conservative group enforcing the new education regulations, as well as on the national level Moms for Liberty. These organizations

resemble Kafka's butchers/watchmen who restrict intellectual nourishment. But Kafka's Hunger Artist is so used to restrictive laws, that "The glaring light did not disturb him in the least; he could not sleep anyway." (87) As the new academic year 2023/24 begins politicians, parents, students, and teachers will not be able to "sleep anyway" because of verbal landmines of new political incorrectness. Fortunately, Kafka's invisible puppet masters had installed safeguards for the Hunger Artist: "The manager had set forty days as the maximum starving time; he never permitted the starving to go on longer, not even in the great metropolitan centers, and indeed, for a very good reason. Experience had proven that for about forty days, through gradually intensified publicity you could go on stimulating a city's interest, but beyond that time there was no audience, a significant decline in attendance could be registered, of course there were slight differences between cities and countries in this regard" ((88). Forty was the number of days that foreign ships had to wait before being permitted to enter the port of Venice. These *quaranta giorni* in Italian merged into the English word quarantine. The founding "manager" of the United States had envisioned a similar "maximum hunger time," or elections. Not every forty days, but every four years, political minorities, whose voices had been starved for four years, are asked to cast their vote, allowing fresh intellectual nourishment from a possible political change. The daily injustice occurring on social, economic, and political levels is met with silence. Unable to change the system monitored by the "manager" the Hunger Artist was "in a melancholy mood, which grew increasingly so because no one was able to take it seriously. And how could he be consoled? What more could he want" (90)? Any criticism, objection, or even frustration is punished by the system: "But the manager had a punishment for such fits that he rather enjoyed applying" (90). Protesters in the United States, who question social, racial, and economic injustice, such as organizations Black Lives Matter, are met with police brutality and incarceration. The Bureau of Justice Statistics published the following numbers for the United States: "At midyear 2021, about 49% of local jail inmates were white, 35% were black, and 14% were Hispanic. American Indians or Alaska Natives; Asians, Native Hawaiians, or Other Pacific Islanders; and persons of two or more races together accounted for 2% of the total jail population." Any behavior that deviates from the Hunger Artist's apparent complacency is met with demagoguery based on fake news. The manager, for example, tries to discredit the hunger efforts by showing photos in which the Hunger Artist "could be seen on a fortieth day of starving, in bed, enfeebled to the point of extinction. This twisting of the truth, which, although it was already well known to the Hunger Artist, always freshly unnerved him,

was too much for him" (90). The misrepresentation or decontextualization of facts in US news media has fragmented voters and undermined the system. Kafka's artist knew that "to struggle against this stupidity, against this universe of stupidity, was impossible" (90). This stupidity, furthered through education reforms, quota driven news media, and lobbyists in Washington has become contagious. To conjure critical voices: "the manager raced with him through half of Europe to see if the old interest might still be found here or there; all in vain; as if by a secret understanding, what was practically an aversion to public displays of hunger had developed everywhere" (91).

Of course, the death of the Hunger Artist did not happen overnight, nor did the erosion of democratic values in the US: "In reality, it could not have happened so suddenly, and now, after the event, people began to recall a number of early warnings, which at that time, in the ecstasy of success, had not been adequately noted and not adequately suppressed, but now it was too late to do anything about them" (91). Democracy was being sidelined and the Hunger Artist's cage was relocated from the circus arena and the admiration of the spectators to the stables, and only accidentally did people acknowledge the artist in his forgotten cage. Federal or Supreme Court judges in the USA, who are appointed by sitting presidents or governors, are removing their own Hunger Artist's cage, such as free speech, the right to a woman's body, and gerrymandering, among others. For the Hunger Artist, change seems to come only through periods of starvation. These periods of cleansing, usually through elections in healthy democracies, could bring change, unless voters are unable to recognize and understand the political demagoguery of profit-driven mass media. "Certainly, the time for starving, as for all things, would come again, but that was no consolation to the living," (91) because the living were living in ignorance; "the children who, because school and life had insufficiently prepared them, admittedly stood uncomprehending—what was starving to them" (92)? When asked why he did not eat, the Hunger Artist answered: "because I could not find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I would not have caused a sensation, and I would have stuffed myself just like you and all the others" (94). A contemporary reader of Kafka's story might feel equally unable to "find the food I like," selecting between political sides in global conflicts, consuming fake news, and surviving a confusing and disjointed world. "We begin to see, then, why critics have often insisted on reading Kafka's works as political, social, or spiritual allegories. his worlds are not just strange but uncanny, because they resonate with so many of the different worlds we encounter in our lives and thus seem both alien and familiar" (Iktin 505-6). Kafka's story serves as a reminder of the importance

of democratic institutions and the need to protect individual freedoms in the face of oppressive regimes and intellectual manipulation.

Ye Si's allegory, "Transcendence and the Fax Machine," similarly reflects the authoritarian nature of the Chinese communist government in Hong Kong. By drawing parallels between the two allegorical works, we can discern a shared critique of political systems that stifle individual expression and autonomy. Hong Kong's colonial past, as a territory of China and a colony of Britain from 1842 to 1997, has played a significant role in shaping its cultural landscape. Today, Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China, but it still retains many aspects of its British heritage. As a foundation for our reading of Ye Si's story "Transcendence and the Fax Machine," we will explore the history and current situation of Hong Kong, highlighting its cultural diversity, political challenges, and the impact of recent events on individual freedoms.

During the British colonial era, which lasted for over a century, Hong Kong, unlike mainland China, experienced a high degree of Westernization, while remaining anchored in Chinese traditions. The long-term presence of the British colonial government did not aim to eliminate traditional Confucian values. However, it led to the emergence of a unique bicultural self-identity among the people of Hong Kong. Both influences manifest themselves in various aspects of daily life, including the legal system, education, language, architecture, and literature. These different aspects merge in Leung Ping-Kwan, who chose the pen name Ye Si, like many other Hong Kong authors and artists. Naturally, Si is equally familiar with classical Chinese poetry and poetics, as with Western kinds of literature. His writing seems to be particularly influenced by authors such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Pablo Neruda, and even Virginia Woolf. Unsurprisingly, the protagonist in "Transcendence and the Fax Machine" professes: "My main hobby is reading—reading the Buddhist classics, the Bible, and the Koran. I used to specialize in Anglo-American literature" (391).

The historical fusion of different cultures is also reflected on a personal level, where it is the result of a socialization process in both the family and the school environment. While traditional values influenced the Chinese self, the Western self embraces modern Western values. This unique position between the East and the West is reflected in a search for a voice. The protagonist in Si's story struggles to express himself to an all-Western audience: "It was not only because academic papers were usually very difficult to write, but also because I was so preoccupied by my present problems that it was hard to

find a space in my mind to reconstruct my remote intellectual thoughts” (395). The protagonist’s present problems are not only political but also personal. Traditional male-dominated Chinese society demands the fulfillment of a generational contract through marriage. “I turned thirty-seven this year. Single....There is only one reason I have remained single: I am not very good at interpersonal communication” (391). While the traditional Chinese focus of marriage is to produce a male child, a Western understanding of marriage adds personal happiness and fulfillment. One aspect of traditional Chinese culture, that has changed in Hong Kong is filial piety. Filial piety, or the respect and care for one's parents and ancestors, has been a core value in Chinese society for centuries. However, in Hong Kong, filial piety has gradually declined over time, although it has never completely disappeared. Research indicates that Hong Kong Chinese interpret their filial behaviors as affection-based repayment towards their parents, rather than strict adherence to external norms. Interpersonal relationships and affection seem to be traded as a commodity within the family. The decline of the nuclear family created a social and emotional vacuum that needed to be filled with material objects, such as a fax machine. This shift in interpretation reflects the influence of modern Western values, which prioritize individual autonomy and personal fulfillment. While filial piety remains an important value for many Hong Kong residents, its meaning and expression have evolved in the context of changing cultural dynamics. Some Western values, however, are being redefined or replaced.

The Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 paved the way for the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. This agreement established the framework of "one country, two systems," granting Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy and preserving its capitalist system and way of life for fifty years. Under this system, Hong Kong has its own executive, legislative, and independent judicial powers. It is allowed to forge external relations in certain areas, such as trade and tourism. However, Beijing maintains control over Hong Kong's diplomacy and defense, and the city's autonomy is subject to the interpretation and enforcement of the central government. Si expresses this unique but often confusing reality for Hong Kong residents in the discombobulated messages of his fax machine. “As the paper slowly rolled out, I could read messages of all kinds: furniture sales by emigrants, second-hand cars, do you need a reliable part-time maid? Japanese *udon* noodles, local grain rice, and taxi surcharges. They were like characters in a novel, narrating another story” (394).

In recent years, Beijing has taken increasingly assertive steps to exert control over Hong Kong's political system and suppress dissent. Si expresses this fact as well in his short story: “But ever since the local scholars set up a ‘Chinese School’ and bibliographic studies became very popular, I have not been on friendly terms with them. Every time they compiled a bibliography or published a volume of selected papers, they would exclude my name. Gradually, I felt the presence of these bibliographies everywhere. It seemed that there was an invisible Chinese brush moving above my head, brushing me off to non-existence” (391). In 2020, the Chinese government imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong, bypassing the local legislative process. This law criminalizes acts of secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces, with maximum penalties including life imprisonment.

The national security law has been met with widespread international condemnation and has raised concerns about the erosion of Hong Kong's freedoms. Since the implementation of the law, authorities have arrested dozens of pro-democracy activists, lawmakers, and journalists. There have been curbs on voting rights, limitations on press freedom, and a climate of fear and self-censorship. These measures have significantly impacted the pro-democracy movement and have led many Hong Kong residents to consider leaving the city. The protagonist in Si’s story, who coincidentally is nameless, does not leave Hong Kong physically. As Beijing erases Hong Kong’s traditional strong cultural and ideological ties with the West, the story’s protagonist desperately tries to continue the city’s Western connections with the help of a fax machine. “My personal and private thoughts could be covered up secretly and poured out only to a ‘black-coloured ear. Even the most rude, rough customs officer would not be able to inspect the electronic waves in the air” (392). The fax machine serves as an instrument of resistance against Beijing’s political aggression. Moreover, like objects of Holocaust victims, the fax machine could bear witness to the Chinese atrocities: “It allowed me to secure a facsimile, a true copy, a true record of my spiritual journey” (392). The existence of a fax machine is only plausible in a capitalistic, Westernized Hong Kong and would not have been an option in Maoist China. In this allegory, Si’s criticism of the Chinese system, expressed through the fax machine, transmits, and transcends beyond his physical Hong Kong.

Hong Kong’s unique position at the intersection of East and West allows for a unique paradigm shift. Whereas most Western nations fall into the trope of the brutal Colonizer, it is colonizing Britain offering values that a post-colonial East did not guarantee. The protagonist expresses his admiration of freedom of speech and religion in his preference for French magazines: “I subscribe to

French magazines and journals which discuss special topics in religion and literature. Perhaps people studying religion are more tolerant and inclusive” (391), than the Chinese oppressors one might add. Of particular interest is that a never colonized or conquered China applies the same mechanism of suppression that was once applied by the traditional Western colonizers. In Hong Kong, however, the European colonizer provided political, economic, and personal freedom.

The erosion of political freedoms, the curbs on press freedom, and the uncertainties surrounding the legal system have raised questions about the rule of law and the protection of business interests in Hong Kong. Beijing's actions in Hong Kong have drawn varying responses from the international community. Several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, have expressed concerns and taken measures to show solidarity with Hong Kong, while still conducting business with China. These measures include imposing sanctions on Chinese officials, suspending extradition treaties, and offering pathways to residency for Hong Kong residents. However, some countries have supported Beijing's actions or remained silent due to their economic and political ties with China. Moreover, some companies and individuals have started to reconsider their presence in the city, fearing the potential risks and uncertainties associated with doing business under the new political climate. This divergence of opinions reflects the complex geopolitical landscape and the challenges of balancing human rights concerns with diplomatic and economic considerations.

The future of Hong Kong and its unique literary traditions remains uncertain, as the city grapples with the tensions between stability and democracy. The Chinese government has emphasized the need for stability and has sought to strengthen its control over the region. However, the pro-democracy movement continues to advocate for greater political freedoms and the preservation of Hong Kong's unique identity. Achieving a balance between stability and democracy will require dialogue, understanding, and respect for the rights and aspirations of the people of Hong Kong. It is a complex and evolving process that will shape the future of the city and its place in the global community. As Hong Kong navigates the complexities of its identity and seeks to find a balance between stability and democracy, the world watches with interest, recognizing the significance of this global financial hub and its impact on the broader geopolitical landscape.

Hong Kong's cultural identity is not limited to a binary East-West dichotomy but reflects a complex blend of influences from China, Britain, and various other cultures.

The city's literature, poetry, and art capture the nuances of its history, the struggles of its people, and the aspirations for a better future. Ye Si's story exemplifies this struggle: a young protagonist, who is trapped between various political, historical, and economic realities is trying to find his voice. “Certainly I wanted to catch up, to make a connection with that world of transcendence, which I believed to be good and beautiful, and to share my ideals. On the other hand, I had a strong feeling that the most important thing to do was to take care of this worldly fax machine before me” (396). The world before him is Hong Kong, that world beyond stands for the West. Too Western to connect with his Chinese roots, and raise a family, yet too Eastern to be successful in the West, Si's protagonist fails both worlds.

Like the Hunger Artist's cage, Hong Kong is placed out of sight of the international community. Freedom, justice, and democracy are sacrificed to preserve the political and economic interests of the oppressive system. “Then I leaned over on top of her, waiting quietly because this was the only communication I had with the distant world of the soul faraway. I devotedly hoped that everything would go well and the message would be transmitted and the response properly received” (395-6). The protests of Kafka's Hunger Artist and the Hong Kong democratic freedom voices remain voiceless and futile.

Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" remains a timeless and thought-provoking work of literature, which transcends its historical context to resonate with contemporary societal issues. Through its exploration of alienation, modernism, psychology, philosophy, and politics, the story invites readers to reflect on their own experiences and consider the implications of societal norms and political systems. By drawing parallels to Ye Si's allegory "Transcendence and the Fax Machine" and examining the political landscape of Florida, we can uncover the enduring relevance and impact of Kafka's work. "A Hunger Artist" and "Transcendence and the Fax Machine" serve as powerful reminders of the importance of individual autonomy, democratic principles, and the constant need to challenge oppressive systems in the pursuit of a more just and inclusive society.

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