Creativity in Hong Kong Cinema

from the Golden Era (1985-1995) to the Extinction Period (1995-2005)

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Abstract

The Hong Kong film industry, one of the most successful and dynamic global exporters of the 1980s and 90s, has in the last decade entered a period of steep decline. From a reputation for seemingly endless creative innovation within an entertainment product able to please even the most jaded of cinematic publics, it appears to have lost its creative edge, falling back upon re-badging projects designed to take its more successful local ventures to English-speaking audiences. Most recently it has been busy producing under the more tightly controlled production codes of mainland China an altogether tamer and more formulaic set of dynastic dramas and children's films.

Within the industry, various explanations are canvassed to explain this drop in productivity. A number of powerful influences are held to intersect in restraining Hong Kong's cinematic productivity. Some of these are external to its own dynamic, such as the rise of successful film industries in neighbouring East Asian economies – especially Korea; the rapid growth of newer digital entertainment media, especially computer games; or the demands of a vast mainland Chinese audience. Together these are shifting Hong Kong production away from the tastes of a relatively sophisticated urban home audience to those of a more regional/rural base, losing both the 'edge' which is possible in highly localised production, and the connection with Hong Kong's own, distinctive, ethnic hybridity.

Other explanations of decline relate more to this 'home culture' perspective, and relate to tensions in film funding, after the late 1990s 'dot.com bubble' economic collapse across East Asian markets – currently replicated in the 2008 US sub-prime-led global recession. A film production system very much built over and into the market opportunism of Hong Kong's entrepot trade-hub orientation perhaps rises and falls with its broader economic fate: it does not and maybe cannot prevail against the trend. Nor has it been an industry strongly conscious of its own traditions, as this study will demonstrate. Rarely taking the time that is offered here to consider its own strengths and weaknesses, or to isolate what is most distinctive about its productions and its productivity, Hong Kong's film industry constantly drives onward to the next production. With no formal training institutions, and even the original studio system and distribution cinema chains now disappearing, there is little impetus towards self-examination, or critical analysis of which products and practices offer sustainability and success to this industry.

This study suggests then that not only is such analysis imperative if Hong Kong's film industry is to survive in the far more competitive markets of the twenty-first century, but that those issues endlessly discussed within the industry may be contributory factors to its problems, but do not in any way explain or excuse its current shortcomings. Rather, it will be argued here that film professionals industry-wide need to examine both past and current attitudes and practices, seeking out within the industry itself those elements in both past success and contemporary productions, which help define a 'best-practice' orientation towards sustainable creativity for this industry. The study focuses upon a single, system-wide question: *how can an industry with a global reputation for dynamic creativity suddenly appear to lose its way?*

Three aspects of this issue of creativity will be examined in close detail: firstly, how far is this industry aware of the creative well-springs of its own tradition/s, and how far can it be shown to have successfully mined these for creative renewal? Secondly, how has the Hong Kong film industry responded across its history to changing production conditions, whether in relation to audience formations, industry regulation, economic capacity, or re-geared technologies? Finally, what has been the industry's own attitude towards innovation? Has it welcomed or resisted the new – and where has this been considered to originate?

Such questions move the study into the orbit of two major international areas of inquiry. Given the need to question creativity itself as the necessary condition of this industry's success, it becomes important to consider contemporary theories of creativity. This study follows Pope (2005), re-examining major twentieth-century theorists of the creative act, but moving from his consideration of the literary text to that of the visual codes of cinema – and with an emphasis, given the

dominant genres of Hong Kong film, on cinematic action sequences, and especially martial arts. At the same time, with a creative product vested less in the personal impulse of the single 'creative genius' than in the inherently collaborative 'company' mode of cinema, the study considers the 'creative industries' concepts of such theorists as Castells (1996; 2001) and Flew (2002). As Hong Kong itself moves to establishment of a creative hub economy constructed around the creative industries theory – somewhat ironically viewing its globally-celebrated film industry as the core contributor – this study will question how far the broader recognition of an engaged, economically-integrated 'creativity' implied in such thinking may help the film industry re-capture its own productivity.

To achieve this, the study operates in two distinct modes. In the first instance, it works quantitatively, examining local Hong Kong cinema box office statistics from the so-called 'Golden Period' of success, to discover which films were pivotal in the rise to prominence of local cinematic product. In a second, follow-up move, it then seeks out a range of the most successful film professionals involved with these productions, and in a series of interviews, questions how far those central to Hong Kong's most innovative and popular movie productions were aware of the well-springs of their own success. What do they see as contributing to the popularity of their productions? What, for them, was innovative – and how could that capacity for innovation be re-captured? In Hong Kong film terms, what is a truly 'creative' product – and a 'creative industry?'

Throughout, this study focuses *through* the many film texts it examines, to the industry practices on which they are based, and which their many distinctive features reveal as peculiarly Hong-Kong in origin. The study is undertaken by someone who is himself deeply immersed in Hong Kong film production: a scriptwriter on many successful ventures, associated with a wide range of industry professionals, whose direct input is central to this study. In line with the requirements of a Professional Doctorate, the study offers as its research foundation an original description of problems which are at core practice-based – adding to this an attempt to produce analysis and deepened understanding of the current film *culture* of Hong Kong.

Interviews for this study were undertaken in Cantonese, and translated by the researcher. In addition, many of the studies cited, and all of the films included in the filmography, were studied in either Cantonese or Chinese. This aspect of the study's work is offered in the hope that it will add to international understandings of Hong Kong film, a more local perspective – and ultimately bring to Hong Kong film studies a sense of the need to engage many aspects of that local culture, restoring them to the production practices of Hong Kong film.

Certification of originality

I certify that all of the materials presented in this thesis are my own original work, and do not include any items presented for any other degree or degree course at this or any other institution.

I further assert that the interviews conducted for this study contain my own record and translation of the comments of those interviewees named, and that any scholarly texts or creative artifacts cited in this study from Chinese or Cantonese sources, are also my personal translations.

Any errors which such translations may contain are unintentional, and relate to issues of interpretation of idiom, or faulty transcription from audio recordings. English is the second language of some of my Interviewees, and the third language in my own case.

Signed: YUEN Kai Chi

Date:

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CHAPTER One: Introduction

1.1 Hong Kong: an international film production centre with an ongoing identity crisis?

In the 1990s Hong Kong, one of the 'Tiger Economies' of the Asian region and an irruptive new influence upon the world cinema stage, suddenly began to see its home film market collapse. What had been an iconic industry, studded with luminary 'creatives' and celebrity 'personalities', the major drive for local media and promotional circuits, had begun to falter. There was an exodus of Hong Kong film stars and filmmakers to Hollywood. Actors and directors such as Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-Fat, Michelle Yeoh, John Woo and Tsui Hark, and martial arts choreographers such as Yuen Woo-Ping and Sammo Hung were gaining international recognition – and accepting overseas commissions. In the international art-house film scene, Wong Kar-Wai, Stanley Kwan, Ann Hui and Fruit Chan were becoming highly recognised filmmakers – and starting to adapt their product to wider tastes.

At the same time, the city itself, home to so much creative filmmaking, was undergoing a remarkable process of decolonisation, and forming a more unified identity (Yau, 2001, pp. 37-38). At stake was Hong Kong's assertion of an independent Chinese identity for itself: for a space soon to be *in* China, but not exactly *of* the mainland. Although the 1997 handover of the ex-colonial territory from Britain to the People's Republic of China was approaching, the notion of regaining national identity and undergoing political, social and cultural re-incorporation, was not altogether welcomed by most local people. There was a nervous tension in the air – and yet one very much *not* to be spoken about. The major event in Hong Kong's history for the two centuries of its existence was nowhere to be seen in its cinematic product.

Many citizens felt that Hong Kong was and should continue to be a separate society, politically, culturally, and even linguistically (Yau, 2001, p. 40), raising the interesting question in terms of this study: how far might Hong Kong cinema be seen to reflect – perhaps even promote – such views? This project certainly proposes, *inter alia*, that Hong Kong cinema is an interesting tool for examining the disjunction that Hong Kong represents within Chinese thinking, culturally and politically, because of its past British colonial rule. It will be argued that the notion of a double identity swirls around in different movies, and particularly, this study will suggest, in Hong Kong's favourite movie genres. Nor does it exist only at the level of theme, plot or characterisation. Hong Kong's unusual role in the transnational movie industry: a small community with a large film market outside its own borders, may be in part a result of this duality – or a major constituent of it.

Those such as Yau *(op. cit.),* offering an analysis of Hong Kong's distinctive economic role in both China's and the world's trading relations, note that the transnational film industry offers a 'speculative ground for global capital investment' (Yau, 2001, p. 48). Analysis of that highly-pressured influence on Hong Kong film productions reveals intriguing patterns of international co-modification: evidence for instance of many aspects of filming being adapted to distributors' views on likely audience tastes, and the complex politics of varying national censorship and licensing demands. More than any other film industry, Hong Kong has had to adapt to film-financing drives from many different angles, responding to 'international capital's various contending factors or levels of functioning within national and local communities' *(Hong Kong Film Museum Letter,* Feb., 2003, Vol.23, p.20). Like Indian ('Bollywood') film, it has been at core largely commercial and populist in nature, dependent upon and successful within both local and diasporic communities. But unlike its Indian counterpart, Hong Kong film has also achieved a sizeable Western market - only to have to shift, seemingly at the height of its international success, to the huge market pull of mainland China, with its accompanying imposition of political and cultural restrictions on content.

In this light, it is important to ask whether Hong Kong cinema is becoming more *national,* or more *transnational.* How do its movie-makers, and so the movies themselves, react to the complex challenges of colonialism, post-colonialism and a resurgent Chinese nationalism? What creative responses is it summoning, from within the vastly successful repertoires of its own industrial and socio-cultural base, to carry it forward into this new set of challenges? Does it have the capacity, at the creative level, to match the successes of its own earlier history? Can the pride, and the proficiency of practice, incurred in its *Golden Period* (1985-1995) carry it forward, through the era of relative failure outlined here: 1995-2005 – a *Period of Decline,* or as many seem to be arguing, a full-fledged *Extinction Period?*

This study is suggesting an intensely local focus in raising these questions: one founded on the view that the distinctive nature of Hong Kong's film product overall stems from something equally distinctive within the film production culture which emerged within Hong Kong, and beneath that, within those deeper and more complex patterns of social, cultural, political and economic forces at play in that small but dynamic locale.

The first question to be raised here is therefore a relatively simple one. In the case of Hong Kong, how have *box office sales* reflected local people's sentiments towards particular film topics, narrative genres, and acting or performance styles – matters which can be shown to engage in deep and complex ways, issues of a local 'Hong Kong' cultural identity, and its relations to wider transnational or international influences? This study will be looking into links between audience sentiment in response to changes in Hong Kong cinema's creative product, as the film industry shifts its centre of reference to mainland China. Initially it will be tracing Hong Kong's own box office results from movie to movie, in order to snapshot response patterns to the major transnational re-orientations impacting upon Hong Kong film, as a central form of cultural communication. The sample will mirror the four decades of Hong Kong's late-twentieth-century rise to economic power, tracking the development of Hong Kong's New Wave cinema from the late 1970s; a movement including directors such as Tsui Hark, Allen Fong, Ann Hui, Yim Ho, and Patrick Tam. In particular, it will trace audience figures for those films widely received – and reviewed at the time – as 'pivotal' in the New Wave movement: productions which were considered to change the direction of film production; to gain unprecedented audience response, or to have moved Hong Kong's international reputation for film production onto new levels. And in doing so, there will be a particular focus upon how each

of these key films in Hong Kong's production history positions itself in relation to a specifically Hong Kong identity politics: that is, what it suggests to local Hong Kong viewers about their place within colonial, Chinese, or international cultural traditions.

1.2 Is Hong Kong film just – or mainly - for Hong Kong viewers?

The identity of Hong Kong has always been marked by its closeness to China; but also by its Western links, through its status as a colony. This multi-directedness has produced a cinema that constantly asks its producers and its audiences the one question: 'Who Am I?' From action to art pictures, local movies can be seen as sharing one constant theme - the search for and affirmation of identity. This thesis examines how the cinema of Hong Kong continues to reflect a dual vision, combining to create a 'localised identity' – one crucial to any role it may subsequently play in achieving a distinctive creativity, and so successfully contributing to a 'creative industries' economic re-development of the city's future within both China and the world.

The New Wave movement, which rose to eminence from 1979 (L. Cheuk-to, 1994, p. 160), modernised and in many ways successfully globalised many tropes of Chinese film and Chinese cultural tradition – and yet did so within distinctively urban settings, and with characterisation and elements of everyday experience and behaviour which were very specifically part of Hong Kong's own high-activity culture.

Hong Kong is a city that has properly created its own cultural identity; one that merges elements of the West and East. Yet Hong Kong is also a Chinese community that has strong links with the mother culture. How then is this very specific composition of 'Hong Kong Chinese-ness' played out in Hong Kong movies? Taking films as diverse as Wong Kar Wai's *Days of Being Wild,* or *Chungching Express;* Fruit Chan's *Made in Hong Kong;* Stanley Kwan's *Full Moon in New York,* or Ann Hui's *Song of the Exile,* shows a very broad range of identity; yet each is intensely Chinese, in a way that also captures a specifically Hong Kong take on life. Curiously, this question of quite what it is that signals this 'Hong Kong-ness' has not been asked before of Hong Kong cinema. Perhaps it has been suppressed in the decade of problematic adjustment to political reunion with mainland China; or perhaps it is still shadowed by a form of academic colonialism, in which aspects of Hong Kong's distinctiveness as a film production culture remain obscured by attempts to view its global trade positioning in relation to Western views of the Hollywood production culture. In those studies and media commentaries which do exist on this 'identity-search' focus within the Hong Kong industry, there has for instance been massive comment on Hong Kong cinema that 'registers the industry's pursuit of the global market, a pursuit that mirrors Hollywood's, whose "authentic" productions consolidate its screen hegemony' (Yau, 2001, p.8). Thus Hong Kong cinema is made to seem always, both as an industry and as a pool of creative talent, to mirror Hollywood. It is viewed as if seeking to flow its productions as Hollywood does - but of course on a smaller scale - from an unquestioned 'universal' stock of creative productivity, out to an equally 'universal' audience, configured as the homogeneous consumer base of global capitalism. Such views contain within them acritically essentialist views of selfhood and 'taste', and have no potential for examining the particularities of how creative product 'flows', in Castells' terms (1996), across national and cultural borders.

Flew (2002, pp. 125-130) outlines how contemporary understandings of cultural production have come to position it as a complex and multi-facetted set of industries and practices, closely allied in both production and consumption to concepts of identity. 'The Cultural Industries', a term originated by Frankfurt School theoreticians Adorno and Horkheimer (see especially 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', *Mass Communication and Society.* Edward Arnold. 1977) were considered to be the producers of information and entertainment product for the industrialised nations of advanced capitalism, producing standardised material for mass commodity markets, and in the Frankfurt School view, distorting the aesthetics of the content of 'high art' traditions in favour of 'mere' distractive entertainment. This distinction between 'art' and 'entertainment', or high art and commercial product, was reflected, as Flew points out, in successive Arts Policies, designed to subsidise the relatively *un*popular at the expense of entertainment, on the grounds that Art promoted civic benefit, and a national identity. Critics of such policy (see for instance Girard, 1982, pp. 22-40) pointed out that to ignore the popular, mass-media product was in fact to ignore the most influential and most widely disseminated products – a position already clear to the Marxist authorities controlling mainland Chinese cultural productivity. With their Maoist understanding of the powers of cinema in particular as a tool of popular persuasion and mass education (see especially the *Yan'an Tracts)* mainland Chinese film producers had a clear vision of the power of the popular cinematic text – a vision constrained only by what actually *was* popular with their then still largely rural audiences.

No such inhibitions existed in Hong Kong, a near-exclusively urban society, which learned very quickly to merge the various ethnic-regional strands of its own local and refugee communities with the spicing of readily-available Hollywood blockbuster product. Working without subsidy, to audiences without private or public resources for many leisure alternatives, Hong Kong cinema went directly and exclusively for the popular. This was shamelessly an industry which set out to entertain – inadvertently fulfilling Garnham's 1987 Anglo-European prescriptions for the emergent new view of what it was that film, as a major force among the cultural industries of late modernity, should be producing:

> Most people's cultural needs and aspirations are being, for better or worse, supplied by the market, as goods and services. If one turns one's back on an analysis of that dominant cultural process, one cannot understand either the culture of our time or the challenges and opportunities which that dominant culture offers to public policy makers (1987, pp. 24-25).

By the late 1980s both Governments and academics had come to understand the cultural industries as important to national economic development. They were major employers in the goods and services sector, with particular potential in relation to value-adding support industries across a wide range of media, information and entertainment services. They had 'multiplier' effects on related industries in the newly emergent 'lifestyle' sector, as well as adding value to tourism and travel, and contributing to the sorts of national 'branding' becoming important for marketing within the new global economy. As the information and entertainment industries themselves began the rapid integration of services enabled by the arrival of digitisation, regulators and major transnational corporations alike began to understand the potential for a whole new form of multiple-use marketing of their product. Items which had formerly been once-off creations: a movie; a hit music track; a popular child's toy – now became transferable cross-platform entities, spinning out in seemingly endless re-iterations and possibilities for cross-merchandising (see especially Olsen, 2003). The localised, specialised, single-focus cultural industries of

both high and popular arts were becoming, in Castells' terms, 'networked' into entirely new relations of both production and consumption: relations which were dispersed in their employment patterns, readily transnational in their collaborations or recruitment of the best artistic or creative talent, and as attentive to the needs, tastes and preferences of their consumers as of their producers.

Faced with such pressures the a-critical hope that a Hong Kong film industry could simply stream its product out beyond its own borders, to 'the world' consumer, raised two further problems. Firstly, how were Hong Kong audiences affected by all of this? Were they going to be receptive to or supportive of views that Hong Kong movies could somehow be 'Hollywoodised' – modifying either their Chinese-ness or their local Hong Kong characteristics, to achieve a broader, global market? Were there instances where audiences flowed away from, or to, movies in the New Wave period of Hong Kong's cinema success, which were reviewed as 'globally oriented' or 'Hollywood-like' in their treatment? Secondly, how far has the reputation of key or 'pivotal' films in this period of change – films accorded special status as altering the direction of Hong Kong film making – been 'fed back' from international market responses, to local box office? Have key, big-reputation Hong Kong films been successful first locally, or did they only subsequently achieve local audience support, as part of a global audience response?

This is a particularly important issue for future film production in Hong Kong, where the current loss of global film financing now means distinctively low production budgets. Can local productions achieve – or regain - the much-anticipated expectation of being the 'Hollywood of the East'? Clearly planned in current 'creative industry hub' Hong Kong economic policies (see especially Dannen, Fredric & Long, Barry, *Hong Kong Babylon: an insider's guide to the Hollywood of the East*, Faber and Faber, 1997, p. 33), might this be achieved in terms of audience response, through relocating a balance between the Chinese traditional film content, and the urban-global of Hollywood action film? Is that what is envisaged, or understood, within policy plans to model a new 'Creative Industries' Hong Kong economy on the early successes of its film industry? Is there any evidence that Hong Kong film creatives – its most successful producers, directors, writers, performers, and cinematographers of the New Wave – understood that they were producing a product that was somehow to vector Chinese-ness: to carry a Hong Kong based but ultimately always Chinese cultural vision to the world? The core question for this study then becomes: is something of that local-global balance part of a formula that was the focus of the Hong Kong-specific New Wave movement in its period of success?

To ask such questions is to move to the second of the major late-twentieth-century developments related to the cultural industries: the emergence of the *creative clusters* planning movement (Porter, 1998, p. 52). By integrating selected creative industries within a relatively small local area, competitive advantage is achieved. Specialist workers and resources can be amassed; related fields can cross-pollinate their creativity, and new collaborations, products and services can emerge. While digitisation appeared at first to disperse production, creating forces such as disintermediation or the 3 x 8-hour global-shift-production day of the animation industry, the *milieux of innovation* which Sassen (1991, p 83) called *global cities* and Castells and Hall (1994, p.137) termed *technopoles* focused new layers of Government at the regional and city level upon the 'creative hub' concept of digital information/entertainment production. Added to what Landry (2000) identified as the *hard infrastructure* of buildings, transport and digital bandwidth, was the *soft infrastructure* of social networks and

human interactivity – the exchange of new ideas and techniques, which promotes creativity itself. With China nominating the southern border region of Shenzhen, Hong Kong's nearest gateway to the mainland economy, as its dominant SER (Special Economic Region) and a major creative hub, Hong Kong became, *de facto,* a creative as well as commercial entrepot, linking China to the global economy.

As part of its testing of these issues, this thesis thus proposes to take up the position that the current problematic 'decline' in the production output, and most would say the quality, of Hong Kong cinema, is enmeshed in these complex moves to find for a small and distinctive local film industry, an even more complex transnational and international role. This is an industry which is being required simultaneously to respond to the particularities of its own dynamic urban setting; as ell as to a long history of social and political unheaval and constraint; to the powerful demands of its core culture as exerted from beyond its own shores, and to its emergence as a 'One Nation Two Systems' space of economic and cultural exchange between China and the West. To this extent this study postulates that the current period of decline in Hong Kong's film industry may be only a periodic cycle in an ongoing production history: one shared from time to time by every other major production culture, and certainly one which should be examined and analysed within the context of its own cultural and economic conditions, rather than confronted by analysis drawn from external examples. Figures used for instance to indicate the market potential of the creative industries as various Governments and corporations plan their integration, indicate in interesting ways the sectoral variability from zone to zone (see Figure 1) and so reveal something of the dilemma in re-positioning film as a 'creative industry'. Film, the dominant sector in Hong Kong's market, is ranked only 7th globally, behind giants such as publishing, research and development, TV and radio, and even music, while it is 8th equal in the US, behind design, advertising, software, and even toys and games, and in the UK, where it is rivaled even by Art.

The global creative economy – market size, 1999 (US$ billion)

Sector	*Global*	*USA*	*UK*
Advertising	45	20	8
Architecture	40	17	2
Art	9	4	3
Crafts	20	2	1
Design	140	50	27
Fashion	12	5	1
Film	57	17	3
Music	70	25	6
Performing Arts	40	7	2
Publishing	506	137	16
R&D	545	243	21
Software	489	325	56
Toys and Games	55	21	2
TV and Radio	195	82	8

Video Games	17	5	1
TOTAL	2240	960	157

Source: Howkins, 2001, p. 116, cited in Flew, 2002, p. 135

To that extent, this is therefore a local study: one initially seeking statistical evidence from box office and ratings and contemporary reviews. What counts here is the specific history of one production culture's trajectory of success. But given the complexity of the cultural influences now understood to be at play in such a production culture, it is important to take the investigation beyond the merely quantitative. The study will move on, once having mapped this industry's major successes, to examine how major figures within those productions identified as successful *by local Hong Kong audiences* brought each key film to its current status as an icon of the New Wave period. To do so is to move back from consideration of the Hong Kong experience in relation to *creative industries,* to examine the specifics of a Hong Kong view of *creativity itself.*

1.3 Phase Two of the study: interviewing film professionals

The second phase of this study will involve the selection of the key films that marked each era of the New Wave, and interviews with those who worked on them, or promoted them. Interviews will include Jackie Chan and Andy T W Lau as actors, Tsui Hark as a producer, Ng See Yuen as an industry manager, John Chong and Pang Ho Cheung as directors, Andy Lau Wai Keung as a director and cinematographer, Johnnie To Ki Fung as a writer and investor – a major cross-section of the Hong Kong New Wave movement. This new set of data will test what seems to be becoming the central hypothesis of this study: that the Hong Kong film culture, in keeping with today's 'integrated', creative-hub cultural industries, has no permanent or mono-directional trajectory which carries it forward into a single planned future. Instead, it will be argued that it constantly adapts to circumstances within a very dynamic economy and culture, and has always done so; that it will periodically rise and fall, just as Hollywood does; that each production partly tests new ground, while a few take giant strides into new territory – and that this is in itself a quintessentially 'Hong Kong' way of doing things.

The study thus 'problematises' the history of Hong Kong's New Wave in these ways, asking at each stage what was going on, and how central film creatives understood their own responses. It will demonstrate how very local patterns of creativity in the films made in both boom and bust periods, alongside the box office responses to them, show that the very uncertainty which Hong Kong citizens – and film makers - faced when they started to confront and examine their relationship with China, has produced not an irrevocable breach in a previously successful production formula, but a recognition of pluralism and experimentation within film. What will be posited is a specific 'Hong Kong creativity' that has already brought great success to Hong Kong cinema both locally and globally, and which can, if thoroughly understood, build it to a new level of maturity.

To do so however is to re-introduce another of the major research questions behind the study: the issue of creativity itself,

as understood by and practised within not just the film industry, but the Hong Kong film industry: a cultural hybrid of Chinese and Western traditions.

UK analyst Rob Pope (2005) notes that the concept of creativity

> ... has an ancient and continuing past rooted in notions of divine creators and mythic moments of creation; a more recent, specifically human history framed chiefly in terms of creative arts and artists; and current applications that range from advertising and public relations ('creating the right image') to business studies and education ('creative management', 'creative problem-solving'). Computer programs ask us to 'Create File', and 'creative accounting' has become the regular euphemism for what used to be called 'cooking the books' (p 1).

Pope also notes however that the word itself in English dates back only to 1875, and that we confront great uncertainty when trying to understand what is involved in a single term used to cover such a broad expanse of semantic ground. How much more complex a set of meanings may then be engaged, once such a term seeks definition within a hybrid culture, straddling late-modern global markets founded on Western principles, as well as accommodating content and practices drawn from Chinese traditions.

Pope himself is anxious to evolve definitions which will be as all-encompassing as possible:

> Is creativity best conceived as initiating things, continuing them or completing them? Or is it something we always come at from the middle? Is 'being creative' something we can ever be or do entirely on our own, or must it always be done with or with respect to others? Further, are we to think of 'creation' in terms of achieved objects and finished products, what was supposedly creat-*ed* by some one-off act (by a god or artist or author for instance) and now exists only as past fact? Or are we to grasp creation in terms of networks of relations and continuing processes: creat-*ing*, with the emphasis upon ongoing activity in the present (by us, here and now, for instance)? Is creativity something that happens 'over there', what we observe others doing? Or is it rather something that happens to us immediately 'in here', as participating subjects? In short, is creativity an 'it' or a 'we' – then or now? Or is it sometimes, under different cultural and historical conditions, something else entirely? (p xv).

At the end of his study, rather than producing the all-encompassing definition, Pope sets up a series of ever-more-radical possible new spaces of creative activity, and claims to have confirmed only that 'creativity is fundamentally a matter of practice: what we do and how – with whatever materials we have to hand or in mind, and in whatever moments we find or can make time and space for' (p. 253). The openness of this invites the sort of work undertaken here – both its application of the concept of creativity into the collaborative processes of film making, and its trans-location into the complex cultural cross-currents of Hong Kong, with its endlessly opportunistic eye for the commercial opportunity. The situation invites the latter of the two tendencies within Pope's creativity formula: its emphasis on 'creat-*ing*', as an adaptive, ongoing and flexible processing. This study suggests that Hong Kong cinema is inherently reactive – so that its current problems are as likely to produce creative response, as to cause it to founder. The study will, from chapter to chapter, seek

to identify the specific features of such a creativity, within both the cinematic product, and the understandings of cinema 'creatives' of what drives their productivity. To begin then what will be a wide-ranging examination of a specifically Hong Kong creativity, is to examine its cinematic realisation, within a time and space continuum notorious for constant re-invention. If the Hong Kong film industry isn't what it once was, neither is Hong Kong itself. How then have various eras of film production viewed their own productivity – and how might any of these perspectives relate to the context of production?

1.4 The Hong Kong movie industry, and its rise to success: 1970 to the early 1990s

Hong Kong is a city that has clearly created its own culturally specific identity; one that merges elements of West and East. Hong Kong cinema even appears at some level to have been quite consciously seeking to play 'Hollywood,' as film hub to at least the Chinese world, if not the entire global cinema-going public. But has this been its sole originary model – or even the dominant game in play?

To explain this ambition, it is important to recognise that when the Hong Kong film industry first evolved as a serious transnational contender during the 1970s, it modeled, and was modeled upon, its own distinctively local cultural identity and economic role at that time. Most of the films being made in those days were action movies (mainly centred on martial arts), as a cheap but very distinctive genre, with low budget production, short production schedules, and the opportunistic use of real locations. This was primarily local-audience product: favourite Chinese traditional action narratives, with the complexities of characterisation or plot suppressed, to meet short production runs. Serious contemporary themes were eliminated - partly to sustain the action-film audience development, but also because colonial British rule perennially discouraged direct social comment. In a final irony, the quick-fix use and constant re-use of Hong Kong locations had the dual effect of inducing an audience sense of pride and commitment to a local product, and modernising what had originally been mainly historically-set martial arts plots.

With this almost accidental set of production parameters, Hong Kong's movie industry rapidly distinguished itself as something novel and interesting to the world movie scene. Its strong 'martial arts master' images, featuring globally-recognised talent and directors, outstanding fights choreography and stunt traditions, and overall a sense of creative innovation, brought the visual excitement of martial arts film to the equally exciting cityscapes and urban plotlines of modernity.

These action movies hit Hollywood-dominated global audiences at a very complex moment in the US social and cultural order: the post-Nixon, post-Vietnam years, when the normal cultural exuberance of US movies was much diminished. The Peace movement had eliminated traditional hero narratives – both the *film noir* crime tradition and the blockbuster 'How the West was won' cowboy epic were entirely out of fashion. White House corruption and the feminist movement had subdued both crime-busting action plots and glamorous 'sex-romp' romances, and Hollywood was producing some of the

most art-house, anti-hero, social criticism movies in its history. While there were major hits in this period, not until *Star Wars* at the end of the 1970s did the US industry begin a slow return to the production of vastly popular action film.

An equivalent New Wave in Hong Kong cinema came at the very end of the 1970s, when a group of young directors started making films that attempted to break away from the norms of kung fu and comedy that had been popular throughout the decade. Yim Ho's *The Extras* (1978), Tsui Hark's *The Butterfly Murders* (1979), Ann Hui's *The Secret* (1979), and Allen Fong's *Father and Son* (1981) were among the films during that timeframe to be hailed for their ingenuity, extending and innovating every aspect of film making, without quite abandoning the established formulae for Hong Kong cinema at the time. It seemed good to be different - and box office responded. Many filmmakers soon followed suit by making movies that sought out experimental concepts and storylines. But such an account makes the whole construct appear too sequential, too organic in its development, and too consistent in its direction. This is a story told with hindsight: a 'rearview mirror' representation, as Hartley once put it (2005, p. 67), where everything appears to have developed from the final assemblage, backwards, in a relatively neat and deliberate sequencing. While it meets many of the definitions and experiences of creativity posited by Pope – and especially those most suited to the late twentieth-century emergence of a 'creative industries' perspective on social and economic planning – it shares with them an excessive and reductive degree of 'managed' change. Pope detects this view of creativity at play in UK formulations embraced by both 'new Labour' under the Blair Government and late capitalism more generally, where 'Creativity is defined as "the application of knowledge and skills in new ways to achieve a valued goal"' (p 27, quoting Seltzer and Bentley, 1999, p. 10). Pope further isolates in the Seltzer and Bentley manifesto for creative change four key principles relevant to the view of Hong Kong New Wave cinema as a *shift beyond tradition:*

1 the ability to identify new problems, rather than depending on others to define them
2 the ability to transfer knowledge gained in one context to another in order to solve a problem
3 a belief in learning as an incremental process, in which repeated attempts will eventually lead to success
4 the capacity to focus attention in the pursuit of a goal or set of goals.

(Seltzer and Bentley 1999 pp. 10-11; cited in Pope, p. 27)

While Pope recognises and endorses at least the first two qualities identified here as innovative, the latter he identifies as more managerial and protective of the status quo:

> Basically, what is involved is a blend of social engineering and skills-based education in the service of a model combining democratic citizenship and competitive commercialism. This is a frankly corporatist model of creativity (p. 26).

While this 'corporatist' perspective was yet to fully develop inside the Hong Kong film industry – and indeed, we will see the beginnings of a call for its implementation in the interview data collected from Hong Kong film professionals collected for this study – the inherently commercial model of Hong Kong film production acted as an early indicator of the sorts of pressures felt under Thatcherite neo-capitalist renewal within the UK. It is important then to shift focus away from acritical

views of creativity within film production built over post-Romantic 'creative genius' *auteur* perspectives: a vision developed late in the Hong Kong milieu and never fully embraced in either Chinese culture or Hong Kong's intensely commercial social ethos. Instead, it is important to consider the many diverse and often contradictory social and economic factors of the 70s era in Hong Kong, before pronouncing on what it was that contributed to the growth of the Hong Kong movie industry, or before attributing it all to the personal genius of one or two prime 'creative' innovators.

1.5 Systematic movie production: Creativity and the business model

The first major influence in this era arose not from filmmaking, but from distribution and sales: strictly the business end of the industry.

During the 1970s, a revolutionary business model was introduced to the local movie industry in Hong Kong – a systematic cinema chain. By linking production more closely to distribution, building a mix of city-wide promotion with local neighbourhood cinemas, industry figures such as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Yuen Bao and the Golden Harvest cinema chain were able to make a greater than usual impact on the Hong Kong market. The impetus they gave to box office demand significantly increased the number of movies produced in Hong Kong, and pushed the industry to new heights through the 1980s.

Similar influences were introduced through changes to film-funding models. A 'film outsourcing system' was established in the 80s, drawing investment from businessmen outside the film industry, to reduce the financial burden on local film makers. For the first time there was sufficient funding not only to increase production overall, but to increase the quality and production values of each movie. In an era of quick profit-taking and economic boom times, cash flowed both to and from the movie industry. It also however left the industry more open than ever to market forces, and in more complex ways, not always the result of creative failure. In the 1990s for instance there was a sectoral downturn in the industry, with a number of factors in play, from pirated DVDs and VCDs then unregulated in the Hong Kong market, to higher production costs as the industry geared up to digital technologies, and higher ticket prices discouraged regular cinema-going. Once again however, a combination of factors was at work beneath these economic explanations.

The internationalisation of Hong Kong talent, signaled for instance in the success of Chow Yun Fat and John Woo, raised the profile and brought greater exposure to Hong Kong cinema. But it also meant that Hong Kong had to share its stars with the world. For the first time the best of Hong Kong's talent had its creativity directed elsewhere - while Hong Kong movies lost some of their competitive edge and 'brand'. Few then understood that the film industry had suffered only the first in a series of major setbacks for the entire Hong Kong economy. The late 1990s major economic crash, which affected almost all of Asia, effectively wiped out funding for local productions, which had by that time become dependant upon business investment. At the same time new Hollywood blockbusters like *Titanic* had started to eat once again into the domestic market. Hong Kong's biggest names, quick to read the signs, joined the general business exodus off-shore. But this was by no means the only negative economic news for the film industry. Although still achieving recognition abroad, the lustre on

Hong Kong's homegrown film industry faded considerably over the last decade of the twentieth century. Hong Kong cinema enthusiasts, who had passionately followed the rise of Hong Kong's own movies during the 80s and early 90s, started to look to South Korea for Asia's boldest and most innovative films.

Since 1998 South Korea's local film industry has undergone an astonishing transformation. A new generation of Korean moviemakers has revitalised the movie industry with bold art house productions, big-budget action, thought -provoking dramas, and controversial satires, including *My Sassy Girl, Shiri,* and *My Wife is a Gangster.* South Korea is the new Hong Kong, with its film industry on the edge of exploding onto the world stage. Some Korean films have already found success in the North American market, and Korean directors are being scouted by major Hollywood studios for U.S. re-make rights – perhaps a duplication of the talent drain which eroded creativity in the Hong Kong industry.

As the Hong Kong film industry lost its most outstanding directors and designers to the rich rewards and glamour of Hollywood, there was less developmental support for a younger generation of filmmakers. With the lack of professionally-recognised film-making training programs, there were still far too few professionals in the movie industry in Hong Kong. Worse - since the films coming out in Hong Kong at that time were mostly of the same low-budget genres: bad New Year comedies and gangster movies, there was no high-quality training ground for those who did emerge, and little to attract a new generation to even seek training. Many were deflected into the booming software and animation industries, producing digital games.

Neither the Hong Kong government nor higher education institutes had organised film courses for interested applicants, so that those young people interested in careers in the movie industry had few means of getting started. The movie industry in Hong Kong had never established formal pathways for entry. Precarious career prospects meant that interested individuals were always largely discouraged from entry. Perhaps, in a perverse way, this was in itself a recruiting technique which guaranteed creativity – since only the most committed and passionately devoted film enthusiasts ever found their way into Hong Kong movie-making. But with the increasing formalisation and competitiveness across all professional roles from the 1980s and 90s onwards, filmmaking began to seriously lag behind in recruitment of creative talent. The Information Era had a voracious appetite for the 'immaterial labour' of digitally trained knowledge workers, and was successful in integrating its training needs into the existing education system and academies and publicising its employment potential to parents. It left the needs of the movie industry far behind. As Pope argues, while the new Creative Industries hypothesis emerging in this era included the recuperative strategy of including 'old media' such as film in its planning purview, this tactic had one important blind spot within its Utopian vision. Established media industries – and especially those, like film, with high production costs and risky and complex sales returns, were suddenly minor players in a crowded field.

In the past, there had been far fewer choices for entertainment. There were no karaoke bars, clubs, internet sites, multiple TV channels... Going to the cinema was a popular activity for spending time with friends and family. But in the late '90s, when digital communications technology started to boom, plenty of exciting and innovative choices of entertainment were developed – and rapidly. The public were now exposed to movies in DVD/ VCD format, or on high-definition digital TV channels and wide-screen Home Entertainment Centres.

True movie fans had gone to the movies for an attractive story, professional filming and shooting effects. They wanted to experience a well-scripted and well-shot movie, sitting comfortably in a well-air-conditioned and ventilated cinema house. But even they were tempted by the emergence of new AV products, enabling them to create their own large-screen cinema experience at home. Movie-going began to disappear from the regular social program of a Hong Kong citizen's life – as the box-office survey for this study will show. And as this single-focus for visual narrative entertainment lost its pre-eminence, its attraction for young 'creatives' similarly declined. New media, inherently more accessible to the young creative 'wannabe', provided altogether easier pathways towards production, even formalising them through its emphasis on 'open source' participation and 'software modding'. At the same time the movie industry itself had little awareness of what was happening across the broad field of entertainment production, or how to contest it. Its inattentiveness – blinded perhaps by its own decades of success – was to prove its downfall, and undermine its own ongoing access to the leading edge of creativity within entertainment production and design.

1.6 Creative change: Researching the industry's own understandings of what produces creative success

This study will suggest then that all of the factors introduced above impacted upon the last decades of Hong Kong New Wave filmmaking, and influenced its capacity to maintain high degrees of creativity within distinctively Hong Kong-styled movies. But in making such claims, the study seeks to move beyond simple narratives of 'what happened'. The sketching-out and endless rehearsal of a 'rise-and-fall' trajectory, while a popular pastime within the Hong Kong movie industry, raises questions about its own reliability. Purely descriptive, often based upon anecdote and opinion, such accounts lack real capacity to access causal relations which might 'explain' the changes they record. Explanations offered remain conjectural. If this account of 'what happened' to Hong Kong filmmaking is to stand on its merits, then evidence needs to be offered. How might such proposed impacts be measured? How can such influences be proven? How can a researcher move beyond this level of hypothesis, to indicate with more precision exactly which movie productions were effected, by which social, political, economic, technological or cultural changes – and when, and how, and to what outcome/s?

To reflect upon and answer such questions is to shift focus, moving away from these preliminary 'scene-setting' accounts of Hong Kong's film industry, to consider how questions raised so far might best be answered. This brings the study to the contemplation of appropriate research methods, together with their methodological justifications (see also Chapter 4). The task will involve both locating and fostering analysis of the most useful data available and accessible to the study. It must suit the emphasis within the study on attending not only to a particular creativity within the targeted research object: Hong Kong filmmaking, but to the proposition that its prime qualities relate in very specific ways to its social and cultural *location* – Hong Kong itself.

The research design for a major project such as this includes of course the processes of conceptualising and planning under discussion here. The issues to be explored are first defined, and then the best ways to conduct the various strands of the

investigation can be decided. But beyond this 'backgrounding' lies the crucial identification of the best ways to locate and analyse solid evidence, upon which to base all subsequent interpretive commentary.

In the first instance, as outlined above, a quantitative analysis of the rise-and-fall trajectory of the Hong Kong film industry will be conducted, tracing through successive box office receipts the relative success and failure patterns of Hong Kong produced films. This will establish which productions succeeded in real terms: with actual audiences - and which failed. In particular, the statistics collected will be used to identify films which stood out from the general fare available: which returned good profits, grossed good sales, and received good reviews. Those films identified as stand-outs in this way will then be subjected to a second set of data-collection processes.

In this second section of the research, qualitative research methods will be used to collect information on how the film professionals involved within their production viewed the merits of these stand-out movies, both in the course of working on them, and in retrospect, as they became known as pivotal moments in the Hong Kong industry. At one level this phase of the research, operating as a series of open-ended interviews with a range of film professionals, will remain purely empirical, allowing respondents to formulate their own views on the experience of working on a given film, and to assert their own responses to its subsequent success and ongoing reputation. In a second, more structured phase of analysis however, respondent views will be probed in an attempt to isolate the *particular forms of creativity* which they reported as contributing to given productions. Those forms of creativity viewed most strongly as contributing not only to each movie's success, but to the reputation of the Hong Kong industry overall, will then be returned to the modellings of creativity itself, foregrounded within Pope's work on human creativity, and Flew's on the primary understandings behind the Creative Industries movement.

The three main research questions behind this study can therefore be summarised as follows:

1. What major patterns of change are evident in the Hong Kong film industry from the Golden Era (1985-1995) to the Extinction Period (1995-2005) of Hong Kong film?

2. How does creativity evolve in the film-making process, both within a specific production, and across an industry, and how do Hong Kong filmmakers understand it?

3. What is it that Hong Kong audiences have responded to in Hong Kong films, and does this include – perhaps because of the dual vision of a mixed cultural identity – a special generic flexibility and 'cultural fusion' formula, on which a new or renewed industry might rise?

Given these questions, and their capacity within a Creative Industries model to impact upon other aspects of a *creative cluster* economy, these become issues of major concern. Within the entertainment sector generally, the movie industry is widely acknowledged as helping to stimulate the expansion of other industries. As consumers spend money on movies for entertainment, this creates a chain-effect, initiating sales of other side-products. A joint promotion in Hong Kong by a

chocolate brand with City Line cinemas in 2005 offered a special discount to movie viewers who purchased chocolate sachets. During the campaign period, the sales volume of the brand increased sharply. These forms of 'vertical integration' cross-merchandising have become commonplace in all sectors of the entertainment industries (see especially Olsen, 1999) and remind us that movies can indeed also boost other elements of the economy of Hong Kong. As movies become in themselves a direct medium for advertising and promotion, the rapid development and heavy usage of 'product placement' or 'title sponsorship' helps different brands and products to create awareness and generate sales. And as Hong Kong maintains a role as an exotic and hyper-modern film location, industries such as tourism, theme parks, travel, accommodation, hospitality, and retailing all benefit.

From the grand perspective, as the 'light' or digital creative industries (see Castells, 1996, and Bauman, 1998, 2000) and their related promotional services come to be seen to play an important role in Hong Kong's economic future, the economy of Hong Kong will increasingly be seen to be affected by its movie industry. Hong Kong is a small island city, without capacity for primary production or even much secondary manufacturing. Its film industry retains a high profile as a mark of its cultural dynamism and business acuity - even given its seeming decline in relative income generation within a grid of newly-acknowledged creative industries (see especially Howkins, *The Creative Economy*, 2001, p. 46). It is this understanding which has led many industry figures and politicians in Hong Kong to maintain a positive attitude towards the revival of Hong Kong's movie industry. But as Hong Kong settles into its likely role as a major exchange-hub for China's manufacturing industries and their increasing flows of product to the world, it will also have to re-design its earlier role as marker of all that is modern and globally-oriented in Chinese creative production. For it will be Hong Kong, and the other mainland 'SER' exchange-hubs like it, which will form and, in the interim at least, sustain the 'outward' or global directedness of China's productivity. China-Hong Kong, seen from this perspective, must 'translate' its local-value designs into globally-oriented forms, and represent to the world what is at once distinctively Chinese, yet modern, urban, hi-tech, fast-paced - and thrilling.

With the support of so many different parties, and a coherent and integrated understanding of the working of creative products and their capacity to add value across an entire economy, Hong Kong's movie industry is likely to achieve its desired economic revival. What this study seeks to reveal, is what might be 'in' those movies. It aims to explain what the secret of Hong Kong's very specific, very local creative success has been – and might be again. In the longer term, the focus for Hong Kong's movie industry will be towards mainland China, with its infinite potential for both distribution and production. Movie makers in Hong Kong are currently learning to negotiate with PRC government; adapting from a very free-wheeling local history of relative non-regulation in the 1980s, to one of absolute government control, with regulation at many different levels. Fitting into the mainland Chinese market, while at the same time maintaining the standard and originality of the movies; what has been understood in Hong Kong film circles simply as their 'creativity', is a difficult prospect. So if this 'creativity', viewed as somehow the essential core of any given movie and the guarantor of its success, is to be a major factor in saving the whole film sector, and modeling success for the other creative industries, we need to know how these flows of creativity which are considered to exist within a given movie, also cycle through an entire industry. How are films influenced by culture, political changes, economics, and social development, in the expression of their 'creativity'?

The case of Hong Kong, with its rapid rise to success, and what seems to have been an equally rapid descent, may have much to tell global film industries.

CHAPTER Two: *The story so far...*

2.1 Two ways of viewing how Hong Kong film makers have created a distinctive vision, at once traditional and modern

One way to approach the central questions of this study: that is, what has been distinctive in Hong Kong film, and how might it regenerate within the changing realities of Hong Kong's creative industries; is to examine in close-focus those specific transformations within Hong Kong cinema product during the most recent periods of historical change.

To this end, two near-contemporary discussions in Volume 15, Issues 3 and 4 of the journal *Cultural Studies* (2001): Li Siu Leung's '*Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity*' (pp. 515-542), and Yao Ka-Fai's '*Cinema 3: Towards a 'Minor Hong Kong Cinema*' (pp. 543-563), help examine the impact of the past decade on the film industry. Issues under consideration include the rapid de-colonialisation of Hong Kong subsequent to its somewhat reluctant return to China, and how this influenced filmmakers, and showed up in their productions. How creatively have Hong Kong's film makers handled this era of intense social change and cultural re-focus?

In this regard Liu Siu Leung's work is especially interesting, since he analyses representations of kung fu film as a means of mediating Chinese nationalism and Chinese modernity, arguing that this otherwise unlikely film-genre proves able to capture and project a complex ambivalence within contemporary Chinese thinking. Yao Ka-Fai meanwhile investigates the concept of a 'minor Hong Kong cinema' through a case study on Fruit Chan's works, suggesting that the new cinematic images which dominate much Hong Kong filmmaking in the handover era are a direct response to new geo-historical situations: an attempt to capture and project in cinematic terms something of the tensions, uncertainties and eroding borders of 'Hong Kong' versus 'China' – a space on the verge of becoming 'China Hong Kong'.

Li Siu Leung focuses his research on kung fu film produced between the 1960s and the early 1980s, suggesting that kung fu cinema was built upon a deep structure of binary oppositions: traditional China versus the modernised West, mostly set in the late Qing-early Republican period. Generally, as Li points out, film critics agree that 'it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the martial arts came to be used as a powerful form of cinematic performance, again, principally in Hong Kong' (see also Sek, 1980, pp. 27-8). Among these, episodes centring on Wong Fei Hung [1] became one of the major constitutive elements of Hong Kong popular culture – and since film was at that time a dominant public entertainment mode, they also dominated Hong Kong filmmaking.

[1] Wong Fei Hung, 1847–1924, martial artist, practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine, revolutionary and Chinese folk hero, subject of numerous television series and films. Wong practised and taught acupuncture and other forms of traditional Chinese medicine at 'Po Chi Lam' (寶芝林), his clinic in Foshan, Guangdong.

This phenomenon produced a powerful effect within the popular cultural imaginary of cinema-going Hong Kong citizenry; a set of understandings and perhaps cultural ambitions at once constituted by, and constituting, a deflective form of popular nationalism. In a probably unintentional reprise of the impact of the cowboy movie or Western on early US movie audiences, kung fu action film contained both immediate audience appeal, and the capacity to represent a distinctively Chinese form of heroic combat, and even political resistance, in seemingly apolitical terms. This kind of kung fu film was set against the backdrop of an early Republican-era China, aiming to articulate itself in modern terms, while formulating its own nationalism over selective elements of its own social and cultural traditions. Li's review of the genre's development reminds us of its unique geo-historical background, so that its particular representations can be seen to focus the Chinese cultural dilemma which bound both mainland and diasporic Chinese audiences into the same frame. How could a still-coherent yet ancient culture assert its own worth to its own communities, in ways relevant to modern citizens, and without fostering uncontrolled or undesirable behaviours or attitudes – such as civic violence or organised political resistance?

Li points out that on the one hand the kung fu films of this era build the question of nation and of subject within the modern-and-yet-still-colonial context of Hong Kong, through a complex and invariably indirect (deflective) means. In Hong Kong, to be Chinese, and nationalistic, and anti-colonial, was an unrealisable proposition. Yet one's imagination could still turn to kung fu: representative of powerful resistance, yet choreographed into controlled gestural forms of defiance, licensed in both Chinese culture and Chinese history. Here is hyper-violent combat, represented through strictly disciplined forms of hand-to-hand fighting, always shown to rest on forms of spiritual superiority, and not using weapons: a mode of conflict that can be shown with total *realism*, without ever suggesting any direct connection with *reality*. It is here that Li sees most value in the use of kung fu: it has an ambiguity of representation which both admits and yet deflects identification with a specifically Chinese identity. For him Hong Kong's discovery of what kung fu film could do, in staging and yet constraining the re-awakening surge of Chinese cultural identity, is as much about Hong Kong's own hybridities and uncertainties, as China's. Like Lo (1993) Li sees that 'A commitment to Hong Kong requires attention to a cultural self-awareness of Hong Kong's in-betweenness, its changing indeterminacy' (Lo, 1993, p.106).

Kung fu – a traditional martial art – thus acts as a symbol of modernity in the popular imagination. What might otherwise seem a mere rehearsal of tradition: a display of past glory, is transformed into a sign of China's latent power – and one which can be called upon for application into the realities of the chromium and glass-towered world of modern urban existence. Translated across from its dynastic settings; shifted from Shaolin to say, Shatin, kung fu becomes a sign of the ongoing complexities of modern life – and of the capacity of modern Chinese citizens to confront, and overcome them. If neither the masses nor the experts can deny the actual uselessness of kung fu as a contemporary problem-solving device (Jin, 1969), its deployment within the fantasy conflicts of film works all too well.

In Hong Kong cinema in particular its enactment within the accurate and faithful representation of an authentic performance style is enhanced by a commitment within the industry to 'performing real' – that is, without special-effects filmic interventions. Hong Kong kung fu, at once a fantasy projection of power and a celebration of real kung fu skill and impudence, balances its audience's demands with precision. This is at once heroic resistance and absolute disengagement; total confection and unadorned truth; and an assertion of renascent national power – utterly depoliticised. So successful

is the formula that it leaves the analyst with only one question: how did kung fu – and in particular Chinese *wu-shu* kung fu - manage this shift in emphasis from the extremism of its martial action *(wu)* to a focus on the artistry of its enactment *(shu)*. How far is this a clue to the sorts of creative transformation and deployment of traditional forms which centrally characterise Hong Kong's cinema success: transformations as much to do with responsiveness to the socio-cultural context of the industry, with all of its political constraints, as with any conscious creative vision, individual or collective, propelling the whole along?

Part of the answer to this question can be found in Yao Ka-Fai's views on how new trends arise within Hong Kong film production. In examining what he calls 'minor Hong Kong cinema', he locates a pattern of acutely attuned responsiveness to social and economic conditions within the local setting, which he sees as reflecting the many particularities of Hong Kong's idiosyncratic space-time formations, from the early 1980s to 1997.

In formulating this position, Yao takes up a particular idea of the 'modern' in film, which comes from Deleuze's cinema project. When talking about the New Wave of films produced by France, Italy and Germany in and after the Second World War, Deleuze points out that

> ... all that was necessary was a new type of tale capable of including the elliptical and the unorganised, as if the cinema had to begin again from zero, questioning afresh all the accepted facts of the American tradition (Deleuze, 1983/1986, p.211).

Postulating that Hong Kong cinema has undergone similar kinds of 'zero' re-invention, Yao argues that instead of a clear-cut periodisation, common across all cultures, 'modern' should be seen to reference the many points of reinventing and reconfiguring undergone in different cultures at different moments, and evincing multifarious *responses to* reality, as well as *conceptions of* reality.

Lyotard (1979, p.77) states that 'in whatever age it [modernity] appears, it cannot exist without a shattering of reality, together with the invention of other realities'. New Wave cinema should be seen therefore not as a single coherent movement or style, but as a way to articulate ruptures among – and often within - different cinemas, occurring in different spaces and times. The chief sense of 'modern' is thus to constitute a chain of reframing, in which prevailing conditions are constantly made to face new potentialities, that are themselves becoming prevalent conditions. According to Lyotard (1989, p.169), cinematic stylistics thus says much more than might at first sight appear. The entire politics of cinematic images is in fact closely relevant to the cinematography. The movement of a film's narrative is almost literally *conducted* into meaningful order – and the orchestration which results is inevitably informed by the prevalent organising principles of the day. In light of this, the 'modern' film's function is to re-view and re-channel those principles, in response to the mechanisms of orientation to which it is subject, at that moment and in that location. This is its 'creativity'.

This understanding of the 'modern' in cinema brings out another element important to an account of Hong Kong's struggle with the specifics of a Chinese modernity: an element which, as Yao helps us to see, benefits from an application of Pierce's concept of *Thirdness*.

Yao sees Hong Kong cinema as having developed what Peirce's system would have seen as a 'Third' cinematic vision or interpretation of its own realities. What Peirce's theories emphasised was the potential for development of meaning in a zone of instability, or even experimentation: an *interpretation* of the relative certainties of the *materiality* and the *ideationality* of Firstness and Secondness respectively, in ways that simultaneously rework and transform them, in the very process of their decipherment (see Peirce, in Hartshorne and Weiss, 1931-1935). Yao develops Peirce's idea as a way of understanding the specifics of Hong Kong's cinema, where so long as everything can be further deciphered and construed according to the logic of a notion of 'Thirdness' that disrupts '1, 2, 3' as a stable combination', then Hong Kong films can be seen as a 'third cinema'. They represent an attempt to film within a non Euro-American context, and to canvass the ways cinema might respond not only to a different set of geo-historical situations, but ones not even in the control of those attempting the response.

To examine Hong Kong cinema's capacity to work in this environment of endless deflection, Yao sets out to discuss a specific Peircean Thirdness in its cinema. Yao is attempting to develop a concept of how a 'minor cinema' might work to account for certain ongoing ruptures within Hong Kong's cultural conditions. In this case the term 'minor cinema' arises from Rodowick's (1997) extension of Deleuze's idea of a 'minor literature', which refers to 'producing collective utterances whose paradoxical property is to address a people who do not yet exist and, in so doing, urge them toward becoming' (Rodowick, 1997. p.154). Minor literature captures not the full force of majority socio-cultural expression, but its minor notes: the as-yet semi-conscious; the half-formed – often the resistant, the suppressed, the unvoiced. Yao applies it to Hong Kong movies, seeing in them a curious indirectness which this study considers a form of 'deflection'. Yao suggests that this is a response to the specific geo-historical situation of Hong Kong's development and entry into modernity. According to cultural historian Abbas (1997), working on the problem of Hong Kong's cultural identity in the transformational moment of the 1997 Handover, 'all we found was largely mystification and disavowal.... Stories about Hong Kong always turned into stories about somewhere else, as if Hong Kong culture were somehow not a subject' (Abbas, 1997, pp.24-25).

Taking up some of the reservations expressed by Abbas' critics, Yao emphasises that this 'minor' note in Hong Kong movies should not be seen as entirely generalising them as a field of cinematic production. The very principle of 'minority' in this sense precludes the possibility of a field-defined, universally present, consciously deployed creative or even stylistic strategy. Instead, it relates to the influence of any number of multifarious and contesting features, including market dynamics, and various forms of local civic politics, within the complex processes of drastic political change. The state of 'reverse hallucination' or refusal to focus on what is all too palpably there which Abbas identified as characteristic in Hong Kong cultural production (1997, pp. 6; 26), needs to be tested by perspectives on what *is* actually there – not least in this study, because of the realist focus of so much of Hong Kong's cinema.

In the meantime Yao's framing of these key concepts: *modernity, thirdness* and *minor cinema* helps explore the capacity of this small but dynamic creative industry to achieve something distinctive: something which may have proven able to lift itself above its many limiting factors, representing more than was believed possible of its own dilemmas, and extending them to an unexpected connectedness, even with non-local audiences. By concentrating upon this combination of modernity and

Thirdness, and so focusing into one textuality 'the deterritorialisation of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975/1986, p.18) Hong Kong cinema may have been able to address its local audiences. They have themselves been living the same realities as the film creatives – and the characters they place within the movies. At the same time, the process may have been able to extend beyond the local, to connect with those undergoing similar but contextually different aspects of the modern condition, elsewhere.

Yao goes on to explore the works of Fruit Chan's Hong Kong 1997 Trilogy as his case in point, showing how far seemingly 'marginal' films can accommodate traditional beliefs and even genres, within an altogether fresh vision. What his work raises for this study however, is why, and how, a culture undergoing transformations at once so globally typical as to resonate with audiences worldwide, and yet so distinctive as to colour their narration with the novelty of a specifically Hong Kong perspective, worked through the sorts of 'strategies of deflection' argued above. What is it that has caused this obliqueness in Hong Kong cinema – and how does it relate to the social, economic, cultural and political frames in which that cinema has worked?

To answer that is once again to turn to Hong Kong's history: to re-examine in more detail the complexities of its development, and ongoing uncertainties of its sense of itself – in regard to almost every aspect of its existence. In doing so, it is useful to consider in more detail the work of Ackbar Abbas, and his attempt to capture at the point of the 1997 Handover, exactly how Hong Kong viewed itself in the world.

2.2 Hong Kong culture and a politics of disappearance

This is a noted recent study of Hong Kong culture, based on discussion of its movies, architecture and literature – the most striking elements of its creative productivity to date. Published in 1997, the main aim of Abbas' book is to clarify the theme of Hong Kong identity considered as 'a culture of disappearance', developed particularly over the fifteen years before 1997, when Hong Kong citizens were daily confronted by the possibility of an all-too-real 'disappearance' of the social and civic order which they had constructed around themselves, and its submergence within a much larger, much older and yet also much newer social order, not entirely congenial to their own values or goals.

Fairchild, (1967, p.7), provides definitions which show how far Hong Kong in this period can be thought of as 'a space of transit'; one emblematic of the greater universal environment of globalism at the end of the twentieth century. Hong Kong, a richly localised realisation of both traditional and modern values and practices, still confronts possible cultural erasure – or at least readjustment – to a larger formation. So too do all local cultural orders, as they enter what Castells (1996) terms 'the nodes on the network' – the accelerating and in many ways culturally obliterating modernisation required of the 'technopoles' of the digital information era (see especially Castells and Hall, 1994).

Faced with issues of unresolved and indeed politically unallayed colonialism, in immediate confrontation with globalism and

'a new turn' within its cultural space which left issues of identity floating in incertitude, Hong Kong's cultural formation at the end of the twentieth century experienced an accelerated set of simultaneous compressions and shocks. Its strange, always ill-defined relation both to the UK and to China, was added to the changed status of culture itself as its focus moved from 'high art' definitions to the capture of everyday experience (see Pope, pp. 22-29), to make Hong Kong's 'disappearance' appear. A colonised (in this case, doubley-colonised) space accepts that its 'high art' culture is founded and directed elsewhere: the principles and ideals of that founding culture are indeed among the forms of legitimation deployed in ongoing rule (see especially Eagleton, 1996). But once understandings of 'culture' take the anthropological/sociological turn of the Cultural Studies moment, outlined above by Pope, and so consider ordinary experience and its representations within 'popular' or 'commercial' formats as meaningful, any 'texting' can be seen to capture, in its way, how those involved see and understand their world. From this perspective, Hong Kong's particular cinematic 'modernity' involves not a 'disappearance' to be read as misrecognition; a failure to engage what is really going on; but a strategy of deflection, allowing it to find within itself a means of questioning every aspect of its relationship to its own powers of representation and self-representation.

Seen in this way, Hong Kong's cinema has demonstrably developed a number of techniques of disappearance, playing across a repertoire of the ephemeral, using in particular images of speed, and any number of forms of abstraction. To this extent a new Hong Kong subjectivity blooms from within this space of disappearance. Abbas suggests that three options were developed for overcoming this condition halfway between colonialism and hyper-modernity: options which attend to the *local,* the *marginal* and the *cosmopolitan* – all of them contained within the particular 'Thirdness' which Yao identified as characteristic of Hong Kong's cinema production. For Abbas however what matters is whether such a disappearance amounts to a threat, or an opportunity. Given its emergence as a strategy of continuance within an ill-defined projection forward, should this particular Thirdness be regarded as a *transitional* stage, ultimately to become something more open, powerful, and self-directive; or is it in itself a retreat *[decline]* and an obfuscation, preventing the realisation of any distinctive or self-actualising new order?

For Abbas Hong Kong cinema's representation of this 'disappearance' takes it beyond the conventional forms of critique made of the work of this industry: both those tending to 'criticise for its relentless commercialism', and those which 'applaud for its high camp qualities' (Abbas, 1997, p.17). He disputes all of these over-simplified readings,[2] and any form of absolute opposition between commercialism and art, arguing that compared with mainland China's fifth generation of filmmakers, Hong Kong's new cinema creatives are all part of the mainstream, the creativity of their product formed more as 'alternatives within the system' (1997, pp. 20-22) – yet another way of embodying and creating within the 'disappearance'.

Based on the background of social and political transformation, but never directly reflecting the actual political situation, Hong Kong's cinematic 'problematic of disappearance' lies instead over 'a sense of elusiveness, the slipperiness, the ambivalences of Hong Kong's cultural space', and covers 'a wide spectrum of popular genres' (1997, p.24). In the vision of its filmmakers, 'Hong Kong will disappear as a subject, not by being ignored but by being represented in the good old ways', producing what Abbas calls – as mentioned above - a kind of 'reverse hallucination: not seeing what is there' (1997, p.25).

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[2] It may of course in itself be simplistic to read these views as reductive. The quality of exaggeration in art which is described as 'camp' has been analysed persuasively as a conscious form of 'deflection', with consistent codes recognisable to audiences – see for instance Sontag (1997).

Abbas describes this as the uncanny feeling of 'the *déjà disparu*': 'the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone, and we are left holding a handful of clichés, or a cluster of memories of what has never been' (1997, p.25). Seen in these terms, the burden of Hong Kong's new cinema is thus to 'construct images out of cliché, give us a critical experience of Hong Kong's cultural space by problematising the viewing process' (1997, p.26).

In Abbas's opinion, five features characterise Hong Kong cinema, including sensitivity to spatial issues; 'affective intensities with no name'; a position of critical proximity; changing the way in which the local is regarded, and a politics that expresses itself best when expressed indirectly. Like Li, Abbas uses the history and development of a particular genre of Hong Kong cinema, kung fu films, to explicate the actual techniques. Films from Wong Kar-wai, Ann Hui, and Stanley Kwan are reviewed, with Wong Kar-wai's four works in particular shown to go beyond allegory to challenge the definition of Hong Kong culture, questioning and dismantling the ways we look at things. By 'describing mutation, they open up new possibilities' (1997, p.62).

In turning to Hong Kong architecture – a marked feature of its filmic representation – Abbas finds another level of this 'disappearance' of identity. The preservation of colonial buildings within contemporary contexts 'flattens' Hong Kong's history, and Abbas details 'how the city dealt with dependency by developing a tendency toward timelessness and placelessness': a mode which troubles the post-1997 emergence of a new set of desires, which for Abbas 'alludes to the new cultural mood that registers, with a high degree of urgency, the need to have some kind of cultural identity' (1997, p.76). According to Abbas, Hong Kong architecture can be divided into three categories: the *Merely Local*, the *Place-less* and the *Anonymous* – none of these able to imprint a sense of distinctive identity onto the city. Abbas feels that Hong Kong architectures 'does not concern itself as yet with the question of cultural self-definition and presents to itself only the false image of power', while its ways of displaying the local within the homogeneity of global architecture only reflect its loss of direction. Hong Kong culture, an example of post culture, 'must anticipate the paradoxes of hyphenation' (1997, p.145) – the *realpolitik* of 'China-Hong Kong'. To succumb to the temptation to express this fact and its accompanying socio-cultural mutations simply and directly would be to fall before the possibilities for any genuine development of a specifically Hong Kong culture. These realisations of dislocation, transformation and self definition, enacted through a politics of disappearance, leave spaces of indefinition, awaiting and expressing in the interim the possibility of something other.

How then is a culture of the in-between to find definition of this 'something other'? Culture is itself one of the most elusive – yet most discussed - concepts used in contemporary texts. Fairchild captures the ongoing centrality of culture as a principle of social organisation when he points out that 'the essential part of culture is to be found in patterns embodied in the social traditions of the group, that is, the knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values, standards and sentiments prevalent in the group' (Fairchild, 1967, p.80). Likewise anthropologist Kottak suggests that 'culture encompasses rule-governed, shared, symbol-based, learned behavior and beliefs transmitted across the generations' (Kottak, 1987, p.35). Pope's entire study of creativity views it as varying across contexts, as an outcome of its role in expressing such 'rule-governed' 'social traditions'. Such definitions confirm the link between culture and social environment, indicating the extent of the problem for contemporary Hong Kong: a culture of disappearance with 'few clear precedents' (Abbas, 1997, p.154). Its unique economic and political conditions must be kept in mind when trying to understand the distinctive characteristics – and the distinctive problems - of its cultural expression.

On the one hand, the colonial history and comparative lack of direct connection with the mainland Chinese culture over a half century make Hong Kong 'a bird of a different feather'. Nor did the 1997 Handover fully ensure or define its new position, giving it a floating identity, without clear direction. At one level end-of-century globalism, fed by the digital informational economy, with its fast-developing technology and ever-accelerating inter-connectedness, has strongly affected Hong Kong's economic structure, turning it into what Castells and Hall (1994) describe as one of the early-emergent 'technopole' hubs of the new economic order:

> Indeed, the most fascinating paradox is the fact that in a world economy whose productive infrastructure is made up of information flows, cities and regions are increasingly critical agents of economic development: as Goodman puts it, the last entrepreneurs. Precisely because the economy is global, national governments suffer from failing powers to act upon the functional processes that shape their economies and societies. But regions and cities are more flexible in adapting to the changing conditions of markets, technology and culture. True, they have less power than national governments, but they have a greater response capacity to generate targeted development projects, negotiate with multinational firms, foster the growth of small and medium endogenous firms, and create conditions that will attract the new sources of wealth, power and prestige (1994, p. 7).

Together, these pressures build a social order directed always slightly outside itself; one relating not only to economic links and informational 'flows' offshore, but to a whole new world order, whose thinking has emerged only alongside its actual development, step by step with the processes which have put it in place. While some commentators have noted the irony that 'Hong Kong's sense of its own distinct identity has appeared only recently, just as it's about to vanish' (see for instance Mathews, 1998, p.113), the revelation within Abbas' analysis of a discontinuous, sometimes evasive, and yet powerfully evocative 'Hong Kong-ness', developing within creative and expressive productions in particular, reminds us of the degree to which the global rests upon a re-alignment of the local. What the informational 'creative hub' city or region requires is a re-orientation of its energies and products, in the service of a far broader consumerism – and alongside this, the need to 'colour' its product in distinctive ways, to keep it branded within the monotone that is international modernity. What Abbas shows in his analysis of Hong Kong expressivity, whether through film, literature or architecture, is precisely the problem of this 'colouring' of product: a cohesive, if never overtly or perhaps even consciously designed styling, operating at the level of a discourse able to traverse the various media of its expression – yet forced, in this instance, to the very limits of expressibility.

Viewed in this way, what Abbas has in effect produced is a form of cross-perspectival qualitative discourse analysis. In doing so he annexes a form of research which can cross disciplines, to examine the various 'languages' of each; in this case, from cinematography to building styles; poetic metaphor to socio-political strategies – all of them working somewhere above the words, sentences and linguistic features used to discuss and implement their particular forms of production and reception - and attending instead to the ways each 'language' is used, what it is used for, and the social contexts in which it is used (Punch, 2005, p.221).The term 'discourse', variously identifiable within the many codes of meaningful communication: visual, linguistic, and so on; refers always to the next level of the general framework or perspective within which ideas are formulated (Sapsford and Abbott, 1996) – in other words, not the actual instances of coding, although these will always be

indicative, but to the broader codes being deployed.

Among the four types of 'discourse analysis' identified by Potter and Wetherell (1996, p.47), two are closely related to how Abbas' analysis works. One they view as having 'developed from a sociology of knowledge perspective, studying specifically how scientists construct their talk and texts to present and validate their work and their actions'. The other works 'to show how institutions, practices and even the individual person can be understood as produced through the workings of a set of discourses' (Punch, 2005, pp. 221-222). How then can a recurrent 'patterning' of produced 'texts', such as those examined by Abbas, be shown to be representing a coherence and a significant strand of cultural meaning, when intent upon deflection of that meaningful coherence? Within Abbas' work, the object is to understand a central 'disappearance' within Hong Kong culture, as its expressive arts are shown to interact with their social environment. How does a discursive *presence* come to code a socio-cultural *absence?*

The problem is one akin to a much earlier issue identified by Manguel (2007) in a study on the ongoing cultural centrality of narrative and story-telling – of no matter which format or genre – and its importance in resolving problems of identity and polity in the escalating interconnectedness of contemporary global politics. In examining what he calls 'the creative function of advertising', he reveals a functioning which he sees as predicated upon 'altering reality by transforming literary language into dogma' (p. 138). This is a processing involving the suppression of imaginative open-endedness and a shackling to the preferred or denotative meanings selected for the product. To explain it, and to argue against its deployment, Manguel refers back to the historical era in which Latin ceased to be a dynamic and developing *lingua franca* across Europe. Abandoned by both everyday users and creative thinkers, it hardened into a kind of pragmatic orthodoxy (dogma), and ossified into ever-less-diversified expressivity:

> The extent of the Roman Empire had brought Latin to regions as far as the Middle East, the Spanish Peninsula to the west, the British Isles to the north, and Mediterranean Africa to the south. But with Rome no longer at its centre, universal Latin became enfeebled in both its semantics and its grammar, ineffectual as an instrument of both conversation and storytelling. The historian Erich Auerbach described its scope as limited to 'an overall provincialism, a narrowness of horizon, a preoccupation with local problems, interests and traditions', and while a certain number of authors developed a style 'mannered to the point of absurdity', most of the writing in Latin became 'unadorned, utilitarian prose tending towards colloquial speech in its sentence structure, tone, and choice of words'. Lacking stories (p. 140).

While this extract displays the contentiousness of both Manguel's own hypothesis over what does and does not foster narrative creativity, and Auerbach's view of where the best narrative should arise – in the centre rather than the peripheries - it does reflect an interestingly similar 'deflection' principle at work. As Latin 'lost' its 'rich' narrativity: its capacity to assume cultural coherence, and so to generate powerfully evocative connotative codings, leaving much to the imaginative projection of the reader/audience, it too produced a form of 'disappearance'. This decline emerges as a 'preoccupation with local problems, interests and traditions', a colloquial register, and a set of codings from which those – like Auerbach – schooled in the old centralist aesthetic could no longer 'read' cultural value. The old language had lost, in their eyes, the capacity to

narrate anything worthwhile. To 'read' in this way however is to disregard both the message of that textual 'absence' – the many stories that it tells us of socio-cultural change - and its licensing of new 'colloquial' or 'conversational' formats, communicating not the secure messages of the central powers, but something/s altogether different.

By reading at this level: not for some assured core meaning but for discursive strategy, as Abbas does, it becomes possible to detect the emergence of these otherwise inchoate or 'deflective' techniques. Gee *et al.* (quoted in Punch, 2005 p. 222) suggest that three principles inform the process of discursive structuring, no matter the particularities of the discourse/s concerned.

1. Human discourse is rule-governed and internally structured;
2. It is produced by 'speakers' [including in this case, filmmakers, writers and architects] who are ineluctably situated in a socio-historical matrix, and whose cultural, political, economic, social and personal realities shape the discourse;
3. Discourse itself constitutes or embodies important aspects of that socio-historical matrix (see Punch, 2005, p. 222).

This being the case, even the perverse concept of a discourse expressing disappearance must be viewed as arising within the 'socio-historical matrix'. Discourse, working into and out from its social context, is a tool in both the construction and subsequent exploration of concrete art forms, allowing projects of analysis such as this one to deconstruct them, as long as the work attends to *understanding the platform on which they are built.* Discourse analysis is thus sensitive to how spoken and written language are used – along with the wider sorts of codes identified here. At the same time it must consider how particular accounts and descriptions are constructed, and to the complex processes for producing social meanings (Tonkiss, in Seale, ed., 1998).

In Abbas' work both cinema and architecture are clearly seen as kinds of discourse. For cinema, *mise-en-scène* analysis is considered one way in which such a form of discourse analysis can progress; the term *mise-en-scène* used to describe those stage directions and staging elements which film shares with theatre: lighting, costuming, setting and the movement of the figures within and across space. Its elaboration as a form of cinematic 'reading' may have problems in creating a direct parallel with other forms of critical reception, but 'at least offered a specific form of critical analysis which was able to deal directly with the visual aspect of the medium' (Taylor and Willis, 2004, pp.13-15). Abbas uses the variant possibilities of cinematic *mise-en-scène* as a means of establishing how instances of Hong Kong film are arranged to evoke and communicate recurrent sets of meaningful Hong Kong experiences.

For example, when Abbas discusses the films of Wong Kar-wai, they are considered as arising within existing cinematic genres. Yet while the narratives may be formulaic, the presentation is new. Wong Kar-Wai is shown to rework settings, lighting effects, the colour palette – and so the mood, aligning with it even the music and costumes. Together these features achieve a certain filmic *discourse:* in this case a sense of indefinition and 'disconnection'. It is this which produces Wong Kar-Wai's own distinctive and haunting evocation of the 'culture of disappearance' - among its strongest discursive formulations on film. Abbas' capacity to read filmic 'discourse' in these ways, through *mise-en-scène* analysis, opens the potential for this present study to examine how – and how far – Hong Kong film creatives work consciously in producing this level of cultural

expressivity – and how far Hong Kong audiences respond when they do.

Explicitly, what this study aims to add to Abbas' formulation of this key discourse of disappearance in Hong Kong's cinematic expressivity is the one singular lack Mathews identifies:

> ... the irony of Abbas' book is that although Hong Kong culture may indeed exist within a space of disappearance, the most striking disappearance is that of Hong Kong from the pages of the book itself (Mathews 1998, p. 1112).

Within the forms of Western cultural theory on which Abbas draws, the need for attention to local perspectives on the issues at stake is constantly stressed. The evidence of these 'local perspectives' remains however too little collected, with the theorisation still for the most part reliant upon the 'expert eye' of the theorist, acting as critical 'reader'. True qualitative data, gathered through participant observation, ethnography, and even auto-ethnography of one's own experience and involvement, adds to this one-off *critical reading* of texts consideration of the conditions of both *production* and *reception* of those texts: the 'encoding-decoding' data of Hall's dictum. It repositions the research object within the context which it ultimately aims to examine. Without such work, there is in these studies of Hong Kong cinema too little concern with the opinions of local creatives, or local commentators, or the actual responses of those Hong Kong people whose distinctive and problematic 'place' is in question.

At one level the entire act of appropriating Western techniques of analysis to a China-Hong Kong enterprise can be called into question. Whether Western theories can capture non-Western experiences or perspectives has long been debated, and while Bourdieu, among others, has more recently tested his own theorisations and techniques in non-Western settings – in his case, Japan (1998) – and found them still effective, exactly how they might need to be adapted to local conditions and preferred social interactions and cultural sensitivities still demands attention. Cultural differences and gaps in the development of research techniques between East and West remind us that anything borrowed from the West should be seriously re-examined before applying it to Eastern cases. In this case the bibliographical notes in Abbas' study show few references pertaining to Hong Kong, and no references at all in Chinese. All too easy then to raise doubts as to whether Abbas really understands Hong Kong, aiming instead only to generalise Hong Kong culture, from an outsider perspective.

This study argues then that Abbas' insights need to be tested against local perspectives; his exterior reading of socio-political mutations contextualised from within those Hong Kong populations involved in adapting to them. A two-way communication format forms the core of the new informational order: even within cinema, where the long traditions of presentation of completed product to audiences have been overtaken by ever-expanding cross-format channels of audience response and consultation. Abbas' over dependence on literary or 'built' resources as the sole source of the discursivity which he calls 'disappearance' is easily challenged. Cultural Studies itself, most notably in Stuart Hall's (1974/1980) formulation, has emphasised the various stages of transformation through which any media message passes, from its origins (although even these are contestable) to its equally various locales of reception and interpretation. The idea that any meaningful 'message' is constructed from signs which have denotative and even connotative meaning allocated by an encoder alone, needs re-considering.

As media theory in particular moved to a reception model, the attribution and construction of meaning derived from a given discourse has become as closely located with the repertoire of receiver/s as with those of the sender/s (McQuail, 2005, p.73). Within Film Studies, this has meant sweeping changes within the sorts of analysis and commentary undertaken within both film reviewing, and academic study of the cinema.

> Historically, mise-en-scène analysis made no direct mention of possible audiences, but instead assumed the audience to be an abstract given, unresearched and entirely unspecified (Taylor and Willis, 2004, p.27).

In discussion such as Abbas' this is a serious charge, since the overall aim is to read socio-cultural transformations from within text, and even from material constructions, and to understand these as indicative of the central paradigms of an entire local cultural formation and those implicated within it. At the same time however, studies such as this one by Abbas remain undeniably compelling, perhaps even carrying added significance from the particularities of what their analysis has revealed: an incapacity for self-analysis, or at least conscious self-analysis, within the cultural discourses in question. Given the 'deflection' strategy of Abbas' 'disappearance' hypothesis, might it be that *only* the outsider perspective can locate such a vision, in a cultural space only too eager to conceal, or at least dis-place, it?

In either case, there appears to be an urgent necessity to submit Abbas' influential hypotheses to the test: to not only 'localise' his study, as this work seeks to do, checking for similar or related discursive formations within the professional filmmaking circles which produced the texts Abbas analysed; but also assessing what happens when the many non-Western strands evident in Hong Kong film narratives and aesthetics are foregrounded. This study thus seeks to assess not only whether Abbas' central discourse of the *déjà disparu* has evolved at a felt level among Hong Kong filmmakers, but whether the rules of *mise-en-scène* analysis, as understood within a Western-dominated and global set of concepts, capture all that a Hong Kong film creative has hoped to achieve. Taylor and Willis, themselves responding to the many challenges made to previous assumptions within theories of media analysis, and seeking to discover how varying socio-cultural factors impact on the meaning/s specific audiences make of cinematic discourse, recommend that we

> incorporate other factors into the investigative arena besides just the meanings either overt or latent in media texts; factors such as institutional constraint on textual meaning as well as the ways in which audiences actively negotiate and read media output as a result of a whole range of social variables (2004, pp. 27-28).

To this end, Hong Kong understandings of the discursive construction of films: how a production arrives at its *mise-en-scène;* what pressures operate upon it and how far Hong Kong filmmaking is local or global in its culture of production, need to be assessed.

One preliminary stage is to discover how far there exists a 'global' set of such understandings: some form of mediating template, on which all cinema builds – as opposed to a set of parallel cultural variants, each responding to its local cultural pre-dispositions and serving its local audience needs.

To do this is to challenge the most dominant texts and handbooks used in screen-writing, and so particularly Hollywood screenwriting. Hollywood models rule the field internationally, due to the availability of a large number of influential and authoritative screenwriting books and manuals, as much as through their dominance of global distribution and sales. Hong Kong and China between them have only a few books on screen-writing, and Film School teachers in both locations very often reference American screen-writing books.

The purpose here therefore is to show whether the existing literature on screen-writing leads to a rigid or formulaic approach to film making; the 'central' and consensual narrative field of Manguel's 'Rome-centred Latin' - or whether it admits alternatives.

Certainly Hollywood producers and directors themselves currently seem to be indicating that there are short-comings in the Hollywood screen-writing approach. They buy screenplays from overseas, such as *Infernal Affairs* from Hong Kong (made into *The Departed*), or *Il Mare (The Sea)* from Korea (made into *The Lake House).* The objective appears to be to break from formulaic Hollywood story- telling approaches and stereotyped characters; to admit among global audiences a set of variant tastes, seeking a more 'colloquial' register – and maybe even acknowledging a certain jadedness (enfeeblement?) of the core formulae. Yet at the same time the new mega-movies being made in China show a tendency to imitate the Hollywood approach. How then does the Hollywood screenplay formula prevail – and how far do its presuppositions meet the tastes and needs of global audiences, once these are re-conceived as just so many instances of 'the local'?

CHAPTER Three:

Is *The Way Hollywood Tells It* also the *Way of the World?*

To examine these questions, this study will analyse the Hollywood screen-writing formula, as outlined in the most widely-used and enduring of film texts: David Bordwell's *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006).

The focus here is firmly upon screen-writing, since there are few other instances in which the superiority, or 'universality' of appeal, is argued for Hollywood film. Cinematography, sound, editing, art direction or special effects do not make claims for a specific Hollywood formatting, and while there is a literature on directors, its studies are too individualistic and biographical to enable any useful generalisations. There is however common agreement on the importance of the screenplay to the success of a movie. An audience mostly reports having come to the cinema to watch the story, and not the cinematography, sound, editing, art direction or special effects – or very rarely. Indeed, many movies fail miserably when they play upon one of these cinematic dimensions, without a correspondingly strong narrative base.

Is there however, only one form of such story-telling? How far has Hollywood found a unique formula, or set of formulae – and does it see these as arising from its own distinctive cultural 'locale', as cultural theory suggests? If so, what is it about these formulae which has enabled Hollywood film to achieve international success – and can narratives from within other cultural formations reach similar success? Bordwell's advice for students of film should help assess the possibilities, and in so doing, aid in this study of the successes and failures of Hong Kong's attempt to flow its film product globally – while staying connected and responsive to a loyal 'local' audience.

3.1 Hollywood's story telling approaches

There is now common agreement that there is a universal Hollywood screen-writing approach, and that this approach has two key elements, involving *the narrative structure* of the screenplay, and the *character arc.*

In *The Way Hollywood Tells It* Bordwell argues that Hollywood movies follow a relatively structured approach to their narrative design, developed in the studio era, where there were strict guidelines not only on generic forms, but on sustaining the distinctive elements of a studio 'brand'.

> All art forms have certain structural templates ... [*screenplay*] manuals' advice points to fairly firm standards of plot construction and characterisation. A film's main characters, all agree, should pursue important goals and face forbidding obstacles. Conflict should be constant, across the whole film and within each scene. Actions should be bound into a tight chain of cause and effect. Major events should be foreshadowed ('planted'), but not so obviously that the viewer can predict them. Tension should rise in the course of the film until a climax resolves all the issues ... These principles have been reiterated in screenplay handbooks since

the 1910s (2006, p.28).

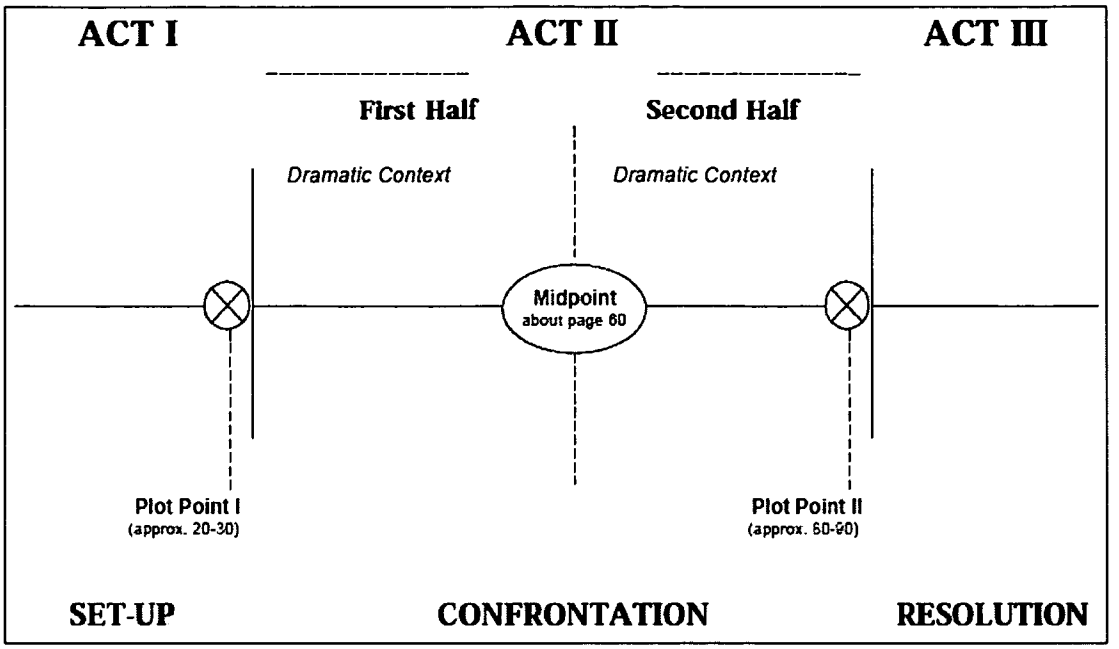
Not only have the Hollywood studios exerted pressure on narrative structure across successive generations, but theorists whose works have become classics of screen composition have themselves situated screen narrative as continuous with the highest traditions of Western classical narrative theory. Bordwell goes on to argue that

> Extrapolating from Aristotle's suggestion that a story should have a beginning, middle, and end ... [the highly successful and influential screenplay manual guru] Syd Field's *Screenplay* (1979) proposes a three-act structure. Act 1 introduces the problems faced by the hero, ending with a crisis and the promise of major conflict. Act 2 consists of an extended struggle between the protagonist and his or her problem, and it ends at a point of even more severe testing for the hero. Act 3 shows the protagonist solving the problem (2006, p.28).

Syd Field's 3-Act Division formula, still closely followed by screen-writers and available online at http://www.geocities.com/rfg170/sw/StoryParadigms.txt, lays out a grid of actions and events through which all successful screen narratives should work.

Act I:		**Act II:**		**Act II:**		**Act III:**
	Plot-point		Midpoint		Plot-point	
The Setup		First Half	'The Pinch'	Second Half		Resolution
pp 1-30	p. 30	pp. 30-60	p. 60	pp. 60-90	p. 90	pp. 90-120

Represented as a balanced diagrammatic structure, the narrative's outline is to be formed like this:



(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syd_Field)

It is important when writing to note the page counts on the diagrams, for Bordwell advises that

> Taking a two-hour film as the norm and assuming that one script page equals a minute of screen time, the authors recommend that act 1 run about thirty pages, act 2 about sixty pages, and act 3 another thirty pages. This ratio of 1:2:1 has become the standard, although some advisors object to strict page counts (2006, p.28).

If only 'some advisors object', then presumably most don't. As a reinforcement of this argument, Thompson (1999, p. 28), conducted extensive analysis of ten different and exemplary Hollywood movies, including *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannah and Her Sisters*, broadly using the above structural formulae. Far from critiquing a structural approach, she added her own refinements, looking at the movie structure in terms of 'the setup, the complicating action, the development, and the climax', and even adding that 'A short epilogue usually follows the climax' (1999, p.28). Her major refinement, and the area where she disagrees with Syd Field, is on the nature of the 'turning point'. Thompson believes that 'a turning point is a small but decisive action that determines the shape that the next large-scale portion must take' (1999, p.33) But the basic screenplay structure remains very similar to that proposed by Syd Field.

With Hollywood screen-writing seemingly so prone to formulaic crafting, it is no surprise that a number of instructional guides are available. But do they agree? Robert McKee, like Syd Field, has commanded large followings, professional scriptwriters included. His manuals are used in film schools all over the world. Both Field and McKee have spread their gospel through very expensive seminars, while Syd Field has issued DVDs on his screenwriting ideas. Their capacity to control understandings of what it is to write for the screen has rarely been contested.

Closer to Thompson's categories, but without disrupting either Field or Bordwell, McKee's Story Design model has 5 elements: the *Inciting Incident, Progressive Complications, Crisis, Climax* and *Resolution.* So compelling is his elaboration of how this will work, that it is worth quoting in its entirety – for it reads much as the film itself works on us, evoking many of the same feelings of tension and excitement.

1. **The Inciting Incident:** this radically upsets the balance of forces in the protagonist's life. The protagonist must react to the Inciting Incident. For better or worse, an event throws a character's life out of balance, arousing in him the conscious and/or unconscious desire for that which he feels will restore balance, launching him on a Quest for his Object of Desire against forces of antagonism (inner, personal, extra-personal). He may or may not achieve it. This is the story in a nutshell. The energy of a protagonist's desire forms the critical element of design, known as the Spine of the story (aka Through-line). The Spine is the deep desire in and effort by the protagonist to restore the balance of life. It's the primary unifying force that holds all other story elements together.

2. **Progressive Complications:** The great sweeping body of story that spans from Inciting Incident to Crisis/Climax of the final act. To complicate is to make life difficult for characters. To complicate progressively means to generate more and more conflicts as they face greater and greater forces of antagonism, creating a succession of events that passes points of no return. A story must not retreat to actions of lesser quality or magnitude, but move progressively forward to a final action beyond which the audience cannot imagine another. When the protagonist steps out of the Inciting Incident, he enters a world governed by the Law of Conflict. Nothing moves forward in a story except through conflict.

3. **Crisis:** It means decisions, the ultimate decision which leads to 'Danger' or 'Opportunity'. The protagonist's quest has carried him through the Progressive Complications until he's exhausted all actions to achieve his desire, save one. He nowfinds himself at the end of the line. His next action is his last. No tomorrow. No second chance. This moment of dangerous opportunity is the point of greatest tension in the story as both protagonist and audience sense that the question 'How will this turn out?' will be answered out of the next action. This dilemma confronts the protagonist who, when face-to-face with the most powerful and focused forces of antagonism in his life, must make a decision to take one action or another in a last effort to achieve his Object of Desire. The Crisis decision must be a deliberately static moment. The audience wants to suffer with the protagonist through the pain of this dilemma. We freeze this moment because the rhythm of the last movement depends on it. An emotional momentum has built to this point, but the Crisis dams its flow. Compressed energy explodes into the Climax.

4. **Climax:** A revolution in values from positive to negative or negative to positive with or without irony -- a value swing at maximum charge that's absolute and irreversible. The meaning of that change moves the heart of the audience.

5. **Resolution:** It is any material left after Climax and has 3 possible uses. First, the logic of the telling may not provide an opportunity to climax a subplot before or during the Climax of the Central Plot, so it'll need a scene of its own at the very end. Second, it is to show the spread of climactic effects. Third, it is a courtesy to the audience (McKee, 1997, pp.303-314).

On close examination, the McKee story design is no different to Syd Field's 3-Act structure. Field's *Plot Point I*, running

towards the end of Act 1, equals McKee's *Inciting Incident.* McKee's *Progressive Complications* and *Crisis* categories are equal to Field's Act 2, leading to McKee's *Climax,* or Field's Plot Point 2, and both end in a Resolution - or Act 3, in Field's parlance. And the entire set of models, as Bordwell reminded us (see above) continues to fulfill Aristotelian strictures on how dramatic narrative 'should' work.

Has Hollywood then uncovered some sort of Chomskyan 'deep structure' principles, 'hard wired' into the human psyche, and operating to guarantee recognition, meaning and pleasure to audiences, within whatever social context/s? Certainly, there are many of influence across the contemporary scene who would hold that they have – among them, albeit for their literary kin – Alberto Manguel. For him 'story telling' of no matter what format or provenance remains an inherent human quality, and one resting upon deep traditions of inherited practice. It is here however that his own sense of the pleasures of both production and reception: composition and readership, begins to acknowledge not so much the rigidity of these Hollywood narrative structures, but instead a more open and constantly reforming set of cultural traditions, always and everywhere understood as *dialogic,* in Bakhtin's terms (1981) – and so as always still in development.

> A literary text lies constantly open to other readings, to other interpretations, perhaps because literature, unlike dogma, allows both for freedom of thought and for freedom of expression, and is, like those essential genes that granted us the power of imagination, self-reproductive. I find it moving that no literary text is utterly original, no literary text is completely unique, but that it stems form previous texts, built on quotations and misquotations, on the vocabularies fashioned by others and transformed through imagination and use. Writers must find consolation in the fact that there is no very first story and no very last one. Our literature reaches further back than the beginnings our memory permits us, and further into the future than our imagination allows us to conceive... (p. 139).

Pope too insists upon a view of creativity as held in suspension between tradition and re-invention – a mode which Pope terms 'in(ter)ventive' (pp. 62-65) in acknowledgement of the dynamic tension which marks creativity, always 'both a rehearsal and a refusal of what is familiar and expected...' (p. 64). Such a view demotes the strict regulatory formats of the Hollywood screen-writing advisors, positioning them closer to those 'dogmatic' or creatively emptied or mono-purpose products which Manguel sees as too pragmatic and applied to sustain imaginative innovation or evocation. Yet for Manguel, this appears to be inherently the case with texts such as those produced in advertising; texts which are at core commercial, so that his aesthetic, no matter how admissive of multi-directedness or an 'open' form, maintains the old binaries between 'art' and 'the popular'.

Such a perspective raises two sets of problems for the unabashedly commercial Hong Kong film industry – and indeed for a means of explaining the ongoing success of the Hollywood screenplay formulae outlined above. If only 'art' can achieve complexity and 'break-out' forms of innovation, then commercial forms of creative production - such as Hong Kong and Hollywood film – must be doomed first to repetition, and ultimately to creative failure. There is also however a renewed difficulty in explaining the loyalty of audiences to the products of both. Only a return to Frankfurt School accounts of an 'inauthentic' response; an untutored audience, held in the kind of 'feudal' thrall to all-powerful mass-media texts in ways

outlined for instance by Habermas (1987, p. 78) could explain the phenomenon of popular cinema's success. Yet to take such a path is to ignore the 'predispositional' power, in Bourdieu's terms, of the 100-year diffusion of Hollywood movies worldwide. This alone has vectored the Hollywood story structure as outlined above into the imaginative understanding of audiences the world over. This is what we all *expect* of a film – or so Hollywood believes. Beyond the capacity of the formulaic narrative structure to succeed with audiences however – and so produce its commercial reliability – Hollywood's research interest does not extend.

Those analysts who have attempted to formulate narrative structure from a broader social-psychological perspective – narrative theorists such as Vladimir Propp or Tzsvetan Todorov – have tended to reinforce the sense of certainty that Field and McKee and Bordwell have, that this is 'the' formula; that those narrative forms which dominate storytelling are in some form of direct cognitive contact with psychological universals and social 'needs'. But Propp and Todorov worked from within a structuralist paradigm. Their theories set out to prove the efficacy of a few 'classic' recurrent themes, working, they proposed, at a deep mythic level, and crossing all cultural boundaries. Testing such propositions is beyond the scope of this study – although it does suggest that there is evidence within Hong Kong film which de-stabilises such hypotheses. It takes up instead Pope's invitation (p. 65) to move beyond even 'in(ter)vention' as an acknowledgement of tradition and past structuring principles, in favour of a more 'dialogic' or 'intertextual' creative dynamic, which Pope reviews under the heading of 'co-operative' creativity.

In making this move to what he describes as 'a shared, ongoing process of change through exchange' (pp. 65-66) Pope returns his focus to the neo-anthropological work of British Cultural Studies; most notably the 'popular taste' projects of Paul Willis (1980), which so compellingly located creative re-workings of 'low' or 'commercial' cultural artifacts in the consumption practices of UK adolescents. Rather than the consumer dupes of Habermas' 're-feudalised' media audiences, irradiated by formulaic flows of 'closed' and largely generic media product, Willis found the sorts of 'co-operative' creativity hypothesised by Pope.

Introducing his own project of an historical and always socially contextualised review of ideas about creativity, Pope acknowledges early-on the shift which had occurred by the twentieth century, from 'an archaic vision of creativity based upon a few privileged individuals' (p. 12). He cites the way in which Willis *et al.* introduce their own project, explicitly seeing in the 'new' creativities of their subject populations a politics as well as an aesthetics: a successful form of socio-cultural resistance through negotiation with the implied uses of those 'mass' media products considered within earlier accounts of creativity to be 'inartistic' and of little cultural value. Willis *et al.* explain the shift like this:

> In general, the arts establishment connives to keep alive the myth of the special, creative, individual artist holding out against passive mass consumerism, so helping to maintain a self-interested view of élite creativity. Against this we insist that there is a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, everyday activity and expression – even if it is sometimes looked down upon and spurned. We don't want to invent it or propose it. We want to recognise it – literally, re-cognise it (Willis *et al.*, p. 1; in Pope, p. 12).

Later Pope characterises this 'vibrant symbolic life' of the everyday re-use of mediated product as a form of 're-creation', as distinct from mere 'recreation' (pp. 84-89); allowing into the equation, as he is keen to do throughout his analysis, the enhanced techniques of *bricolage* enabled through digital interactive media. For the present study, it is more important at this stage to focus upon the degree to which this licensing of an active and constructive reception destabilises any and all views of creativity which are founded upon single or unitary schemes. Whether intent upon isolating a core narrative structure; hinting at its capacities to contact some form of 'deep mythic' cultural or psychological core; allocating to it the power to hold vast audiences in sway, or locating within the 'genius' of one supposed abnormally sensitive individual the special capacity to contact and emotionally move others, it is the simultaneous and so contradictory claims upon universalism and élitism which this study rejects.

To take this perspective is to recognise that creativity as conceived within the powerful framings of Hollywood practice has carried within itself a problematic equation of individual genius and personal address, all from within the midst of a Modernist industrial production culture intent upon marketing a successful commercial commodity. It therefore becomes worthwhile examining the second element discussed within the advisory texts on Hollywood' screenplays: those addressing the concept of the *Character Arc.* This too proves to be, in itself, an affirmation of the view that at some deep psychological level, all human experience will play out in the same ways – even if the 'human' in mind seems to be, for the most part, male. The constant focus upon 'character' makes of it the fulcrum upon which is leveraged an entire cultural vision of human identity and behaviour, and so suggests that there is a limited range of possible developmental trajectories through which 'selves' might progress. In this way it reasserts the standardised, consumerist, literally 'recreative' rather than 're-creative' ethos which is at the heart of its commercial endeavour.

3.2 The Hollywood Character Arc

The Character Arc details the emotional changes undergone by a character within a film's narrative. Bordwell comments that

> Today's *[screenplay]* manuals demand more: Every major character should have a flaw ... Given a flaw, the character must conquer it. Hence the character arc. 'In the most simplistic terms,' says screenwriter Nicholas Kazan, 'you want every character to learn something ... Hollywood is sustained on the illusion that human beings are capable of change.' Through the plot's act structure, the internal and external conflicts must be reconciled. At the end of the second act, the darkest moment yields to enlightenment as the hero prepares to attain the external goal. Act 3 then shows the firmness of the character's change. She has merged her wants and her needs. Such signs of personal growth are said to gratify the audience. When the characters are forced to deal with their inner conflicts in order to solve their outer problems, our relationship with them grows and strengthens (2006, pp.29-30).

What is under construction here is what Bakhtin (1981) would describe as a particular *chronotope:* the way in which human figures are seen, within narrative, to move across *space,* through *time.* Here, Bordwell reproduces the narrative structure which Bakhtin recognises within the European Novel as in part the chronotope of the *idyll,* with its deeply detailed situating of characters and actions within the traditional life of a given settled space; and the *Bildungsroman* or fable of the

developmental self, breaking away from the idyllic locale, through a series of traumatic 'self revelatory' breaches with its values and practices. Bordwell cites Kazan: 'Hollywood is sustained on the illusion that human beings are capable of change' – an 'illusion', it must be assumed, which Hollywood does not itself share, given its tendency towards the formulaic. It is an interesting aside in Bordwell's work, given the power of his own descriptive accounts of precisely how the Hollywood formula 'works', and suggests that as analyst and commentator he sees himself, alongside colleagues such as Kazan, into whose texts he weaves his own, as somehow standing above or to the side of the central Hollywood project: perhaps 'in(ter)ventive' rather than 'cooperative'.

Certainly, Bakhtin himself views the novelist as outside the work (see especially pp. 256-257): '...he can represent the temporal-spatial world and its events only *as if* he had seen and observed them himself, only *as if* he were an omnipresent witness to them' (p. 256). Yet if the author remains outside, the reader (in Bakhtin's terms the *listener-reader)* is always undergoing the act of being pulled inwards, required to engage imaginatively with whatever 'recreative/re-creative' facilities are on offer. This is, we must remember, a dialogic processing, no matter which chronotopes may be in play. Bakhtin, while refusing a fully developed theorisation of the act of a dialogic 're-creative' reception, insists on this particular power of narrative:

> In the present work we will not consider the complex problem of the listener-reader, his chronotopic situation and his role in *renewing* the work or art (his role in the process of the work's life); we will point out merely that every literary work *faces outward away from itself,* toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself (p. 257).

The acknowledged guru in terms of the Hollywood character arc, its focus firmly upon this proffering of the changeable self to the *viewer,* is Lajos Egri. His handbook, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (1972), has exerted similar levels of influence upon script-writers to the Bordwell, Field and McKee prescriptions outlined above. He too has large followings, with his writing often quoted when the second element of script-writing is discussed: the movement of characters through the events of the narrative – still, given the limited presentational duration of commercial film screenings, arrayed across the 3-Act structure.

Egri's principles create very much the same 'life quest' narrative of crises confronted, as the McKee and Field formulae.

1. **Premise (goal or road map):** The premise is the seed from which the story grows. It is a thumbnail synopsis of the story or play you wish to write. It should include the character <Dishonesty>, conflict <Dishonesty leads to exposure>, and resolution <Goal>.

A number of elements of this prescription are interesting, in terms of the ways that 'character' is represented to audiences. Not only is the full structure of the narrative trajectory revealed to the audience from the outset: a 'character – conflict – resolution' cycle which guarantees closure, and so re-asserts social stability and a sense of a 'self completed', but that 'self completed' is held to be somehow already extant, merely concealed beneath wrong directions ('dishonesty') and available for absolute recuperation at the 'end' of the drama. So certain is this formula, that what is in fact a narrative 'resolution' can be set up ('anticipated', as Bakhtin reminds us) as a deliberative 'goal' – as if the characters were indeed co-extensive with

the real selves of the audience: people actually able to have and achieve - or fail to achieve – goals.

2. **Pivotal Character(s):** The pivotal character forces the conflict from beginning to end. He has a duty to perform, and must force the issue to the bitter end, never backing down. He is relentless because circumstances beyond his control force him on. The pivotal character usually wishes to – or for - change. He is perennially dissatisfied. He is often militant, even ruthlessly so, whether fighting for or against the status quo. He is the motivating power of the story; nothing stops him from reaching his goal. Only great passion makes pivotal characters – so that the formula includes both great men and criminals.

Egri has more of a character slant than either Syd Field or McKee, who emphasise structure. This is what leads to the importance of Egri's next element: a three dimensionality in the lead character, despite the limited hyper-masculinity of the character type singled out here. Egri's formula stands out – perhaps an indication of his deeper implication in the formation of an individualistic/ psychologistic masculinity of quest (see especially Bettelheim, 1974; Campbell, 1976). His focus is squarely upon a neo-hero, whose interiority has to be developed alongside his physicality – in keeping with late twentieth-century social demands (see especially Craig, 1992). The shift, interestingly in line with what Bakhtin described as the *chronotope of the threshold,* introduces the promise – or perhaps menace – of endless change, and perhaps explains its own seeming escalation into increasingly violent representation. Change and perpetual crisis, certainly to the levels indicated here, contain within them those forms of the *abject* or uncontrolled psychic self which Kristeva (1980) characterised as outside admissibility in the heroic male self.

3. **Character (3-D):** The first dimension, the physical, covers the appearance and general health of the character. These affect his psychological development, resulting in either an inferiority or a superiority complex. The social context is the second dimension. The third dimension, the psychological, is the result of the previous two. It will give rise to ambitions, frustrations, temperament, attitudes, and even fully fledged psychological complexes. To understand the actions of an individual, we must first find his motivation. Many characters prove unable to escape the effects of a particular short-coming.

Syd Field covers similar ground, but more concisely, quoting the novelist Henry James: 'What is character but the determination of incident? And what is incident but the illumination of character?' (Field, 1994. p. 11). What is especially illuminated here in this three-part illustration of the character's worldview is an intensified, and seemingly integrated and so coherent social vision and cultural perspective: an ideology in fact, written all the way through. With the *physical action,* the *social context* and the *psychological expression* of the major protagonist all aligned, a 'depth' of representation is produced, which intensifies the impact of the narrative, rendering it as a form of coherent 'experience'.

4. **Unity of Opposites:** Each character must serve a purpose. He should be an integral part of the whole structure so that if he is removed, the structure collapses. The characters who surround him should be integrated into his story by creating a bond between them, known as the unity of opposites. These people might oppose one another, but they cannot walk out on each other. We must ask: What is this unbreakable bond between the characters? What is so much at stake that they cannot leave each other?

This further intensifies the centrality of the main protagonist, modeling through minor characters the sorts of responses, and

so values and behaviours, to be taken up by audience members.

5. **Growth:** Every living entity needs nourishment in order to grow. In order to have growth in writing, we must feed it with conflict. Conflict results from contradiction, produced as the out-growth of two strong wills, desperately straining against each other. Contradiction, animosity, fear, jealousy, covetousness, hate, and ruthless ambition are the ingredients upon which conflict thrives.

Such qualities are also of course social negatives – disruptive, and harmful to self and others. What makes their presence – indeed their dominance – in drama so problematic is the degree to which they are elements central to the competitive behaviours urged within those cultural formations which produce success within competitive neo-liberal socio-economic systems: the dominant world order of the twenty-first century (Rose, 1996; 1999).

6 **Orchestration:** Contradictory characters are pitted against one another, the evil against the just, while someseemingly all-powerful premise provides a unifying force which drives these contradictory characters towards what always seem to be their predestined ends. With these otherwise contradictory characters unified by this premise, we have orchestration. This appears then as a third force which serves to coordinate the seemingly unharmonious contradiction, placing it within a larger paradigm, within which both contesting sides and all subsidiary characters – however contradictory - find meaning.

This of course ignores the fact that the orchestration is a composition by the screenwriter: a selective and overdetermined construct, doing its best to masquerade as 'fate', 'destiny', or 'justice' – whatever justificatory formation can be brought to the specifics of the narrative in question. That 'larger paradigm' within which all is positioned thus becomes the major message of the production: its contribution to the meaning systems within which it arises, as a communicative medium.

7. **Point of Attack:** The point of attack should start a story. A story must open with a crisis which is the sole point of attack. A decision must be imminent and the characters must be ready to take action.

This criterion from Egri is similar to Field's *Plot Point I* or McKee's *Inciting Incident* – a reminder of how much agreement there is that action, and only action, drives narrative in today's screenplays. Reading back the cultural message behind such a criterion means viewing it not, as screen-writers must, as compulsory to the medium; but instead as a selection appropriate to its socio-cultural context. Not only does action launch narrative – it does so *first* through the physical, only then involving the consequences that flow first through the social, and then the psychological. The value-chain is clear. 'Action' in cinematic narrative is outwardly directed, physical and embodied, rather than say, intellectual or emotional. It is seen to produce rather than to rest upon social and/or psychological pre-dispositions. It is, to this extent, about masculinity and what Habermas would term 'public sphere' matters, rather than the intimate/private issues of personal domestic life. It is about neo-liberal selves, viewed as in competitive (agonistic) play, the one against the other, and their relative status and success to be judged through their 'behaviour' in situations of conflict. And it is above all else about self-directedness and independence, the self elevated above the crowd, through freely-chosen 'noble' acts which signal both social worth and spiritual virtue.

8 **Conflict:** There are four types of conflict - *foreshadowing, static, jumping* and *slowly rising.*

Foreshadowing conflict should appear at the beginning. Crisis involves the hint or the promise of future conflict. In static conflict, the conflict remains on an even keel, rising only momentarily. In Egri's view it is found only in bad writing – perhaps an indication of how far the competitive character is ultimately to be positioned as righteous: a structuring entirely necessary within the ideological directedness of these forms of competitive masculinity identified by Craig and Rose *(op. cit.)* as central to modern neo-liberalism. Constant arguments and quarrels create this form of static conflict, unable to offer scope for the grand heroic gesture of 'final showdown' which will enable the more powerful to triumph.

In 'good' conflict, every movement, and every line of dialogue must further the action toward the final goal. In *jumping* conflict, the characters jump from one emotional place to another, eliminating the necessary transitional steps – in effect, wiping away the motivational and justificatory structures written into the story, and so returning the otherwise 'licensed' violence and conflict to the realm of meaninglessness – to which some might argue it has always belonged. For Egri, this too is considered bad writing. 'Nature' never *jumps*. To represent what is in fact an ideological formation as 'natural' is to write back in those justificatory elements: to create the preferred 'slowly rising' form of conflict, with its capacity to make character response appear as if inevitable.

9. **Transition**: Let us assume that there are nine emotional steps between the two poles of love and hate: love, disappointment, annoyance, irritation, disillusionment, indifference, disgust, anger - and finally hate. When each character goes through each step, then we have slowly rising conflict.

A story is thus seen as a series of crises, climaxes, and resolutions: a consciously constructed escalation, represented as if a natural sequencing. No matter the polarities in question, it begins with a crisis - and builds from there. The crisis is a turning point, a time when a change is imminent. As the conflict rises to meet each new crisis, moving first to climax, and then to resolution, the author keeps building towards a final crisis, which will be the sum total of all the other crises, climaxes, and resolutions, so 'proving' the power of the central premise.

Once again, Egri's structure agrees with both Field's and McKee's, demonstrating an industry-wide consensus, and providing the sort of deep social embeddedness which explains the ongoing success of the Hollywood formula with audiences. But is this a formula-for-all-seasons: a structure which is as universal as its author-advisors appear to believe? Can it for instance accommodate to socio-cultural change – or, more directly for this study, to a changed location, where the neo-liberal patterns of psychological individuation central to the formula are mitigated by a different cultural formation, a colonial past and a future shaded by ideological uncertainties?

Hong Kong film thus becomes a test ground for the efficacy of these prescriptive narrative structures, viewed as ways of both capturing social experience, and representing ideals of individual human behaviour. If the Hollywood narrative formula is indeed universal, then it should be evident within Hong Kong's own screenplays. If however there are clear departures from these structures, then it suggests the influence of a local vision, which would demand either a variant set of formulae – or a more open screenplay creativity, in which many different formulae might co-exist. This study will argue in the following

chapters that Hong Kong's movie formulae can in fact be shown to both accede to and depart from these various attempts at defining the structure of the screenplay. At least to this degree, it will be shown to have evolved – and still be adapting – its own narrative trajectories, around its own, local, perspectives and concerns.

CHAPTER Four:

Finding a distinctively 'creative' Hong Kong

4.0 Is there a local Hong Kong creative tradition?

With so much of the film analysis of Hong Kong's cinema increasingly identifying a distinctive local production formula in play; one directed to Hong Kong's own social and cultural perspectives and preoccupations; what is the likely outcome of the current re-direction into mainland Chinese markets? How close, and how distinctive, are the demands of Hong Kong and mainland audiences? How far may this particular pressure on Hong Kong film be part of the explanation for its contemporary decline – at least in terms of box-office retreat from its original 'home' audience? If there is a local and traditional appeal to Hong Kong audiences through their own preferred narrative structures and character portrayals, rather than, as is assumed in the Hollywood models outlined in the last chapter, one which is universal and absolute, what may be the impact of introducing change?

Today, Hong Kong-mainland co-production is by far the biggest line of production in the Hong Kong movie industry – and this seems unlikely to diminish in the future. Mainland culture, social practices, and Government regulations are major forces for change within the creative production of Hong Kong moviemakers.

Theorisation of the impacts of policies and practices relating to 'the support and control of mass communications' originates from the third chapter of *Mass Communications* by Wilbur Lang Schramm in 1960, a study which focused upon 'the evolutionary process of freedom and forbiddance, and the relationship between government and communication' (p. 67). It was the first systematic study concerning the correlation of governmental administration and mass communications.

More recently in the 1990s, Barry R. Litman summarised the impacts of policies and laws on the development of the American motion picture industry in *Motion-Picture Mega-Industry* (1998). Gillian Doyle (2002) subsequently analysed the contemporary relationship between media economics and public policy, summarising it as 'free market versus intervention; [with] support measures for media content', and arguing the usual neo-liberal, free-market, self-regulatory views that 'the competences of mass communications have always suffered from diversified intervention of the state's hierarchs' (p.74). For Doyle, 'Institutional measures and policy priority greatly influence the economic achievement of media markets and firms' (p.86).

In recent years, Hong Kong-mainland film co-production has become a notable force in the film market of greater China, and even across the world. The concept of 'Hong Kong-mainland film co-production' was initially presented in a PRC (People's Republic of China) report on *Regulation for the Management of Import Films* in 1981, indicating the start of formal

cooperation between the film industry of Hong Kong and that of the Chinese mainland, at that point identifying co-productions as *import films*. 'The Chinese mainland is the biggest market after all' comments Bordwell, (2000, p.102) – yet he sees no real benefit for the Hong Kong producer, '... except low-cost location and labour force' *(ibid,* p.123). Across the board it appears that Hong Kong-mainland film co-production has not been regarded within academic studies as likely to produce anything of merit; an interesting example of the failure to consider how far a changing socio-cultural context might add to the creative challenges of an industry which, as we will see later, has done so much to rise to the many such challenges already delivered to it.

Hong Kong-mainland film co-production was not considered with much seriousness until the introduction of CEPA (the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement - 内地与香港关于建立更紧密经贸关系安排). Since then films jointly produced by Hong Kong and the mainland have been considered 'local' – and in the 'local' literature this has been considered a beneficent relationship. The history of mainland and Hong Kong or Taiwanese film co-productions demonstrates a clear alliance of cultures. While ideology, taste, audiovisual techniques and business operations in Hong Kong and the mainland are distinct, each arising in their own political system, economic structure and background, Chinese films produced by both sides are becoming integrated. Not that this is seen as an entirely positive set of outcomes, even in its own backyard. CEPA has proven a mixed blessing for the local Hong Kong film industry. Access to Mainland markets is easier, but filmmakers now face new curbs on creative freedom.

To reach a more evidence-based conclusion on the pros and cons of this new collaboration, this study must now move to examine the pre-dispositions identified within the Hong Kong industry in particular, argued as arising within the unique specifics of its cultural context, past, present and probably future, which have fostered within it a particular form of creativity, sufficiently flexible to ensure its survival. The following chapter outlines a set of interlocking studies designed to identify where, and how, the Hong Kong film industry locates its own sense of having produced a winning formula for its movie-making. It postulates the emergence of a distinctive model of creative cinematic productivity, not fully dependant upon the sorts of Hollywood screenplay structures outlined above, and yet not entirely 'empty' of cultural direction, as if merely awaiting the demands of the massive mainland audience which it confronts.

4.1 Selecting *indicators* of creative success

In the first instance, such a study needs to capture what has been happening in the Hong Kong film industry in relation to its creative content, during the last few decades. One specific goal is to question how far the uncertainty with which Hong Kong citizens were faced when Hong Kong residents and filmmakers alike started to confront and examine their relationship with China has impacted upon what had been a confident, innovative and financially successful commercial film industry, with a global market. At the same time however the research must remain open to alternative explanations and influences, relating to socio-cultural change within Hong Kong's own population, economic shifts in the local and global entertainment markets, and the various influences of creative teams and individuals within an industry notably reliant on the creativity and

capacity for innovation of its professional production teams. Capturing information on such issues is however problematic – especially once the questioning moves beyond the relatively well-established industry techniques of box-office evaluation, or the academic traditions of media regulation study, or aesthetic review of individual productions, or discussion of the 'style' of individual directors or players. Such approaches, developed largely within the Hollywood and European contexts, do not offer an approach which suits the task under way here.

Economic analysis of the industry over the past few decades certainly has the potential to trace out parallels between Hong Kong's economic and political relations with mainland China, and the patterns of success and decline in its film industry. While many have noted the recent descent of Hong Kong's film industry from its former heights of international success, with peak box office success in 1992 (HK$1,218,781,150.00) falling to a low of HK$293,016,626.00 in 2005, (Hong Kong Kowloon & New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd), there have been no sustained studies of why, or how, this occurred, or which creative trends marked the success and the failure.

In an attempt to examine such a shift in far more detail, analysis of the industry in this study focuses initially on the economics of box-office takings as a hard indicator of creative success, taking into account the top three movies from 1985-1994 (the Golden Era) and 1996-2005 (the Extinction Period). Were there significant patterns of creativity within these different clusters of high-earning popular films? Is there continuity, or difference, in those films preferred by Hong Kong audiences across these two decades? What can be learned from simply examining what was most popular at times of relative success, and failure?

Simply identifying these movies also allows however for a new and altogether more significant form of re-evaluation of their 'worth' to those audiences who chose to see them, through an examination of what film professionals of the respective eras considered especially creative and alluring in these films. 'Celebrity interviews' with key actors and directors from each set of these top-three movies will allow 'the creatives' involved – directors, writers and actors, including Jackie Chan, Andy Lau, Tsui Hark, Wong Ka Wai, Andrew Lau W. K., Ng See Yuan, Pang Ho Cheung, and John Chong – to reflect upon both what they conceived of at the time as innovative production, and what in retrospect they feel may have contributed to both the rise and subsequent fall of Hong Kong cinema.

With no Film Schools in Hong Kong Universities, and Media Studies only recently introduced, [3] film professionals have been unable to commission detailed studies of the state of their industry. [4] One outcome of this has been the incapacity to evaluate, whether industry-wide or in relation to the design of a given film project, how far social, economic, and even direct

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3 There is one Cinema and Television Degree at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), which has trained and graduated two film-industry-based students: Cheng Tan Sui and Patrick Leung P. K., working as movie directors since 1950. There is an advanced diploma of Cinema and Television in the Academy of Performance Art, which has trained one graduated student, Alan Mak S. F., working as a movie director since 1985 (Hong Kong Movie Industry Professional Report 2003, *Film Bi-weekly Magazine* vol.526 p.26)

4 The first Movie Professional Training Centre was set up in 2005 by Jackie Chan and the Movie Workers Association, subsidised by the Government, and the first Skill-Upgrade Training Centre for the Movie Industry was set up in 2005, also by the Government *(Hong Kong government Educational Yearly Report,* 2005)

political change may be impacting upon the film industry's response to its audiences, local and global. The economics of its funding and the changing conditions regulating its production codes act upon what may or may not be represented, and so on what may or may not reach production. Many industry professionals report anecdotally the ways in which tighter Government controls over content have heightened anxiety over creative innovation. Now that the main income from Hong Kong movies comes from audience sales in mainland China, the same sorts of anxiety which produce heightened sensitivity during scripting of a new film, also apply to any attempt to study systematically the long term impacts of regulatory conditions on creative independence.

These are not however simple concerns over Government regulation. Although it will for instance be obvious to all that movies concerning political issues are highly restricted in the mainland Chinese market, production personnel appear equally uncertain as to which genres and narratives to attempt. Even as film remains a core part of Hong Kong's post-1997 cultural policy formulation, the directions of that cultural policy remain imprecise, centred more on the economics of film funding and the drive to integrate Hong Kong's film industry into new attempts to brand the entire economy within the parameters of the new 'creative industries' concepts (*Zhen xing Xianggang dian ying gong ye zheng ce bao gao / Xianggang dian ying gong zuo zhe zong hui,* Xianggang: Gai zonghui, *2002*).

For all their promise of a renewed, even more concentrated and focused creativity driving Hong Kong into the creative prominence central to successful, dynamic economies of the information age, these policy directives may be overstating the potential for such initiatives to be centered upon the creative reputation and income-flow capacities of its film industry. The developing policies need to consider the conditions under which this industry is currently operating. At one blow the Hong Kong film industry appears to have lost local audiences; confronts competition from both new media forms and burgeoning Asian competitor film production; is denied the foundational cultural styles of *urban noir* and the intensely local comedic values of its most successful 'home audience' idiosyncratically Hong Kong productions, and simultaneously risks loss of its global markets, less interested in the narratives and filmic styles required for mainland Chinese market licensing.

4.2 'The creatives' speak for themselves

By taking this complex mesh of possible influences into account, this research will offer a systematic reflection on Hong Kong films, their distinctive qualities, and the reasons for their success. It will seek the insights of Hong Kong film practitioners, using interviews to obtain first hand material on the recent development of the industry. This practitioner emphasis, entirely lacking from those few studies of the industry which do exist (see especially Dannen & Long, 1997, p. 97), allows best- selling directors and producers to talk about limitations acting to constrain their product, even at moments of unparalelled success. Issues to be raised include, for instance, why the Hong Kong industry's varied list of products has seen only kung-fu action movies access the global market. An insider perspective, drawing directly upon decisions made by those creatives who have best 'read' the complex changes of their markets, balances the 'outsider' or 'critical' orientation of existing studies, and has the potential to reveal why creative decisions and directions often credited with both the success and subsequent failure of Hong Kong film, took the forms that they did. What has been the secret of Hong Kong's very specific, very local success? Is that 'local' character of these films a central part of their formula, and if so, can it be re-established under the new economic

and regulatory regime, and its requirement that the industry serve mainland audiences? Does the current decline of the Hong Kong industry indicate a permanent loss, or merely a cyclical downturn, of a type experienced in more mature industries – such as Hollywood? Given the professional connections of the researcher, a full-time script writer for Hong Kong films, this 'inside' view, open to the allusive and often unspoken inferences exchanged within a professional milieu, offers the study an advantage. While it may well, as methodological specialists warn, elicit and admit perspectives which might not otherwise have been formulated within either the interviews or their subsequent interpretation, given the field in question and its saturation in promotional interviewing, this is more likely to be a positive rather than negative feature.

Revisiting at this stage the three main research questions posed for this study allows us to see more clearly how the proposed research design will traverse the concerns of each:

1. What major patterns of change in viewing preferences are evident in the Hong Kong viewing public from the Golden Era to the Extinction Period of Hong Kong film?

The *hard indicators* drawn from Box Office receipts as a means of mapping which films and which film genres have succeeded and failed across the two sample decades of Hong Kong production will create a solid foundation of evidence against which can be tested both the arguments raised to date in the critical and interpretive literature surrounding Hong Kong film, and the understandings gathered from Hong Kong's film creatives, in the interview phase of the research.

2. How does creativity evolve in the film-making process, both within a specific production, and across an industry - and how do film 'creatives' understand it, and talk about it?

By reviewing the professional career trajectories of significant Hong Kong film creatives, and questioning them explicitly about their own understandings of and practices within the creative process, the study will amass useful data for its examination of the specifics of Hong Kong film industry creativity.

3. What is it that Hong Kong film makers believe that audiences have responded to in Hong Kong films, and does this include – perhaps because of the dual vision of a mixed or shifting cultural identity – a special generic flexibility and 'cultural fusion' formula, on which a new, more global industry might rise?

By re-focusing its questioning of creativity onto this more local and culturally-specific issue, the study aims to tease out how Hong Kong has positioned its own creative relation with first Hong Kong local, then global, and now 'China-Hong Kong' or Chinese mainland audiences.

At one level this section of the work, operating as a series of open-ended interviews with a range of film professionals, will

remain purely empirical, allowing respondents to formulate their own views on the experience of working on a given film, and to assert their own responses to its subsequent success and ongoing reputation. Immediately following each interview, a second, more structured set of analytical passes over the responses will probe respondent views on the particular forms of creativity which they witnessed in given productions, and how they understood these forms of creativity as contributing not only to each movie's success, but to the reputation of the Hong Kong industry overall, and to any distinctive features which they may have felt it to have acquired.

Each of the eight pivotal film productions identified in the quantitative section of the research will therefore be placed under this more detailed form of scrutiny, with a key creative contributor questioned in relation to his views on its particular elements of creativity. A major cross section of the New Wave creatives: all of them major players in the Hong Kong film industry, will test the perspectives of the core creative powerhouse behind Hong Kong cinema. No matter what future emerges for the Hong Kong film industry, their influence is likely to colour its outcomes.

To this extent, the design of this study is committed from the outset to establishing from within the research field the social, economic, and perhaps cultural and ideological currents influencing both the production and the product of Hong Kong film. Positioned somewhere between academic and practitioner perspectives, the research calls on Willis' view (see especially 'Notes on Method' in *Culture, Media, Language*, 1980, p. 90) that 'there is no truly untheoretical way in which to "see" an "object"'. Research begins by hypothesising possible problems – and solutions; only then moving to find appropriate ways to collect and organise data; to construct concepts to explain them; to undertake more detailed analysis of their inner relationships, and to account for both their existence, and their emergence in the sequences and formations observed. The study thus expects, as Willis puts it, to be 'surprised' - 'to reach knowledge not prefigured in one's starting paradigm' *(ibid.,* p. 90). Nor does it anticipate a necessarily smooth or fully integrated set of findings, being quite prepared to encounter the need to 'focus points of divergence and convergence between systems (p.106)'. In seeking a specifically local, inner-world view of what remains a comparatively small industry, it seeks to establish what is and has been distinctive in the Hong Kong film industry's creative success – at the same time reading back its capacity to adjust to the various global or 'outsider' influences impacting upon it. For Willis, 'By reading moments of contact and divergence it becomes possible to delineate other worlds, demonstrating their inner symbolic qualities' (p.134). Here that 'other world' is in fact the 'insider world' of Hong Kong film production – one which the researcher shares, as a professional writer of screenplays. For the purposes of this study, however, it is a world estranged; distanced into the status of research object, in a search for descriptive methods which will enable a new view of trends and patterns in creative success – and perhaps allow for an enhanced reflexivity and critical awareness among its practitioners to emerge. Within 'insider' cultural analysis of this type the possibility of 'being surprised' in these ways rests on finding techniques which can reveal, as Willis explains it, 'the interlocking of human meanings, of cultural codes and of forms' (p.137).

To that extent, this is a work of Cultural Studies: an attempt to capture the cultural formations under contestation within recent Hong Kong social history, as expressed back to Hong Kong and world audiences, through the entertainment medium of film. Focusing as it does on both the 'measurable' evidence for a widespread social endorsement of Hong Kong cinema's representations of itself, to itself, through box office receipts, and on the directly-expressed understandings of what has been

most distinctive about Hong Kong films, drawn from those experiences relayed by central movie-making figures, this study seeks definition of the much-celebrated 'creativity' of Hong Kong film. It hopes to tease out the influences behind it, and so assess the impact of social and economic changes which may have produced its seeming decline. To this extent, one part of this research is experience-based, inviting expert interviewees to relate their own understandings of what creativity in Hong Kong films has meant, built from their own past engagements with it. The study thus takes up the position argued by Pickering (*Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, 2008, p.19), who introduces his recent anthology of articles on research in Cultural Studies by reminding us of how the 'experience' at the core of such work is to be interpreted:

> One of the distinguishing features of cultural studies is its focus on the subjective dimension of social relations, on how particular social relations and configurations are lived and made sense of, so highlighting the complex intersections between public culture and private subjectivity and the transformative potentials that may arise there. These are crucial for our sense of who we are or might become, and experience – not only what is undergone but also how this is articulated, understood, drawn on and shared with others – is... vital to our changing identities and changing conceptions of the social worlds we live in *(ibid.,* p. 19).

Pickering warns us however of too swift or too simple an assumption that what we encounter in reported experience is some self-evident form of truth.

To regard this process as a means of learning directly about self and the social world, through gathering straightforward narratives of experience, complete with the full set of insights arising from them, is clearly both superficial and inadequate. As Pickering argues, it suggests an overly-simple, unilinear narrative movement, where any account offered is simply taken at face value, as 'truth'. It also proposes a unitary subject, where the interviewee crafting the account offered is considered as if untroubled by the sorts of complexities or contradictions or confusions to which all humans are inevitably subject. It allows little scope for incommensurability between experiences, even when these arise at different times or places; between experiences and cultural forms, even when it is clear that the narrator is reporting something with complex cultural influences and consequences; or between experience and identity. Overly-simplified conceptions of experience such as these are the result of the underlying humanist model of explanation on which the inquiry which produces it is based. It does not mean that the experience itself must therefore be dismissed, but it does mean it should be reconceived as always in some ways problematic – and subject to further analysis and scrutiny *(ibid.,* p. 27).

Pickering urges the constant and careful questioning of all narratives of experience, noting first the role of the researcher, and the trend towards:

> ... greater recognition of the need to deploy research methods in a more participant-centred way, and to develop relations between researchers and researched on a subject/subject basis rather than attempting to adopt a position of spurious detachment from an isolated object of research, as with the natural science model of research. Such an approach raises the question of the researcher's involvement, for this is obviously directed in certain ways and depends on some degree of theoretical understanding of whatever is being researched, whether this is experience of gender, social class, ethnicity or whatever. What counts is awareness of how this understanding shapes the research and how it should be open to being reshaped by the findings of the research (p.

190).

To do this is to work towards establishing from within the informants' 'experiences' the cultural context within which Hong Kong film achieved its reputation as a 'creative' and successful industry, and became the exemplar for both regional 'tiger economy' competitors and the proposed Hong Kong 'Cultural Creative Industry' planning. It is important to examine both those conditions which produced that success, and those which hope to achieve more. Those dilemmas which provoked this study: the seeming failure of the Hong Kong film industry, and the industry-insider feeling that it now lacks clear direction – especially frustrating whilst confronting the demands of the new 'creative industries' proposals – closely mirror those which a major socio-economic study by Boltanski and Chiapello (*The new spirit of capitalism*, 2006, p. 104) identifies as bedeviling all economic planning, at every level. Writing explicitly upon the widespread calls from country to country for what they term 'the projective city' as a space for reorganising both economic production and social living, they comment on the felt experience of such changes from citizens, and the impact upon how ordinary people at all levels are to find their own roles within this reorganised model of creative productivity:

> In effect, there comes a time when it is very difficult for actors in firms to continue to work, to project themselves into the future, if their only support is a kaleidoscopic image of economic existence and forms of economic success, composed of a mixture of queries and fragmented mechanisms. Those who run firms, those who advise them, and those who train the cadres destined to join them, (or in retraining) need to be able to invoke some plain, self-evident truths that make the world intelligible. Young cadres in particular feel a need clearly to identify the new forms of success and the new rules of the game in the economic world, in order to know how to conduct themselves and prepare their children. This demand for intelligibility exerts significant pressure for greater explanation and formalisation of the rules of conduct, which will then guide action. In fact, people tend to conform to these emergent new rules, if only because they confer meaning on what would otherwise merely seem like an arbitrary proliferation of ad hoc mechanisms and locally convenient improvisations (2006, p. 104).

Reframing the research question for this study in terms of Boltanski and Chiapello's much wider quest, how far can the experiences within the Hong Kong film industry be regarded as mere '*ad hoc* mechanisms and locally convenient improvisations', suddenly switched in to the much broader issues of global economic restructuring, and the many dilemmas it presents to those increasingly left to their own devices, in seeking out the new 'rules of conduct' for their own – and their industry's – survival? Is this part of the 'insider perspective' of comparative industry failure which has motivated this study – and if so, can it be shown from *inside the product itself:* as existing in the cinematic creative expression of Hong Kong's more recent films?

To seek such information is *to work in detailed ways with the lived experience of creativity* – and thus to enter categorically the world of qualitative, even post-qualitative, research methods and methodologies. At one level the work proposed in this second phase of research is clearly ethnographic: focused not only on insider interviewing, but involving a fellow-insider creative practitioner as interviewer. It permits to that extent the play and interplay of already-established professional relations, which may be able both to elicit and later to interpret references and allusions to issues and ideas beyond the scope of the classic 'objective' observer. It also however risks collusion with established principles, and complicity in

suppressing or favouring certain perspectives. How might such tendencies be mitigated?

The dilemma reaches out to recurrent debates within social science research, and especially within the field of Communication Studies, which consider both the efficacy and the validity of those attempts at objective and largely quantitative studies which launched the 'Mass Communication Studies' discipline; as opposed to the more interpretive work of the culturalist tradition (see especially Gumpert, 1998, p. 38).

The film industry, enmeshed half in the commercial realities of the business world, and half in the creative and critical frames of the various artists working in production, perennially oscillates in its selection of research data to inform its future decision-making. Nor is it alone in this compromise position – for the world of research itself continues to debate the virtues of the many contesting techniques available. Cizek (1995, p. 28) calls the current state-of-play as he comments that 'numbers are out; rich full texture is in'. But he also challenges the hegemony of the cultural narrative approach, cautioning against any uncritical and unreflexive use of its collected *data* as if this amounted to *'findings'*. Maynard (1987) similarly cautions against the wholesale jettisoning of quantitative work, while also noticing a parallel tendency towards relatively crude data collection and analysis, and an equivalent slide towards delivery of interview records as if these were in their own right 'proof' of central hypotheses.

Bertrand and Hughes (2005, p. 179) locate a similar tendency within the semi-quantitative research methodologies of Media Studies, including both Content Analysis and audience effects studies. In each they reveal a too-immediate and uncritical push from simple category-clustering to full interpretive analysis: a technique they describe as revealing

> ... a tendency to make unwarranted inferences, to take the discussion further than the data legitimately allow. In fact, it is not possible to prove inferences made on the basis of content analysis alone, although too many research reports seem to assume that once the measurement is done the meaning is self-evident (p. 179).

Bertrand and Hughes go on to note how recent media study attempts what they term 'the balancing act' of multiple sampling, addressing media audiences, institutions and texts in the same project. As scholars within Communication Studies now proverbially note, (Maynard, 1987; Sherman and Webb, 1988; Rodman, 1992; Wills, 1980; Cizek, 1995) the quantitative and the qualitative can be used together, providing mutual support and testing the strength of each other's data. Further – as in this case – they can be used in sequence, one delivering to the other 'early indicators' of the shape and direction of the research problem, so that the second data collection method can be fine-tuned in relation to its questioning. But beyond this form of category-checking and elaboration of early indicators, lies the ongoing capacity of sheer numbers to engage more directly with those elements of social understanding which drive, as Tony Bennett has long argued (1992, p. 35), government and regulatory policy, and, as this study will show, the forward financial commitments of that inherently commercial enterprise: the Hong Kong film industry.

4.4 *Commercial creativity:* contradiction or cultural strength?

Without any government financial support, all Hong Kong films aim at commercial success. Beyond local box office takings, the major income source lies in export into other countries. Consequently, distribution and promotion become top priorities, and can determine the fate of Hong Kong films – even before they enter production. Indeed, films which are considered to be difficult to distribute simply will not be funded – a factor exacerbated in the case of Hong Kong, with its small local market – but one which in all cases influences the degree of licence granted to film creatives at all levels.

Because of the importance of export, the Hong Kong film industry has long established a sound and effective operation system called 'selling outside', [5] which involves selling the copyright of Hong Kong films to other regions.

There are two ways to 'sell outside'. Firstly, like other commodities, finished films can be sold in other areas, with Southeast Asian countries constituting the major target, since most Hong Kong film stars enjoy great popularity in these countries. Dubbed into local languages and dialects these films attract large regional audiences, and hence considerable economic benefit. Unfortunately, with the development of alternative media entertainment formats, Hong Kong films have ceased to be such attractive entertainment programs for Southeast Asian audiences. Partly as a result of this declining interest, but achieving an unfortunate feedback effect which intensifies audience retreat, decreased quality of both creativity and production values has added to this sharp lowering in financial returns from 'selling outside'.

Secondly, given the drawcard of having major established stars involved in Hong Kong films, some film investors have been able to entice Southeast Asian film buyers to pay a deposit for film copyright in advance of initial production in Hong Kong. Compounding the deposits from various regions, investors could then start production. This funding technique - the film industry equivalent of 'selling short' on the Stock Exchange - was popular while the Golden Era of the 1970s and 80s appeared to bring guaranteed box office success to Hong Kong films, but things changed with the arrival of the Extinction Period.

To understand why is to understand how film distribution and promotion operate in Hong Kong. Film distribution companies are usually responsible for promotion, the funds for which come from 15% of the estimated box office receipts. Local promotional channels include TV, newspapers, magazines and celebrity events. But if the actual box office receipts for a Hong Kong film reach HK $10,000,000, 30% will be spent on distribution and promotion, with another 30% going to the cinema operators, 10% to Hong Kong government taxes, and only the remaining 30% as returns to film investors. Even when the box office benefits of a Hong Kong hit break records, the income barely meets the film's production costs. For example, the box office receipts for the film *Infernal Affairs* amounted to HK $60,000,000, but only $18,000.000 went to the investors. This is why export earnings have become critical to Hong Kong film making. With percentages declining at precisely the moment that digital effects and stunt sequences require more and more expensive sets and post-production, Hong Kong has had to appeal to wider global audiences, simply to fund potential hits.

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5 The term alone indicates an interesting perspective on the strength of the Hong Kong industry's sense of its own prioritisation of the local.

The effects of this local financing dilemma can be most clearly seen in the history of the rise and fall of Hong Kong's cinema chains – the distribution networks which formed, but which also respond to, local audience demand. Before 1995, there were more than one hundred Hong Kong films produced every year, and shown in Hong Kong theatres divided into five major cinema distribution circuits:

1. Shaw Brothers,
2. Golden Harvest,
3. Golden Princess,
4. Regal Holdings,
5. New Port Circuit.

Each chain had around twenty cinemas, distributed across various regions and neighbourhoods. After 1995, most closed down, or changed to featuring international pictures, so that only two chains now remain: New Port Circuit and Golden Harvest, with only forty cinemas to run. The sole foreigh-language film distributor of significance in Hong Kong is Continental Distribution, which has recently produced such large-scale international films as *Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon, Fearless,* and *Warlords* – films whose mainland China and U.S. success has sustained the local industry through its period of readjustment. The pace, and the depth, of that 'readjustment' can both be read clearly from the figures recording Hong Kong cinema audience figures in the 1970s, '80s, '90s, and today:

1970s : 55,000,000. per head the whole ten years

1980s : 61,000,000. per head the whole ten years

1990s : 44,500,000. per head the whole ten years

2000s : 62,774,000 per head between 2000-2005

If growth at levels which are returning to the peaks of 'Golden Era' success now seems evident, the 1990s sharp decline is still a very recent reminder of the need to build-in sustainable growth. These raw figures on the rise and fall of Hong Kong audiences need of course to be examined in far greater detail, with a number of factors, both internal and external, to be taken into account before any comment can be made on what produced that 1990s decline.

Hong Kong films traditionally aimed at excitement, leaving foreign language films to explore more artistic elements and produce films of social criticism. Target audiences have been mostly young people, but it should be recognised that most Hong Kong young people in the 1980s and 1990s were urban unskilled workers, with tastes developed around action genres and fast-paced entertainment. By the mid-1990s, demographics show that most film fans from this Golden Era had established families and were struggling to keep up with mortgages. Money spent on movie tickets meant the expectation

of a premium product: most often a big-budget, special-effects-packed Hollywood blockbuster.

After the mid-90s arrival of the information age, the new informational economy in Hong Kong demanded higher education qualifications at entry-level within the workforce, with the number of Universities increased to eight, and international films once again replacing Hong Kong product in terms of box office receipts (Yau, 2001, p. 136). This drop-away effect in terms of audience selection of Hong Kong productions can be seen in the records of box office takings between 1985 and 2005, reproduced below. Note for instance how the total-takings figures in the left-hand box, ranging from $800m. to $1500m., tend to obscure the rather steeper decline in the right-hand figures on local production takings. From a relatively balanced comparison between local and imported takings in 1985, Hong Kong films experienced a sudden popularity surge, more than twice as popular as imports within just two years. They repeat the pattern in the early 1990s – only to drop below imported takings by 1995, rallying briefly in 1996, and then falling sharply, to around 15% of their previous highpoint.

Year	Box-office(HK$)		
	Total	Non HK	HK
1985	$869,385,000	$313.087,000	$556,298,000
1986	$910,702,000	$295,985,000	$614,717,000
1987	$1,209,600,000	$349,542,000	$860,058,000
1988	$1,410,775,000	$331,622,000	$1,079,153,000
1989	$1,274,168,848	$517,893,980	$756,274,868
1990	$1,380,916,125	$690,942,125	$689,974,000
1991	$1,380,909,391	$319,084,061	$1,061,825,330
1992	$1,557,817,978	$339,036,828	$1,218,781,150
1993	$1,564,159,812	$407,516,932	$1,156,642,880
1994	$1,431,115,027	$545,814,060	$885,300,967
1995	$1,308,406,176	$705,445,538	$602,960,638
1996	$1,273,302,782	$594,199,626	$679,103,156
1997	$1,255,946,504	$714,971,330	$540,975,174

1998	$985,193,359	$571,112,266	$414,081,093
1999	$892,600,368	$541,397,530	$351,202,838
2000	$937,506,276	$537,476,281	$400,029,995
2001	$1,038,564,042	$591,627,778	$446,936,264
2002	$902,026,590	$557,028,624	$344,997,966
2003	$888,884,377	$469,591,050	$419,293,327
2004	$954,429,548	$523,482,010	$430,947,538
2005	$941,613,498	$648,596,872	$293,016,626

Data from the Hong Kong Film Archive, Resource Centre (1985-1988) and Hong Kong Kowloon & New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd (1989-2005)

To answer the seemingly simple question: what happened? is to drill down into far more detail than can be provided by statistics alone. What was it about these Hong Kong films which saw them first succeeding, and then failing, in attracting local audiences? What was it that initially pleased Hong Kong cinema goers – and then stopped interesting them? Which aspects of the 'Golden Era' formula might succeed again – or has the audience itself changed, along with the context of production for what was, at least at first, a very local production culture?

4.5 Hong Kong audience tastes: Favourite genres and stars and the directors who catered to them

Action film has been the pillar of Hong Kong filmmaking since the 1970s. It has enjoyed a competitive bargaining power across Southeast Asian, European and American markets, as well as being steadily attractive to the Hong Kong audience. Bruce Li and Lau Ka Leung in the early and late 1970s respectively, and Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung in the 1980s, have been popular with audiences all over the world – but their performances were designed for local Hong Kong audiences.

This has not however been a one-genre film industry. Besides thrillers, fantasy adventures and cops & robbers action, comedies have been long time favourites, both in Hong Kong and across Southeast Asia. Film creatives were not slow to take the hint. By the beginning of the 1980s Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, and Yuen Woo Ping, among others, had created the *action-comedy* fusion format as an exclusive Hong Kong genre, adding action elements popular in Europe and America to

the comedic styles favoured in Hong Kong and across Southeast Asia (Fu, 2000, p. 62). Which Hong Kong films were most warmly welcomed is clear through reviewing the percentages grossed by the twenty most popular film genres in the first five years of the Golden Era (1985-1990).

1985	comedy 50%,	action 7%,	crime 6%.
1986	comedy 40%,	action 15%,	crime 2%.
1987	comedy 11%,	action 13%,	crime 8%.
1988	comedy 20%,	action 11%,	crime 8%.
1989	comedy 15%,	action 6%,	crime 12%.

(Data from Hong Kong Film Archive, Research Centre)

In almost every case comedy is the clear leader – but the strength of action films, and a sustained interest in crime stories, suggests precisely the fusion that Hung and Chan initiated. Already it appears that what may otherwise have been seen as a form of 'individual genius' innovation, may have been motivated by the 'hard indicators' of cash returns and box office success – and while the performance formulae and the presentational styles used to capture this new compound audience may indeed be conceded as a form of creativity, its entanglement in the commercial concerns of an entire industry cannot be underestimated.

That having been noted, are there similar formations and influences at work to explain the sheer dominance of what seems a mere handful of film 'creatives' whose names we will see recur at the top of Hong Kong's box office lists, across both Golden Era and Decline productions. How far is it the power of a local 'star' – someone intensely present in the local media, known in depth by Hong Kong audiences – which produces audience enthusiasm? The 'star' system, produced within Hollywood's modernist industrial practices for 'streamlined' mass audiences of the early and mid twentieth century, seems to be operating inside Hong Kong – but should it be understood in the same ways? What is it to be a star in Hong Kong film, and what influence does it have on the industry overall?

Only the large Hong Kong film studios established the star system and became powerful enough, financially and materially, to make new stars popular as idols for young people. For instance, in the early 1960s, '70s and '80s, all the Hong Kong film stars were from the two major film studios, Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest. Only once the Golden Era of Hong Kong films emerged did independent film makers manage to begin production in the film industry - but none of them was financially and materially strong enough to launch new stars. They turned instead to TV performers and popular singers, profiting from their established public profile.

The end of the major studios such as Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest has had a far-reaching impact upon the talent-pool of performers available to film. It has meant that no new Hong Kong film stars have been introduced. Today the successors to the great stars of Hong Kong cinema are youth idols from other forms of performance media – and that means that

they are becoming younger and younger. Not film stars in the strictest sense, they lack the promotional power to build sustained careers over decades, or to capture audiences across the region and around the world. How then is this new, non-studio/non-star form of film industry to cohere around a production, or to 'brand' a distinctive Hong Kong product?

One answer has been to retain an emphasis upon the creative leadership and insight of directors.

It was not only star performers who emerged during Hong Kong's Golden Era of movie production. New movie themes started to appear in the early 1970s, when a crowd of new directors returned to Hong Kong after graduation from the film departments of overseas universities. The new packaging and new elements of movie content which made Hong Kong films attractive both in Hong Kong and abroad were in many instances introduced by these 'New wave' directors (see especially Teo, 1997, p. 82), including Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, Alex Cheung K.M., and Tam Kai Ming.

Their innovation did not however change the content of the most popular and commercial Hong Kong movies. By the mid-1980s when Hong Kong films had entered their Golden Era of peak success, martial arts films were appearing in large numbers. Famous directors included Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Lau Ka Leung and John Woo – yet from the 1990s on most of these directors were moving, one after another, to Hollywood: John Woo, Wong Ka Wai, Tsui Hark, Kirk Wong, Ringo Lam... Martial arts films began to be too expensive to produce for the Hong Kong market, with low-budget romances and youth realism taking their place – films with nothing like the earlier pulling-power.

With the arrival of the 21st century, things improved. With less internal competition, the Hong Kong film industry has been able to amass the resources to produce large-scale films to international standards. *Infernal Affairs, Election,* and *Warlords* are typical examples, and directors such as Andrew Lau W.K., Jonnie To K.F. and Peter Chan H.S. are once again winning audiences.

This suggests then a three-stage shift in the financial fortunes and creative response of Hong Kong movie-making, from the 'small local market' foundations of the 60s and 70s, into the rise-and-fall trajectory of the past three decades:

1970s Studio and cinema chain dominance – Shaw Brothers/Golden Harvest
regular cinema-going public/young workers
crime thrillers/comedy
LOCAL PRODUCTION CULTURE

1980s Cinema chains multiply
strong cinema-going public for local films
New Wave overseas trained directors
Martial arts film evolves
LOCAL PRODUCTION GAINS OFF-SHORE AUDIENCE

1990s Cinema chains peak; rival digital entertainments arrive

audiences held by successful creative production

actor/directors dominate: established partnerships

Stephen Chow comedy, Jackie Chan comedy/kung fu fusion

PEAK SUCCESS OF LOCAL PRODUCT

2000s Cinema chains decline, industry re-directed into China

local audience numbers collapse

aging actors replaced by untrained TV/music stars

established partnerships still prevail

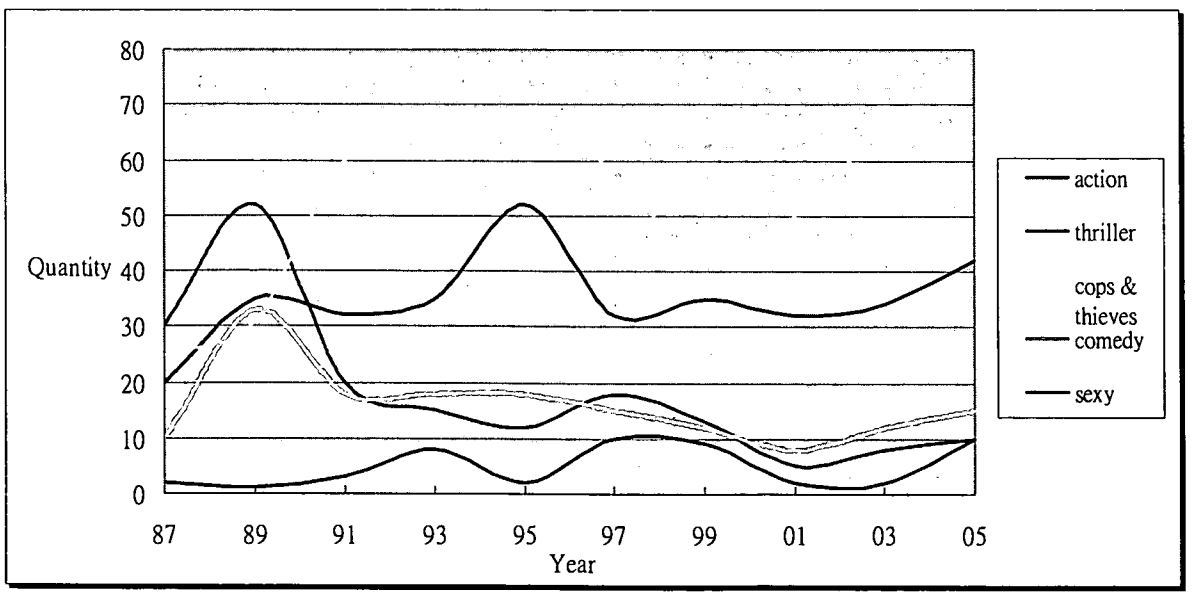
new emergent fusion forms – Stephen Chow kung fu updates

Andrew Lau crime/duplicity

LOCAL FORMULAE ADAPTING TO NEW CONDITIONS

But while this modeling helps foreground the changes which have occurred across the industry, it is also important to acknowledge the degree of continuity, and adaptive or controlled change, which has been evident.

The following chart and table for instance reflect audience preferences and the five most productive film genres during the twenty years from 1985 to 2005. In each case it is clear that audience preference for established film genre forms has held up, with comedy and action film still consistently dominant. While audience numbers and so box office returns may rise and fall, the relative returns across genres remain stable.



Film genre popularity with Hong Kong audiences: 1987-2005

YEAR	87	89	91	93	95	97	99	01	03	05
action	20	35	32	35	52	32	35	32	34	42
thriller	30	52	20	15	12	18	13	5	8	10
cops & robbers	10	33	18	18	18	15	12	8	12	15
comedy	25	31	60	63	68	58	42	50	65	64
sexy	2	1	3	8	2	10	9	2	2	10

Film genre popularity with Hong Kong audiences each two years: 1987-2005

Data from Hong Kong Film Archive, Resource Centre.

These figures reveal trends so clearly present and so strongly sustained, as to suggest that film-makers of the era were very certain indeed of their creative direction – and while in the following chapter this evidence will be tested against that of box office success, to check audience response, the commercial bias of Hong Kong's film industries immediately suggests that the production figures will closely echo receipts, when it comes to preferred genres.

To model the production culture of Hong Kong's cinema in this way is to suggest several key strands of influence upon its creativity – even before introducing the possibility of regulatory or policy interventions, relatively direct political impact, or the stylistic presence of particular productions, local or international, altering audience tastes or production techniques. Behind this culture of creative production lies a multi-facetted responsiveness. But Hong Kong film-making must always be viewed, before all else, as a commercial industry, where financial risks and available funding are the ultimate arbiters of every creative project.

4.6 He who pays the piper, calls the tune : Film funding in Hong Kong

Beginning in the 1980s, the large local Hong Kong movie companies ceased their original business. The Shaw Studio transferred its focus to TVB television. Golden Harvest sold their stockholder's rights to Christian Holdings, ceasing production of Hong Kong movies; followed by Cinema City and Dickson.

Hong Kong movies could no longer depend upon local investors, and were forced to seek investment from other countries and territories, including Mainland China, the US, Japan and Korea. In 2005 *Daisy* (2005), directed by Andrew Lau Wai Keung, was financed by a Korean company and starred Korean actors; *Terracotta Warrior* (1990), directed by Ching Sui Tung and

starring China's most famous actress Gong Li, received investment from Mainland China. Peter Chan's 2007 movie *The Warlords* starred Andy Lau, Jet Li and Takeshi Kaneshivo, a joint capital venture from China, the US and Japan.

Strictly speaking, movies receiving investment from off-shore capital cannot be classified as Hong Kong productions, since these off-shore investors take their own local market into consideration in offering funding, and this in itself affects creative decisions made in production. This is especially so for those movies receiving mainland Chinese investment, where political certification restricts content. The impact of these mixed-productions has been immense. Since 2000, only three Hong Kong produced films: *You shoot, I shoot* (2001), *Beyond our Ken* (2004), and *Trivial Matters* (2007), all directed by Pang Ho Cheung, can be classified as Hong Kong movies, made exclusively for Hong Kong's local market, and backed only by Hong Kong investors. For this reason Pang Ho Cheung has been selected among the film creatives for interview in Phase Two of this study, in an effort to reveal what guides the content of a now-aberrant strand of the purely local in movie-making – and why its director continues to explore this local focus.

In the meantime, one possible consequence of film-financing arrangements for the 'local' Hong Kong production culture suggested above, has been to deflect support away from the more successful and established production partnerships – always a strength of the Hong Kong culture – and onto the newer, and perhaps more immediately adaptive creative leaders. In 2007, the SAR Government for the first time set up a Film Development Fund to support small and mid-sized films in terms of investment – part of the 'creative industries' and 'creative hub' focus on start-up and SME-status enterprises (see Flew, pp. 130-138). Any small and mid-sized Hong Kong film with production costs under HK$12,000,000 can apply for help. Upon approval, the Government will invest 30% of the costs, i.e., HK$3,600,000, in return for becoming a stockholder. Although the Government is not involved in the commercial operation, it shares the copyright and any subsequent profits.

Successful professionals – for instance regular visitors to world film festivals such as directors Wong Ka Wai or Fruit Chan - have difficulty applying for SAR Government Film Development Funding, instead relying on various film funding sources from Europe, the US, Japan and Korea to keep their productions' creative edge. As will be evident in the following chapter, this means that the most experienced and most financially successful Hong Kong practitioners are excluded from receiving support for 'local' films. How then is the Hong Kong film-making community to reproduce itself? Alternatively, is it possible to sustain the success of this industry with both local and global audiences, when the most experienced creative talent must, according to the film funding system, orient its focus off shore; and while new talent, its recruitment still mostly informal, is burdened with maintaining Hong Kong's traditional 'local' preferences in terms of cinema product?

4.7 Getting in on the act(ion): The professional community of Hong Kong film makers

Entry to the industry for filmmakers in Hong Kong involves distinctive methods of recruitment, and in fact presents something of a barrier to those seeking admission as 'outsiders' – for relatively informal patterns of co-operation among family members has meant that father-son combinations, or teams of brothers, have provided the backbone of the profession.

While Hollywood has produced a number of family dynasties, the Hong Kong film industry, typical of Hong Kong's 'family' businesses, has taken this possibility further, in effect producing a half-closed profession. It has been very difficult indeed for a newcomer to gain access to any post within the film industry.

One outcome was perhaps inevitable: a strong tendency, at least in the early days, towards recurrent themes and genres in Hong Kong films, as these tightly-interconnected groups worked through their own preferred and high-reputation specialisations. Most notably this meant an emphasis on high-action martial arts genres, a proven crowd-pleaser which almost came to brand Hong Kong movie making in its entirety.

Then in the mid-1970s a crowd of enthusiastic young people, second-generation Hong Kong film lovers, undertook film degrees at European and American universities, and were able to join the Hong Kong film industry at its moment of rapid expansion, creating an entirely new force within production. This New Wave created a revolutionary breakthrough in Hong Kong film history (see especially Cheuk, 2003, p. 46), with representative directors including Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, and Alan Fong Y. P. By the end of the 1970s, with the help of Bruce Li's worldwide influence, these New Wave directors were able to take Hong Kong films out of their strictly local Asian ambit to the film festivals of the world, making all that was distinctive in Hong Kong films known to global audiences.

By the 1980s these same New Wave directors had stimulated the industry in ways which brought about rapid improvement in local film practitioners' skills, lifting the quality and production values of Hong Kong film overall. Working with performers such as Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung, who had been trained in martial arts at Chinese Opera Colleges since childhood, they were able to integrate world-level cinema best practice with a range of action moves and original creative embellishments to formal martial arts performance. This fusion of Chinese traditional arts and the latest international production practices brought a new level of excitement – and novelty – to the screen. Working collaboratively across many productions – the typical pattern within Hong Kong film-making culture - , these New Wave directors and a growing band of innovative star performers were able to break into production on their own terms, ushering in the prosperous Golden Era *(ibid.,* p. 123).

The career of Wong Jin, the most productive and successful director of the Golden Era in the 1980s and '90s, is a case in point.

In an interview published in 2007 he related how he had completed a BA in Chinese, at the Hong Kong Chinese University. Although he didn't know much about films, with his father Wong Tin Lam then a senior film director, he was able to join a TV station as a screenwriter. After some outstanding successes in television he was invited to become a film director and made a series of very popular films - but. Wong Jin himself recollects both his own inexperience, and the informality of how he arrived at a solution. Each day, before going to the shooting location, he would work through the script in the bathroom; ask his father for a few opinions on the day's shooting problems, and then set out to direct. From such a pragmatic and seat-of-the-pants technique he claims to have constructed a career and reputation which position him now among the most successful directors in the industry (Wong, 2007, pp. 96-103). This narrative – one which surely has to be taken with a number of grains of salt – may owe something to Wong Jin's sense of modesty, and perhaps to his sense of humour – but

it also says much about how far the culture of Hong Kong moviemaking rests on Hong Kong culture itself. This involves a distinctive compound of filial piety, respect for traditions, strong collegial loyalties and cooperative work relations – yet all tied to an earthy pragmatism and sense of humour, and a drive to, no matter how, get the job done.

Add to this a few other issues which seem to play about this story: for instance, just how far Wong Jin's degree at Hong Kong Chinese University had developed within him a close appreciation of the traditions of Chinese language, literature, and worldview; how much he had learned in the pressure-cooker world of television writing and production, with its very tight production schedules – and how much any child of a successful film director already knew, formally or informally, of what was after all so very much the family business: in Chinese tradition, part of the daily fibre of every child's life.

Compare this to the conditions experienced by film professionals of the Extinction Period. The plan devised for this study's data collection originally involved an interview with Peter Chan H. S., contacted before 2007. He promised to arrange a time, but was preparing to go to mainland China to work on *Warlords,* the shooting of which was then in full swing. With the deadline for the research still more than one year away, he agreed to a formal interview around October, 2007, when the shooting of *Warlords* would have come to an end.

Perhaps not so unexpectedly, work on this large-scale martial arts film, all in ancient costumes, met with many difficulties. It took ten months to finish a film which was originally expected to take six months. Originally scheduled for release at Christmas, 2007 all over the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, it was delayed until the beginning of 2008. At last, the interview could go ahead. But then the production costs for *Warlords* blew out to US$40,000,000. As a result, under the film financing rules this film was going to have to be sold internationally... From December 2007 to May 2008, Peter Chan was endlessly flying backwards and forwards to and from Hong Kong, always off to attend yet another event to promote his film. He was seriously worried about box office receipts - for it is not enough just to create a good film when you are a 21st century Hong Kong film director. You have to be good at marketing, and able to plan, package and promote your film, once it is made. All your professional relationships are called upon, working to attract the best-known actors and actresses to talk-up your new work across the globe. You need access to flexible forms of finance, to save production costs – and you need to work in strange new places, because Hong Kong films now have to be made in low-cost locations in mainland China in order to survive. These days, only the omnipotent and multiskilled practitioner can prosper.

What then does this tell us of creativity inside the Hong Kong industry? Having suggested that its rise to success developed from a stable and culturally embedded set of Hong Kong Chinese practices, and subsequently followed a trajectory to peak success only as it intersected with a range of generators of innovation, how is it now dealing with these many layers of creative inhibition – albeit differently motivated and configured – which set limits to earlier phases of cinematic creativity? To examine this in more detail, the study now returns to the box office figures for local Hong Kong films, to examine how this hyper-commercial industry has responded to both shifts and powerful cultural continuities in the tastes and interests of its audiences.

CHAPTER Five

What can we learn from the Box Office?

5.0. Hong Kong audiences for Golden Era films

One of the simplest ways of assessing which films achieve success: which stand out from the usual fare – is to collect the revenue returns from box office receipts. There are of course many immediate arguments which arise as to what exactly such an exercise might prove – for audiences are not, as this study has argued above, naturally occurring entities. They are produced in varying ways, not all of them dictated purely by the 'appeal' of a particular film. Yet box office drives subsequent production in powerful ways, and remains a major factor within industry evaluations of what is or is not a successful product. Audiences too are kept informed of box office success, with reviews, programming schedules, cinema trailers and even media 'League tables' all using box office receipts directly, to market both current and future productions.

Stephen Chow is one Hong Kong practitioner who is more than familiar with movie promotion techniques. When *Shaolin Soccer* did well on its release into cinemas, he produced a short advertising video telling audiences that the film was grossing so spectacularly, that its ticket price would be lowered – attracting even more viewers.

Here, the aim is to note the biggest box office successes among local Hong Kong audiences from 1985 to 2005, as a way of checking how far it is the creativity and innovation within individual films – or perhaps the work of individual production teams or team members – which appeals to audiences. Each film is listed with its director – but subsequent analysis will extend to consideration of how far prominent actors, cinematographers or effects specialists, or even producers with strong promotional apparatus behind them, can influence the audience share for any given production. The data cited is drawn from statistics held by the Hong Kong Film Museum, the most unbiased central source for lodgment of complete financial returns for Hong Kong films. What these data tell us is, quite simply, which were the three most popular Hong Kong films with Hong Kong audiences, each year. No claim is made, or intended, that these were in any way 'the best' films of their year – indeed, comparative lists of award winners for each year show that many productions subsequently become classics when they were not especially popular upon release. What is regarded as one of the best Hong Kong films ever, *Centre Stage* (1991) by Stanley Kwan, was not one of the three most popular films of its year. Another famous director, Wong Kar-wai, who has won many awards in international film festivals, seldom appears on the list of most popular Hong Kong films in terms of box office receipts.

Film awards are based on criteria which often remain outside popular taste: one reason why academic film analysis so often works away from popular product. Indeed this factor leaves the industry with the sorts of dilemma central to this entire study, which focuses upon what is meant and understood by 'creativity' within commercially-produced and released films, as opposed to, for instance, art house film. If, as is currently being argued within the profession, Hong Kong cinema needs to

'regain its creativity' in order to achieve its former success with both local and global audiences, what was that 'creativity'? Was it in fact what audiences of the Golden Era responded to – and if so, what forms did it take, and how might those forms be re-introduced in future productions – either to replicate past glories, or to take forward the tradition in new ways? In Pope's terms, in attending to its audience's responses, what should the film industry attempt to 're-create' in relation to a distinctively Hong Kong cinematic production?

Such questions will of course require far more analysis and inquiry than will be offered simply from a survey of twenty years of box office receipts – but this remains an interesting departure point for indicating the dimensions of the problem at hand. It is, to that extent, one which could usefully be undertaken more often within Film Studies.

5.1 Box-office receipts for the 3 best-selling Hong Kong movies each year from 1985-2005

Year	Name of the movie	Director's name	Box-office (HKD)
1985	*My Lucky Stars* (福星高照)	Sammo Hung (洪金寶)	$30,748,643.00
	Twinkle Twinkle Little Star (夏日福星)	Sammo Hung (洪金寶)	$28,911,851.00
	Merry Christmas (聖誕快樂)	Ko Chi Sum (高志森)	$25,782,012.00
1986	*A Better Tomorrow* (英雄本色)	John Woo (吳宇森)	$34,651,324.00
	The Millionaires Express (富貴列車)	Sammo Hung (洪金寶)	$28,122,275.00
	Aces Go Places IV (最佳拍檔千里救差婆)	Ringo Lam (林嶺東)	$27,012,748.00
1987	Armour of God (龍兄虎弟)	Jackie Chan (成龍)	$35,469,408.00
	It's a Mad Mad World (富貴逼人)	Ko Chi Sum (高志森)	$27,141,624.00
	The Autumn Tale (秋天的童話)	Mabel Y.T. Cheung (張婉婷)	$25,546,552.00
1988	The Eighth Happiness (八星報喜)	Johnnie To (杜琪峯)	$37,090,776.00
	Police Story II (警察故事續集)	Jackie Chan (成龍)	$34,151,609.00
	Dragon Forever (飛龍猛將)	Sammo Hung (洪金寶)	$33,578,920.00
1989	God of Gamblers (賭神)	Wong Jing (王晶)	$36,294,029.00
	Mr. Canton and Lady Rose (奇	Jackie Chan (成龍)	$34,036,029.00

	蹟)		
	Mr. Coconut (合家歡)	Ko Chi Sum (高志森)	$31,246,447.00
1990	All for the Winner (賭聖)	Corey Yuen (元奎) Jeff Lau (劉鎮偉)	$41,326,156.00
	Hearts Into Hearts (三人新世界)	Sin Kei Yin (洗杞然)	$23,275,483.00
	A Terracotta Warrior (秦俑)	Ching Siu Tung (程小冬)	$20,991,782.00
1991	Fight Back To School (逃學威龍)	Gordon Chan (陳嘉上)	$43,829,449.00
	Armour of God II (飛鷹計劃 2)	Jackie Chan (成龍)	$39,048,711.00
	To Be Number One (跛豪)	Poon Man Kit (潘文傑)	$38,703,363.00
1992	Justice, My Foot (審死官)	Johnnie To (杜琪峯)	$49,884,734.00
	All's Well Ends Well (家有喜事)	Ko Chi Sum (高志森)	$48,992,188.00
	Royal Tramp (鹿鼎記)	Wong Jing (王晶)	$40,862,831.00
1993	Flirting Scholar (唐伯虎點秋香)	Lee Lik Che (李力持)	$40,171,033.00
	Happy Gangs (花田喜事)	Ko Chi Sum (高志森)	$35,481,480.00
	C'est La Vie, Mon Cheri (新不了情)	Eric Yee (爾冬陞)	$30,659,369.00

1994	God of Gamblers Return (賭神 2)	Wong Jing (王晶)	$42,896,526.00
	Drunken Master II (醉拳 2)	Lau Ka Leung (劉家良)	$40,971,484.00
	It's a Wonderful Life (大富之家)	Ko Chi Sum (高志森)	$37,367,669.00
1995	Rumble in the Bronx (紅番區)	Stanley Tong (唐季禮)	$56,912,536.00
	Thunderbolt (霹靂火)	Gordon Chan (陳嘉上)	$45,647,210.00
	Sixty Million Dollar Man (百變星君)	Wong Jing (王晶)	$35,236,551.00
1996	First Strike (簡單任務)	Stanley Tong (唐季禮)	$57,518,795.00
	Forbidden City Cop (大內密探零零發)	Stephen Chow (周星馳) Kuk Tak Chiu (谷德昭)	$36,051,899.00

	God of Cookery (食神)	Stephen Chow (周星馳) Lee Lik Che (李力持)	$28,268,090.00
1997	Mr. Nice Guy (一個好人)	Sammo Hung (洪金寶)	$45,420,457.00
	All's Well Ends Well 97' (家在喜事 97')	Ko Chi Sum (高志森)	$40,435,675.00
	Once Upon a Time In China & America (黃飛鴻之西域雄獅)	Sammo Hung (洪金寶)	$30,268,415.00
1998	The Storm Raider (風雲雄霸天下)	Andrew Lau Wai Keung (劉偉強)	$41,532,235.00
	Who Am I (我是誰)	Benny Chan (陳木勝)	$38,852,845.00
	Young and Dangerous (古惑仔之龍爭虎斗)	Andrew Lau Wai Keung (劉偉強)	$12,875,410.00
1999	King of Comedy (喜劇之王)	Stephen Chow (周星馳) Lee Lik Che (李力持)	$29,848,860.00
	Gorgeous (玻璃樽)	Kuk Tak Chiu (谷德昭)	$27,545,889.00
	A Man Named Hero (中華英雄)	Andrew Lau Wai Keung (劉偉強)	$23,368,902.00
2000	Needing You (孤男寡女)	Johnnie To (杜琪峯) Wai Ka Fai (韋家輝)	$35,214,661.00
	Tokyo Raiders(東京攻略)	Jingle Ma (馬楚成)	$28,187,905.00
	Summer Holiday (夏日麼麼茶)	Jingle Ma (馬楚成)	$21,336,647.00
2001	Shaolin Soccer (少林足球)	Stephen Chow (周星馳)	$60,736,667.00
	Love on a Diet (瘦身男女)	Johnnie To (杜琪峯) Wai Ka Fai (韋家輝)	$40,435,886.00
	The Accidentals (特務飛龍)	Teddy Chan (陳德森)	$30,009,076.00
2002	Infernal Affairs (無間道)	Andrew Lau Wai Keung (劉偉強) Alan Mak (麥兆輝)	$55,046,706.00
	Hero (英雄)	Chang YiMu (張藝謀)	$26,648,345.00
	Marry A Rich Man (嫁個有錢人)	Kuk Tak Chiu (谷德昭)	$21,688,609.00
2003	The Twins Effect (千機變)	Lam Chiu Yin (林超賢) Bullet Yan (甄子丹)	$28, 423,960.00

	Infernal Affairs 2 (無間道 2)	Andrew Lau Wai Keung (劉偉強) Alan Mak (麥兆輝)	$30,225,661.00
	Running on Karma (大隻佬)	Johnnie To (杜琪峯) Wai Ka Fai (韋家輝)	$26,339848.00
2004	Kung Fu Hustle (功夫)	Stephen Chow (周星馳)	$49,481,996.00
	Fantasia (鬼馬狂想曲)	Wai Ka Fai (韋家輝)	$25,093,425.00
	Escape from Hong Kong Island (新警察故事)	Benny Chan (陳木勝)	$21,109,502.00
2005	Initial D (頭文字 D)	Andrew Lau Wai Keung (劉偉強) Alan Mak (麥兆輝)	$37,862,364.00
	Wait Till You're Older (童夢)	Teddy Chan (陳德森)	$20,163,545.00
	The Myth (神話)	Stanley Tong (唐季禮)	$17,062,608.00

From 1985 to 2005, twenty different films have been annual box office champion. However, familiar names appear more frequently. Some genres, some stars, some directors, are seen year by year, indicating those trends which have impacted upon the film market in its era of greatest success. This study divides these twenty years into several periods, according to changing trends, reading back from box office success the major figures and practices which influenced the industry, and its response to changes in popular taste and interests.

Three major sub-eras and **seven key moments of influence** emerge from such an exercise, indicating shifts in what might be termed the 'film economy of Hong Kong', decade by decade – the term 'economy' understood here in its broader sense of a total system comprising a given society, including its cultural base, political direction, economic circumstances, and the industries and products which arise within and reflect back its prime concerns. While by no means implying a view that films are always works of social realism, directly mirroring the society which produced them, such a position accepts that any media product; even when consciously contrived as fiction or even as fantasy, is influenced by the circumstances in which it is produced, and the audiences for whom it is designed. To see changes within those sets of circumstances: the matrices of production and reception, is to detect some important ways of calculating the pressures operating upon the film industry in this era, and, it will be argued later, influencing both the films produced, and the ways in which audiences responded.

Major sub-era One: TRADITION

Here the works receiving the greatest audience approval meet Pope's criteria for a creativity formed squarely within the conventions of a cultural tradition. They are, in his terms, 'original' – a concept more complex than may at first sight appear, given its semantic connection to a creativity working well within its cultural *origins,* as well as to work producing some degree of *innovation.* Again in Pope's terms, it is *fitting* work: it takes up the issues of its founding culture, and represents them back, in ways which *full-fill* the expectations and understandings of home audiences.

Influence One: John Woo

Here the work of John Woo, focused on dramas of justice, loyalty and the calls of friendship, sustains a sense of a strongly-bound social order – one able to prevail even within the worst of all possible situations. As will be argued below, Woo's films gave Hong Kong audiences a sense of a heroism within their own purview: a justice towards which all could struggle. They were, to that extent, narratives of everyman –without departing from their Chinese cultural context.

Influence Two: Stephen Chow

Alongside Woo's dramas, the traditional comic performances of Stephen Chow insert into the formula stories of reluctant everyday heroes, caught up in events larger than themselves – but always ready with native guile and quick-witted *mo lei tau* responses, and able ultimately to both survive and escape whatever arises.

Together these two set in place a powerful set of production criteria; perhaps played over a little differently by fellow directors and performers, but enabling the sorts of onward development which lead forward to sub-era two: a period of TRANSITION, which begins in the mid 1990s, with the rise and rise of the success of Jackie Chan.

Sub-era Two: TRANSITION

What Jackie Chan produces is a fusion of drama and comedy: a re-working of kung fu action which maintains the nobility of the protagonists of Woo's films, while annexing the 'little man' ingenuity and luckiness of Stephen Chow.

Influence Three is thus **Jackie Chan's** modernisation of the Chinese martial arts performance – one which incidentally makes it more readily accessible to non-Chinese audiences, and so carries Hong Kong film into mainstream world markets for the first time.

Influence Four continues the trend – with a director-performer with the same levels of traditional training as Jackie Chan; but also the same sense of the adaptive possibilities of established performance arts. **Stephen Chow's return** to major Box office success comes with two notable fusion films: *Shaolin soccer,* and *Kung fu.*

No one formula however can contain or sustain alone a creative industry experiencing the multiple demands of globalisation and post-handover socio-economic change. Sub-era Three sees Hong Kong film enter a period of Box Office decline, signaled in its films by a shift away from re-workings of traditional performances, and into a period of multi-stranded experimentation.

Sub-era Three: A complex re-emergence

As Hong Kong film begins to confront the new realities of both its own political future and the multiple audiences of a digital communications culture both the audience and the directedness of film begin to fragment. Production becomes more experimental at every level, with everything from theme to cinematography playing out a new, questioning role. Across each of the three final Influences established so far in this very recent era, a far more tentative, dis-engaged note is being struck:

Influence Five: Wong Kar-Wai's rootlessness

Influence Six: Andrew Lau and the duplicity of the modern gangster

Influence Seven: Johnnie To and Hong Kong's transitory urban modernity

While none of these produce quite the Box-Office impact of Stephen Chow's sunset-career fusion of the traditional with the new, together they suggest both a re-direction of the industry, and a return to acceptably solid levels of local income. What remains to be seen, and what will be addressed in the discussion which follows, is whether this altogether less culturally-assertive or positive set of narratives will sustain audience interest – or create it, in both succeeding generations of Hong Kong movie-viewers, or global audiences beyond the art-house/Award-winner circuits.

5.2 TRADITION Influence One – the 1980s: John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow*

A Better Tomorrow cemented John Woo's place in Hong Kong cinema history. It was selected as the second best Chinese film ever in the *Best 100 China Motion Pictures* list in 2005 (for a full listing and sense of the many rival productions, see http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%8B%B1%E9%9B%84%E6%9C%AC%E8% 89%B2).

This one film had a profound influence on the Hong Kong industry, and later achieved success on an international scale. It was not only the best seller of 1986, but also stood for the beginning of a new era. It defined best practice for the action movie of its day, at a time when action movies characterised the Hong Kong industry globally - and even now, what late comers to this still-popular genre do is replicate its formula for success.

Immediately however it becomes obvious that if this film became an industry model for future productions, it was itself already deeply embedded in past traditions of film making in Hong Kong – for this film is not the original version. The main

section of the plot came from a film of the same name directed by Lung Gong in 1967. Further: the film's plot significantly reproduces the sense of family-based and professional cohesion behind this sort of 'insider' re-working of Hong Kong's movie-industry traditions.

*Ho, one of three main characters in the film, intends to give up his lucrative career in crime for the sake of his younger brother, **Kit**, who has joined the police force. However, Ho is betrayed on his last job, and subsequently his friend **Mark** avenges the betrayal. In the end, the brothers come to an understanding, although along the way they also have to protect themselves in some very violent kung fu based incidents. The whole story focuses on the friendship between Ho and **Mark**, describing the special emotional bonds between men – especially those bound by the loyalty codes of professional life: even within crime. An ethos of male heroism and personal power is central to the film, and appears to have been a key to the impression made on its audiences.*

Directed by John Woo, the film stars Chow Yun-fat, Ti Lung and Leslie Cheung. Although made on a tight budget and with virtually no advertising, so that it was relatively unknown until it went on screen, it broke Hong Kong box office records, and went on to become a blockbuster in other Asian countries.

As Abbas has pointed out, 'The kung fu arts genre has gone through a number of distinct transformations, each one a rewriting of the genre' (1997 p.29). In Abbas' eyes, there are two distinct qualities in Woo's films: 'a fascination with extreme violence, often filmed in slow motion for emphasis, on the one hand; and on the other, a plot that underlines the need for personal loyalties, usually between male friends, in a crumbling world' *(ibid.,* p.33). Abbas captures here the features most noted by analysts of Woo's work; elements in need of further explanation. Are they simply an elaboration of existing kung fu conventions, or has Woo added something new: something, as this study will argue, arising from within the Hong Kong of its day?

5.2.1 Woo's place in the Hong Kong tradition of film-making: The influence of Chang Cheh

John Woo was originally assistant to Chang Cheh (張徹) in his early days in film-making, and learned much about how to express the *Jiang Hu* ethos in kung fu. *Jiang Hu* literally means 'The Killing Pool', and indicates the milieu, environment, or sub-community, often fictional, in which many Chinese classical *wuxia* (martial arts) stories are set. The term can be translated literally as 'rivers and lakes'. *Jianghu* presents an alternative universe, co-existing with the actual historical one in which the context of a *wuxia* plot is set. Each *wuxia* novel or film has its own *Jianghu* setting, although in a trilogy like Jin Yong's *Condor* series it will be one with continuity; whereas Gu Long's *Jianghu* is distinct in every telling. Both reveal an aspect of the cultural power of this tradition within Chinese storytelling, and in its sense-making, more generally, within Chinese cultural identity. The sense of a parallel universe of impassioned action, which intersects with and enacts a form of justice over the experiences of everyday, suggests a form of psycho-social projection. It is one which leaves intact both the social calm of Chinese society, and the personal family and clan based status of individuals – while at the same time licensing the naked expression of power. In Bourdieu's terms (1991) *jianghu's* licensing of *wuxia* action creates a form of 'euphemistic' social discourse, deflecting tensions into an imaginary enactment, just as do the highly structured language

forms of civic or professional speech.

Chang's kung fu films are said to have been the best in Hong Kong during the 1960s and 1970s (see: http://edu.ocac.gov.tw/culture /chinese/cul_ kungfu/c /4142.htm). Chang's film *One Armed Swordsman* was the first to take more than $HK 1,000,000 in local ticket sales. It set a new benchmark for Hong Kong martial-arts films, broke box office records across Asia and won international acclaim. Chang is credited with having created what is termed *'the tradition of the male spirit'* in Hong Kong cinema; a theme which took over from the trend towards popular romantic plots at that time. In his films, the romance centres not on the love between a man and a woman and the development of their relationship, but on a heroic spirit considered to exist inside the depth of men's hearts. Scenes are filled with hand-to-hand fighting, rather than soft-focus idealised visions of emotional connectedness. The heroes in Chang's films, and subsequently Woo's, are strong - yet not so strong that they cannot be beaten or defeated. At core the films are about a form of integrity. These everyday heroes stick to their beliefs, and will fight to the death – a story trajectory close to those outlined above for the classic Hollywood formula of Field, McKee and Egri. Indeed, death is not impossible in these films, and its very real presence best expresses what a real hero is (see: http://globalyesasia.com/b5/Emagazine/ArticlePage.aspx/section-videos/code-c/articleId-61/).

This new representation of a world of men, constructed as vehicle for the re-assertion of both traditional and modern virtues, attracted thousands into Chang's audiences; and while no statistics are available for the gender breakdown of those audiences, these representations of a new Hong Kong masculinity came to define one central strand of Hong Kong film. John Woo, as one of Chang's most accomplished assistants, then took up the tradition – and developed it further.

5.2.2. Woo and the philosophy of violence

Woo was first employed as a script supervisor at Cathay Studios, a role which immersed him in the work of structuring – and often re-structuring – both the narratives on offer, and those breaking through into production. Certainly this immersed him in Hong Kong's filmic traditions, but it also led to innovation, for by the 1970s he was acutely aware of the directions new Hong Kong cinema could most usefully take. In 1971 he became an assistant director at Shaw Studios, where Chang Cheh, already famous, took him under his wing. In 1974 he directed his first feature film, *The Young Dragons (Tie han rou qing).*

The new formula which he was developing achieved early success when this film was picked up by Golden Harvest Studio, where he went on to direct more martial arts films. His career trajectory within the Hong Kong industry however prompted the inclusion into the kung fu repertoire of a new, and again arguably characteristic Hong Kong generic strand – for Woo's next success was as a comedy director with *Money Crazy (Fa qian han)* in 1977, starring Hong Kong comedian Ricky Hui. Once again, it allowed a re-focus onto contemporary local character and plot dilemmas – features which refined his interest in the formulation of a specifically Hong Kong styling for his films. Woo wanted to capture a central and distinctive new masculinity in his films. He found it in a compound of the modern, streetwise application of traditional virtues, expressed through the fast-pace and often excessive demands of a modern urban existence – all delivered with the wit and bravura

founded not just in comedy, but specifically in Hong Kong comedic play. What local audiences found funny was already – as will be argued below – codified into a particular form of verbal wit and physical performance, and recognised as a distinctive element of popular filmic entertainment.

The new formula – instantly recognisable today – may however have been too much, too soon for late 70s/early 80s Hong Kong. Woo was struggling towards something as yet unrealised in either national or identity politics: something still often unexpressed, except perhaps in the sorts of compound or fusion forms Woo himself was attempting.

In the mid 1980s, Woo suffered a burnout. His films failed at the box office, and he retreated in exile to Taiwan. John Woo — once the new comedy king of Hong Kong — seemed on the way out. It was then that director/producer Tsui Hark funded Woo in a longtime pet project called *A Better Tomorrow.* It single-handedly redefined Hong Kong action cinema, with its emotional drama, slow-motion gun-battles and gritty atmosphere. The film's trench coat / sunglasses fashion sense, and the intensified combat style with a gun in each hand at close quarters (http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%90%B3%E5%AE%87%E6 %A3%AE) finally captured the accelerating social pace and competitiveness that Woo had been seeking as an expression of the 'new' Hong Kong. Here was a masculinity for its day: referenced in both Western and Chinese traditions of crime and justice action, but acutely tuned to contemporary image and the new, post modern cult of semi-alienated, semi-affinitive cool.

Many people still remember one central act in *A Better Tomorrow: **Mark** goes into a restaurant, drinking and clutching his sex-worker date - and then, seemingly without warning or provocation, takes out his twin guns and shoots his enemies dead.* Here slow motion is used to emphasise Mark's actions, and to focus and prolong our gaze on the calculated and controlled power of the vengeful hero. Woo now knows exactly how to create a hero – and how to position him within action which represents the spontaneity and yet purposeful will of the new male.

When Woo was young, he records having been impressed by French new wave cinema. He is on record as having said that Jean-Pierre Melville was his favourite director. The killer in the long raincoat and black hat in *Le Samurai* is one of the most memorable figures in Melville's films - and part of Mark's image in Woo's production comes from there. The cool style, pessimistic fatalism and inevitable loneness can be found in both Melville's motion pictures and Woo's Hong Kong martial-arts films.

The extreme violence, another sign of male power in Woo's productions, has however a more personal origin in Woo's past. Growing up in a poor family, Woo himself witnessed episodes of the most extreme violence happening in front of him – events which helped him understand the principle of *Jiang Hu* when still a small boy. Yet he believes not that violence can solve all the problems, but that justice is the final answer – a key element within his films, working to re-centre the core masculinity away from violence for its own sake, and onto more complex issues of personal and social control.

5.2.3 The way to justice

The action orientation of these films shows what heroes will do when they face difficulties - but it cannot help audiences understand why they choose to resolve problems in this way. The spirit behind Chinese kung fu cinema which motivates the extreme action is the tradition of chivalry within Chinese culture: the ethical capacity within an individual, which leads him to contest injustice on behalf of the wider community. Kung fu cinema thus represents a behavioural paradigm; a civic code, in which the disciplined and spiritually enlightened martial arts exponent lives in private obscurity – until enjoined to fight on behalf of others. A kung fu hero is to be understood as just such a chivalrous man: one disciplined within those martial arts which enable him to resolve conflict by violent means, yet committed to the even more disciplined promotion of a just and well-regulated social order. Such heroes strive to achieve real justice, even to the level of self-sacrifice. From this perspective, violence becomes just the path to justice: partly the capacity for action which will restore order, and partly a visual notation of the discipline behind the physical skills and commitment to the just cause, which acts to guarantee the status of the central character as chivalric hero.

Woo respects chivalrous men of this tradition, and wants to create contemporary parallels in his motion pictures. The protagonists in his films value justice, and then friendship, above all else. Such friendship exists for Woo among the heroes central to *Jiang Hu.* The storyline of *A Better Tomorrow* creates an up-to-date version of the classic chivalrous hero, as Ho, having established his heroic credentials through a lucrative career in crime, recommits to justice for the sake of his younger policeman brother, **Kit.** He wants to rebuild close connections with his family – another element constitutive of a just society within a Confucian ethic, and a bond of such importance that it enables **Kit** to understand his brother's circumstances, and allows him to choose to fight alongside him. Audiences were moved by the sincerity and intensity of the emotion developed between the main characters – one which is represented as far exceeding the love expressed within traditional romance plots, and which offered a deeper sense of a new and modern masculinity, re-affiliated through the ethic of *Jiang Hu* to the protection and expression of traditional masculine *virtu* within a modern context.

Hong Kong cinema critic Lo Ka remarks:

> The heroes in Woo's motion pictures are the ever-disappearing heroes of the world. They appreciate friendship and justice. They try their best to help the weak and beat down the strong. They take full responsibility for their behavior and will sacrifice their lives for the sake of their ideal (1997, p. 69).

What Lo *et al.* capture here is the return of a traditional hero: the re-assertion of core Chinese masculinity, now saturated with both the plot dilemmas/life decisions of modern urban life, and the stylistic signs of a traditional cult figure, taking up a mix of Chinese and Western tropes. Audiences responded with enthusiasm to the formula – but Woo added more. His films not only enacted the new hyper- masculine morality: they embodied it, in terms of design and cinematography.

5.2.4 The style of Woo's work

In a research paper as yet unpublished in English (2001) Woo Chengyu has suggested that there are a number of distinctive and recurrent characteristics within John Woo's hero films, beginning in its particular narrative focus, but ultimately extending into every aspect of the production design.

The first of these relates to the ethic Woo forms as he updates the possibilities of *Jiang Hu,* and relocates his central figures to a contemporary social setting. It amounts to a new code of social conduct, re-evolving from the lived experience and civic communal values of an under-class whose ideals have been fired within the particular melting-pot of Chinese cultural traditions, ancient and modern. Patriarchal family morality, *laissez-faire* economics and the pursuit of wealth are producing narratives of a new, non-Western yet not totally traditional Chinese form of psycho-social individuation. Characters within this new set of narratives are more than usually constrained by the behaviours demanded for success in a tightly competitive market, and yet retain a strongly asserted commitment to family and even corporate loyalty.

5.2.4a The heroic self as pursuer of justice, loyalty and fame

Living in a world of power, Woo's protagonists emphasise fame and status above all else – these are the markers which confirm the recognition of their own power. Money is important, but since justice and loyalty are much more important to these characters, their reputation for commitment to justice as a cause larger even than themselves is what makes them admirable. In the terms recently evolved by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) to describe an entire system of social values and ethics under late modernity and re-intensified capitalism, the situation into which they are driven by the plot enables them to confront, choose and enact a particular 'regime of greatness' – or in the event of failure, to display their own ultimate 'littleness' in the scheme of things to which they have dedicated their lives. These are then values and practices able to protect and reflect grandeur even within lives otherwise lost in crime, or mired in the corrupt influence of dishonorable – unchivalric – men.

5.2.4b What it is to be betrayed, and to betray

Betrayal is thus a consistent theme within Woo's films, since it is a theme which enables characters to array themselves across the scale of good and bad, or greatness and littleness, as tested through the key ethic of loyalty. Who is truly worthwhile, and who is merely crafty? Who will keep loyalty in mind no matter the situation? Who will maintain loyalty, even as they are themselves betrayed?

Here values are asserted from within the otherwise seemingly random distributions of wealth, status, and success, asserting the need for an ethics which can assess social worth beyond these dominant markers of modern social standing. This modern working of the ethic of *Jiang Hu,* by its return to a physical masculinity – albeit a disciplined one with calls on a code of conduct – equalises social access to male *virtu.* These are codes which can be embraced and expressed at any level of the full social spectrum, from major corporation to small family business; from law court to street gang. As in the

reading-responses of all central cultural myths, audiences will find their own connection, at their own level.

5.2.4c To endure, or to return fire?

Patience is a core virtue in traditional Chinese culture; founded on the Confucian ethic of an unchanging social order and filial piety, and confirmed in Buddhist principles of slow, evolutionary cycles of spiritual growth. Good people do not necessarily fight back at the onset of hard times. They will instead try to endure, in the hope of better things. From this perspective it then becomes fate, not human will, which eventually forces them to return fire. In narrative terms, circumstances must thus be pushed beyond all endurance, so that motivation remains righteous.

Within the *Jiang Hu* ethic employed by Woo this means that heroes must act only from within the central frame of core values, to remain heroic. As with Aristotelian tragic heroes of the Western tradition, their cause must be both just, and of epic proportions – at least as assessed within its own socio-cultural location. Random or spontaneous acts of violence may appear – but will always be either allocated to those who emerge as wrong-doers, or else to those motivated within the complex unraveling of a justificatory back-story, with their lapses into violent response thereby re-coded as 'justice'. Here the masculinity which both ethically 'chooses' and then enacts a violent justice is about control at both levels – and while that control can be expressed through violence, it does not license its random or unrighteous expression. This is one very interesting reason for the capacity of *Jiang Hu* based movie plots to stylise their martial arts play, so creating an *aesthetic of violence* which acts simultaneously as a *mark of morality.*

5.2.4d Revenge

Revenge in *Jiang Hu* plots is close to revenge within Classical Western tragedy: it makes – and simultaneously breaks - a hero. It is a necessary, and usually ultimate, step in the journey towards heroism.

There is inevitably a decisive struggle at the end of such films: this time the narrative and plot, supporting the stylisation, signaling both the central protagonist's commitment to social resolution, and his capacity for personal endurance. As with classic tragedy, the final confrontation which marks the denouement of plot and the restoration of social order rests on a single set of shoulders – yet Atlas-like, holds up the whole world. The issues portrayed must, by definition, be of such proportion and such social import that they impact upon the whole social order.

For some this ethic of responsibility seems unconvincing when enacted through episodes of extreme violence. Shek Kit for example has remarked that this kind of behaviour is not believable and makes no sense (1999, p. 29). The revenge motivation works however because of its representation of the extreme passion aroused within a man who is faced with the ultimate social responsibility of maintaining order through the allocation of life or of death. To be true to the ethic of *Jiang Hu* he must do so whilst himself in a controlled and emotionally cool mood of vengeance, rather than whilst swept away in a motiveless killing frenzy. Thus the stylisation of the action, and the acting style which conveys it, both serve the plot.

The formula may seem perverse, but it successfully creates an agent of social order, in the very midst of a forest of bullets.

5.2.4e Sacrifice in the cause of justice

Sacrifice is ultimately the hero's fate. This is a transformation myth, the all-too-flawed and human protagonist taking on the semblance of an inhuman killer, and yet one represented as God-like rather than uncontrolled or barbaric, because acting in the name of justice. The details of his particular journey towards justice-killing are progressively stripped away, as round after round of the plot becomes resolved. He becomes a larger-than-life figure, dedicated to ends which are social rather than merely personal – for while these killings are always specifically motivated by the personalised justifications of a complex narrative of injustice, they escalate to a stage at which someone must be called to enact the endplay, and take responsibility for a final reckoning. It is this exteriorisation of inevitability to which the emergent hero, however unlikely, finally commits, which makes the act one of sacrifice – and which operates as only myth can, to resolve the paradox of an agent at once driven by social forces, and exerting the powerful expression of his own will. Sacrifice must be freely chosen – and here, given the enactment of the sacrifice through extreme violence, it is an especially powerful and resolute will in question. To this extent these films focus not simply upon the expression of a renewed masculinity, but a hyper-masculinity – and at saturational levels. The question raised is then not 'how does this work?' – for that is familiar enough – but 'why this, now?' Why does Hong Kong film, in this period, take up such myths – and represent them at such levels of intensity and high-action violence?

5.2.4f Friendship between men

Woo Chengyu adds to his analysis of the features typical of Woo's films the importance of male bonding.

John Woo's early mentor Chang Cheh, he points out, always wants to present themes of the friendships which exist between men, creating a kind of *Yang Gang (manhood)* film. Woo too emphasises the spirit of maleness in his work, with friendship between men very important within the plots and action – centrally implicated in the emerging new morality. Where then does this arise, and what drives its arrival in Hong Kong film?

In the same paper which elaborates this list of qualities found in John Woo's films, Woo Chengyu also makes interesting comparisons with Western gangster films – comparisons which help unravel the reasons behind this focus onto masculinity and male relations within the films.

5.2.4g Relationships between men and women

In Woo's motion pictures, women are not of the least importance to the story. There are few women in any of these films, and those who do appear make little impact. This is altogether a world of male heroes – who appear to forget the very existence of women.

In Western gangster films, a woman sometimes plays a key part in the story. Love is important to the male character, and sometimes all he does is for the good of his lady. To this extent, such films are about what might be called hetero- normative social institutions: the concept that order restored means order which accommodates social structures best represented within patriarchal domesticity and male-female relations. That even gangsters: figures representative of social *dis*order – endorse such values as socially central, and work through the seemingly-contrary violence and disruption of their own creed to re-establish them, suggests a powerful presence of what Habermas (1989, pp.52-56) termed the 'private and intimate sphere' of the conjugal male-female relationship, at the core of these otherwise masculine narratives.

The same could be said for the Hollywood Western: the outdoors, hard-living, trail-blazing pioneer or outlaw always brought to book by the dedicated law man – and all directed towards and often represented in, restoring order to protect patriarchy. The homestead, the covered-wagonload of family possessions, wife and children; and the developing small town, beset by lawlessness, fighting, hard-drinking and 'bad-girl' saloon floozies, are protected and made fit for respectable families and hard-working business-folks. One central plank of Western 'action' film is thus revealed, as masculinity – even hyper-masculinity – is re-positioned, and validated in its performative display of that masculinity – by re-insertion into the domestic.

That no such 'return' occurs within *Jiang Hu* films suggests an altogether different focus for their myth formation.

5.2.4h The importance of loyalty

Woo's films view loyalty as the most important thing in the world – a bond and responsibility explicitly portrayed as existing man-to-man. The male spirit, as represented within these films, is in fact built almost completely upon the base of loyalty. It is this feature, and the focus it reveals on society as founded not upon the individual will, but upon that will as inextricably bound to social obligation and bondedness one to another, which distinguishes these 'action heroes' from those of Western film.

There, while loyalty may be used as a plot device: a means of establishing the moral commitment of a character; it is not the core within the mythic formation produced within the narrative. What is contrived instead is space for the expression of *individual will:* the coming-to-age and self-assertion of the lone man, choosing to centre his being and his future activity within the social order – or fighting to preserve his 'right' to do so. The 'loyalty' theme of Hong Kong action film on the other hand positions the individual hero as *already firmly within a set of social obligations:* indeed, formed by them; existing only as a result of their existence, and requiring only a total commitment to their various duties and responsibilities, to achieve heroic status. Rather than a lone individual choosing to affiliate, the Hong Kong hero is *always already affiliated* – the problem confronting him one of re-asserting or redirecting that affiliation, whatever the form required, to reclaim his identity. There is here no quest for identity; the slow location and construction of a social role, but instead the acceptance – often through travail – of a role which has been wrongly rejected. It is this which operates as 'loyalty' – the powers of the rightful role exerting a pull on the protagonist, and returning him, inevitably, to the social core.

5.2.4i To leave or to stay?

Thus it is that the action-men in Woo's films are positioned to feel tied to the *Jiang Hu* code. They may sense the wrongness and inadequacy of their current life commitment, and be represented as waiting for a chance to escape the gang; the service of a corrupt leader; the performance of an increasingly meaningless cycle of anti-social behaviors and roles. In Western action stories, as shown in Hollywood scripting formulae, the central characters choose their course, positioned by the narratives to undertake violent action as an assertion of their personal power, and are ultimately directed at achieving full individuation and claiming their right to define their own destiny (see the narrative schema proposed by Field, McKee and Egri, in Chapter Three, above). But Hong Kong action heroes act only as impelled by circumstance – ever-hopeful that circumstance will return them, through their ultimate commitment to the values of order, to an orderly and righteous role. Thus it is that their destiny is achieved not through self-assertion, but through a more corporate or collaborative engagement, which requires a higher loyalty, to breach a lesser. Thus too, of course, the escalating violence – for in a scenario in which it is violent action which represents the decisive turns of the plot and the morality, only a more violent act can prevail, in supplanting the character's enmeshment in violent activity.

5.2.4j Romance and realism

What is displayed in Woo's cinema is not of course the reality of life in Hong Kong. Mong Kok for instance is altogether safer than in his films. The *Jiang Hu* culture evoked is in the imagination of the director; the reflection of what is ultimately a fantasy world. What the character **Mark** does in *A better tomorrow* is a highly romanticised version of the more mundane social imperatives operating upon real Hong Kong citizens. While Western gangster or action films seek to embed themselves within a tapestry of references to real-place, real-time actualities – often for instance taking up contemporary political or cultural references and events – Hong Kong films consciously evoke the fantastic, alongside the realistic and known, as if signaling the intent that these narratives be read and understood to be operating at a mythic level. For example, there is a scene where **Mark** goes to shoot the opposition to avenge his brother. He goes alone, and kills most of them - though at the cost of losing one of his legs. A further scene talks about whether he can leave Ho to find his own way to a new life. However, he gives up and turns back to fight with Ho. Finally, he loses his life for his brother. It is this, above all else, which makes these films work to fire the popular imagination: not representing the mundane realities of Hong Kong life, but a heightened and more dramatic version, plunging audiences into versions of the very dilemmas they encounter daily – but at a level of urgency, heroism and social/cultural significance rarely acknowledged or recognisable within their own actions and choices.

5.2.5 *Mark:* The most successful tragic hero

Hong Kong film critic Lam Pei Li has suggested that **Mark** is the complete Hong Kong tragic hero (no date; pp.19-24). On the one hand, he is a mere cipher in gangland, of little real account; just an assistant to gang boss Ho. On the other hand,

he is the most sensitive character in the story, and one with whom audiences identify. He tempts luck by burning fake money to light his cigarette - but avenges Ho, dispatching all their enemies in a double-gun *tour-de-force* action scene, even though he loses a leg in the fighting. He conceals his misfortunes to keep Ho happy; seems to care for nothing; has no spiritual needs. When Ho prays to the deity to be blessed in the coming fighting, Mark does nothing. What he cares about is loyalty between men, and a rough version of self-affirmed justice - so much so that he gives up any opportunity of escape and chooses instead to return and fight with Ho. It is hard to find a character as compelling as this in Hong Kong film. The performer Chow Yuen-fat became the most famous actor in Hong Kong after the success of this film, and many people still believe that this is his best work. The image of a killer in a long overcoat wielding the double gun has become a local classic.

So why is a guy from gangland so favoured by Hong Kong's largely law-abiding audiences? Gangland stories are seriously popular in Hong Kong cinema. The genre is well established, and while film critics note that this kind of story is unrealistic, there is a long tradition of Chinese novels focused on *Jiang Hu*. Many even consider it a legitimate force within the real world; an alternative form of justice, maintained outside government, and working for the public good. Again and again narratives detail the direct-action deeds of chivalrous men, portrayed as real heroes and worshipped by a public dismissive of government regulation.

With gangland configured as the modern *Jiang Hu*, Mark becomes just such a chivalrous hero: a man who acts not for money, but from a belief founded in justice and loyalty. He fights, as so many would wish to do, an unfair system: a hero promising righteous order amid the chaos of social inequity otherwise protected only by the alien powers of a distant form of rule – whether before or after 1997. And if, at the end of the story, Mark dies in the final decisive struggle, his spirit is remembered in the hearts of the living. His death elevates him to classic hero status, and spreads his identity and morality across the many lesser instances experienced by audience members.

Chang Cheh himself appreciated Woo's productions and the direction in which he had taken the *Jiang Hu* theme, commenting in an article on the ways in which Woo had developed new techniques for representing action play:

> Woo's characters, his theme of male bonding, and his depictions of emotions in his gunplay films were influenced by martial arts pictures. The shots of blood spurting out in slow motion are in many ways strongly expressive, and these types of movements – reaction sequences after being shot or in other ways attacked – are based on the techniques of martial arts pictures. Thus, they appear altogether new and unique when placed among the action films of Hollywood and of course, Woo was a big influence (Chang Cheh, 1999, pp.23-24).

This influence over the wider industry comes mostly, it must be said, from *A Better Tomorrow*, now a myth within the movie industry, and one of the milestones in Hong Kong film history. John Woo is not however the only creative figure to have spun the Chinese cultural traditions within Hong Kong film into entirely new, and very local, directions.

5.3 Influence Two: A different form of tradition. The era of Stephen Chow: *Justice, My Foot*

Stephen Chow is another miracle of Hong Kong cinema. His motion pictures dominated the best seller lists between 1990 and 1993, and most of them attracted audiences of more than 10.000.000.

Stephen Chow attended a training class held by the Television Broadcasting Company of Hong Kong (TVB) after his graduation from senior secondary school. In 1982 he finished TVB training and became anchorman on a program for children. During the years 1982 to 1986 he played minor roles in soaps, until in 1989 he became the main character in the soap opera *The Final Combat.*

There he began to perform his own unique brand of *Mo Lei Tau (Sense of Nonsense)* comedy – and became wildly popular. Yet despite his success in *The Final Combat,* Stephen Chow turned towards motion pictures. 1990 marks the beginning of his era of influence in film, with *All for the Winner* the best seller for that year, with box-office figures of more than 40,000,000 – sales which broke the record for contemporary Hong Kong cinema. *Fight Back to School* (1991), *Justice, My Foot* (1992) and *Flirting Scholar* (1993) were each the best seller of their year. Stephen Chow had become the hallmark of movie success for the early 90s.

Justice, My Foot is said to be one of the all-time best sellers (see http://feature. hibiscusrealm.net/~ ban/feystore/film/f script/f023.htm). It tells a story from the Qing dynasty.

Judge Song (played by Stephen Chow) is a famous judge who decides to retire when his sons die as a result of his mistaken judicial defence of wrong-doers. Mrs.Song (Anita Mui) meets a widow who has been treated unjustly by the new judge – and Mrs. Song is also treated unfairly when she attempts to intervene on behalf of this lady. So Judge Song takes up his profession once more, to defend the widow and avenge his wife. After a tense and funny series of proceedings, Judge Song wins the lawsuit and the story has a happy ending.

Thus the story is to some degree inconsequential; allowing the performances alone to carry the movie through to star-status.

So much is this the case, that it has in fact been suggested that these works succeed purely because of Stephen Chow's skills in presentation (see for instance http://feature.hibiscusrealm.net/~ban/feystore /film/fscript/f023.htm and http://mymui.com/film-judge.html). These productions, it is argued, would not have won such acclaim without Stephen Chow's performance. They cannot be repeated by other comedic actors, who cannot duplicate Chow's expertise in *mo lei tau.* The exaggerated performance style it involves is what evokes audience laughter, while the quality of the film's structure and the performances of the other actors are much less important.

One interesting test-case for this involves the film called *Justice, My Foot.* Its content comes from an older film with the same name, with critics regarding the newer work as a much better movie – but is this solely because of the excellence of the actor's performance?

The original story is about how a little man becomes a hero – but Stephen Chow acts the role instead as a skillful lawyer, and his performance is much funnier than the original. However, the overall success of the film rests not on his performance, but on the contrast with the lawyer that he opposes. The second lawyer is chicken-hearted, cautious - and cunning. His wife on the other hand is daring, rash and frank. She is also a martial arts master – and every time the lawyer is baited by others his wife goes to bat for him... The couple remains human and even admirable however: the wife enjoys jokes with her husband, and the love between them moves many audience members. Much fun comes too from the detail of the couple's everyday life – and later, when the lawyer decides to quit the profession after pondering an unfair defence. Reviewers conclude that this version of the film is more reasonable than the original, with more detail enriching the humanity of the characters (http://mymui.com/film-judge.html). In sum it is all of these qualities: not simply the enactment of *mo lei tau* comedy, which makes this movie a success. This is a far more clearly structured film, able to make its themes and characterisation accessible and enjoyable in a number of ways. Among its successes is the focus onto an everyday quality of Hong Kong life and behaviour, best summarised as *the life of the little man* – an enduringly popular element of the local industry, with a strong influence upon box office success.

5.3.1 The image of the *Little Man*

Characters in Chow's productions are almost always ordinary men: little men, and not heroes.

In the early 1990s Hong Kong society was developing quickly, and undergoing great change. The fast lifestyle and the great workload pressure created in local people a sense of being flooded: swept off by too many demands, all equally imperative. Essayist Zhang Yan, (2000) remarks that Stephen Chow's performances embodied these feelings exactly, during that period. With the mid-90s return of Hong Kong awakening a Hong Kong identity, Chow's comedy seemed to personify the new confusions: the chaos of multiple social and economic demands and uncertainty over what might happen next. The laughter his performances produced was immediate in its impact: it needed no particular depth of thought, and seemed to carry no specific program of moral instruction. It was, as audiences gratefully acknowledged, purely an entertainment - and the social disorder evoked in its scenarios appeared to represent directly the chaotic reality of the era.

Cut off for so long by British rule from the centre of their own cultural and regional politics, Hong Kong people had lacked any developed concept of nationality: even of collective ethnic identity and destiny alongside other Chinese people. When faced with such dramatic changes to their future orientation in the last years of the 20th century, what most prioritised was the personal happiness, security and prosperity of their own small families. And the protagonists in Chow's moving pictures are just such people: no big ideals; perhaps a little selfish; smart in a small way - and not necessarily over-keen on hard work. This characterises what Hong Kong people call *the little man,* or *the small potato:* not special in any way, and common enough across society. So it is that Stephen Chow's protagonists became the spokesmen for so many ordinary people, the deep comprehension of the majority perception which they seemed to embody striking the contemporary nerve, and offering release for otherwise intolerable levels of cultural tension.

The icing on the cake stemmed from Stephen Chow's own commitment to remembering how he himself – the original *little man* - had become a superstar. He understands the way the little man feels – and knows how to represent his responses. In the scripts he took on, characters might suffer great hurt - but they never complain, and keep right on working. In one of his most representative roles, in *King of Comedy,* his experiences closely reflect his own early years within the industry. Like his character, Chow carried the heaviest workload - and was often pushed around by other more demanding players. But it is this experience which allowed him to understand and capture the little men's perceptions – and to translate them, as he so famously has done, into the comedic repertoires of *Mo Lei Tau.*

5.3.2 *Mo Lei Tau* culture

Mo Lei Tau is a name given to a type of humour originating from Hong Kong in the late 20th century. It is a phenomenon which has grown largely from its presentation in modern film media. Its humour arises from the complex interplay of cultural subtleties significant in Hong Kong. Typical constituents of this humour include nonsensical parodies, juxtaposition of contrasts, sudden surprises in spoken dialogue and action and improbable and deliberate anachronisms (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mo_lei_tau).

And Stephen Chow is considered the major proponent of *Mo Lei Tau.*

> As typified in Chow's 1990s Hong Kong movies, *mo lei tau* developed into an 'anything goes' form of nonsensical humor that can and does ignore narrative conventions. It is nonsensical in the way that Edward Lear's poems are, with irrelevant elements somehow thrown together; as opposed to, say, Lewis Carroll's novels, where the nonsense relies on a play on logic or semantics. Generally, a *mo lei tau* scene rests on incongruity, consisting of rapid comic banter, non-sequiturs, anachronisms, fourth wall references, and Cantonese slang and wordplay. Regarded as an integral part of Hong Kong's popular culture, it is considered by some as both unique and untranslatable. Compared to Wacky Comedy film for a Western cousin, *mo lei tau* movies have a greater attention on puns and other Cantonese word tricks. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mo_lei_tau)

This kind of nonsense is built directly onto a base of the common culture of everyday life. The long history of Chinese traditional cultural belief and practice provides a wealth of material – but so do the conventions of Hong Kong film itself, with sly admission of the presence of the audience escalating the jokes and turning them back upon the players. Chow has only to break the rules – any of these rules - and the 'reversal' creates the humour, the whole edifice becoming a self-referencing universe of incidental and accidental effects, all dependent upon *the little man's* comic incapacities.

Critic Qi Meng (2004) remarks that the comedic effect of *mo lei tau* in Chow's movies comes from the double reversals of the vast contradictions which bank up within each film. In his opinion, such reversals are common enough as the source of comedy. What Chow contributes is not just the reversal, but the double reversal – an added surprise for media-savvy audiences.

In one scene Chow's character falls into the water and can be supposed to be in the middle of a major crisis. Instead he emerges, cleaning his teeth and looking calm and composed. The innovation entirely renews the gag, adding both surprise and the sort of casual insouciance which builds new dimensions into the *little man* figure. Its audacity, unexplained operationalisation, and seemingly casual and confident enactment, build in the sorts of deep psychological pleasure isolated by Eco (1986) in his analysis of the audience response to classic Disney and Warner Brother cartoons in the Western tradition of popular film comedy. Noting the constant repeated tropes of the dissolution of the body in cartoon scenarios: those scenes in which the cartoon characters are blown up; flattened by steam rollers; stretched out like rubber bands; frozen and shattered like ice; inflated and exploded like a child's balloon; and all the other experiences that the animators can contrive; Eco suggests that the pleasure lies in the deep psychological affirmation experienced when the character's body is literally re-animated. It puts itself together again; re-inflates from its flatness; re-links its severed limbs; collapses its over-extended form back to normality – and so suggests a magical power to prevail over any form of physical disruption.

Eco suggests that this is an especially masculine pleasure: one dependent upon the male psychological need to assert the impenetrability of the body – and thus the figure of the armoured warrior, able to resist all threats, and to repel all attempts at wounding. The wounded body is what French feminist theorist Julia Kristeva (1980) has pointed out is the 'abject' body – culturally feminised, in its recognition of the visceral chaos which lives beneath the surface. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) have called this 'the body without organs', a culturally-inscribed body, written inside our media representations only as a surface for the elaboration of identity. It is this unreal body which representational media such as film use to persuade us that we can assert a fierce independence and power in the face of our otherwise very real physical vulnerability.

Inside Chow's *mo lei tau* representation of *the little man,* exactly such assertions of the capacity to prevail are being enacted. Adversity may recur in as many ways as the scriptwriters can imagine: the pleasure for the audience lies in the confident expectation that in each and every case, the protagonist will not only rise again, but do so with an entirely new twist on how to survive. Ingenuity, layered over familiarity and expectation – that expectation half thwarted, and half met – is what provides the pleasure. The audience has a new – and yet recognisable and comprehensible; even comfortingly known - watching experience, with the first reverse under the audience's control - *but the second one not.* It is both the formula, and the creativity within the formula, which count. And further: it is very much a collaborative creativity, resting on an exchange of knowing winks and nudges between player and audience.

Having established this renewed and powerful relationship with audiences; one otherwise the marker of live performance; Hong Kong film of this era has been able to extend the affordances of that relationship into more complex and culturally significant issues. Filmic action and image sequencing able to work at deep, psychoanalytic and mythic levels, also operate across more than one meaning-formation. Qi Meng, *(op. cit.)* in the same paper offers further explanation for Hong Kong audience responses to *mo lei tau* scenarios. He notes how this kind of laughter involves liberation from traditional constraints – and he reads that cathartic liberation at three distinct levels of Chinese culture.

The first layer Qi Meng investigates involves *the release of interior thought:* as enacted by Chow, the bursting forth of what many might quietly think, but few would dare to articulate. In traditional Chinese culture, politeness is prized, and personal emotion should remain unexpressed. In Chow's *mo lei tau* films, the screen directly shows the protagonist's personal thoughts. For example, in the film *Hail the Judge,* as soon as the protagonist encounters a beautiful bride, he immediately imagines her flinging herself into his arms - and this is what the screen shows. In a convention known in Hollywood as the *Dreams of Walter Mitty,* drawn on a series of short stories by humourist James Thurber, private thoughts gain public projection, so that nothing can remain concealed. Every time the protagonists meet ugly girls, they immediately feel nauseous – and with a performer such as Stephen Chow enacting these responses, everything from vocal tone to gesture and posture strengthens the comedic effect.

The second element Qi Meng detects is *the problematising of the emphasis on sex.* Public representation of sex is taboo in Chinese traditional culture, and people usually avoid talking about it. Yet in Chow's movies it is not avoided, but instead seems to connect to everything and anything that happens. In the film *Royal Tramp* there is actually no direct sex scene at all - but the audience will find a sexual connection at almost any moment. As cultural linguist Fairclough points out (1989; 1992; 1994) those topics which are of most concern to us, and which we most seek to suppress, produce in us a nervous excess which expands their presence, rather than achieves their obliteration. What Freud would have called an example of *parapraxis:* the inadvertent mention of the very idea a speaker is trying to avoid; Fairclough reveals in his discourse analytic as 'over lexicalisation' or 'over-wording': the nervous allocation of too many variable euphemisms for the one thing we most want not to mention. Here it is clear that what Qi Meng has isolated is a filmic and comedic exploitation of the same principle: an 'over-screening' of the forbidden and the suppressed, which invites audience complicity and collusion in a mutual recognition that we are who we are, as much because of what we will *not* say or do, as because of what we comfortably admit.

The third of Qi Meng's points refers to *the filmic exaggeration of violence* – an element which this study has already suggested links to a deep-seated cultural need for a specific model of a corporate or socially-bonded masculinity: a de-alienated form, integrated into the projects of legitimised social institutionalisation. As if to de-fuse the violence which occurs within a modern/urban competitive masculinity, *mo lei tau* re-choreographs its expression, taking into it some of the sillier filmic references, whose inappropriate appearance acts to interrupt the tension by challenging audiences to recognise the cultural allusion, and so juxtapose softer and altogether crazier scenarios onto the current action. In *Love on Delivery* the struggle scenes use a Garfield facemask, the reference to a fat and chronically cowardly cartoon cat immediately disrupting the tension. Masks – so often a sign of criminal intent and the sustained menace of the alienated character, here revert to the status of children's toys. Garfield – who within his own feature films operates as much the same sort of anti-hero *little man* as Chow, and who in many ways enacts the *inner-little-man* of his owner, reminds audiences yet again of the ongoing humanity of less-than-heroic selves.

In sum, Chow's *mo lei tau* performances both set out to and succeed in elaborating a specifically Chinese Hong Kong identity: a pressured yet resilient set of selves, subject to vast cultural pressures, yet battling through on a daily basis to some sort of livable solution. With endless examples of new-minted joke scenarios – and without having mentioned at all the

repertoire based on the endless Cantonese capacity for punning and word-play – the creative possibilities seem as vast as the Chinese audiences who share the cultural conditions which have produced this *mo lei tau* formula and its particular themes and comedic strokes. Yet immediately it is also evident that this kind of *mo lei tau* culture in fact constrains the further development of Stephen Chow's moving pictures. Since the foundational elements of this comedy are built on the common understanding of a very specific culture, and require that it work in its own language, recognise a mix of Chinese cultural conventions, and Chinese and Western media references, and so share a very localised and even time-bound collective memory, it becomes difficult in the extreme to promote this kind of product to any world beyond Chinese traditional culture. In some instances, it may even be difficult to move even within that broad culture. Later, as discussed below, Chow changed the style of his productions, in an attempt to break into the international market. In the meantime, this study contends that what he had helped create was a second major stream of idiosyncratically Hong Kong cinema.

The final question must be: can he be considered to have achieved this feat alone?

5.3.3 Chow's greatest helpers

Though there is little difficulty in viewing Stephen Chow as one of the greatest actors in Hong Kong cinema history, he cannot and did not arrive at every element of this distinctive Hong Kong formula by himself.

Director Johnnie To for instance played an important role in the making of the film *Justice, My Foot.* He started planning the whole story for this film after he finished *All about Ah-Long.* Originally he intended to caste Chow Yuen-Fat and Do Do Cheng, but when neither one was available, he invited Stephen Chow and Anita Mui into the production. In an essay on the project available online at http://mymui.com/film-judge.html To points out that the most interesting element of this movie is the way he uses a modern angle in a treatment of ancient matters. Though the players appear in period costume, they use modern idiom and expression: dynastic characters, with a 20th century mindset. This in itself acts to de-emphasise the *mo lei tau* elements, which assimilate to the audience's dual vision, rather than carrying the full dis-locational load in their own right. To that extent this film is focused not on Stephen Chow alone, but on the ensemble performances of the full caste – with special emphasis on the interaction between Chow and Mui. It is a salutary reminder of how far every film is a collective and collaborative endeavor, with actors, directors, writers, cinematographers and crew all contributing in their way to what the audience, like the critics, will make of the screened results.

There can be no denial that as a great comedic actor in this era, Stephen Chow has contributed much to the development of Hong Kong's film industry and the box-office success of its productions. His intensely local movies are one of the hot topics in Hong Kong cinema study, with many Chinese researchers greatly interested in his development of a *mo lei tau* comedic culture. Yet his ultimate failure with international audiences and the pressing need to explore the mainland market have forced him to make some radical changes (discussed later in this study). In the meantime, it is important to consider the reasons for the international success of those Hong Kong film artists who *have* successfully entered the global and mainland markets – chief among them the readily recognisable and very widely known Jackie Chan. In the next section, this study turns to discuss some of the features which mark out Jackie Chan's career and production successes from other Hong Kong

film makers, assessing how his particular modes of creativity within film have been able to meet both local and global cultural demands.

CHAPTER Six

Sub-era Two – Transition: Jackie Chan's *First Strike*

6.0 Influence Three: Jackie Chan

Whenever there is talk of martial arts film in Hong Kong, Jackie Chan cannot be ignored. For more than ten years, Jackie Chan has been not only the most famous Hong Kong actor in the world, but a Hong Kong icon, representing his city and its culture to the world. You can find his face on posters from the Hong Kong tourism board - and hear his songs on television. He seems set to remain the leading Hong Kong actor, so that whatever he has to say will always mean something within this society.

6.1 Brief career path

Jackie Chan was born on April 7, 1954, and named Sing Lung, in Cantonese. In 1960 his father emigrated to Canberra, national capital of Australia, to work as head cook for the American embassy, while six year old Chan remained in Hong Kong, attending the Chinese Drama Academy, a Peking Opera School run by Master Yu Jim Yuen. There he was submitted to rigorous training for the next decade, excelling in both martial arts and acrobatics. He eventually joined the *Seven Little Fortunes,* a performance group made up of the school's best students, using the stage name 'Yuen Lo', in homage to his master.

During this period Chan became close friends with fellow group members Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao, the three of them later to be known as the *Three Brothers* or *Three Dragons.* At the age of eight, he had appeared with some of his fellow *Seven Little Fortunes* in the film *Big and Little Wong Tin Bar* (1962), with Li Li Hua playing his mother. Chan appeared with Li again the following year, in *The Love Eterne* (1963) and had a small role in King Hu's 1966 film, *Come Drink with Me.* After an appearance as an extra in another King Hu film, *A Touch of Zen,* he began his adult career in the film industry. Everywhere he came into contact with major cinema figures. At the age of 17, he worked as a stuntman in the Bruce Lee films *Fist of Fury* and *Enter the Dragon,* under the stage name Chen Yuen Long. He received his first starring role later that year, in *Little Tiger of Canton,* which achieved limited release in Hong Kong in 1973.

Jackie Chan's Hong Kong film career however could well have been short-lived. He joined his parents in Canberra in 1976, where he briefly attended Dickson College, and then took employment as a construction worker. A fellow builder named Jack took Chan under his wing, earning him the nickname 'Little Jack' - later shortened to 'Jackie'.

In 1976, Jackie Chan received a telegram from Willie Chan, a film producer in the Hong Kong film industry who had been impressed with Jackie's stunt work. Willie Chan offered him an acting role in a film directed by Lo Wei, who planned to model him after Bruce Lee for the film *New Fist of Fury.* His stage name was changed back to Sing Lung (in Chinese: 成

龍, literally 'become the dragon') to emphasise his similarity to Bruce Lee, whose stage name was Lei Siu Lung (in Chinese: 李小龍, meaning 'Little Dragon'). The film was unsuccessful. Chan was not accustomed to Lee's martial arts style. Despite the film's failure, Lo Wei continued producing films with similar themes, but achieved little improvement at the box office.

Chan's first major breakthrough was the 1978 film *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow,* shot while he was loaned to Seasonal Film Corporation under a two-picture deal. Under director Yuen Woo Ping, Chan was allowed complete freedom over his stunt work. The film established the new comedic kung fu genre, and proved a breath of fresh air for Hong Kong audiences. Chan then starred in *Drunken Master,* which finally propelled him to mainstream success.

Upon Chan's return to Lo Wei's studio, Lo tried to replicate the comedic approach of *Drunken Master,* producing *Half a Loaf of Kung Fu* and *Spiritual Kung Fu.* He also gave Chan the opportunity to co-direct *Fearless Hyena* with Kenneth Tsang. When Willie Chan left the company, he advised Jackie to decide for himself whether to stay with Lo Wei. During the shooting of *Fearless Hyena Part II,* Chan broke his contract and joined the Golden Harvest chain, prompting Lo to blackmail him with triad heavies, blaming Willie Chan for his star's departure. The dispute was resolved with the help of fellow actor and director Jimmy Wang Yu, allowing Chan to stay with Golden Harvest.

Willie Chan had become Jackie's personal manager and firm friend, and has remained so for over thirty years. He was instrumental in launching Chan's international career, beginning with his first forays into the American film industry in the 1980s. His first Hollywood film was *Battle Creek Brawl* in 1980. After commercial failures in 1985, Chan temporarily abandoned his attempts to break into the US market, returning his focus to Hong Kong.

There Chan's films began to reach a larger audience across East Asia, with early successes in the lucrative Japanese market, including *The Young Master* (1980) and *Dragon Lord* (1982). Chan subsequently produced a number of action comedy films with his opera-school friends Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao. The three co-starred together for the first time in 1983 in *Project A,* which won the Best Action Design Award at the third annual Hong Kong Film Awards. Over the following two years, the 'Three Brothers' appeared in *Wheels on Meals,* and in the original *Lucky Stars* trilogy.

In 1988 Chan starred alongside Hung and Yuen for the last time to date, in the film *Dragons Forever.* In the late 1980s and early 90s, he featured in a number of successful sequels, beginning with *Police Story 2,* which won the award for Best Action Choreography at the 1989 Hong Kong Film Awards. This was followed by *Armour of God II: Operation Condor,* and *Police Story 3,* for which Chan won the Best Actor Award at the 1993 Golden Horse Film Festival. In 1994, Chan reprised his role as Wong Fei Hung in *Drunken Master II,* which was listed in *Time Magazine's* All-Time 100 Movies. Another sequel, *Police Story 4: First Strike,* brought more awards and domestic box office success for Chan, but did not fare as well in foreign markets.

Chan finally succeeded in establishing a foothold in the North American market in 1995 with worldwide release of *Rumble in the Bronx,* attaining a cult following in the United States - rare among Hong Kong movie stars. He then co-starred with Chris Tucker in the 1998 buddy cop action comedy *Rush Hour,* grossing US$130 million in the United States alone (see

http://mymui.com/film-judge.html).

In Hong Kong Jackie Chan was box office champion in 1995, 1996 and 1997, and the second best seller in 1998 and 1999. This means that for most of the 1990s, Chan's productions were among the most popular films in Hong Kong cinema. What however explains his success – and where does his work fit, in terms of a developing overview of Hong Kong's representation of itself, to itself?

6.2 Stage One - Successor to Bruce Lee in the martial arts genre

Bruce Lee was the first success from the Hong Kong kung fu genre in the international market. In his films, he often acts as a kung fu master, fighting against colonial power. With this formula, he created an enduring image of the kung fu hero in the memory of audiences. His work is considered to have been influential enough 'to introduce a new level of authenticity and a new type of hero to the Hong Kong cinema' (Abbas 1997. p. 29). Lo Wai, as we have seen, intended to train Jackie Chan as another Bruce Lee, but ultimately failed to replicate the formula. Bruce Lee's success, it seems, could not be repeated in the same way. His personal characteristics had matched the era in unique ways. As a result Jackie Chan – an altogether different type of performer - was forced to develop his own performance style. This was not however an impossible task, given his impeccable training credentials, and his early varied experience in films. Whatever emerged was always going to be distinctive. Most film critics today do consider Jackie Chan the successor of Bruce Lee, but in ways which mark a second moment in the development of the martial arts genre in Hong Kong film.

Desperate attempts by a number of artists to imitate Lee's performance had failed, until *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow,* where Jackie Chan changed direction, away from the Bruce Lee style. In this film he is tasked with enacting not a master but an apprentice, allowing comic renditions of stumbling performances, and an inadequate proponent of the kung fu art, easily bullied by others. Strict training at the hands of the master produces a new type of kung fu, and sheer luck saves the day. What emerges is *comedy kung fu:* an altogether more human version, which opens the genre to a much broader audience, and a different sort of narrative connection.

Chen Mo (1999) summarises the differences between Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan as kung fu artists, pointing out the ways in which their respective performances shifted the production techniques around them. His insights help illustrate this 'broadening' of the genre, and reveal one of the pivotal moments in which, as will be argued later, Hong Kong film has proven able to adapt itself to new audience demands. Careful analysis reveals Chan's kung fu films as having built both their action and their characterisation around the following features.

6.2.1 Fruitful use of *mise-en-scène* and camera angles

This shift in Hong Kong action film was mainly due to technological developments, with both camera and digital editing able to capture cleanly the elegance of motion within the kung fu moves. Crystal-clear fast-action shots and utterly accurate

cutting showed audiences more of each action sequence than had ever been possible. Technique became central to kung fu action, with audiences rapidly educated into the finest details of the physical moves. Enjoyment was both enhanced, and prolonged. There is simply so much more to watch, than before, so that kung fu action could take up larger and larger sections of each feature film.

6.2.2 The creation of an 'environmental' fighting

In part to distinguish between the many kung fu sequences in his films, instead of going armed, Chan's kung fu character takes advantage of the physical environment in which he finds himself, adapting whatever is at hand to fight his opponents. In his films, tables, chairs, windows... all can be used as weapons. This adds both surprise – audiences never guess what might be coming next – and range to the kung fu action. At the same time it adds ingenuity and quick- wittedness to the Chan character – not to mention luck: that most Chinese of qualities. For Chan, no matter how disadvantaged at the outset of a fight, audiences know that the one necessary – if unexpected – opportunity will be very precisely in place, as needed. Both an added rush of suspense and the pleasures of comic incongruity are introduced, allowing the kung fu action to take on some of the aspects of *mo lei tau* comedy – at a faster-than-usual pace, in relation to the visual jokes.

6.2.3 Comedic elements are added into the fighting

At one level this introduction of a comic emphasis risks the whole genre of the kung fu film, positioning this prime cultural exemplar of hyper-masculine control as open to intermittent lapses in concentration; forced into last-minute and split-second inventiveness, and altogether behaving as if fortune, and not peak fitness, were producing the desired outcomes. What validates this re-processing however is both the enjoyment which comes from laughter, and the re-humanisation of the central character, no longer a distant and near-mythical hero figure, but an ordinary man with the benefit of a few skills, seemingly barely-remembered, and the typical *small potato* dependence upon near-impossible sequences of good fortune to extricate himself from otherwise desperate circumstances. The formula diminishes the high-seriousness of the original kung fu genre – but in doing so it also removes the need to introduce progressive escalations of realist violence; a problem which has bedeviled many other action genres, to the extent of losing many of them some sections of their audience, and at times their unrestricted general admission licensing.

At the same time, by scaling back the focus on fight sequences, and no longer having to develop all aspects of the film through lone-figure physicality and violence, the films can move into other aspects of character, plot and setting. The dramatic situations broaden, allowing each film to introduce something entirely new. A richer plotline, a larger ensemble-performance, more original themes – and kung fu achieves a far broader audience.

6.2.4 Use of modern technologies in scene design

When necessary, Chan's kung fu characters have the flexibility to take up new technologies, or to use hyper-modern settings to their advantage, in the endless, spontaneously reactive search for the perfect spur-of-the-moment weapon. This

combination of contemporary, hi-tech gadgetry, the human imagination, and traditionally disciplined physicality and athleticism, impresses modern urban audiences far more than purism, when it comes to kung fu action. Chan's characters become, like their audiences, figures drawn from today, and charged with all the features which Hong Kong citizens recognise as their own: quick-witted inventiveness; infinite flexibility and adaptability; a willingness to re-work the environment to immediate needs, even as it changes around you; application and endurance; the drive to apply traditions in new ways; good humour and even the quick quip in the face of adversity, and an irrepressible confidence that their luck will carry them through.

Bruce Lee may have been a legend, but with this combination of elements, Jackie Chan became a mass hero.

6.3 Stage Two: Elements of humour

Humour and comedic effects are the predominant signs of Chan's martial arts movies. Instead of serious, near tutelary themes built on legends of the master-apprentice relation, Chan focuses on the *small-potato* perspective and stories from the *little man's* daily life: stories of adaptation to circumstances, and resilience in the face of uncontrollable forces. It is very much the formula which James L. Smith (1976) uses as the explanation for the development of European melodrama in the nineteenth-century European and American industrial city – melodrama being a semi-comic genre still dominant in the pathos elements of silent-movie performers such as Chaplin, whose own version of the *little man* tramp shares so much with Chan.

Smith characterises the archetypal melodrama audience member in a figure he calls 'Joe Whelks, of the New Cut, Lambeth, and his many friends in New York, Paris, Bradford or the Edgware Road' (p. vii) – and we can add the cinema-going *small potatoes* of Hong Kong's Golden Era movie fans. Smith portrays Joe (or his Hong Kong cousin, *Zhou)* as needing

> ...a theatre that faced up to the difficulties of the real world he lived in. Melodrama met that need. Country folk bred in the simple reassuring certainties of village life [or the hitherto stable values of Confucian family order] were suddenly thrust into the moral chaos of the mighty city, tied down twelve or fourteen hours a day to humdrum machine tasks, left to the mercies of a culture they did not understand, and kept economically dependent on the chance decisions of an inscrutable employer (p. viii)

Compare the social conditions of increasing uncontrol under late modernity, as outlined by Boltanski and Chiapello, and their call for the representation of 'plain, self-evident truths that make the world intelligible...' *(loc. cit.).* Smith goes on to show how melodrama had met that need, for the industrial citizens of Europe's new reality:

> Melodrama brought these moral and emotional insecurities under strict control; it dramatised Joe's problems and provided them with perfect answers; it faced his fears and fantasies and exorcised them all... Always it holds up to Joe's eye a mirror which reflects life not as it is but as it ought to be; clear-cut, simple, morally benevolent and enormously exciting *(op. cit.,* pp. viii-ix).

In Hong Kong, an ultra-modern and sophisticated urban setting built upon the labours and energies of so many past and

present mainland immigrants and refugees; for so long a colony without control of its own political destiny, some of the views on life developed within early industrial society have re-emerged. Perhaps these are even intensified by the sense of global exposure, specific to a small island city-state open to the transience of its international port and air traffic hub status, with a relatively unregulated economy, and a level of trade exchange which makes it more reactive to market forces than many other societies. At the same time, Hong Kong draws its traditions not entirely from itself, but from the vast, ancient and powerful culture beside it – so that its own stories, perspectives and ways of seeing are constantly coloured by and coded into those of China. Its short window of opportunity for self expression, between its own achievement of economic self-assertion – which produced among other economic powerhouses its film industry – and the growing cultural re-engagement of world markets by China, thus saw films representing Hong Kong's own narrative re-workings of both Chinese and international themes – all with a local spin. Who better to represent *Zhou small potato* as the archetypal Hong Kong citizen, than 'Jackie' Chan: Hong Kong born; Chinese trained; exposed in young adulthood to life in one of the more adaptive Anglo nations, itself busily asserting a distinctive national identity through film. His performances become at once a form of fusion art and post-colonial hybridity: *Thirdspace* representations, in Homi Bhabha's terms (1994), giving back to local audiences a mix of survivalist identities and strategies that they are only partly conscious of in themselves.

Bhabha is a leading voice in postcolonial studies and is highly influenced by Western poststructuralist theorists. In the *Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha uses concepts such as mimicry, interstices, hybridity, and liminality - all influenced by semiotics and Lacanian psychoanalysis - to argue that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent. In an effort to deal with these 'in-between' categories of competing cultural differences, Bhabha attempts in his introduction to *The Location of Culture* to shed light upon the 'liminal' negotiation of cultural identity across differences of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions:

- It is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)?
- i.e., cultural identities cannot be ascribed to pre-given, irreducible, scripted, ahistorical cultural traits that define the conventions of ethnicity.
- Nor can 'coloniser' and 'colonised' be viewed as separate entities that define themselves independently. Instead, Bhabha suggests that the negotiation of cultural identity involves the continual interface and exchange of cultural performances that in turn produce a mutual and mutable recognition (or representation) of cultural difference.
- This 'liminal' space is a 'hybrid' site that witnesses the production - rather than just the reflection - of cultural meaning.

From this perspective what Chan is working through in these otherwise populist 'entertainments' is a new form of cultural meaning, in a space heavily marked by the 'liminality' of cultural influences. The tendency within his works for the seeming haphazard: the unplanned and purely fortuitous; the events-beyond-control – makes more sense than before – and contributes its own impetus towards a re-forging of cultural value within the experience of a culture 'in-between'.

6.3.1 Thirdspace identity and the comedic character

The humour within Chan's films appears of course to stem from the antagonist's personal characteristics, its focus a kind of perennial naivety, which deflects the necessity for real examination of the circumstances which produce the dilemmas which the character confronts. In early Chan films, these antagonists are often naughty boys, or what Australians call 'larrikins': indomitable, careless and often in trouble. However, because they are kind-hearted and prone to helping others, audiences look upon them as sweet boys, happily regarding them as old friends. Such characters are never unflawed, but these small faults make them even more popular with and familiar to audiences. As they struggle to overcome villains and circumstances much bigger than themselves, it is all too easy to identify – and to transpose the specifics of the conditions portrayed into parallels of morality, if not of scale, across contemporary Hong Kong life.

In Chan's films the *little man* perspective, while immersed in the sort of character arc/narrative structuring 'filmwork' or cinematicisation revealed in the outline of Hollywood formulae cited above (see Chapter 4) – is enacted in a specifically Hong Kong way. The comedic streak represented in the opportunism and endless optimism of the antagonists is intensified, firstly through the plots – which seem to evolve from the very core of their characters, despite the equally real lack of depth or change involved in these forms of character arc. What is involved here is not the transformational characters of Hollywood, set into narratives evoking quest for self in a neo-liberal socio-cultural context, but what Bakhtin (1981) would identify as the sort of character used within the chronotope of classical romance. These are characters who move across the landscape of their adventures without incurring real change within themselves. What they are, they are throughout the film's action – and as part of the formula, even from film to film. Good-hearted and just a little gullible, they seemingly invite the sorts of story-genre which will reveal just these qualities. Associated with this is a tendency to be accident-prone; perhaps even a little clumsy: the constant apprentice, always bumbling with the master's tools. Chan has himself always designed at least some of the comic scenes within his roles, to point up these very characteristics. For example, in the film *Police Story,* in order to show his antagonist what a powerful man he is, he sets out to tell another woman how much his girlfriend is afraid of him. But his girlfriend happens to show up and overhears the conversation – for Chan is so afraid of her, he has had to explain the whole story...

These plots are not at all intended however as simple moralities. All the other characters have similar flaws, and they too have their limitations exposed in the course of the plot. This infinitely recessive mirroring of all-too-human qualities both reinforces Chan's own representation of everyday ordinariness, and spreads it out, carrying it into audience experiences, and making of it an endearingly local and *little man* set of cultural virtues.

To detect what Chan is about in these scenarios is to return to Bhabha's thinking on Thirdspace: the hybrid zone between tradition and renewal; between rule and self-direction; between 'then' and 'next'; not quite one or the other. Abbas (1997) has remarked that humour was especially important in this Golden Era period of Hong Kong film 'because it could be related closely to the relationship of colonial tensions in Hong Kong' (p. 30) – but in a typically postcolonial deflective way, never committed to outright or overt criticism. The most immediate situation faced by Hong Kong people was not any

upwelling of anti-foreign sentiment, either anti-British or anti-Chinese, but anxiety over an uncertain future, with Hong Kong's return to mainland China so suddenly appearing as a real possibility. Ordinary Hong Kong citizens, with no access to political self-determination, and no traditions of political involvement, neither knew what action to take, nor felt much desire to take national responsibility for the macro future of their society. There was for instance little assertion of an independent national state. All Hong Kong people wanted was to maintain a smooth-running daily life, and enjoy the usual levels of personal and domestic happiness. Entertainment, as Abbas suggests, was more needed than ever. Chan's pictures were the perfect evocation of the moment.

6.4 An orderly society

One of the most important themes in Jackie Chan's work involves its expression of a *spirit of justice.* His stories mostly portray a poor man, without significant amounts of money and power, but with powerful enemies, such as local criminals, corrupt leaders, inflexible systems, or just plain, cruel fate.

Chan characters do their best to overcome such circumstances, no matter how difficult. To this extent they are the comedy version of the chivalric hero of serious *Jiang Hu* narratives, as told by John Woo (see above). Close to hand for these characters is the yardstick of justice – and while the plotting and especially the action scenes may blow out of all proportion to the situations which engender them, the logic behind the action is always well-intentioned and socially admirable, capturing absolute audience support. Watching Chan movies involves embracing not just a belief in a progression towards a just society, but a belief that a better world is possible – and that ordinary folks can contribute towards it, through probity and courage within their everyday actions. To that extent, this is as much a moral universe as that in John Woo's movies – just one better adjusted to the scale of the everyday and local. But besides this generalised justice theme, Jackie Chan has announced that his pictures are among the most 'socially healthy' in the world - because there is no explicit violence, and no sex.

6.4.1 No violence; No 'amativeness'

Though fight scenes fill these movies, there is no direct violence shown on the screen. The bloody scenes so often at the core of Hollywood productions are hard to find in Chan's films. He designs the whole combat process with a view to comedy, seeking the pay-off in audience laughter, and working to release, rather than to intensify, the tension. The spirit of peace is always at the heart of the protagonist's brief. This also explains why the performers usually use their fists, rather than guns or other more modern weaponry. The aim is to penalise the opponent, or in classic kung fu terms, to use their own energy against them; and so allow justice to triumph. Life is precious, and that same life is the very heart of these films. Chan avoids stories which evolve towards death - so that his central protagonists are never aggressive. Theirs is a combat of last resort – or a combat stumbled into, all unwilling. Not only does the formula endorse all over again the *small-potato* or *Little Man* emphasis, it produces pictures suitable for the whole family – the core unit of the Confucian ethic, in terms of its contemporary Chinese social formation.

Similar restrictions occur on Chan's use of love scenes. Sex scenes are shown in Hong Kong pictures, and are in fact one of the major attractions in many directors' repertoires. However, Chan insists there be no love-making in his films, and has even banned close-focus on romantic scenes. Chen Zhi-ling (2003) has even noted that female characters cannot be treated indecently by the protagonist's opponents, as a motivator in the plot. If the hero fights at all over a female character, it is because she is taken hostage in some way: it is her freedom, and not her person, at stake. This is rare in Hollywood martial arts films, where female characters are all too often subjected to some form of sexual violation, or its threat, in order to motivate the excesses of the subsequent combat. So without sex or violence – what's left? The answer lies, once again, in the careful foregrounding of possible, yet always surprising, action-performance.

6.5 Chan's creativity: a renewed focus on *action*

Another important reason for Chan's success – and one central to this study - is his focus on a specific form of consciously-creative *performance*. Jackie Chan has said that every time he produces a new film he always tries to express its action in an innovative way (see Cai Hong-Sheng, 1999). He understands that audiences incline towards the new, even within a known formula, and believes that the best way to seize their attention is to keep impressing them with creativity.

This creativity is usually expressed in two ways.

The first element rests mainly on the *creativity of the kung fu action.* In his early work, as mentioned earlier, Chan generally fights against opponents without weapons, making full use of traditional Chinese kung fu moves, unarmed. It is well known both within the industry and by audiences that Chan seldom hired stuntmen or doubles. No matter how dangerous the scenes, he always appeared himself. The fact that he was injured many times during shooting became a promotional element for his pictures: a guarantee of their authenticity and realism, compensating the Hollywood form of realism built upon escalating images of violence.

At the same time Chan kept creating *new sub-genres of kung fu action* in his productions, including the *Drunken Fists* and *Laughing Fists* motifs. This capacity to create – and even to risk respect for the discipline through comic pastiche, showed his deep understanding of Chinese traditional kung fu, and yet also his ability to practise its art with such skill that he could introduce entirely new notes, without any loss of classical technique or respect for the tradition. It is to that extent an illustration of Pope's *in(ter)vention* mode of creativity, in which 'The tense and radically unstable concept that is *in(ter)vention* will help articulate a sense of creativity in some of its more restlessly innovative aspects' (pp. 62-63): a concise description of Chan's capacity to insert into the established kung fu repertoire moves drawn from almost anywhere, involving almost anything – a creativity that is less *restless* than *relentless*. The endless mixing or hybridising of the technique is clear in the titles alone, where the fusion of personification *(fists* which laugh or drink to excess) and synaesthesic description captures the ways in which Chan's action sequences will slam one tradition into another – all at lightning speed.

The tendency was intensified when from the time of the film *Plan A* Jackie Chan started to exploit modern science, hi-tech devices, and even architecture, in the choreography of his fights, and their integration into known and familiar Hong Kong

city locations. In *Plan A*, he not only fights opponents with his fists, but uses guns with utter accuracy – while in later stories he designed fight scenes combining flight, skyscrapers, or car chases. The modern urban environment has become the preferred background for his stories, perfectly integrated into traditional kung fu action. Cai *(op. cit.)* calls this an 'integrated martial arts genre'. The animate and inanimate aspects of the combat not only fuse, but exchange value. Chan appears to be becoming part of the urban environment, and the city co-extensive with his simultaneously all-too-human/superhuman capacities.

Does this however amount to a new configuration? It is at least possible to argue that at this point Chan's practice moves closer to Pope's concept of 're-creation', which he glosses most usefully as 'an ongoing transformation of past-through-present-to-future and self-through-other-to-otherwise' (pp. 86-87). Chan has moved a long way towards Bhabha's 'third' possibility: a space between past and future, in which some form of new seems to be emerging. What then are the elements anchoring his transit, and how does he appear to be redirecting them?

6.6 A Chinese perspective

From the 1980s on, whenever Chan pictures appeared, they were always among the top ten best sellers in terms of Hong Kong box office. He added more international elements into his productions in later years, to appeal to markets all over the world, but local production characteristics remained clear in his films – one reason for their recognition as distinctive offerings.

Chinese or perhaps more generally East-Asian moral features can always be found to the fore in Chan's roles. His protagonists, as we have seen, emphasise public responsibility, and keep the public benefit in mind. They seek no form of personal profit from their actions, even when tempted. They are consistent and reliable; perhaps not so clever - but street-smart, and full of a kind of naïve wisdom, which sits well in the immediate cultural context of a largely de-politicised social order, with its morality founded more upon cultural convention than upon deep affiliation to religious or other consciously ideological practice.

Above all Chan's roles are calculated to reverse the martial-arts trend towards escalating violence, and so to avoid the excesses of so much of contemporary action film. Instead, Chan's fights represent the efficacy of exercising forbearance. Both within the character type, and as a result of the kung fu expression of discipline and Chan's own particular emphasis on the use of weaponry-to-hand, these films express a general unwillingness to engage in aggressive behaviours. These are characters who seldom fight; and who will not until cornered. Once again this suits the cultural passivity emphasised in Chinese social philosophies, and embodied in elements of the kung fu art – but in Chan's representation such values are redoubled by multiple facets of their embodiment.

6.6.1 East-Asian plots

Chan characters tend to remain silent in the face of conflict or adversity - until finally brought to face the urgency of their

situation. At the beginning of each story the protagonists generally suffer some difficulty in life – perhaps bullied by their opponents. But only when the situation worsens do they stand up and fight back. The motivation is doubly justified: conflict on behalf of justice, and generally also for the public good – a virtuous defence of the civic ideal, and a restoration of narrative equilibrium which satisfies audiences psychologically and socially.

Reinforce the morality of the plot with the same structural principles within the fight sequencing: a hero slow to wrath and displaying real martial expertise only as pressed into action, and the message becomes especially powerful and appealing. It reassembles inside the film's action, as Eco has suggested (see above), a fragmented and vulnerable psychological sense of self, validating the viewer's own sense of the powerlessness of a dis-unified and 'lone' subjectivity, and yet seemingly able to assemble all that is haphazardly around them and turn it to advantage, constructing a new centrality and a recognised social status. Order is restored at every level – all with the *little man* archetype at the core. Most notably, this operationalising of the little man trope is enacted at the level of martial arts – yet that is not its sole mode of expression. To fully appreciate what Chan has achieved, is to examine in more detail just how the particular creativity within his performances is realised. Is Chan working beyond the mere spectacle which centres action film? Is he more than an object of the camera and its endless quest for motion? Part of the answer lies in the richness of his background in Chinese traditions of performance.

6.6.2 Oriental techniques of performance

Critic Zhou Xing (1999) has remarked that Chan's films highlight a range of Chinese performance techniques, new in Western markets, and perhaps not entirely understood as both founded in traditional disciplines, and subjected to endless forms of innovation and creative enactment.

6.6.2 a Sequenced performance flow

One of the most obvious charms of Chan's pictures is that he always tries to maximise the physicality. No matter how dangerous, he keeps excavating the body's potential, seeking out new stunts and techniques. He works hard at detailed designs for his trade-mark *action-plus-surroundings* stunts, and the outcomes seem a perfect match for both the fast-moving, mostly urban environments, and the expressive rhythms of the fast-paced action sequences.

The unique reality of these effects: real or realistic settings, with no cutting to accommodate stunt-doubles – leaves the pacing of the film editing with an added coherence and integration. This is a quality that audiences read, even when entirely unaware of the processes of production, filming or editing. Audiences see a hero able – seemingly against both the odds and the qualities of the character they have come to see as altogether ordinary – to defeat an enemy without external intervention. Not only is this lone hero more easily a source of audience identification; his connection to the *small-potato* trope intensifies the heroism, and spreads the identification more broadly across those audiences.

6.6.2 b Oriental dramatic expression

Mentored in a drama training school by the master performer Yu Zhan-yun, Chan has a profound sense of the conventions of Chinese traditional drama. This characteristic shows in his dramatic expression. Chan knows how to show the power of his protagonists in the scenes he designs. His responsiveness – facial, gestural, postural, and tonal – in every way represents the levels of conflict encountered. Audiences feel the threat, as Chan's character does, reading it from the many coded layers of his performance, drawn from deep within the acting conventions of Chinese dramatic arts.

It is common for instance in martial arts films for many kinds of enemy to appear at almost the same moment, flooding the hero's responses and creating the strongest possible feeling of disorder and menace. Just when audiences are most worried about the protagonist, he will suddenly and rapidly deal with the entire situation in a tightly ordered sequence – as if the entire combat were some mathematical equation, which he has suddenly solved. The resolution reverses the threat and the power relation immediately, and absolutely – and maximises audience satisfaction along the way. It is as if the entire world order has suddenly – almost inexplicably – re-balanced around the centre of combat; a reading often embellished by camera positions which revolve around the central clash of hands, feet or weapons, to create a three-dimensional and almost atomic swirl of intricate action and counter-move – until finally, the sequence is resolved.

Part of the philosophy behind Chinese traditional drama, this de-emphasises once again the individual as original source of the action, suggesting instead a working out of fate or destiny, in which human actors are mere chess-figures, choreographed upon the scene by some stronger, invisible force. Certainly, in cinematographic coding, the tendency to rapidly withdraw the camera position to enable a full-scene shot as the group combat strategies emerge gives the impression of some sudden shift into an almost god-like array of the fighting elements. The combat becomes 'bigger' than the individuals, or even factions, concerned. This move is reflected in some work by Deleuze and Guattari (1983), who have considered the ways in which twentieth-century sports and physical movement have passed beyond the ancient Greek ideals of the human body as the powerful centre of athleticism: the muscle of the leg propelling the runner or jumper; the arm projecting the ball, discus or javelin forward. They see instead the new 'flow' sports of modernity (see also Csikzentmihalyi, 1996), in which the body is abandoned to the powerful impetus of a greater source: whether it be the wind (sailing, windsurfing. parachuting, hang gliding, sky-diving, base-jumping); or water (surfing, kayaking); or even gravity itself (abseiling, luge, skiing, skate-boarding). Perhaps unaware of the theories behind martial arts, and their use of the counter-forces of resistance to attain impetus, they have failed to include them in their analysis – and so missed the degree to which martial arts combat is already theorised in its own traditions, along lines parallel to their own.

Chan's enactment of kung fu on film maximises this sense of 'flow' power – but spreads it beyond the natural into the cultural. His creativity makes it urban and modern, as Deleuze and Guattari note of today's 'extreme' sports – but also social. Actants[6] within the Chan fight sequence – whether human or part of the environment – are not mere ciphers, used to

[6] The term is drawn from Actor Network Theory (ANT), and denotes the interaction of technologised entities and human actions; for instance, an electrically operated door controls human movement. See especially Latour (1988) and Law (1986).

score the hero's combative power, but elements of a coherent social whole. Together human figures and aspects drawn from the environment over which they fight are arrayed around the swirling centre of dis-order, within which the hero becomes an agent – however unlikely – of the Chinese and Confucian principles of rationality and ordered sequencing; as well as the Chinese and Taoist principle of harmonious balance. This assemblage is thus at once ancient and modern, and builds within itself a sense of absolute certainty and rightness – to which audiences respond.

6.7 Jackie Chan's *in(ter)ventionist* creativity: *tradition* becomes *transition*

All in all, Jackie Chan represents the era of greatest success for the comedic martial arts genre, and what he has achieved shows one kind of creativity in Hong Kong cinema - a source based in traditions so powerful that it suggests far more recombinant potential, awaiting embodiment within a new re-directive mastery. Audiences are all too aware that Chan did not succeed either by luck, or by individual talent alone, but through collective and multi-dimensioned thinking across the whole industry and its more remote constituent arts.

This study suggests that it is this *recombinant* capacity – so strongly present in Chan films, as well as within his film career – which Hong Kong cinema needs to trust, and to foster. The question however now becomes: is this formula perhaps the remit of the individual - the genius performer or producer, altogether unique, or perhaps encountered only once within a generation? Can the *in(ter)ventionist* principle of recombination be encountered elsewhere in the Hong Kong industry – and can it work or be made to work in other ways?

The proposition is worth testing against a second interesting tendency within the box office statistics coding Hong Kong's preferred film releases: the return during the period of decline of a favourite Golden Era performer: Stephen Chow. The cinematic product which returned him to new heights of both local and global success operates however in a renewed, *in(ter)ventionist* way – one which invites comparison with these traditional/transitional tropes identified in the work of Jackie Chan.

6.8 Influence Four: Stephen Chow's return in *Shaolin Soccer* and *Kung Fu*

Kung fu film in the 21st century has returned Stephen Chow's name to the list of best sellers in the Hong Kong film industry. *Shaolin Soccer* in 2001 and *Kung Fu* in 2004 were each box office champions. Stephen Chow pictures are still among the preferred choices for Hong Kong audiences – but they also did well in the international and mainland markets. One local moviegoer posted typical audience comments online:

> Shaolin Socer [sic] is one of the finest entertaining movies I have seen before. It is special movies which deserve the appreciation. i love to watch Chinese movies and in my favorite movies catalog Shaolin Soccer become the part of it .....
> (See http://www.dianying.com/ft/title/slz2001/review)

Kung Fu took $HK 180 billion at the box-office in just forty days on the Chinese mainland. So what produced this major

new stream of success for Chow? Besides taking much longer than usual to shoot, at once implying enhanced production values, the overall styling of a martial arts film and some of its most distinctive features have been changed. Stephen Chow's successful return shows his own particular capacity for recombining and reworking a tradition, and so to capture the specifics of his new re-creation of the Shaolin Kung Fu tradition, this study will analyse these two new Chow movies in some depth.

6.8.1 *Shaolin Soccer*

However unlikely the fusion might seem, *Shaolin Soccer* is indeed a movie about Shaolin kung fu and Association football. Shaolin kung fu has always meant the best kung fu in China, with *Shaolin Sifu* both an original location for kung fu performance, and home to an unbroken tradition of its practice. Football meanwhile is now considered the most popular sport in the world, with East Asian teams beginning to rise into contention in the World Cup. Chow intends to combine these two significant elements and their respective physical disciplines – and fan bases - to insure that he attracts both audiences, perhaps even introducing one to the other...

Many moviegoers online have commented on how much they like this movie. Some have suggested that Chow was trying to show the power of kung fu in a new way, paralleling its controlled and tactical techniques with those of soccer - a successful fusion, but one which took hard work, a serious approach and immense creativity. Others dislike Stephen Chow's changes, and comment that this movie is actually far less funny than its predecessors in the Chow repertoire, and in the end sets up an inappropriate hero. For these commentators the all-important small-potato character has been lost – and his excision has risked the formula (http://www.dianying.com/ft/title/slz2001/review).

One of the major changes in the telling of the *Shaolin Soccer* story is that it contains very little of Chow's signature *mo lei tau* performance. Instead its subversion of the heroic core, focusing on issues of justice, is portrayed in a relatively straightforward, direct and action-based spirit. The main plot is very simple, with nothing like the complexity of previous Shaolin films. Stephen Chow's role is in fact very much the small potato - at first. He is a Shaolin Temple monk who wants to take advantage of kung fu techniques to improve Chinese soccer. However, these small-potato characters are not designed to have characteristics such as greed, lust or national ambition... The Chow role is too positive: much more like a legendary hero, and not at all an ordinary character, embedded in everyday living.

A second major innovation comes in the use of over 400 computer-based graphic shots in the film. It was the first time Chow had tried computer-assisted techniques on such a grand scale, producing complex visual effects. This compensates for an otherwise overly simplified story. The focus on visuals de-localises the film, making it more universal and much easier to understand for non-Chinese audiences, not schooled in either the techniques of kung fu, or its cultural and philosophical foundations. Chow's previous movies are so localised that they mostly defeat foreign audiences. The laughter rests too heavily on everyday understandings of traditional culture and vernacular language – but in *Shaolin Soccer* Chow avoids the Hong Kong cultural focus, losing part of his Hong Kong audience, but achieving successful entry to an international market.

Finally, this ultra-commercial production lost no opportunity for promotion, foregrounding the dual fan-base and the

computer graphics to elicit mass appeal. Before shooting Chow organised a major competition to cast one of the female roles – even if in the end she was only the second female antagonist. The publicity ensured that during the three full years of production audiences kept hearing about this film (see especially Xie Shi-ming, 2005.) This time Chow was engaging his ingenuity in creative applications of industry production practice – the creativity less in the film, than in its production processes and promotional ploys – another new development in the Hong Kong film industry as it transitions into the *creative industries* collaborative model. This film understood as no film had before, both the need for and the strategies of *audience formation,* actually pre-emptively positioning its audience, and calling its new, hybrid-interest sports-kung fu film-goers into existence. Where earlier film had read the subtle and unsubtle strands of existing audience preference, engaging a range of local traditions and story-types to maximise audience, this film trusted its own capacities to create that audience anew, calling on its professional colleagues in computer technology, Public Relations and even casting, to help build what would become box office. This is a sign of a mature creativity: one which knows – and trusts – itself as an industry among allied media industries: the 'creative industries' of Florida's and Flew's analysis. So is this a major step forward for Hong Kong film, able at last to shift towards new audience address, outside its own traditions? One check lies in the fate of Chow's second kung fu film.

6.8.2 *Kung Fu*

After a further three years of production, *Kung Fu* was released in 2004, and again proved to be box office champion. In the mainland market too it managed an extremely good result.

In a major analysis of this film Li Zhi-tian (2005, p.10) concludes that there are three characteristics of *Kung Fu* which guaranteed its success.

First is the introduction of a single-line-progressive narrative structure. The whole story centres on the conflict between the Axe gangsters and their opposition. With the simple linear progression of this story telling, a strong opponent fights another, until an even stronger champion appears. Both good and bad simply increase in power, until protagonist **Ar Sing**, played by Chow, magically becomes a kung fu master and asserts order with the final victory.

This type of story is very familiar to Chinese audiences, with its structure derived from traditional novels. It is founded in the Confucian belief that good men will always prevail, no matter the difficulties. **Ar Sing's** experience shows the everyday *little man* maturing into a hero, so that power seems once more lodged within everyman. The formula reinforces not only traditions of social order, with champions of the people seen to arise by merit from within their own ranks, but the modern individuation myths of the Hollywood tradition which require all men to create their own future, this time validated from inside a classical Chinese perspective. As with *Shaolin Soccer,* Chow's version of a kung fu drama modernises tradition, and gives it a new trajectory, projecting it into a wider world.

The second element of innovation is once more the large-scale use of computer graphic techniques. Even more money was spent on this film - over 150 billion Hong Kong dollars, with rumours that over half of it was spent on computer graphics

design and production. Many entirely new and very spectacular visual effects can be added to the kung fu repertoire. Unlike martial arts legend Bruce Lee or the king of 'real' kung fu films, Jackie Chan, Stephen Chow neither knows nor performs kung fu. Nor did he want to reprise the moves of others' performances. In this film Chow created a distinctive martial arts style with the help of computers, transferring many of the more abstract concepts of kung fu traditions which had formerly appeared only in print; some of them improbable to say the least; into visual effects with immediate dramatic impact.

At the same time, Stephen Chow's love of humour meant that the computer graphic techniques could also be used to add comedic effect, defusing some of the sustained violence and tension of the fast-paced conflict. There is for example a scene where **Ar Sing** is escaping with the landlady running after him. They move faster and faster, until suddenly, **Ar Sing** runs right underneath a truck. His legs are graphically modified to look like wheels - and keep this same shape even after he has run out from under the truck. Such body-morph shots are more usual in cartoons – although the unreality of it all does bear comparison with such Hollywood offerings as the *Indiana Jones* series. It is an innovation for Chow, who has shifted from surprise comic effects through language or make-up, to introduce this new form of in-joke shared with audiences: a knowing glance at how much of the movie is a matter of computer enhancement. Like the use of wit or disguise, this involves a generous – and confident – sharing of what are in effect production techniques, with audiences – one more sign of maturity within Hong Kong production values.

Li Zhi-tian's analysis views the third characteristic of Chow's Kung fu as its homage to classic scenes from the genre – a major trope of post modernity across all media, remixing the familiar and the surprising. Just as the *Indiana Jones* films re-mined the best scenes from Hollywood's Saturday-afternoon 'B' movie fare, *Kung Fu* plays out all the favorite encounters of the Shaolin tradition – adding however a whole range of other action modes, from Disney cartoons to contemporary block-buster techno-films. If **Ar Sing** pursued by his landlady reminds audiences of endless chase sequences in Disney's cartoon *Mickey Mouse* or Hanna Barbera's *Road Runner,* when the **Fire King** in *Kung Fu* catches bullets in his fingers it reprises scenes in *The Matrix.* This time the jokes are spreading out, referencing Western film as well as the Chinese kung fu tradition – and because of the visual basis of the cultural literacy invoked, no longer limited to the local.

Here Chow takes a major step towards a global creativity – specific in its form, yet aligned to the tastes of global movie-goers whose film-viewing habits will best pre-dispose them to Chow's films. This is a cleverly calculated appeal to world audiences – and once again a form of self-referential creativity which not only can be admired for its own wit, but for its contributions to a rather more direct audience address. As will be discussed later in this study, such address, arising at a moment when audiences no longer form in neat queues at cinemas, involves a panoply of formats, media modes, and self-initiated on-uses, and is crucial for the health and survival of the film industry. That Chow has so successfully found a Hong Kong formula through which to access these new audiences is a major achievement, of enormous consequence. He has successfully moved his film making techniques from an initial strength gained through address of local audiences, to a formula which offers the global market both a fresh take on current action film, with all the tricks of postmodern ironic self-referentiality and the most up-to-date computer graphics, but also a typically-postmodern 'backwards' entrée to the traditions of Chinese kung fu, produced on its own terms.

Having successfully renewed what are specifically Chinese action film genres, yet addressed them to global audiences in very up-to- the-minute ways, has Chow found *the* formula for Hong Kong film: a bold and powerful - and perhaps adaptable – fusion form?

To date, Stephen Chow's 're-emergence' with this new fusion form signals the highest levels of renewed commercial success for the Hong Kong film industry. Not since the 'Golden Era' have takings mounted so high. But is his formula a clear way forward – or are there simultaneously new creative ventures underway, which may also yet mature into box-office gold? To examine this question is to go a little downmarket: to take up not the block-busters under analysis so far, but a mix of the solid achievers rising into prominence – and perhaps some of the films whose influence is registered more across the industry itself, than with audiences. The chapter which follows examines the more experimental productions of the post-millennial era.

CHAPTER 7:

A New Emergence: The *in(ter)ventions* of *un*popular cinema

7.0 Influence Five: Wong Kar-wai and rootlessness – between box office and arthouse

When it comes to box-office figures, Wong's moving pictures have seldom been among the top three best-sellers in the past decade. Yet whenever people talk about the creativity of Hong Kong cinema, Wong is among those cited. He has built up his own style from as early as his first production, *As Tears Go By*, which was very popular with Hong Kong audiences. Although his second work, *Days of Being Wild* was much less welcomed, with many claiming that they could not understand it, prizes were awarded at several international film festivals. The industry admits that his piloting of innovative film-making forged a new path for Hong Kong cinema, and his productions remain popular among art house audiences.

7.1 Wong Kar-wai's career – a non-traditional entrant

Born in Shanghai, Wong moved to Hong Kong with his parents at the age of five. After graduating from Hong Kong Polytechnic College in graphic design in 1980, he enrolled in the Production Training Course organised by Hong Kong Television Broadcasters Limited (TVB) and became a full-time television scriptwriter. In the mid-1980s, he became a scriptwriter/director at The Wing Scope Co. and In-gear Film Production Company, the production houses owned by renowned Hong Kong actor/movie producer Alan Tang Kwong-Wing. Wong's current nostalgic, artsy style took shape during his apprenticeship with Alan Tang Kwong-Wing, who invested in the first movie Wong directed, *As Tears Go By* (1988). Wong's career took off when he directed the film *Days of Being Wild* (1990), despite its losing Alan Tang millions of invested dollars.

Wong subsequently graduated to feature film work. He is credited with ten scripts between 1982 and 1987, covering an array of genres from romantic comedy to action drama, but claims to have worked in some capacity on about fifty more, without official credit. He considers *Final Victory* (最後勝利, 1986), a dark comedy/crime story for director Patrick Tam, his best script.

Wong's directing debut in 1988 with *As Tears Go By* produced a crime melodrama of the kind then hugely popular, with heavy borrowings from Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1974), but it already displayed one of his principal trademarks: strongly atmospheric colour use in the shooting which some have compared to expressionist forms. It remains his only box office hit to date. His next film, *Days of Being Wild* (1991) was a drama about aimless youth set in the early 1960s. It established what is now his trademark form: elliptical plotting, moody atmosphere, lush visuals and music, and a focus on the burden of memory on melancholic, misfit characters. The film was a box office failure but now regularly tops Hong Kong critics' polls of the best local films ever made: often described as a sort of Cantonese *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Wong also established his own independent production company, Jet Tone Films Ltd. His partner in the company is Jeffrey Lau, a director and producer who tends to work closer to the populist vein of mainstream Hong Kong film.

Wong went on to direct several more feature films in the 1990s produced by Jet Tone, which allowed him to work at his own pace. Among these were *Chungking Express* (1994), which follows the lives of two love-struck cops in Hong Kong and the mysterious women they meet and fall in love with. Originally intended to be a distraction piece to take his mind off the endlessly delayed *Ashes of Time*, it ended up as one of his most popular films, if not the most popular. *Fallen Angels* (1995), was originally intended to be the third act of *Chungking Express,* but when the tone failed to match the other two sections, he cut out the continuity references and made it a standalone movie. Most now see it as a semi-sequel to *Chungking Express,* a neo-noir film about on a disillusioned killer trying to overcome the affections of his partner, a strange drifter looking for her ex-boyfriend, and a mute trying to get the world's attention in his own ways, all set against a sordid and surreal urban nightscape.

Wong's fourth movie, *Ashes of Time* (1994), released between *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels,* applied his approach to a star-studded *wuxia* (martial arts swordplay) story. The desert shoot in Mainland China dragged on for over a year and resulted in one of contemporary Hong Kong cinema's most notorious commercial disasters.

Wong Kar-wai's first major international recognition was at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival where he won the Best Director prize for *Happy Together* (1997), a film that mixes Argentinian tango, Brazilian song and Frank Zappa instrumentals into the account of a stormy affair of a gay couple living as expatriates in Buenos Aires. Wong mentioned the name of Alan Tang Kwong-Wing, his early mentor, in his 'thank you' speech at the award ceremony, but as this rundown of his movies shows, he had already moved a long way from the sorts of Hong Kong films produced when he entered the industry.

So what had changed, and how much did Wong himself contribute to that change? Despite his background as a script-writer, one of Wong's trademarks as a director is that he works largely through improvisation and experimentation, involving the actors and crew in the evolution of the film's action, rather than adhering to a fixed screenplay. This has been a frequent source of trouble for his actors, his financial backers, and many other people connected with his films, including sometimes himself. The filming of *In the Mood for Love* (2000) for instance had to be shifted from Beijing to Macau after the China Film Bureau insisted on seeing the completed script. This was all in all a minor setback in the very complicated evolution of that project, which went as far back as 1997, and demonstrates more of the somewhat *ad hoc* but infinitely flexible nature of Wong's productions. It had been Wong's intention to make two films, one of which would be titled *Beijing Summer.* With even the bare plot still unclear at the time, this film eventually started taking form in Macau - although there Wong made even more changes, planning to call the film *Three Stories about Food.* Eventually he decided that it was better to settle for only one story, and *A Story About Food* centres on a writer – somewhat ironic, since he so often refuses to use one. Together with scenes shot in Bangkok and Cambodia's Angkor Wat, the filming took as long as fifteen months. This was an especially arduous time for lead actress Maggie Cheung, whose hair and make-up reportedly took a daily five hours, and who appeared in different *cheongsams* in each scene. She famously compared the lengthy shoot to a cold she was unable to get

rid of. Working without deadlines, the film's upcoming premier at Cannes nonetheless put some pressure on Wong to finish editing. Intending by that stage to name the film *Secrets*, he was dissuaded by Cannes, and finally named it *In the Mood for Love* after Bryan Ferry's cover of the song of the same name.

This complex evolutionary processing of films admits into the equation the sorts of *auteur* privilege best known in European movie-making; a far departure from the early studio-formula days of Hong Kong's movie origins. At the same time Wong's very open direction/production style admits a collaborative and even ensemble influence into the mix – not welcomed by all involved, as suggested above, yet of undeniable efficacy in maximising the creativity of these films, and admitting the *transitional* mode argued above as crucial to the survival of a Hong Kong industry . They are, to that extent at least, experimental – part of their appeal to art house audiences, critics, and international film festival curators and juries. Their influence on the broader Hong Kong industry, and on fellow directors and producers, is a more complex matter.

Wong's *2046* (2004), a film about capturing lost memories, was the third chapter of the shared but somewhat discontinuous story that had begun with *Days of Being Wild* and continued with *In the Mood for Love*. Infamous for its long drawn out shoots without any real regard to deadlines, the film produced a running joke amongst the crew - that Wong would *finish* in the year 2046. His international reputation and influence however continued to grow. In 2006, he became the first Chinese director to preside over the jury at the Cannes Film Festival. In February 2006 *Screen International* reported that Norah Jones would make her acting debut in Wong Kar-wai's first full English - language film, *My Blueberry Nights*. The film opened the 2007 Cannes Film Festival as one of 22 films in competition (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wong_Kar-wai).

Given the international footing that Wong's work has established, it is perhaps curious that he has a reputation for a near-obsessive thematic pursuit of alienation or rootlessness at the core of his films. Having argued throughout this study to date for the powers of a localised, deeply-entrenched filmic connection to Hong Kong and Chinese cultural foundations, this study must now consider how well this far less culturally anchored strand in Wong's work engages with the mobility and de-legitimised 'project' identity formation of the twenty-first century global citizen/consumer – a formation to which high-density/high-transience urban agglomerations such as Hong Kong are considered to have contributed greatly (Castells, 1997; Castells and Hall, 1996). What has driven Wong is the radical 'loosening' of his film-making techniques, and his endemic attraction to alienated characters. How far does his 'mean-streets'/*film noir* interest represent modern Hong Kong, or modern East Asia, as opposed to classic Hollywood and French film nostalgia? Are these the only, or the best, ways to engage with the cityscapes and psyches of a modern Chinese existence?

7.2 Exile in the urban city

Zhang Tai (2001) has concluded that the obvious characteristic of Wong's films lies in their root-lost nature. Partly, he suggests, this comes about because of the socio-political history of Hong Kong, long a colonial territory, confronting a major puzzle in relation to its destiny and its identity in facing the return to mainland China. Identity seeking has become a hot talking point, ever since the topic of return began in the early 1980s – but is one rarely addressed, as argued earlier, inside

Hong Kong films. Wong's films thus become part of both the tendency that Abbas termed 'the politics of disappearance', and the aesthetic of 'deflection' identified in this study.

One significant marker for this is the way so many antagonists in Wong's films have no names. No matter whether they are police or gangsters, or even killers; they are usually identified merely by number. Such numbers are cold, turning people into mere ciphers, and reflecting the modern bureaucratic order, where people without community or real public engagement lose their roots and become figures in dreams. They are, as myth-analyst Vladimir Propp points out within the nature of folktale, roles rather than individuals: there to carry out necessary actions, and otherwise without purpose or distinctive identifiers.

As is typical of alienation stories, the mode established in classic European Existentialist works of fiction by novelists such as Camus, Malraux or Kafka, and later playwrights in the tradition of the Absurd, including Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter, characters strive to communicate with others, but inevitably fail – or else suddenly and inexplicably abandon the entire project, just as they begin to get close. In Wong's film *Fallen Angels* the mute played by Takeshi Kaneshiro loves fighting – just for the human contact it affords him, locked out of the world of speech. Wong uses these strange behaviours to accentuate the deep-felt desire for social connection. Urban citizens are too self-protective, fleeing whenever another gets too close. This is precisely why Ou Yang-feng loses his love in the film *Ashes of Time,* and why Wong Fay leaves for California once Tony finally begins dating her. They are afraid of being rejected - and the best solution is to be the first to reject.

Wong is relating the dilemma of the modern urban heart in a very emotional and detailed way. In the film *Fallen Angels,* partners Leon Lai and Michelle Lee have collaborated in over 150 killings and have lived together in the same small room, but they fail to really know each other, their only connection the answering machine. Michelle begins to switch her emotional connection to material objects, which cannot reject her and will always be there. The situation is similar in *Chungking Express.* When Tony Leung loses his love he begins to talk to his towels and soaps.

In a further bid to show the extreme loneliness of modern social existence monologue replaces dialogue in these films. While, like soliloquy, it is a device which enables audiences to get direct access to the protagonists' thoughts, in Wong's films it is the main sound - some say the signature of his work (Zhao Shun-hua, 2007. pp. 26-29). In Ashes *of Time* Ou Yang-feng's monologue covers most of the story and explains the otherwise fragile scenes. It proves not only powerfully expressive, but also an irreplaceable narrative device. Audiences easily identify, trapped as they are in a darkened cinema, mostly unable to talk to one another – at least for the duration of the film – and maybe not then. Urban space is getting smaller, but the distance between individuals is so big that everyone feels in exile. How then to communicate with a world of exiled mutes? In Wong's films, the technique involves a very contemporary take on the politics of time and space.

7.3 Modern communication - Time and Space

Time and Space are two significant themes in Wong's work. One of his movies is, after all, called *Ashes of Time* in English – itself a hint at the sense of loss and irretrievable break from the past. In fact Wong's films represent a renewed understanding of modernity, which recognises and deals with time and space in a very different way.

The mark of time is among the few ways remaining to define modern experience. In Wong's movie, Leslie Cheung tells Maggie Cheung that the minute they just have spent together will never be changed. It has entered history. Takeshi Kaneshiro's character eats all the tinned pineapple due to expire on April 1st, in order to memorialise his lost love. Time is shown to have little meaning, unless it is defined in some way, and so exaggerated into salience. Time is made memorable only through emotional definition, and Wong tends to connect emotional stories to some very precise date. Only then does the anonymous stream of everyday existence flare into significance – if fleetingly, and in an altogether irrecoverable way.

Space is another especially stressed experience in Hong Kong life. The high tension produced in crowded living spaces creates a hyper-urbanised impression of small, boxed-in, gloomy public spaces, with little to invite a longer stay. The telephone kiosk, bar, rainy street, bus or metro station... these are the classic places re-appearing in Wong's movies. In *Days of Being Wild* Andy Lau goes to the telephone kiosk every night to wait for Maggie Cheung's call, but when finally the call comes Andy has already left for somewhere else. Modern transportation speeds across this meaningless terrain, providing only the spaces of uncertainty, without belonging, in what Castells (1996) calls 'the space of flows'. The landscape, while founded in the real of Hong Kong's streets and apartments and offices and warehouses, blurs and loses human definition. Here it is not only the past and tradition which are lost, but also any present engagement with meaningfulness. And yet this new vision of Hong Kong experience is founded upon precisely the same social and cultural terrain: the locales of everyday living, as the Stephen Chow/Jackie Chan *little man* genres. What Wong has done is to twist the prism through which this space is viewed, disconnecting it from its traditions, to visibilise its colder commercial heart and its various accompanying inhumanities.

Flew (2002) introduces into his account of the new creative industries economy a distinction which he observes in the creativity required for survival in the accelerative competition which marks global commerce. There are, he suggests, 'Two modes of knowledge creation. *Incremental knowledge creation* is knowledge that is embodied in organisations, into which those who enter the organisation are inducted, and gradually add to' (p. 149). Flew uses Disneyland's theme parks and their rigid staff training policies, to show how far such a model will insist upon inculcating 'the Disney way'. In contrast, the second form of knowledge extension comes through a radical rupture with established knowledges. 'By contrast, *radical knowledge creation* is based upon extensive experimentation and testing, and explicit recognition of the likelihood of ideas failing' *(ibid.).*

If the former model fits the *transition* moment identified in the work of Jackie Chan, and the later 'return' moment for Stephen Chow, it is the latter *rupture* format which characterises the work of Wong Kar-wai. As his career trajectory suggests, his is an outsider view, not bedded into the traditions of either Chinese performance arts or Hong Kong studio dynasties, but instead backed by the commercial capacity to experiment with every aspect of film production. If this view is to endure however, it will need, according to Flew's analysis, to arrive at some form of settled, generic status, where it too becomes 'embodied' within the organisation which re/produces it – and that, to date, appears not to be the case. Flew in fact states outright that 'radical knowledge creation based on tacit knowledge and unproven assumptions, is unlikely to thrive within large organisations' (pp. 148-149). It is however 'increasingly important to competitive strategy in the new economy, particularly in knowledge-intensive industries' *(ibid.,* p.149). In other words, if Wong's new and distinctive images of rupture

fail to engage with either the traditions of Hong Kong film making, or the Hong Kong audience, they still act as the crucial beacons of creativity required of the newer, decentred and collaborative 'creative cluster' industries of the new 'hub' model. Flew quotes Leadbeater (1999 p. 105):

> Big companies in knowledge-intensive fields will resemble a mother-ship with a flotilla of smaller companies around it. To be creative a big company needs to be linked into a knowledge-creating network outside it, which gives it access to the places where counter-intuitive, unconventional ideas are being created (in Flew p. 149).

If Hong Kong is to find and follow a hybridised in(ter)ventive way through this; a way which readmits the incrementalism of Chan and Chow; is the work of Wong Kar-Wai the necessary split or rupture, which can indicate the opening of a central, ongoing trajectory for the industry? Or is he working in effect on a cultural antithesis: showing through the bleakness of his vision the necessity of a human re-in(ter)vention – beyond which there is only the darkness of the empty cinema, in a now dis-connected culture, too complicitous with the very real fragmentation of communities in the informational economy?

In the conclusion to his own work Flew suggests a similar trajectory, traveled by the entire world of digitised mediation: one in which there has been a serious loss of discourses of creativity based upon alternatives to economic models of productivity. In reviewing his own research questions, Flew ponders the possibility that the creative industries model upon which so many futures are being built may be too firmly founded upon *economic modeling of the act of creation*, at the expense of admitting other forms of human ingenuity and expressivity. He considers the importance of a rehumanised social connectedness, currently fading as our daily endeavours lose contact with tangibles, inside the virtual realm of informational productivity. Two of his four final questions work to unsettle his own central hypotheses:

> Does the discourse of a knowledge economy run the risk of uncritically accepting society and culture in ways that are framed by economic thinking, and are oblivious to other discourses about creativity, including those constructed in explicit opposition to dominant economic thinking?

> What are the broader social and cultural implications of a turn away from an economy based upon tangibles (agriculture and manufacturing) to one based upon intangibles (information and services), and what is the relation of creativity to these developments? (p. 208).

In asking such questions, Flew reminds us of the intensity of Wong Kar-wai's vision of a bleak new urban Hong Kong landscape: one filled with points of an unreal and inhuman connectedness through precisely these 'intangible' new industries. Is Wong's work a harbinger of new social experiences: a vision of what may be occurring, if the informational society does not adapt to and accommodate itself to human needs?

7.4 Commercial pressures

Wong Kar-wai with his background in the commercial world of television has a better chance than many to understand the pressures of contemporary economic existence. A director very much aware of the commercial basis of his industry – a spirit which defines every aspect of his community and society - Wong clearly understands the everyday details and the overall values which rule the world of business. In an interview as early as 1995 Wong said this:

> ... ordinary people define the commercial product too narrowly. Movies should be one kind of commercial product and be packaged in different ways. This is just like the situation in a supermarket which allows different kinds of products. The market needs flexible things and promotion ways (Wong, 1995).

Wong regards films as just another business – despite his arts success. He was among the first directors to own his own independent movie production company, Jet Dong, which he set up to keep full control while shooting. In the past, he had sold in advance across the South-East Asian markets before producing. Now the market situation has changed and he cannot pre-sell in this way - but the sense of a commercial impetus behind each production is still obvious in a number of ways, each worth examining in some detail, for what it shows of the influence of the new informational world upon this older medium's creative control.

7.4.1 Super Star casting

Superstars are always among the most important selling points in a movie. With psychological studies showing that audiences gain emotional satisfaction through identification with superstars, the promotional apparatuses which surround and support movie-making have endlessly extended the availability of 'star' access to today's film fans. Wong clearly understands that audiences may not be attracted into the cinema by the story of a killer or a policeman, but they definitely will buy a ticket for a movie with their favorite superstars. He hires major stars in every movie, including Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, Fay Wong, Andy Lau, Jackie Cheung, Leslie Cheung, among others. Although Wong is a specialist director known to take an infinitely long time over each movie, and is notorious for having no script before beginning a shoot, stars of this magnitude co-operate with him because he challenges them, creates a new image for them, and always provides the opportunity to become part of a quality production. Leslie Cheung won best actor at the 1991 Hong Kong Film Awards after over ten years' hard work in the industry – and the film which brought him the award was *Days of Being Wild.* From then on he was labeled the 'oriental James Dean', and considered a specialist in gangster roles. Tony Leung took best actor at the Taiwan Film Awards in 1994 for *Chungking Express* and again at the Hong Kong Film Awards in 1997 for *Happy Together.* Wong it seems is especially good at re-packaging superstars, piquing audiences with the mixture of familiarity and strangeness. Taiwanese actress Brigitte Lin was regarded as a famous beauty, but what people remember is the figure with the blond hair, long raincoat and big sunglasses from Wong's film *Chungking Express.*

7.4.2 An eye for the commercial property

As well as the use of superstars, Wong knows what types of movie are the most popular in today's market. In one interview he explained that he usually focuses on police dramas because he likes the uniforms - and because, together with their gangster adversaries, they provide plots filled with action, which attract audiences. The formula works well with Hong Kong audiences, familiar with its features – although Wong himself always aims to innovate within the generic frame.

7.4.3 Visual stylisation

Wong makes substantial use of modern movie techniques. Changes in shooting speed, super-wide camera angles, deformed space and MTV-style visual effects create a space cut across by surprising new perspectives and unexpected points of view. These effects have become the distinguishing mark of a Wong film. Sometimes they are part of the story; at other times they have little direct connection. However, they help create a sense of personalised style - very important in a modern citizen-consumer's life, where the selves constantly made and re-made to fashion's dictate see expressivity itself as a cultural goal. In many ways this hyper-stylisation is part of the post-modern impetus towards the externalisation of style: its revelation of its own construction and calculation, with design representing itself, for its own sake.

Wong himself has explained that because Hong Kong is so small he uses the super-wide angle to create an impression of scale (Gao Xu, 2000, p. 3). The super-wide angle gives audiences an altogether new impression of all-too-familiar surrounds. Familiar visuals become strange, the angle exaggerating the distance between things, and creating that strong mood of the lone figure, lost in this new and unexpected spaciousness. To this degree the technique supports the themes: alienated characters, unable to communicate. But it also has much to say of the moment in which Hong Kong and its film-making found itself.

Abbas too (1997) notes an especially personalised visual style in Wong's work. He remarks that in *As Tears Go By* Wong develops spatial ambiguities through a peculiar use of colour and slow motion.

> Colour is always either too strong or too weak, and the film looks by turns gaudy or pale, over- or under- exposed, too red or too blue. The colour is never just right. Similarly, action is so problematic that slowing it down reveals nothing further, certainly not a moral or cognitive point. The more slowly and carefully we look at something, the more puzzlingly it looks back at us, it seems (Abbas,1997 p. 34).

In *Chungking Express* Wong's use of unusual visual speed appears again. Audiences can see policeman Tony Leung drinking coffee quite normally on the screen, but the scene behind him is moving fast, blurring into a vague human flow.

Abbas connects the use of these camera techniques with Wong's sense of a colonised culture.

> Because Wong's film consistently gives us a form of visualisation that problematises the visible, it can be said to represent and critique such a place. It does this in its use of colour and slow motion, but also in the way it produces a general sense of visual overload, seen, for example, in the running together of the fast and the slow; in the absence of transition between the idyllic and the brutal; in the choice of unusual camera angles that disorient, shown directly from above or below *(ibid.*, p. 45).

Abbas comments that the visual overload in MTV video functions to hold an audience's attention, while in Wong's film it suggests that attention itself cannot hold out against ultimate disappearance. Characters become mere *actants:* figures without real agency or autonomy, unconsciously enacting roles and destinies; moving in the pre-established grooves of a slot-game world – significant enough and familiar enough on its own terms, but oddly removed from more powerful realities, dictated from elsewhere.

7.4.4 Flexible production – multiple projects

To some degree Wong's production management indicates something of those pressures of indirection within his preferred method of work.

In some years, because of his lengthy shooting times, Wong has produced two films at once. One has always tended to be more commercial; the other less so. This habit has formed in part because of pressure from the film company. Wong commonly spends too much time and too many resources on the one production. In order to cover the costs and (re)gain the confidence of the production company, Wong has had to make a second, cheaper feature at almost at the same time. One example is in fact *Chungking Express,* produced in the process of dealing with the post-production on *Ashes of Time.* Uncharacteristically, it took Wong only three months to finish – not his usual one to two years. The actors all knew that there would be no script before shooting, and that Wong would change his ideas again and again, and often on site. He would also however insist on take after take, trying various angles and techniques. Even Wong himself was not always sure whether a particular shot was possible, or how it might finally become useful. In an echo of the lack of directedness Abbas locates inside the filmic techniques, Wong's own directing style appears to allow the film to dictate itself: to emerge from within the ensemble of acting, camera work and editing – even, as we have seen, *absent* a script.

7.4.5 Collaborative creativity

Two names appear so frequently on the list of Wong's shooting crew: Christopher Doyle and William Chang, that some in the industry call them the 'golden triangle'. Their collaboration creates exciting outcomes and surprising innovations – but is yet another sign of Wong's refusal to fully plan or control his direction.

Christopher Doyle comes from Australia, and is Wong's designated cinematographer. They have worked together since 1990. Doyle loves trying new methods on shoots. In *Days of Being Wild* he took on high-difficulty camera work. In *Happy Together*

he alternated black and white and colour scenes. *Chungking Express* used both slow camera speeds and hand-held camera shots to capture the feeling of thousands of people passing by. In *Fallen Angels* Doyle trialed super-wide angle shots to create the impression of the short distances but blocked communications which are central to urban daily life. Wong and Doyle both appreciate the play of light and shadow, and love to use rain and inverted reflective images to create closed and claustrophobic space around their antagonists. Perhaps because of their many common interests in literature and music they appear to work together seamlessly, and innovate with total confidence and consensus.

William Chang is the designated art director for Wong's films. He has been to Canada to study film and believes that Wong gives him the freedom and inspiration he needs to maximise his creativity. In Chang's view the burden of the art director is not, as cynics might suggest, to compensate the lack of a superstar, but to control the visual expression for the film – and with Wong's direction otherwise suppressing the integrative functioning of most other film projects, visual styling is certainly allowed through.

In the Mood for Love is a good example. Chang designed two colour-palettes for the movie: red, used for interior spaces like the kitchen, bar and canteen to give people a feeling of restless movement, and blue, used outside, to express a cold, lonely and hard-edged mood. Costumes change too, according to the antagonists' mood. The cheongsams on the actress, the wallpaper, and even a glass cup or a pair of ear-rings have been carefully selected by Chang to capture a finely detailed emotional charge (Yao Jun, 2005).

7.5 The pure and the impure: Art and commerce in uneasy relation

With this intriguing mix of quirky outsider productions, and yet a careful eye on commercial considerations, Wong has been able to create his own space within the Hong Kong film industry. The creativity of his productions is paramount, with critic Rene Torky commenting (2002) that although Wong references such a wide range of sources, he is not a post-modern director, being too caught up in current mainstream genres. To this extent he continues to meet the criteria for Badiou's *thesis of impurity* (2005): the view that cinema, because of its embeddedness in the popular and the commercial, never completely refines its art:

> The cinema is a place of intrinsic indiscernibility between art and non-art. No film, strictly speaking, is controlled by artistic thinking from beginning to end. It always bears absolutely impure elements within it, drawn from ambient imagery, from the detritus of other arts, and from conventions with a limited shelf life (p. 84).

While Wong's cinema may make more space than many in the Hong Kong repertoire for *artistic thinking*, it accommodates itself to the *impure elements* of the commercial genres which he continues to explore. Though few of these productions in fact achieved major box-office success Wong Ka-Wai remains among the most important figures in the Hong Kong industry. As Abbas comments, he created an entirely new space within Hong Kong's urban landscape: that space of cultural vision which Abbas himself identified as the *déjà disparu*, commenting that 'it cuts across different genres and historical periods, being very much the negative ground against which both time and action are experienced'. In his opinion, Wong's

productions relate to Hong Kong culture in ways that cannot be directly transposed. 'They go beyond allegory to challenge the definition of Hong Kong culture itself by questioning and dismantling the way we look at things' (Abbas 1997, p. 62). Add to this his bold attempt to take this vision into the heart of commercial production, and it begins to be possible to see precisely how central Wong Ka-Wai has been to the creative impetus within Hong Kong film – a model for the ways in which its central hybridism and fusion of forms are partly a cultural response, and partly an economically-driven accommodation to audience tastes. This careful balance – and even those qualities of *imbalance* it produces – move us much closer to a vision of what has been happening in the last few decades of Hong Kong film; and especially to how its distinctive brand of creativity works.

7.6 Another staple genre re-emerges: police drama and *Infernal Affairs*

One way of assessing how the ongoing traditions of Hong Kong's commercial film creativity were proceeding in this later period – supposedly the era of eclipse – is to examine those films made not in the kung fu or comedy genres of the Golden Era, but in the police and crime drama formats within which Wong Kar-wai had been experimenting and inventing renewal. In the summer of 2003, during the harshest time ever for the Hong Kong cinema industry, *Infernal Affairs 2* was in production - at the same time as *Infernal Affairs 3* was under preparation. The reason for all this urgency was the success of *Infernal Affairs*, so popular in 2002 that it took 28 billion Hong Kong dollars in only 11 days, and 30 billion overall. The Hong Kong Film Awards gave it seven trophies, and in the film competition marking the tenth anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China *Infernal Affairs* won best creative movie. It also won prizes at the Golden Horse Awards (for Taiwan and Hong Kong). Successful both in its creativity and at the box-office, it deserves detailed exploration.

7.6.1 A brief history of Hong Kong police movies

There has been a long history of Hong Kong police stories. This kind of movie has been popular in part because it evokes audience curiosity, with its focus on detection and the posing of a mystery to be resolved – at the same time as furnishing the material for an action movie, with all the fast-paced incidents and physicality, and the scope for dramatic visual effects. Wang Hai-Zhou (2005), in his work on the history of Hong Kong police movies, shows how long this genre has remained a staple of the industry.

Early Hong Kong-based police stories appeared during the New Wave of Hong Kong cinema. Previous films made by Golden Harvest and Shaw Brothers were unrelated to the local culture. The directors who created the New Wave began with action stories about the Hong Kong police – a world-famous force, with their colonial connections to the British policing system, sitting alongside even older Chinese traditions of detection and the bringing to justice of out-law gangs. Add the martial-arts background, and set the narratives against the backdrop of a major international port at China's gateway, and the formula could hardly fail. At the same time, these stories could only come from Hong Kong. What emerges is the first of the distinctively local film genres.

During those years the most famous productions were *Man on the Brink, Tiao Hui* (跳灰 in Chinese) and *System.* Most were based in shades of gray, the only way to handle stories about the police and the system at that time. Endings were mostly pessimistic. *Man on the Brink* by Alex Cheung Kwok-Ming became quite famous. It tells of a police undercover agent unable to gain the confidence of his gangster targets, and equally misunderstood by his lovers. At the end the only colleague who knows his true identity dies, and he himself then dies in action. The film reveals the depressing side of police life, and their difficult living conditions. The movie has become a classic in Hong Kong.

Gray Police portrays the human side of the police, at the same time as reflecting current local conditions. However, its gloomy mood and pessimism prevented it from achieving mainstream success. Emerging from these excessively downbeat New Wave films, a kind of comedic police story evolved. These films no longer focused on contemporary police reality, or set out to handle corruption or work conditions, but simply emphasised all the possible comedic effects arising from the extremes of human behavior with which policing must deal.

Jackie Chan's films are central to this moment, and helped create a new kind of police story for the screen. *Plan A* and the series of *Police Story* films developed a new genre in Hong Kong cinema, combining the characteristics of action comedy and police stories. The antagonists in Chan's movies become 'Police Heroes', and yet their lives have close connections with Hong Kong culture generally. Chan has tried – typically - to create a positive image of the Hong Kong police; no longer so pessimistic, and just a little mischievous. In his stories the central responsibility of the police is to protect the Hong Kong people, no matter whom. Chan's films emphasise danger and action, and each movie brings some new visual stimulation. However, his work has been criticised for its lack of attention to the internal emotional lives of his police characters. These characters display their qualities through martial arts moves, but audiences have no access to their thought processes; in part because the next defensive move must always be a surprise to the audience, as much as to the opponent. This does however limit the humanity of the films, with perhaps only an actor of Chan's status and training in physicality and expressivity able to bring off the levels of connection and sympathy they do manage to create.

Later productions by Ringo Lam managed to meet this need for audience empathy. *City on Fire,* which won best actor and best film in the Hong Kong Film Awards, is also about a police spy. Lam was interested in personalising his police characters, and wanted access to their thought-processes. He aimed at creating an image of trustworthiness: a stable and honourable hero, not however required to undertake heroic action sequences or to express lofty ideals. His police are altogether ordinary, confronting issues they cannot always resolve. *Beast Cop* and *Expect the Unexpected* focus on this new, realistic policing. In *Expect the Unexpected* the police manage to deal with important international matters - yet ultimately fail when confronting the problems of *small-potato* citizens... Audiences are left uncertain – as are the police characters themselves – as to whether they can solve cases or not: something which never occurs in 'hero' movies.

Another significant change is the transition towards to viewing policing as a collective and collaborative activity, never really dealt with through the one-off, individual, heroic intervention. *The Final Option* is well known for its stories of the SDU (Special Duty Unit 飛虎隊). The central protagonist here is very much part of a team, with the discipline of policing and its collective, corporate spirit emphasised. As long as everyone is fulfilling his role and doing his duty, all of society, these

films suggest, will be stable.

The *Infernal Affairs* series concept takes all of these developments into account. The spy or undercover agent concept, the collective spirit behind policing, and the in-depth focus on aspects of human nature are all illuminated by the extremes offered within these new police stories. The maturing of the various formulae seems to have intersected within this series, and the outcome marks a new high-water surge for Hong Kong film. This time too the success is built through attention to Hong Kong's own local social and cultural traditions – as contained within film itself.

7.6.2 Influence Six: Andrew Lau, the duplicity of the modern gangster, and the creative elements introduced by *Infernal Affairs*

Spy thrillers are not especially new in Hong Kong film. As the review above indicates, *Man on the Brink* and *City on Fire* both centred on the same topic. *Infernal Affairs* however is not only about spying, but about both a double agent, and a double plot. The police have set up an undercover agent to gain information on gangsters – but the gangs have simultaneously infiltrated the police. Many practitioners have called this a new *grand concept*, and regard it as a major innovation.

7.6.2 a Multiple plots

John Chong for instance has commented on how difficult it is to deal with this new concept, because it can potentially be regarded as improbable by audiences. The plot involves a gang boss selecting boys to be trained in the police academy. Only one boy may achieve the seniority needed to work as an effective agent, but the chances improve with the numbers recruited – so that the narrative implies an academy heavily laced with gang recruits! Meanwhile, the concept adds an entirely new tension to the concept of the agent undercover, and shows how, even at the fundamental level of plot, and within a saturated genre, innovation is still possible.

7.6.2 b Dislocations in time and space

One distinctive feature of the film *Infernal Affairs* is its lack of a significant time signature. The story simplifies its schema by purposely ignoring both time and location signs, compressing the movement of the film's actions, through the indistinct and culturally unbranded spaces of everyday modern, inner-urban city life. The tops of skyscrapers are used as preferred venues for trysts, making it hard to identify specific places, and strengthening tension. Being on the top of a tall building gives the feeling of being pushed to the ends of the world. There are few choices ahead: nowhere else to move on to. With so many movies finding ways to show a Hong Kong trying to ignore the need to acknowledge its identity, *Infernal Affairs* has managed yet another original coding. The sequels, *Infernal Affairs 2* and *Infernal Affairs 3*, return to a specific time, with the story developing alongside the process of Hong Kong's return to mainland China. In the meantime however, the entire series is marked by this indistinctiveness and indirectedness of the original, its vast popularity suggesting that these

time-space atmospherics evoked some form of recognition and affiliation with audiences.

At first sight it could appear that this film is playing with aspects of myth: embracing a Bakhtinian *chronotope* (remembering its definition as a time-place model) which is close to that of the Classical Graeco-Roman romance, and allows for unchanging, archetypal characters to move across the landscapes and events of their experiences, as if untouched by aspects of space or time. However the characters in *Infernal affairs* are too closely matched to their time-space foundation to admit this model, suggesting instead an entirely new chronotope behind the narrative – one which moves well beyond both the highly-structured and familiar *character arc* of Hollywood plots, and the character-development focus which Bakhtin identifies for the modern novel. Instead, what the *Infernal affairs* films evoke is closer to the most recent workings of time-space understandings, which van Leeuwen (2008) suggests are growing out of the time-waiting asynchronicities of the digitised personal communications era. He comments that 'Time in the postindustrial age is fragmented and multiple' (p. 84; see also Castells, 2007), and proposes that

> Society has become polyrhythmic. In the vacuum created by the disappearance of universal and taken-for-granted rules of clock time, authoritative timing may reassert itself in places where it is no longer needed. But this creates friction and conflict. The solution has to lie elsewhere. Temporal coherence in a polyrhythmic society will have to rely more on social timing *(loc. cit.)*.

Van Leeuwen suggests that an early-indicator behaviour of this polyrhythmic time may lie in music, and especially African music and its various globally-popular derivatives, where 'all players use their own timing', noting that 'polyrhythmic music celebrates individuality and difference' *(loc. cit.)*. Interestingly, this fits recent work on community and multiculturalism (see especially Delanty, 2003, for definitions of post-multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism, pp. 104-105), which emphasise difference and pluralisation. If van Leeuwen is right in this suggestion of the evolution of a new mode of 'social' time, most notable in concentrated urban spaces, and marked by a polyrhythmic social (dis)connectedness, then films such as *Infernal affairs,* alongside the work of Wong Kar-wai, may be among the first indicators of its emergence.

7.6.3 Polyrhythmic (dis)connectedness: youth sub-culture and *Initial D*

Initial D dominated the box-office in 2005. It was re-written by Andrew Lau from a Japanese cartoon, and stars super-singer Jay Chow, new idol Edison Chan and experienced actor Anthony Wong, and centres on a group of youngsters who love racing cars during the middle of the night. Like the successful series *Young and Dangerous*, the movie is full of youthful energy and represents this youth sub-culture in romantic ways. The film concept however was adopted with commercial considerations upfront.

In order to strengthen target audience appeal – and play to the digital multi-connectedness of that demographic - the movie's theme song, featuring Jay Chow, was released on his latest CD and played on radio and TV shows. The acutely commercial focus on these elements extended to ways of promoting this film both before and after its release – as did its scheduling into cinemas during the summer break, to attract young audiences in the holiday period. Here is an instance of polyrhythmic *promotionalism:* a film positioned as a single product, not just placed into the ongoing stream of films showing

in cinemas, but produced and marketed to a target demographic, with all of the preferences and pre-dispositions of that group in mind. So what has led Lau to this hyper-aware marketing of his films – and how far may it be a major way forward within Hong Kong movie-making in the intensified and cross-platform collaborative productivity of the creative industries era?

7.7 Andrew Lau's Career Path

Andrew Lau is another well-known Hong Kong director. During the years selected for this study many of his pictures, including *The Storm Riders*, *A Man Named Hero*, *Infernal Affairs I, 2 & 3* and *Initial D* have been the most popular in their respective years, marking the emergence of an energetic and creative director, with the capacity to respond to new conditions.

Andrew Lau Wai-Keung has worked as a director, producer, and cinematographer. He most famously collaborated with Ringo Lam on *City on Fire* (1987) as well as with Wong Kar-Wai on *Chungking Express* (1994) as cinematographer, and has directed the Wong Jing-produced sex-exploitation movie *Naked Killer 2* (1993) and the immensely popular triad themed *Young and Dangerous* (1996), including its five sequels and one prequel. Subsequently, Lau collaborated with *Young and Dangerous* star Ekin Cheng on the comic book-based *The Storm Riders* (1998), the highest grossing Hong Kong movie at the time, famed for its use of special effects. Lau went on to make several less successful titles in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including *The Park* (2003). In 2002, he established Basic Pictures. The first three films from the company were the hit *Infernal Affairs* trilogy. He reteamed with Alan Mak to co-direct *Initial D* (2005), marking singer Jay Chow's acting debut, and the 2006 film *Confession of Pain.* His latest effort is the 2007 film *The Flock* (Hollywood movie), which marks his first English language film (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Lau).

7.7.1 The peak genres of the commercial, embedded in the social

Lau is thus a highly commercial force within Hong Kong film, having tried many genres, mostly with great success. As early as 1987 his collaborative work *City on Fire* produced a film regarded as an impressive spy story. The main innovation in this movie lies in its focus on the antagonists' emotional life, and the degree to which they become rounded characters with full life trajectories. These police agents are no longer ultra-cool heroes, but encounter everyday dilemmas like everyone else. Yet at the same time Lau is happy to draw material from sources which run counter to this interest in deep characterisation. He numbers parodies for instance among his favourites, and is happy to adapt already-popular subcultural formats, such as *manga* and *anime* texts. Many of his productions take their stories from re-written parodies. Among them the *Young and Dangerous* series, popular in the years 1996-2000, included the third most popular film of 1998.

With the gangster genre an established hot property in the Hong Kong industry Lau sets his stories into the same frame as John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1989), one of the all-time classics - but turns his camera towards the younger generation. In a departure from Woo's style, no antagonists in Lau's films wear suits. They choose to appear totally distinctive, changing

their hair colour, and dressing in strangely-cut clothes. While Woo's gangsters dress formally, attempting to appear wealthy, Lau wants the world to know they are the gangsters. In all other respects their lives are those of contemporary young people. They go to bars, perform karaoke, and keep fit on the basketball courts underneath their apartment buildings. The energy of the young is present in every instance.

There are further connections with the broader Hong Kong society in these gangster plots. The gang image may have become stylish – but the mob ethos still demands that personal loyalty which marked the spirit of *Jiang Hu.* Gang members act collectively, even as they fight internally over money, power and beautiful women. Lau comments in the interview for this study (see below) that he does not want to promote violence, and insists that the plots of his films show that wrong-doing will be punished. One critic goes so far as to conclude that Lau's gangster movies have provided a positive model for personal values in troubled times. In the years between 1997 and 2000, when financial storms hit Hong Kong's economy and destabilised life across the entire population, the *Young and Dangerous* series suggested that the young in Hong Kong could still live autonomous and eventful lives, even in the most difficult times – as long as they maintained the energy and group-focus needed to overcome their difficulties. These pictures, for all their focus on entertainment, crime, and violence, presented audiences with core cultural values.

In part the dynamism of this formula stems from Lau's embrace of special digital effects to enhance and update the energy of his films. *The Storm Riders* is another successful moving picture re-written from a comic. The original story comes from a famous cartoon made in Hong Kong, so that audiences were already very familiar with the content. The added appeal came from the special computer techniques which Lau introduced from Hollywood. The film took almost two years to complete, with Lau admitting in his interview for this study that learning computer techniques in mid-career is difficult – as was gaining film-company support for the experiment. After the movie's success, Lau was considered 'the representative of Hong Kong computer acrobatics' (Andrew Lau Interview on *Talk Asia* /2007). Lau himself however has remarked that a computer is just a helpful piece of equipment, insisting that movies should concentrate on the content of the stories and the performances of the antagonists *(ibid.).*

This suggests that Lau occupies the same *transitional* space as Jackie Chan and the re-emergent Stephen Chow within Hong-Kong's film creativity: their focus still firmly upon the social and cultural traditions of their community – albeit read through a keenly commercial lens, even as they adapt to the new trends and sub-cultural formations of the day. But are they alone in this? Are there indicators of a new 'film creative' emerging; one entering from different backgrounds, whose pre-dispositions enable them to adapt to changed and changing conditions, with less difficulty than Lau for instance has reported. One interesting case in point is filmmaker Johnnie To.

7.8 Influence Seven: Johnnie To, Hong Kong's urban modernity, and its realisation through a focus on personalised style

Johnny To Ki-Fung is a filmmaker who has gained both a local fan base and international recognition. An assistant TV

director in the Shaw Studios era, To became famous when his 1989 film *All About Ah Long*, starring Chow Yun-Fat, became one of the biggest box office hits of the year. In 1996, To and frequent collaborator Wai Ka-Fai formed 'Milkyway Image', a production house that specialises in cost-efficient independent films – most notably of course those made by To and Wai, as well their frequent collaborations with Hong Kong creatives from Law Wing Cheong to scriptwriter Yau Nai-Hoi.

Although he has directed extremely popular comedies and rom-coms such as *Justice, My Foot, Needing You...* and *Love on a Diet*, To's more serious works are mostly about masculinity and male bonding (*The Mission*, and *Running Out of Time*), or else are simply about guns (again, *The Mission*). Another theme is fate and the concept that our lives may not be under our control (*PTU, Expect the Unexpected* and *Running on Karma*).

To's films have played around the international festival circuit. *Throw Down* was screened Out-of-Competition at the Venice Film Festival in 2004, and *Exiled* was shown in Competition in 2006. Four of his movies were featured in the Cannes Film Festival: *Breaking News* in the Out-of-Competition midnight screening in 2004, and *Election* in Competition in 2005, and his most recent, *Triangle, Election 2* (aka *Triad Election)* was screened in an Out-of-Competition midnight screening at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006.

In North America, To's films have been consistently screened at the Toronto Film Festival. *The Mission, Fulltime Killer, PTU, Breaking News, Throw Down* and *Mad Detective* all screened between 1999 and 2007. In 2006, *Election, Election 2* (*Triad Election),* and *Exiled* were screened.

In 2005 To received the Time Machine Career Achievement Award at the Festival de Cine de Sitges, Europe's most prestigious film festival, specialising in genre films.

In 2007, *Election 2* and *Exiled* were released in the US. To was also honoured as a *Filmmaker in Focus* at the 2007 Rotterdam Film Festival. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnnie_To).

None of this should suggest that To in any way deviates from the Hong Kong preoccupation with commercial success for his films. Not only have his own films received box office support from Hong Kong audiences; he is a keen collaborative worker in the industry, often crossing generic boundaries to work on productions outside his own favoured formats. How then has this degree of flexibility not impeded the development of his own distinctive styling of films?

7.9 Commercial success

Certainly To understands his position and his responsibility as a commercial director. As early as 1988, seven years after his first failed production *The Enigmatic Case*, his second film *The Eight Happiness* succeeded at the box-office. He has directed Stephen Chow films, including *The Mad Monk* and *Justice, My Foot*, the latter winning the Box Office for 1992. Besides these, he also has produced best sellers like *Needing You, Love on a Diet*, and *Running on Karma* – among others.

There are common elements within these films. Major roles are all acted by super stars like Andy Lau, Sammi Cheung, and Cecelia Cheung. Storylines are relatively straightforward, the main stories mostly centered on romantic love. The success of these highly commercial films has insured that Johnny To is recognised as a capable director – and yet he was not himself happy with the industry culture behind the production of formula-based films. In an interview (Jonny To Interview on *Talk Asia* /2005) he remembered that when he was working with Stephen Chow on *The Mad Monk* he felt dissatisfied because he had to take direction from the star. Working in the shadow of such an established and experienced film creative as Chow, he could not express his own ideas – and in any case, the film was designed to cater to conventional audience tastes. To believed that he could do much better - he wanted to do better. He began to construct his own production style.

Acutely aware that in the Hong Kong market investors insist on complete returns for their money, To knew that only commercial success could maintain the opportunity to try his own ideas. To gain relatively independent control in producing *PTU* he worked on more than five commercial films, including *My Left Eye Sees Ghosts*. His bankability guaranteed by the commercial success of these films, he was able to develop his own signature style in a further series – a degree of autonomy enhanced by starting his own company, Milkyway Image.

7.10 Personalised style through genre variation

This commercial credibility, enhanced by his emergence among the ranks of a new generation of directors who have worked in Television; a group which includes Ann Hui and Tsui Hark, has meant that To understands the powers of film genre.

Genre films contain internal rules and reproduce consistent character types. Audiences are familiar with these genres, and arrive with clear expectations. With gangster films for instance a major Hong Kong genre, gangster stories are repeated again and again, year by year, the classics often brought back for an updated treatment with the next generation of stars. The formula however twists in the telling, introducing the sorts of variation and new creativity (in(ter)vention) which interest To.

Traditional narrative modes in Hong Kong gangster films focus on the fire power of each side, and emphasise the action through direct fighting. To however uses the genre to create a tense psychological contest. *Running out of Time* is a good example. A smart thief and a clever policeman form a direct one-on-one competitive relationship. In this case though the thief becomes seriously ill, and wants to do something meaningful with the last days of his life. The film's 'action' plays at a greater depth across concepts of good and evil, and questions the ultimate meaning of lives.

A different game of cops and robbers is also played out in *PTU*. While at face level it appears to offer the usual fare of police intent upon catching a thief, the narrative develops into a far more complex account of the relationships among police oficers, the psychological behavior of the thief, and so on. Once again, this can be regarded as a film which breaks out of genre.

Breaking News in 2004, yet another story about thieves and the police, not only reveals the psychological contest between the two sides, but focuses on the use of modern communications equipment – a feature which massively advantages the

criminals, so that the police have to form alliances with the news media to refocus public attention onto their cause. The film thus plays across the very ground over which it constructs its own narrative: the degree to which the public find crime sagas action-filled and thrilling – and the moralities they enact charged with social and cultural meaning. Here, with crime moving to exploit that fascination to its own advantage, policing and civic order – under-resourced and unglamorous – are faced with yet another set of hyper-modern compromises. Along the way To's film portrays ethical dilemmas every bit as complex and irresolvable as those of the *small potato* citizens who constitute its audience.

Johnny To's personal re-conceptualisations of these established genres has helped develop the generic variations which keep the Hong Kong product vibrant, and help it address not only audiences in a complex and endlessly adapative hyper-modern urban locale, but those regional and global film consumers confronting similar pressures and dilemmas. His re-imagined crime thrillers, always pushing the contemporary that one step beyond, express his own responses to modern life - and to some extent extend those of his audiences. By grounding what is a somewhat bleak view of human nature and social pressure in the otherwise comforting structural framing of the crime narrative (see especially Belsey, 2002), To keeps his box office appeal – yet pushes into some of the more complex ethical and cultural issues of the day.

7.11 Personalising the visual: To's characteristic dark image

Matching this new vision of social complexity and moral ambivalence are the innovative effects produced within To's styling of the visual image.

To is noted for some very specific effects. The first is the use of gray, shaded, cool colours. No matter the time of day or night, scenes are always bathed in cool light and colour tone, suited to narratives of exile, where antagonists lead shadowy existences, outside the law, often undercover. In such literally shadey places motivations and even identities are only half revealed – and sometimes psychologically as well as motivationally only half understood. The setting underpins the narrative structure and the slower pace of the overall action. Compared with other crime films, To's productions are considered relatively restrained in their action – even quiet. Fight scenes are not common in these movies, with the focus instead on the moral environment, character psychology and motivation, and the complex relationship between antagonists. The structure of these stories foregrounds description, and To emphasises every shot, to produce an expressive and visually rich filmic texture. As a result the cutting is mostly simple and direct. No time is wasted on unimportant details, with tension carefully maintained by long focus. Some audience members even complain of not understanding plot development, for in these films much of what is going on is carried not in the narrative, but in the art of film itself. To's is a total product, with all aspects of a movie involved in what it 'tells'.

Typical of many directors who totalise their production techniques in such ways, in the interview with Johnny To produced for this study, he refused direct comment on his own or any other directors' productions. He insists that a finished work explains itself, and considers it a waste of time to focus on past productions. However, in other interviews (2003) he has commented that the movies *King of Comedy* and *The Monkey Goes West* by Stephen Chow are that director's best productions, and admitted that *Infernal Affairs* is in his view one of the best films produced during the ten years since Hong

Kong's return to mainland China. In other words To, like all Hong Kong film creatives, keeps a close eye on the market, and knows very well what is going on, industry-wide. While he may be intent upon re-styling the product, and re-directing the focus of its favoured genres, his productions remain both within-genre, and inherently commercial – to this extent, still *in(ter)ventive* in their creativity.

7.12 Four core features of Hong Kong film's creativity

This analysis of the box-office best sellers during the past twenty years – two decades which witnessed the steep rise and fall of Hong Kong cinema's Golden Era and Decline and produced three different orientations towards film as a creative product - makes it much easier to understand the overall developments marking Hong Kong film in that time. It is at last becoming possible to make sense of the creative directions established within its productions.

Four key areas have emerged to explain what is most characteristic of Hong Kong film's creative culture.

7.12.1 Always commercial at core: The power of the super star

In this twenty year period not a single successful film failed to caste super stars as antagonists. Although big directors like Johnny To have said that it is not always easy to work with these major stars, each entrenched in their own forms of creativity, their presence remains such a selling point with audiences that no director or producer seeking box office success dares focus on unknowns.

What this reveals is the importance to Hong Kong cinema of commercial success – and that means attracting local audiences. While future production funding and studio resourcing rest on the reputation for ongoing success, no Hong Kong film will stray too far from an established formula – a feature which impacts on other elements of film making, but which is especially evident within casting. Not that this is in itself unproblematic – for as several directors have indicated, some of the most successful and enduring superstars work hard at protecting their own image, and either refuse or resist direction within roles which shift or tinker with their image. Some, like Jackie Chan, work positively with their own reputation, finding creativity within their own performance style, and ceaselessly introducing innovative and imaginative changes into their acting repertoire. Others overpower the director's vision, even re-building their own career trajectory in order to regain control of their own films.

On the other hand, directors like Wong Ka-Wai have proven themselves adept at taking advantage of super stars. With box-office appeal guaranteed, they have been able to push their stars hard, extending their performance range and leading audiences to anticipate something new with each release. The stars' careers prosper – and achieve greater longevity, less likely to exhaust the pool of roles, and able to 'age' into new character-types. The downside of course is the tendency for established stars to monopolise the major roles, and so block the development of younger artists. Most of the current superstars such as Tony Leung, Andy Lau, Stephen Chow and Jackie Chan are over 40 years old. Hong Kong cinema needs to attend to generational change. Otherwise it runs the risk of losing audiences, or failing to address specific types of

creative renewal, even before it begins to lose experienced actors. The impact a major star has upon a production – an impact registered clearly both in box office returns and the directors' accounts of production cultures where the hierarchy of control has so often been with the actor – is an important and too often disregarded part of movie creativity, exerting powerful back-draft influence upon writers, cinematographers, fight and stunt choreography and art design. The formula for survival and renewal is difficult, but clear. Directors who are interested in the commercial power of superstars need to thoroughly excavate their substantial potential, as well as remembering to find opportunities for new comers.

7.12.2 Established genres – with constant variation

While no major themes track across the best sellers on the list of Hong Kong box office successes prepared for this study, some narrative genres appear again and again, and are entirely characteristic of Hong Kong film.

The obvious example is the martial arts genres. As soon as Bruce Lee made Hong Kong martial arts films famous in the 1970s, they became the hot genre. Following Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan added comedic elements into traditional martial arts and transferred the legendary kung fu master protagonist into a real hero, but one founded upon *the little man* and embedded in contemporary daily life. At almost the same time, Stephen Chow added the martial arts element into his *mo lei tau* comedies. The impression of what was at the core of martial arts films totally changed – and this set the precedent for ongoing innovation. Later, in the turn into the 21st century, visual effects have been emphasised, with films from *Hidden Dragon, Crouching Tiger* to *Kung Fu* stressing the hyper-realised graphic beauty of martial arts as one of their most important selling points.

A second generic strength within Hong Kong film has been the crime thriller, with special emphasis on the cops-and-robbers pursuit of the *roman policier*. Narratives within the twenty-year period sampled have however shifted, to stress the relationships formed among police officers, methods of criminal detection and police procedure, and relations among thieves: the insider view of the world of crime. The screen portrayal of the police officer is becoming more and more detailed, with their former role as mere agent of the action-plot shifting into the psychology of character: police officers confronting criminals, fellow-officers and even themselves, as they struggle to find a balanced and viable social self within the extremes of human behavior they confront. Films such as *Infernal Affairs* capture all of these new focal directions, and audiences respond with enthusiasm to this simultaneous deepening of characterisation, and shifting of the action-plot into the familiar and everyday world of real social engagement.

It is this redevelopment of the crime genre which explains the ongoing appeal within Hong Kong cinema of the gangster movie. The gangster genre is, quite simply, the industry's favourite, justifying the portrayal of the most extreme behaviors at the level of both morality and action. A society locked into the efficient and fast-paced modernity of a small urban setting finds its release in these high-testosterone killing-sprees of chase sequences and shoot-outs, while the themes of re-doubled duplicity, concealed identity, treachery and betrayal, familiar from traditional Chinese novels, give audiences a vision of their own experiences of ultimate socio-political uncontrol. Created in these films is a careful deflection or 'disappearance': the impression of a world behind daily life, which might at any time unleash malevolent forces. Whether founded in off-shore

politics or unregulated exposure to neo-liberal economic competiveness, this vision is squarely rooted in the drive within all industrialised and urbanised states towards the sorts of melodrama which represent their own powerlessness. These themes thus offer audiences in part a cathartic release into the powerful aggressions they most fear, and a simultaneous drive towards justice, ever-hopeful that right will prevail. If resolutions of the petty disputes of the real world disappoint, the gangster film compensates – in mega-proportions.

Gangster stories, it seems, will never end – and they continue to help Hong Kong audiences bridge their own sense of anxious social and political alienation into a more directly ethical cultural practice drawn on the everyday, bringing them their own dilemmas, magnified into significance.

7.12.3 Capturing the dynamic: Experimental camera techniques

In terms of camera skills, huge progress has been made in twenty years. Directors have worked hard to present innovative images on screen, trying new ways of using the camera, and introducing whole new repertoires of action to meet the potential of digital image-processing software in post-production and editing. They have tried hand-held cameras to create live motion in their images. Colour palettes have been brought into play, to express mood and introduce a form of restraint into high-tension, high-action films. Hong Kong has yet however to construct the cross-media collaborations with industries such as game development which would guarantee state-of-the-art digital creativity.

All practitioners interviewed admitted that the development of digital technologies across the industry has helped them produce better work. When Tsui Hark came back from America he immediately tried to re-style martial arts films. Though this was not so popular at the time, many people remember these films, and appreciated his courage and confidence. In the 1990s, Andrew Lau went to the USA to study the uses of computer-enhancement in film. *The Storm Riders* took two years to finish, but the box-office was so good that he considers it well worthwhile. Today more and more films user computer-enhanced production, with even long-established performer and director Stephen Chow's two films from 2001 to 2004 introducing computer graphics design. To date however this has been the film industry's professionals adapting to digital techniques, rather than the sort of collaboration seen in new rival production cultures – such as Korea. The need for future creatives to emerge with both sets of understandings: to value and seek out the innovations of the new digital screen media, and to research and understand the multiple consumption patterns of today's mobile screen-media 'audiences' (see especially Castells *et al.*, 2007), is an urgent feature awaiting industry-wide attention.

At the same time Hong Kong's sense of a locational modernity is reaching the limits of visual expressivity, as seen in To's introduction of distortion shots to reveal a cityscape and urban culture now finding difficulty in both action-shooting and psychological projection of its own internal frustrations. Filmic techniques, such as the introduction of a limited colour palette to intensify those frustrations, playing them against visual restraint as a comparative; or Wong Kar-wai's technique of breaking the time-framing of camera shots, running fast speed crowd shots against real-time focus on a protagonist, have similarly reached their limit. Many of these tricks confuse audiences, working subliminally rather than at a conscious level of awareness. Digital techniques, still in the experimental stage as regards a developed filmic language, may provide a second

repertoire and action-scape: a sort of *Second Life* cityscape of the mind, onto which the thematic identified here may be more directly projected. But such techniques are still in development.

Certainly Hong Kong directors and filmmakers seem as willing to experiment and to write anew their film language as any others – and equally certainly, the new repertoire suits their focus on action-sequences, urban settings and psychological insights. In a sense Hong Kong film has an advantage, its sustained interest in plots involving duplicity and an ambivalent ethics established through contested morality lending itself well to the first and second generation of digital effects, focused on morphing, scene transformations and the machine-body interface of the cyborg. The entire play over appearance and reality, rendered digitally as materiality versus simulation, sits right inside the crime genre – so that experimentation is likely to succeed, in box office terms, within Hong Kong's preferred genres. Hong Kong's very explicitly commercial creativity is well positioned to accommodate this level of digital innovation. But it may need to question the future directions of genre preferences – and to do so in collaboration with other digital media production industries. The question is: can this predisposition towards *transitional creativity:* a one-step-forward, one-step-back linking of past and future, bridge it on into the next phase? Is this ongoing *deflective* mode of addressing distinctively Hong Kong preoccupations able to confront the more fragmented and diverse issues of the new century?

7.12.4 The Hong Kong behind the film: Identity politics and cinematic creativity

What remains in question is how far these characteristics of a Hong Kong cinema represent just the history of the many material practices and production experiences of the industry, emerging randomly across the past two decades, and how far they relate to the economy and society through which they emerged.

How have the twenty years of a very specific social history beyond the industry impacted upon it – especially given its tendency towards a commercial orientation within its funding models? Has the ongoing cultural location of this filmmaking – intensified by both the economic success of Hong Kong as a global trade centre, and its cultural rapprochement with mainland China, influenced the movies it produced? While the definition of creativity has not itself been discussed in detail in this section, significant elements of creativity have been traceable – and each has, in its way, articulated with these sorts of consideration. What appears to be emerging is a sense in which Hong Kong's cinema has been, and remains, both intensely *local* in its address, built very clearly – because of its commercial orientation – into and out of the preferences and identity of the local people and socioscape; and yet at the same time *global:* able to absorb and re-play new influences, such as digital effects, in locally-characteristic but internationally exotic and distinctive ways.

Box office best sellers may not be number-one choice when it comes to considering the most creative films in many people's eyes, yet this study suggests that both the extent and types of creativity displayed within the Hong Kong film industry show that commercialism can produce, rather than inhibit, creativity.

Further: from a study initially conceived to address 'the problem' of falling returns and a decline from a former 'Golden Era' for Hong Kong film, this analyst at least is beginning to argue that the seeds are already apparent of an industry and a

film culture very likely to prove able to sustain itself successfully into the future.

Two issues however remain. Given the sorts of local and in-house industry debate which initiated this study: the view within Hong Kong that its film industry was in trouble; and yet the clear indicators within this close analysis of box office success and ongoing potential for redevelopment, why is there such a negative bias within the industry? How far is this a true reflection of past achievements and current capacities; how far yet another aspect of Hong Kong's hyper-sensitivity to its curious position as slightly outside the focus of the Chinese mainland, and subject to the external economic forces of the unregulated 'free trade' global market?

Secondly, having located within industry practice a series of acutely responsive innovations across a range of production roles and tasks, what has Hong Kong film itself contributed to the repertoires of creative movie-making – and how far might it be regarded, in its own right, as a distinctively *creative industry?*

In the following section, which reports on interview discussions on these issues with major figures in Hong Kong film, these broader aspects of creativity will be stressed.

CHAPTER 8:

The Creatives: Interviews with influential Hong Kong film professionals

8.0 Group One: From *Tradition* to *Transition* – Andy T. W. Lau
Ng See Yuen
Jackie Chan

The common wisdom within the Hong Kong film industry may be that it has seen its days of greatness pass: that its audiences are passing to other, newer, media; its regional South East Asian markets now flooded by rival product from rising national film industries; its initiative stifled by the rigid demands of mainland censorship, and by its own failure as an industry to develop a systematic industry-wide practice or to guarantee a flow of trained new talent across all of its professional categories; yet the films produced in Hong Kong have proven as innovative, as audience responsive, as distinctively Hong Kong in their styling as ever - and are becoming more internationally successful (Yau, 2001, p. 43).

What the box office review in previous chapters has suggested is that rather than extinguishing Hong Kong's creativity in film making, the so-called Extinction Period (Abbas, 1997, p. 23), with all of its new economic and political restrictions, has in fact forced a more creative approach. It has positioned the industry within a more challenging, but more self-aware and market-responsive environment, in which one common element: *flexibility,* has produced an unanticipated survival (Zhen, 2002, p. 86).

This section of the study sets out to examine what that flexibility might mean in terms of creative film making, questioning eight major figures within the film industry. Together they have creative experience stretching back to the Golden Era, but careers which have proven able to adapt into these days of supposed Extinction. What do Hong Kong's most prominent directors, actors, producers and cinematographers see as having ensured their industry's survival? Which films do they see as most memorable, most distinctive, and most successfully realised – and why? What do they make of Hong Kong's film future? How are they positioning themselves for it - and how do they see it responding to the new economic and political constraints, and to *creative industries* policies?

At core such questions remain focused upon creativity: the capacity to work within budgets, audience tastes, technological limits and new capacities, and socio-cultural dictates, including censorship – but to produce within those constraints films which are at once innovative and yet familiar; which meet, and yet exceed, audience expectations. Working responsively, and always collaboratively, as film makers must; often unable to impose their individual vision upon a film, in the traditions of the European film *auteur,* or the Hollywood studio mogul (Teo, 1997, p. 61), how does the Hong Kong film creative work?

The replies which follow represent a range of possible perspectives, collected from the various professional roles which bring films into being, and from across the generic divides of Hong Kong's preferred film types. Each interview will first be contextualised within the details of the respondent's own film career, to enable his views to be assessed against the background of his work, and the era of his greatest accomplishment. Following each interview, the content will be used to summarise and characterise the views expressed, building a composite picture of how creativity is regarded from inside the Hong Kong industry.

This will allow the study to return to its original research question: whether Hong Kong film will prove able to retain and even rebuild and expand upon its early reputation for novel and dynamic film production. With the box office review conducted above beginning to suggest that maybe such potential is indeed still present within the film industry, and that its features may run deep into and out from a local Hong Kong orientation to its world, can these notable film creatives provide any hints as to what exactly is needed to sustain and enhance film, within Hong Kong's embrace of a new and integrated *creative industries* approach (Hartley, 2005, p. 11) to media production in the global/digital era?

To answer these questions, the study has been fortunate enough to obtain interviews with major Hong Kong film makers. All have been selected because of their sustained professional success – even if their responses have at times indicated how hard-won that success may have been. All were invited to comment on exactly the same questions – the degree to which continuity and consensus can be established across their replies helping build an overview of current industry pressures, and potential. At the same time, each took his answers, to a greater or lesser degree, in a distinctive direction, working from his own experiences within the industry, and suggesting a range of views, as well as of professional angles on the specifics of the industry's current challenges.

This range was to some degree anticipated, the selection of interviewees fixing on those who could represent all the major professional roles within movie production, to test whether there might be a particular element of Hong Kong film work which is currently problematic. This aspect of the study focus proved however especially interesting, as will become evident. The ways in which *the creatives* interviewed so frequently reported having crossed between production roles; or commented upon unusual power relations within the industry, as compared with other national film production cultures, seems pertinent to the flexibility and adaptability currently demanded of film industries – a feature which has also been identified elsewhere as a major element of the new 'informational' or mobile-digital media environment's reorganisation of everyday life and work into the twenty-first century (see especially Castells, 1996). At the same time there proves to be much within these responses which also suggests an especially distinctive, and localised, Hong Kong industry response to such challenges – and the analysis will return to this point as it enters the concluding chapters.

8.1 Andy T. W. Lau: From Golden Era actor to 21st century director-producer

1. *Please briefly introduce your career path from 1980.*

Andy T.W. Lau, an experienced actor in TV series and movies; came to work at TVB in 1981 and began to act in movies in 1982. In recent years, also a movie producer and director.

In 1982 nominated as the most promising newcomer in the Hong Kong Film Festival Awards and was honoured as best actor in the Hong Kong Film Festival Awards and the Golden Bauhinia Awards respectively in 2000 and 2001. In 2004, a role in *Infernal Affairs 3,* for the first time, received the best actor award at the Taiwan Golden Horse Awards; in 2006, the Asia movie-maker highlighted at the Fusan Film Festival; in 2007, gained the Great Asian Award for Success at the Box Office in the Asian Film Awards hosted by the Hong Kong International Film Festival. Since 1981, appeared in more than 100 movies.

2. *How would you evaluate the development of Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s on? What are its milestones and turning points? What are its main characteristics?*

Undeniably, the *Infernal Affairs* series is an important milestone in Hong Kong film, and people are still taking delight in talking about it.

A script of Hong Kong origin gained international attention and was impressively present on the international stage. It can be viewed as a turning point in Hong Kong's film industry.

Besides this, the film *Hidden Dragon, Crouching Tiger* has had an undoubtedly far-reaching impact on Chinese films. Original films made in the Chinese language have finally found a place on the world stage. This inspires movie makers to make more effort in regard to creativity, contributing to the subsequent emergence of movies set in ancient China - such as *Hero, The Promise, House of Flying Daggers,* and *Banquet.* Chinese films have been gradually accepted by the world.

3. *Can you talk about your impression of Hong Kong film culture? What marks its production culture at the local level?*

All these years Hong Kong films have been comparatively more localised than those in other Asian areas, which is, on the one hand, an attraction point and, on the other hand, an obstacle to the world market.

The themes, formats, and styles of Hong Kong films are featured as a local characteristic, which is not a problem for wide acceptance in the local market; but once they are in the world market, they are incomprehensible. The localised subject matter, language, and performance are good enough to resonate with international audiences, but to establish

this image on an international stage and to be in the world's mainstream may be difficult.

4. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films of the 1980s, the 1990s and those after 2000?*

Generally speaking, we have been making progress all these years.

In shooting and producing, we are obviously more serious than before. The production standards are being updated all the time, especially on work after 2000, even to the international level.

In addition to the improved standard of the staff behind the scenes, the performances of the actors are more sophisticated, more diversified and profound.

5. *What do you think are the main elements which have affected the creative development of the Hong Kong film industry?*

Mainly talent, I think. The film industry proceeds always from human beings and humanity. Those who remain in this business are fond of and are focused on movies, as the ebb in the fortunes of films has already got rid of those who thought of it only as a way of making a living.

6. *How would you define 'creativity' in Hong Kong cinema? Is it related to the subject, format, content, or style of a film, or is it something else?*

There has been less and less creativeness in Hong Kong films, for they have to cater to other tastes, such as those of the mainland. Sometimes for the sake of acceptance, we sacrifice creativity to accommodate cultural difference...

7. *What do you think are the main influences on the creativity of Hong Kong cinema?*

There are constant factors influencing film creativeness - for example, commercial considerations in adapting to new markets. But these are not just good or bad, favourable or unfavourable. Environment is just an objective fact, not the key to creativity itself. Since the environment is changing all the time, we need to adapt to all kinds of conventions to obtain the greatest creativity. Most of the time, creativity involves capturing a changeable world.

8. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films and others? As 'the Hollywood of the East', what are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood?*

When it comes to competing with Hollywood films, Hong Kong films are not in the least inferior in regard to the vitality of their creativity, and the fluent and flexible flow of producing procedures. The standard might be based in Hollywood. Hollywood films may have an advantage in post production, because they have better hardware and

software in animation and special effects.

Hong Kong actors have some difficulty getting into the main stream in Hollywood because of their skin, their culture and their background. As long as they adapt their style and find a position, they can make it in the international market.

9. *How do you think the local profession sees 'creativity'?*

Nowadays, the opportunities movie producers face are more and more challenging. At the same time, more and more visible and invisible constraints exist. For example, to enter the mainland market, there are various commercial considerations, including the examination and approval of the mainland. At present, film producers know more about how to achieve maximum creativity within a fixed framework. It takes more effort. But it doesn't mean that there is no good work or fine creativity. Within the changing environment movie producers need some time to adapt and to find an optimal point of balance. I believe that the present state is only a bottleneck in a transitional period. Afterwards, the whole environment will improve.

10. *Can you talk about international evaluations of the 'creative' in films from Hong Kong?*

Because of commercial factors, Hong Kong films are actually unable to enter the international mainstream at this stage. Only Chinese films invested in by Hollywood can reach there, such as *Lust and Caution,* or *Hidden Dragon, Crouching Tiger. The Departed* is not one of them. International audiences do really appreciate an authentic Hong Kong version, but are mostly quite unconscious of the origin of these films. Therefore, Hong Kong films still stay local. Since international audiences have not yet come into contact with *real* Hong Kong film, it is still too early to talk about their evaluation of our creativity in these films.

11. *How about local audience responses towards the 'creative' within Hong Kong films?*

Hong Kong local or ordinary audiences do respond, and are especially positive to good new examples. I would like to say that the Hong Kong audience is a highly appreciative group. If we put heart into our work, they never look on us coldly. They can see our progress, and give us tremendous support.

12. *Please list three Hong Kong films which are quite 'creative' in your view, and provide reasons.*

Creativity can be categorised into two types, one just a reworking of subject matter, format and style, and the other leading the whole industry in a new direction.

In the first type, *Expect the Unexpected, Running on Karma,* and *Too Many Ways to be No.1* are representative examples which surprised people and gave them real pleasure. But this kind of creativity is just a once-off. Once they

are gone, they are gone. They cannot be accounted a big deal across the whole industry.

Within the second type the representatives are *Hidden Dragon, Crouching Tiger* and *Infernal Affairs.* The former initiated a tide of ancient Chinese movies like *Hero, The Promise, House of Flying Daggers,* and *Banquet;* the latter pioneered the way into Hollywood movies, which is of course the new directional beacon in Hong Kong films.

13. Please list one or two films which you've worked on which are especially 'creative' in your view. As one of the producers, could you please talk about the production processes used and how you made these films more 'creative' than usual?

In my mind the most creative film I have ever made is *Running on Karma.* Not just the content of the story but also the support materials released when the film was on exhibition have had considerable repercussions. Besides this, *Men Suddenly in Black,* and *Too Many Ways to be No.1* are also examples of great creativity.

14. The primary objective of mass culture is to maximise the interest and entertainment of audiences. So how do you plan to combine business profit and creative spirit in the production process?

As mentioned before, creativity and commercial elements are not mutually exclusive. Creativity is everywhere. The better the product, the more profit it is going to make. The current objective investment environment has changed, but the change is about the shape and scope of the frame. What we have to do is to work out the greatest creativity, but it takes some time to adapt. That is the principle all the time.

15. What do you think of the current situation of Hong Kong cinema? What is its future and how might it come to boom again?

At present, it is said that Hong Kong films are in decline. I guess it's because of objective circumstances and the current transitional period. As long as we trust ourselves, and don't deliberately try to imitate other mainstream models, we can slowly adjust to the most suitable styles and positions. The future is promising.

16. What are your feelings overall about the years of Hong Kong cinema's boom and decline? What do you plan to do to help it develop?

No comment.

8.1.2 Andy Lau' on Hong Kong creativity: from Golden Era to 'a promising future'.

Lau is surprisingly upbeat about current conditions within the film industry and finds that 'the future is promising' – as long as Hong Kong creatives trust themselves.

For him the task ahead relies upon what he terms 'balance' – not only a directorial balance between market constraints and creative flair; a quality he describes as 'maximum creativity within a fixed framework'; but a balance for an entire industry, always poised between local and global tastes. It is this constant two-way pull which Hong Kong's directors in particular have to recognise, finding ways to respond which will both sustain a loyal local audience, and build an increasingly enthusiastic international market. His is, to this extent, a classic 'in(ter)ventionist' creativity, in Pope's terms, reworking the known into the unknown or inherently unstable future.

The good news for Lau is that 'original films made in the Chinese language have finally found a place on the world stage' (see also Lu and Yeh, 2005, p. 38). This he sees as already an indication of a distinctive Hong Kong capacity to find that elusive 'balance' – for the pull of the local has been especially strong within Hong Kong film making. In his view Hong Kong films have been comparatively more localised than those in other Asian areas, on the one hand, an attraction point and, on the other hand, an obstacle (see also Dannen & Long, 1997, p. 123). Now the pressures exerted by mainland markets, and the new-won success globally, are re-orienting the industry, in ways which Lau feels need careful negotiation.

At one level, filmmakers must be careful not to lose that which has made them distinctive: the special Hong Kong cachet of their films (see also Fu, 2000, p. 92).

> Hong Kong films are not in the least inferior in regard to the vitality of their creativity, and the fluent and flexible flow of producing procedures.

Not only do they, in Lau's view, capture something of the dynamism and high-paced urgency of Hong Kong life, but they add to it a typically Hong Kong openness in production techniques: a negotiative and adaptive set of strategies which will consider all needs and respond rapidly to new demands. Care must be taken however, lest this responsiveness and eye to the market over-react, and abandon the industry entirely to making product on behalf of others. New markets have their dangers:

> There has been less and less creativeness in Hong Kong films, for they have to cater to other tastes, such as those of the mainland. Sometimes for the sake of acceptance, we sacrifice creativity to accommodate cultural difference...

Nor is it only mainland markets, with their strict enforcement of their own cultural standards, which exert a dangerous or destabilising influence. Western markets too, which can seem to offer the stamp of full global success, can exercise a deadening effect – especially in relation to their lack of depth when it comes to appreciation of the real potential of an industry's creative expression (Cheung & Chu, 2004, p. 67).

For Lau, international audiences have not yet come into contact with 'real' Hong Kong film. What has happened so far is collaboration between Hong Kong and Hollywood, a relationship which has introduced some elements of Hong Kong film to the Western palate, but in a limited way. It has not yet engaged anything like the authentic product, or released its full repertoire (Cheuk, 2003, p.137).

It is this which leads Lau to see the urgency in retaining a focus on the local audience: the movie goers to whom Hong Kong's films are addressed, and from whose cultural experiences and social perspectives these movies emerge. It is also however part of that expression of Hong Kong-ness that leads its film professionals to the crucial adaptability needed, in Lau's view, to sustain their industry, and to keep it innovative. Constraints, from no matter which quarter, only elevate the challenge – and meeting that challenge is part of the necessary 'balance' in creativity.

> Environment is just an objective fact, not the key to creativity itself. Since the environment is changing all the time, we need to adapt to all kinds of conventions to obtain the greatest creativity. Most of the time, creativity involves capturing a changeable world.

If anything, Lau feels that the limitations and restrictions placed on the contemporary industry have improved its standards:

> Those who remain in this business are fond of and are focused on movies, as the ebb in the fortunes of films has already got rid of those who thought of it only as a way of making a living.

With the cynical profit-seekers dropping away, more, rather than less, creative talent has been unleashed. And at the same time, the ingenuity required to make films within narrowed parameters – all the while keeping them balanced with increasingly sophisticated local audience demands – has intensified professional creativity.

> At present, film producers know more about how to achieve maximum creativity within a fixed framework. It takes more effort. But it doesn't mean that there is no good work or fine creativity. Within the changing environment movie producers need some time to adapt and to find an optimal point of balance.

For Lau, the adaptive strategy has been to attain the long-view in production: to 'create' for the market, whatever its current predilection:

> ... creativity and commercial elements are not mutually exclusive. Creativity is everywhere. The better the product, the more profit it is going to make. The current objective investment environment has changed, but the change is about the shape and scope of the frame.

In other words, at a macro level 'creativity' is about ensuring returns – guaranteeing the future of the entire industry, by sustaining and even expanding the market – when necessary, into new fields. Those productions which count for Lau are

those which are creative within *film generally,* and not merely within the *film of the moment.*

> Creativity can be categorised into two types, one just a reworking of subject matter, format and style, and the other leading the whole industry in a new direction.

Here then is a film creative thinking at the macro level (Caves, 2000, p. 31); working industry-wide; aware of global pressures as well as the need to keep the enriching feeds of local tastes, and to keep recruiting from that talent-pool, to build on those advances being made within this moment of supposed extinction. Lau sees that production standards are being updated all the time, especially on work after 2000, taking it even to the international level.

> In addition to the improved standard of the staff behind the scenes, the performances of the actors are more sophisticated, more diversified and profound.

He is enthusiastic about all aspects of the new challenge, even commenting upon creative responses beyond the direct frame of movie-making, as he acknowledges the new role played by promotional industries and merchandising:

> In my mind the most creative film I have ever made is *Running on Karma.* Not just the content of the story but also the support materials released when the film was on exhibition have had considerable repercussions.

The breadth of vision here, able to focus at once on the detail of local conditions, and the long-term view of how Hong Kong film can build itself a distinctive place within world film, is the final characterising feature of Lau's comments. For him, the talent, the experience, and all of the necessary qualities are in place – it is now merely a matter of the industry's holding its nerve:

> As long as we trust ourselves, and don't deliberately try to imitate other mainstream models, we can slowly adjust to the most suitable styles and positions.

This is the 'balance' Lau urges, and which he believes will guarantee the future. But are others so sanguine – and do they share Lau's respect for this very specifically Hong Kong view, that adaptability and a long-term focus on markets can produce the capacity and the right environment for that more immediate, once-off creativity which keeps forward momentum?

To answer this, the following Interviews in this section will present the views of senior film-industry manager Ng See Yuen, followed by the key figure identified earlier in this study as representing the *transition* in Hong Kong film from its cultural performance origins in Chinese traditional arts, to its entry into Western markets and global prominence: actor and director Jackie Chan.

8.2 Ng See Yuen: 'Flexibility – part of Hong Kong culture'.

For a more detailed analysis of how the Hong Kong industry developed that capacity to negotiate change, this study turns to Ng See Yuen, chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers. He summarises what he sees as the local creative advantage in a single key word – and once more understands it to be culturally related. For Ng See Yuen what counts most in Hong Kong film-making is 'flexibility - and it's part of Hong Kong culture'.

1. *Please briefly introduce your career path since 1980.*

Ng See Yuen, an experienced creative from the 70s to now, a founder-consultant of the Hong Kong Directors Association and the Chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers. I have worked as a director and a producer. As a producer, I discover new talent.

2. *How would you evaluate the development of Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s on? What are its milestones and turning points? What are its main characteristics?*

By the end of the 1970s the 'cinema factory' studio system had been destroyed and there were many independent productions. The younger generation rose and there were many different kinds of genres. That was what marked the Golden Era for Hong Kong cinema. There were many high-quality movies which were exported worldwide. There were two kinds of development then in Hong Kong cinema: one involving the expansion of production sites, and the other a change of genres – along with the birth of good new players.

3. *Can you talk about your impressions of Hong Kong film culture? What marks its production culture at the local level?*

Flexibility - and it's part of Hong Kong culture!

4 *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films of the 1980s, the 1990s and those after 2000?*

As the industry developed in the 1990s things became worse. It turned even worse still after 1997. The financial storm and SARS hit it heavily.

The internal problem was that we developed too fast from the 1980s into the 1990s, and the output was so good that it's hard to get beyond it. The external problem was that the market we relied on decreased. They have no further interest in Hong Kong cinema. When the 21st century arrived, the quantity of films produced was even

smaller - and the quality was worse.

However, the opening of the mainland market also brings us hope. Though there is censorship, it is being loosened. And Hong Kong cinema is flexible enough to adapt to it. So we have to keep to our own style, while adjusting to the mainland market.

5. *What do you think are the main elements which have affected the creative development of the Hong Kong film industry?*

The elements include talent, censorship and funding. The $HK300 billion funding for Hong Kong cinema development will be much more helpful. It will help the middle-to-small sized productions come into being, and promote diversification in film production.

Scientific technology is also important to cinema production.

6. *How would you define 'creativity' in Hong Kong cinema? Is it related to the subject, format, content, or style of a film, or is it something else?*

Moving pictures themselves are the stimulus for our creativity. There is no formal film college in Hong Kong, and almost none of the practitioners have been trained professionally. Their ideas are heavenly steeds soaring freely across the skies! Hong Kong censorship is not strict and this has created a big space for production. We have had fruitful outcomes - and most are quite funny.

Hong Kong cinema is inherently commercial, without many abstract works.

Now our beliefs have influenced the mainland market, and they are now also focusing on the box-office.

7. *What do you think are the main influences on the creativity of Hong Kong cinema?*

Our films lack depth and offer no profound insight into our society and life. Our screenwriters read too few books!

8. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films and others? As 'the Hollywood of the East', what are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood?*

Not much difference in terms of creativity: we can create things freely enough. There is no intellectual property right protection in Hong Kong and no good system for talent training.

9. *How do you think the local profession views 'creativity'?*

They emphasise creativity. There are two kinds of creator: one involves collective creativity and this mostly is used in comedies; the other is individual creativity and is good for production in depth.

10. Can you talk about international evaluations of the 'creative' in the films from Hong Kong?

We tried to expand our international market as early as the 1980s, and once possessed the whole South-East Asian market. A few martial arts films became popular in Western markets, and they still regard Hong Kong cinema as producing an entertainment product. So we should emphasise the local market, not the international one, because international demand always changes. What we should do as a matter of priority is to develop the local market.

11. How about local audience responses towards the 'creative' within Hong Kong films?

They don't know what creativity is - but they can tell what's good!

12. Please list three Hong Kong films which are quite 'creative' in your view, and provide reasons.

One is *Drunken Master.* The beautiful action shots and the comic effects impressed audiences. It was called a 'new martial arts genre' by Hark Tsui. [7] The actors were dynamic and the images were sharp in his films. He was the first person who tried to explain the secret elements in kung fu movies, and this made the genre more attractive. Though *Butterfly Murders* did not attract much audience, it is not the same as the other martial arts films at all. It has become a milestone and pretty well no-one could easily surpass it.

13. Please list one or two films which you've worked on which are especially 'creative' in your view. As one of the producers, could you please talk about the production processes used and how you made these films more 'creative' than usual?

Drunken Master and *Butterfly Murders* are the two I like most. They added new elements in terms of creativity, through rethinking the era's development rules.

14. The primary objective of mass culture is to maximise the interest and entertainment of audiences. So how do you plan to combine business profit and creative spirit in the production process?

No contradiction at all. Business *means* creativity, and creativity is the key point which attracts an audience. Creativity means new things which can be discovered and developed.

We need the younger generation for further development - or the industry will be ageing.

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[7] Craig D. Reid and Tsui Hark, Interview with Tsui Hark, *Film Quarterly*, 1995, Vol. 48, No. 3, pp. 34-41.

15. What are your feelings overall about the years of Hong Kong cinema's boom and decline? What do you plan to do to help it develop?

I hope that more and more youngsters will join the industry - it will not be enough to rely on government funding.

8.2.1 Ng See Yuen: 'Creativity is the key point which attracts an audience'.

Ng See Yuen, currently at the helm of Hong Kong cinema, produces here an overview of an industry which has passed through its early formative phase, and now confronts the rather more demanding circumstances impinging upon all creative industries. As digital media products begin to flow in new and unanticipated formats into new viewing spaces, with fewer and fewer protective barriers protecting local product from global competitors, traditional media industries such as film need to adapt and update.

While the Hong Kong film industry has itself had considerable early success with exporting its product, this too is increasingly difficult, and threatens the all-important local focus. For Ng too however, it has been Hong Kong's development into new feature-film genres which has kept it growing:

> There were two kinds of development then in Hong Kong cinema: one involving the expansion of production sites, and the other a change of genres – along with the birth of good new players.

The expansion of the production infrastructure has fostered creativity in terms of both player talent and concept innovation – and in fact for Ng See Yuen it is this capacity to refocus the types of film made which has ensured the industry's success:

> By the end of the 1970s the 'cinema factory' studio system had been destroyed and there were many independent productions. The younger generation rose and there were many different kinds of genres. That was what marked the Golden Era for Hong Kong cinema.

To some extent Ng considers that the industry has become the victim of its own early success, with both the local production culture and the regional markets becoming saturated with product, too soon. Not only does it become difficult to sustain the innovation, but it creates in audiences an expectation of the constantly new and the consistently excellent – demands better met through skimming peak productions from global film imports, rather than by pressuring a single local market to maintain delivery.

> The internal problem was that we developed too fast from the 1980s into the 1990s, and the output was so good that it's hard to get beyond it....When the 21st century arrived, the quantity of films produced was even smaller - and the quality was worse.

To re-enter the international market, and to meet its demands and those of local audiences, Hong Kong film will have to rediscover the creativities of its early phase – and that, In Ng See Yuen's view, means funding the depth of production which smaller, independent companies achieved in the earlier phase. Only this, he believes, will guarantee the diversity which fosters experimentation and allows the best to emerge – but this requires funding from sources which do not necessarily anticipate safe returns. Development of new capacity, and experimentation, need sustained financial support. While, like many of these interviewees, he sees mainland censorship and its limits on the scope of production as in fact a challenge acting to enhance creativity, he also sees the need to develop the industry's potential through careful sector-wide planning.

> The elements include talent, censorship and funding. The $HK300 billion funding for Hong Kong cinema development will be much more helpful. It will help the middle-to-small sized productions come into being, and promote diversification in film production.

It is the creativity emerging from these smaller operations which, in Ng See Yuen's view, produces in Hong Kong a dynamic film culture – a view which takes his thinking markedly close to that of the theorists of a 'creative industries' approach to productivity enhancement within the new global media production culture. By massing the creative talent, yet at the same time allowing small-to-medium film companies to form and re-form, combining and re-combining the film professionals in new production teams, the industry maximises both its productivity and its capacity for innovation. No one company is committed to production styles or salaried individual creatives whose techniques and concepts may fall out of vogue, missing this or that aspect of the current market.

Inside such a culture, an intensified hot-house of competitive production builds up a rarely achieved 'practical creativity' – one founded on constant adaptation to new circumstances, yet able to maximise the exposure of all those professionals involved in film production, to the realities of what does and does not work, for this or for that kind of film. As Ng See Yuen puts it (see also 張燕, 2006, p.78):

:

> Moving pictures themselves are the stimulus for our creativity. There is no formal film college in Hong Kong, and almost none of the practitioners have been trained professionally. Their ideas are heavenly steeds soaring freely across the skies!

The result is not quite an open field, for the market itself, and the many strands of tradition within Hong Kong film, exert very powerful influences upon what gets made, and who gets to make it. But what is formed is a constant sense of the need to take all of these pressures into account: to insist not upon the individual vision of the director, or even some consistent studio style, but to negotiate, in Hall's terms (1991, p.16), a film which will sit somewhere inside all of the expectations and demands impacting upon its creation; in this location; for these audiences; at this time, and within these cultural paradigms.

Ng See Yuen's take on creativity in film production makes it clear that there is however quite a degree of variation, even within the distinctive and self-reproducing Hong Kong industry. For him, there are two important modes of creativity:

> There are two kinds of creator: one involves collective creativity and this mostly is used in comedies; the other is individual creativity and is good for production in depth.

The first form of 'collective creativity', as outlined earlier in this study in discussion of the traditional comedy of Stephen Chow, produces crowd-pleasing entertainment, where the production focus is on cultural traditions of wit and physical comedic performance drawn from known social circumstances with humorous consequences. The other, more individual creativity which builds up a sustained unitary vision of distinctive human experience is also necessary in Ng's view – for it pulls films forward, releasing the sorts of intensity of vision which can find new directions and move audiences in new ways. For Ng See Yuen it is the latter which is still missing in the Hong Kong industry, perhaps too intent upon maximising audiences to take the necessary risks – but perhaps also too enmeshed culturally in collective, culture-affirming, collaborative creation to endorse and allow a distinctive individual vision.

> Our films lack depth and offer no profound insight into our society and life. Our screenwriters read too few books!

Nor is this simply a macro-cultural problem. If film has perhaps for too long been intent upon crowd-pleasing, cut off from the high-art sources which might have supported a more profound filmic engagement, it has also been too intent at the industry level upon reproducing itself. It has been training its new talent within its own production teams and on-the-job, with no feeds in from other sources, and no Film Schools to distance review and critique from market forces, and so help to develop a more reflexive practitioner. Given their corporate and mostly collaborative, team-built origins, Hong Kong films tend to reproduce the qualities of the industry in which they are made: to assert collective values, common-sense judgments and everyday experiences – what has been termed in this study, *Tradition*. Those individual visions which do emerge from within this collaborative approach are considered financially risky, socially and even culturally dangerous, and may not even be afforded the sorts of individual recognition sought for their producer's artistic vision:

> There is no intellectual property right protection in Hong Kong and no good system for talent training.

So is there a future for the sort of visionary movie-maker Ng See Yuen begins to envisage here? What might be at risk in any move to foster this more *auteur* oriented productivity within the Hong Kong industry, given that its success to date seems to have rested upon the traditions of collaborative, corporate and 'incremental creativity' identified by Flew (2002 p. 148) and Leadbeater (1999 p. 105). Since these are very much the qualities and values which appear to be so deeply enmeshed within the business ethos Hong Kong has constructed from its own social formations and cultural pre-dispositions, how might new forms of creativity emerge?

Precisely how films become accounted 'creative', and how those formulae which do work with audiences can be prevented from becoming a seemingly endless round of sequels and imitations, is perhaps best learned by approaching Hong Kong's biggest ever box office success: the most widely recognised Hong Kong star in the world today - Jackie Chan.

While for world audiences Chan is identified with martial arts films, in Hong Kong his contribution is known to have been far wider – and his capacity to keep re-creating both himself and his films is legendary. More than any other figure to date, he has proven able to bridge the many divides which cross Hong Kong film culture, from action film to local comedy; from

Hong Kong to mainland fame; from Chinese-language film to Hollywood co-venture; from genuine local hero to global brand (Chen Mo, 1999, p.13). In all of these ways, Chan personifies the future which Hong Kong creative industries seek. What is it then which has produced his success – and what insights can he himself provide into the techniques, attitudes and strategies needed to both build and sustain this complex, multi-facetted, even contradictory form of creativity?

8.3 Jackie Chan: "It's the human element!"

1. *Please briefly introduce your career path since 1980.*

Jackie Chan, an experienced movie maker as well as a famous actor, choreographer, and film director. Studied in a theatrical troupe when young, getting well-known through a series of action movies such as *Super Fighters* and *Drunken Fists* at the end of the 70s. Led the Hong Kong action movie to a new milestone with a self-directed star role in *Police Story* in the mid-80s. Produced over 20 self-directed, self-starring Hong Kong action movies from the beginning of the 80s. During recent years mainly engaged in the making of Hong Kong and Hollywood movies as an actor and action director.

2. *How would you evaluate the development of Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s on? What are its milestones and turning points? What are its main characteristics?*

Starting from the late 70s, Hong Kong movies have been characterised by comic material and acrobatic fighting action, and have been warmly welcomed all over the world.

My early action movies took the beginning of the Kuomintang period or the ancient dynastic era as the background for my characters, to highlight the vaudevillean characteristics of Chinese Kung-fu. Not until 1984 did I establish a specialty in Hong Kong-styled action movies for the new era, by adding massively difficult and ultra-thrilling feats in *Police Story,* which was a huge world-wide success. As a result, recently Sammo Hung, Yuan Wo Ping and I were invited by Hollywood producers to work there, to inject characteristic kung fu movements into their productions.

3. *Can you talk about your impressions of Hong Kong film culture? What marks its production culture at the local level?*

Hong Kong people are both intelligent and flexible. Local producers decant these elements into their movies, making local productions full of fun and clever pranks... So local audiences detect this characteristic colouring, and this kind of style makes it very easy to strike a sympathetic chord with local audiences, who can accept the movie characters as objects of imitation, or even ideal role models. So I can show positive models in my movies, hoping that the younger generation will take them on – gradually, the Hong Kong movie has become part of the mainstream native culture.

4. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films of the 1980s, the 1990s and those after 2000?*

The development of local productions can be divided into two stages, from the 1980s to the 21st century — before 1997, a year of 'golden harvest', producing so many excellent Hong Kong movies, and after 1997, when the situation worsened day by day, and led to the extinction period.

The advantages for local productions in these two stages were the same. The more flexible movie makers have always been willing to pay any price to achieve the best. What is different is that local movies are now stressing creativity more and more - and the themes have also become diversified. This establishes a more international vision in these movies. No more movie makers making the same commercially-themed movies at the same time. So the movies overall obviously get better.

5. *What do you think are the main elements which have affected the creative development of the Hong Kong film industry?*

It's the human element!

Audience anticipation is what goads a producer to attend to the quality of a movie.

An excellent movie is the best development goal – but it's affected seriously by the market. Take the most prosperous times in the 80s for example, when the market was buzzing and the movie business could make money easily. Most film producers simply followed suit. When the audience suddenly fell in love with a particular subject, too many people went crazy and jumped on the gravy train. As a consequence, the movie industry worried most about its financial losses.

However, so long as the movie producers keep their self-confidence and make their movies with all due care, audiences will return to the movie theatres. Local movies will have a great new future - one day.

Next we must respond to those social pressures which demand that we educate Hong Kong residents to respect copyright. Even more important: we need to encourage broader cultural activities, to cross-stimulate the film market...

6. *How would you define 'creativity' in Hong Kong cinema? Is it related to the subject, format, content, or style of a film, or is it something else?*

Creativity always refers to the new. It doesn't matter how it operates: if it can eliminate older forms, and gain acceptance from audiences – that's creativity!

7. *What do you think are the main influences on the creativity of Hong Kong cinema?*

Again, it's the human element!

Man creates within commerce as well as through art. So long as each local movie professional stays positive and competitive in their movie-making, local productions will remain upbeat, and produce an inexhaustible creativity.

Since the Hong Kong Government has only just started to set up a movie support and development department, past investors have mostly been lead by profit margins alone. They would insist that box office returns produced exactly what had been promised, and would flood the market with whatever was popular... They just seized the moment – a racket like that could never produce creativity.

8. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films and others? As 'the Hollywood of the East', what are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood?*

It is almost the same. Hong Kong's creative producers used to look for creativity within the most commercial themes, but producers in other areas such as Taiwan, Japan and Mainland China like to consider art first. There are also lots of splendid directors among them, however, their commercial achievement has always been inferior to that of Hong Kong directors as their works are actually *restricted* by their art.

And Hollywood is purely a product of commercial operations and activities. Therefore, no matter whether in East Asian countries or the USA, all movies are ultimately directed by marketing, so that every creative motive in both the US and Asian countries is the same ... creativity is based on marketing, and the major admiration is reserved for the best creativity, but US creatives have had sufficient funding to experiment, to innovate, and to practise different styles of creativity.

9. *How do you think the local profession views 'creativity?*

In the golden age, most film producers neglected innovation and would plagiarise, imitate, follow the fashion and so on. But after the extinction period, they began to emphasise innovation and carefully foster their own creativity. Either for the individual or the whole industry, if Hong Kong movies cannot create new forms and materials, they will never have a promising future.

10. *Can you talk about international evaluations of the 'creative' in films from Hong Kong?*

Since the 80s, most of the movie producers in the world have appreciated Hong Kong's creativity, and so during that time many Hong Kong producers were invited to develop their careers in Hollywood. In more recent years when they

adapted the Hong Kong local production *Infernal Affairs* into the Hollywood feature *The Departed,* it attracted a large and appreciative local audience.

Generally, the international market has had high praise for the creativity of some of our Hong Kong movies.

11. *How about local audience responses towards the 'creative' within Hong Kong films?*

Mostly just ridicule, because they think that local productions are plagiarised versions of Hollywood movies. Their views were caused by the fact that film producers were indeed copy-cats and just followed the format in the Golden Age.

Fortunately, over the last two years local productions have displayed greater creativity, and gradually, there are appearing some excellent films and film producers.

12. *Please list three Hong Kong films which are quite 'creative' in your view, and provide reasons.*

(laughs)

Well, these three movies were produced by me in the Golden Age of the 80s.

Police Story creates a realistic hero from real life and reflects accurately the police sense of justice and selfless devotion.

Project A, a stereotypic action movie in the beginning of the New China Period, creates a fervour for enduring struggle.

Dragon Heart is an encouraging story about a retarded public figure, and the social pressure that his family members suffer. These three movies have something in common, a 'feeling of excitement' which envelopes the entire audience in the same feeling. When they see their favourite characters change something impossible into something possible, the audience burst into thunderous applause - and enjoy the pleasure gained from these movies.

13. *Please list one or two films which you've worked on which are especially 'creative' in your view. As one of the producers, could you please talk about the production processes used and how you made these films more 'creative' than usual?*

The answer is the same as No.12...

14. The primary objective of mass culture is to maximise the interest and entertainment of audiences. So how do you plan to combine business profit and creative spirit in the production process?

Commerce is absolutely compatible with creativity, because only the latter can attract audiences - which is an invariable rule.

15. What do you think of the current situation of Hong Kong cinema? What is its future and how might it come to boom again?

It is a time of struggle, and if everyone keeps the faith then we can produce excellent movies.

The future of Hong Kong movies is bright as both Hollywood and the Asian market are keeping an eye on their development. Good movies will never lack audiences.

What's more, the opening up of Mainland China is indeed a big potential market for Hong Kong movies.

16. What are your feelings overall about the years of Hong Kong cinema's boom and decline? What do you plan to do to help it develop?

Education, whether through the State or a private organisation, should be viewed as a top priority. Hong Kong's citizens are gifted, their thinking is sophisticated and they are creative.

The movie industry as well as most businesses and professions needs this creativity as a form of innovation which is the basis of competition in the 21st century.

However, it is disturbing to see that the American movie industry is expanding, while the Hong Kong industry is in decline. This is happening in spite of the greater creativity and the responsiveness shown by the industry in Hong Kong.

In the final analysis, it is apparent that education and training are the key. There is no doubt that Hong Kong people have creative ability, but perhaps the skills aren't adequate. The secret of success lies in training.

8.3.1 Jackie Chan – 'Commerce is absolutely compatible with creativity'.

From the outset it is obvious that Chan's vision has rested on his capacity to hybridise film product. While his early training in Chinese theatre created in him a discipline which enabled him to shift his own performance across character types and even generic forms, without ever losing control over his performance, his exposure to life outside Hong Kong and China also

seems to have contributed to his absolute confidence that the narratives and performance styles at his command were able to transfer into newer contexts, and to please far wider, cross-cultural audiences.

> My early action movies took the beginning of the Kuomintang period or the ancient dynastic era as the background for my characters, to highlight the vaudevillean characteristics of Chinese Kung-fu.

It is Chan who reminds us, with this reference to vaudeville, of how the filmic focus on martial arts action – a choreographed and troupe-based collective performance – imports into a film a hero-narrative structure. These films centre upon one against many, with the pleasure of the filmic text dependant again and again upon that slight, unanticipated innovation which allows the lone hero to prevail...

To this extent the vaudevillean element is melodramatic as well as comedic. It mimics the experiences of *the little man,* thrust unprepared into the world of larger and more powerful figures – a trope which Chan develops and makes his own. But it is the sheer brilliance of his martial arts discipline which enables him to take the even larger risk: introducing a comedic element into the performance, so that each new move becomes less and less likely to succeed... (Chang Cheh, 1999, pp. 23-24). Not only then do Chan's performances enhance the *little-man* status of his characters, and so suit the everyday perspectives of his audiences; they also slip seamlessly into the more collegial and production-team based ensemble performance styles of comedy. Chan becomes an ideal figure for Hong Kong cinema's local production culture: one dependent upon its capacity to represent that local-ness, back to itself (Cai Hong-Sheng, 1999, p. 12).

But Chan has not allowed his creativity to rest there. In latter years he has clearly seen the need to move beyond even this formula of hybridisation, shifting towards the new global demands, by re-positioning martial-arts film making for world audiences, and for a cooperative East-West cinema of unprecedented form.

> Not until 1984 did I establish a specialty in Hong Kong-styled action movies for the new era, by adding massively difficult and ultra-thrilling feats in *Police Story,* which was a huge world-wide success.

This shift from localised comedy to globally-oriented thriller shows not only the range of the local industry, but its capacity to build out from its own psycho-social preoccupations, towards a more profound set of social-ethical concerns within human behaviours. While the 'little man' trope met the psychological needs of a generation denied access to direct social or political expression, the darker but more forceful police thriller asserted a new Hong Kong confidence – and enabled Hong Kong film to engage with themes and narratives more easily able to travel: to connect with similar concerns in other cultures. For Chan, it is the capacity to achieve this sort of major transformation which produced both genres, but subsequently allowed one to prevail over the other, as local circumstances changed, and global audiences developed (Chen Mo, 1999, p. 16).

> Hong Kong people are both intelligent and flexible. Local producers decant these elements into their movies, making local productions full of fun and clever pranks... So local audiences detect this characteristic colouring, and this kind of style makes it very easy to strike a sympathetic chord with local audiences...

That Chan has always thought deeply about how his productions impact upon his audiences can be seen from his comments on the degree to which audience members '...accept the movie characters as objects of imitation, or even ideal role models'. Not only has he constantly insisted that his movies portray morally admirable characters, he believes that it is this which has made Hong Kong films so acceptable.

> So I can show positive models in my movies, hoping that the younger generation will take them on – gradually, the Hong Kong movie has become part of the mainstream native culture.

Beyond the local, creativity becomes not adaptation to the known and respected formula; not the 'type A' collective creativity Ng See Yuen formulated earlier in this discussion; but a re-orientation to a more distinctive vision and a commitment to both technical and expressive diversity.

> In the golden age, most film producers neglected innovation and would plagiarise, imitate, follow the fashion and so on. But after the extinction period, they began to emphasise innovation and carefully foster their own creativity. Either for the individual or the whole industry, if Hong Kong movies cannot create new forms and materials, they will never have a promising future.

Jackie Chan goes further, embracing the creative industries view that it is innovation which drives the cultural industries in the 21st century, and makes them competitive on the global stage.

> Hong Kong's citizens are gifted, their thinking is sophisticated and they are creative.
>
> The movie industry as well as most businesses and professions needs this creativity as a form of innovation which is the basis of competition in the 21st century.

With Florida (2002), Castells (1996; 2007), and Flew (2002) Chan sees the future as one in which only this form of creativity will prevail: one constantly re-assessing demand, and able – as he has himself always been – to adapt quickly and incisively to whatever emerges. Yet once again, like so many other respondents in these interviews, he is conscious of the scope of this demand, and the degree to which all elements of the film industry confronting this new mega-culture of art/commerce will need to be re-positioned in a coordinated and complementary way. For Chan, so accustomed to the very pinnacles of both local and global movie success, the current conditions of the Hong Kong industry remain more than challenging.

> It is disturbing to see that the American movie industry is expanding while the Hong Kong industry is in decline. This is happening in spite of the greater creativity and the responsiveness shown by the industry in Hong Kong.

To survive, let alone reclaim some degree of pre-eminence with either local or international audiences, the industry will need not only to achieve system-wide change, but to remain open to successive waves of changed demand. Like many of his

colleagues at the top of the industry, he sees this new openness as the key to innovation – and sees that the foundations need to be in place across all professional roles within film-making, if the total culture is to adapt.

> In the final analysis, it is apparent that education and training are the key. There is no doubt that Hong Kong people have creative ability, but perhaps the skills aren't adequate. The secret of success lies in training.

As John Chong has remarked (see 張燕, 2006, p.26), as Hong Kong film, like that of industries world-wide, adapts to the new rivalries of other digital media formats entering and even dominating the entertainment and leisure industries, members of the movie production team formerly considered ancillary, or parts of post-production or promotions, may have to be admitted to the core operation. At the same time all creatives will have to become familiar with the capacities of the new digital media, and their contributions to the making of films. As Chong puts it *(ibid.,* p. 31), films can be good – but primarily they have to *look* good. And it takes the skills of every member of the creative team to make it so.

Overall, what these three interviews suggest, along with the years of film making experience contained within them, is the degree to which Hong Kong is very much capable of sustaining and asserting its own industry, through its own very distinctive film culture. So far though that industry has been mostly 'reactive' (Marchetti & Tan, 2007, p.73), producing what audiences and distributors want. To that degree the creatives have not controlled their own industry, as Hollywood has.

These particular artistic creatives – each a major player in his own right, but representative of very widespread views - are telling us that until the industry controls its product, and keeps a flow of properly trained and experienced local production staff, Hong Kong film making will continue to be the victim of global trends. It will see its production capacity – and output - cherry-picked: the occasional film selected for global promotion, while the remainder service only local audiences. Meanwhile, those local audiences, as many noted in the interviews, are already learning to steer clear of local products not endorsed through the increasingly powerful promotional channels of digital world-wide media. Stripped of the cachet of international recognition, films which do not gain critical recognition in Festival awards; or achieve cult status among large demographics; or establish merchandising deals and pre-release promotional campaigns; or negotiate joint-venture cooperative international production and so guarantee high production budgets and large bi-cultural audiences, simply cannot compete.

What this leaves however is the problem which Andy Lau in his Interview suggested was a 'Type A' creativity: that central Hong Kong capacity for adaptation within restraint; able to rebuild over previously successful models. This type of creativity, always commercially oriented and embedded in social traditions in its search for popular content, both called forth the original audience, and has been markedly continuous with values held as central to Hong Kong society overall.

Perhaps, as so many of the comments made in these interviews suggest, this – and maybe every - local culture still needs to build these cultural narratives outwards, from everyday life into the cultural imaginary. It still appears necessary, at least to these very experienced and successful film creatives, to show local cultural detail in what tend to become regarded as the 'best' films - the ones these interviewees comment upon as the most creative.

In this case then the global product, as Castells suspected (*The Rise of the Network Society,* Blackwell, 1996, p. 78), *needs* the local culture... For Castells *(ibid.,* p. 83), trying in his monumental works on the new digital social order to describe not 'space' but acculturated 'place', those familiar and meaningful locations in which we have accumulated shared social experiences have now been shot through with the speed-of-light 'flows' of digital media communication, creating what he terms a 'space of flows'. These new flow spaces remain intangible and inhuman – at least until, as Web 2.0 commentators and creative producers are hoping, we come to inhabit them with equal intensity to our known physical zones, or our 'old media' products. In the meantime, it is film which is helping bridge us into this new, rather more fluid form of the cultural knowing of location.

Precisely how this might happen – or how it might already be happening – is the subject for the next set of Interviews for this study. These introduce perspectives on creativity from five current Hong Kong film makers, covering a range of professional backgrounds and career trajectories: John Chong, Johnnie To, Tsui Hark, Andrew Lau, and Pang Ho Cheung.

The discussion which flows both in and from their Interviews will, among other concerns, suggest that Hong Kong film has already begun struggling to produce compelling visions of this next phase, and to narrate its felt, lived experience of the new de-localised 'space of flows'. The product which results is, as they indicate, at once extreme, and surprisingly familiar: part of the new mix of media captures of the textures within modern life.

CHAPTER NINE:

Filming in 'the space of flows': Hong Kong movies 21C

9.0 Group Two: *A new emergence* - Tsui Hark, John Chong, Johnnie To, Andrew Lau W. K., Pang Ho Cheung

9.1 Tsui Hark: *'If you are confident you create happier work'*

Tsui Hark, now both a director and a producer in Hong Kong movies, began his career in the even more collaborative and audience-responsive world of television production, and so knows in detail the sorts of pressures produced in forms of collaborative creativity which must meet local demand. He too makes very close connections between the professional culture of Hong Kong film production, and the broader local cultural context in which it arises.

1. Please briefly introduce your career path since 1980.

Tsui Hark, a respected director and producer in the Hong Kong movie industry, joined a television station after coming back from America in 1977. After a year and a half joined the film industry as a director and worked as a producer from 1984. Creates, shoots and works on promotional materials in the industry.

2. How would you evaluate the development of Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s on? What are its milestones and turning points? What are its main characteristics?

There is a close relationship between Hong Kong cinema and its production culture. There are fewer people who have qualified or studied in foreign countries.

There have been two big changes since the 1980s: one was that the boom in television production created opportunities for new directors. This is very important in cinema history because it has opened a space for us to tell stories in another way. The other is that some Taiwanese filmmakers went to study in Europe, and their work affected the Hong Kong industry. Besides this, the European orientation also influenced the younger practitioners. The new generations came from foreign countries, and television stations and these specialist communities brought in many new skills. At that time there were film festival invitations from the Western world,

and that meant that we became known to the outside world.

3. *Can you talk about your impressions of Hong Kong film culture? What marks its production culture at the local level?*

It is so various that it can't be summarised in one word. It is very flexible and good at combining the best elements with its own characteristics.

4. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films of the1980s, the 1990s and those after 2000?*

Things were flourishing in the 1980s, but the content was still conservative. It was not until the 1990s when the practitioners started seeking out further development that the subject matter began to experiment. In the 21st century we have recognised that we need to expand into the mainland market and the subject matter needs to be adjusted. The market is not the same as before - and some big scale movies have appeared.

5.What do you think are the main elements which have affected the creative development of the Hong Kong film industry?

The vital element is the market. In the old days the South-East Asian market was the biggest space for Hong Kong cinema and we hoped to expand into the Japanese market. Things have not really changed now: people are shooting for the mainland market or the international one.

The other important element is talent. There are good movies when there are good practitioners. If we are not qualified there will be no good work. However, sometimes there is a lot of talent around at the same time, and sometimes it is so difficult to find...

The third point involves the insight of investors. They should be the ones to really *want* good movies, and pass production power to the best artists.

6. *How would you define 'creativity' in Hong Kong cinema? Is it related to the subject, format, content, or style of a film, or is it something else?*

Creativity includes everything, style, skills, and the script. The best practitioners know how to bring out the charm of a movie. Hong Kong movies are the same as any others, but they come from a small city where there's little space between people and the pace of life is very frantic. All these lead to an edginess in our expression - and yet that's also an entertainment element which makes audiences think of themselves as cool. That's our big advantage.

7. *What do you think are the main influences on the creativity of Hong Kong cinema?*

It's to do with attitude. Some people are too quick in everything they do, and the lack of a solid foundation obstructs their further development. Besides, the narrow life style means that some practitioners won't attempt new thinking and creativity. Too many people think in the same way and lack creativity.

8. What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films and others? As 'the Hollywood of the East', what are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood?

No big difference.

9. How do you think the local profession views 'creativity'?

Different people insist on different ideas. The screenwriters think that they are looked down upon, and the directors say that there are no good scripts. The bosses feel that both are lacking. The big productions don't come to Hong Kong, and they have to combine investment deals from Taiwan and the Mainland. The small potatoes do their best and just want to get in on the formal production chain as soon as possible...

I hope that the industry won't continue just living on its luck, and that there will be some good practitioners to work for it.

10. Can you talk about international evaluations of the 'creative' in films from Hong Kong?

Super stars and the martial arts genre have both been emphasised. As long as a film shows up well in local markets, it will be noticed internationally.

11. How about local audience responses towards the 'creative' within Hong Kong films?

They still lack confidence in local productions, because Western pictures are better in terms of creativity and resourcing. Even though a movie is a kind of entertainment, our creativity reflects any pessimistic emotions within the industry, and that makes the output less charming. If you are confident you create happier work; if you're not, the work will be less attractive.

12. Please list three Hong Kong films which are quite 'creative' in your view, and provide reasons.

One is *Grey Jump* by Li-Han Chiang. He has worked out many kinds of movies full of creativity. The martial arts movies by King Hu are also very special. Comedies by Michael Hsui can provide audience with surprising comedic effects and the feeling of watching his movies is almost the same as going to the market. *Aces Go Places (series)* combines a modern feeling and these comedic elements, so it was innovative.

13. *Please list one or two films which you've worked on which are especially 'creative' in your view. As one of the producers, could you please talk about the production processes used and how you made these films more 'creative' than usual?*

Aces Go Places 3. I was its director and confirmed the content and the artists first. Then we discussed the story while shooting. I learned a lot from it. Comedy was the genre which was most familiar to us and the easiest for creativity. We tried to combine different thinking and to share the different life styles. We showed the points we appreciated and argued for them.

13 *The primary objective of mass culture is to maximise the interest and entertainment of audiences. So how do you plan to combine business profit and creative spirit in the production process?*

There is no big difference between them. All commercial behaviour needs commercial elements and skills, and the only difference is that you add some philosophy and personal feeling into it. You just share with the masses your own topics and ideas. Creativity is part of commercial behavior and there is no contradiction between them. Movies which are not commercial yet considered classics have not appeared in Hong Kong yet.

14 *What do you think of the current situation of Hong Kong cinema? What is its future and how might it come to boom again?*

I can't help but think it is a difficult time, and I find that people look down upon the industry. They have decreased the number of productions - and some have even stopped shooting. So the production ratios are becoming worse and worse. We have stalled, just when others are developing - and this is not the right long-term direction. I hope that more people will work aggressively to change their practice. Don't accept that an acutely difficult time will block the development of the industry.

15 *What are your feelings overall about the years of Hong Kong cinema's boom and decline? What do you plan to do to help it develop?*

I think directors should not be divided by nationalities, or by genres.

It's not necessary to understand Chinese to shoot Chinese movies. The space needs to be expanded. There are many practitioners now and they can't all work in the same small circle.

9.1.2 Tsui Hark - Creativity bounded by 'the narrow lifestyle'

Tsui Hark's television background has allowed him to see how far strictly local recruitment and training in screen media production have influenced Hong Kong film:

> There have been two big changes since the 1980s: one was that the boom in television production created opportunities for new directors. This is very important in cinema history because it has opened a space for us to tell stories in another way [see also Fu, Po-shek, 2000, p. 21].

While he does not elaborate on precisely what this 'other way' might be, he does comment on how far some of his own favourite films reflect the everyday life of Hong Kong's street culture, suggesting, like many other Interviewees, that one element which distinguishes the industry is its responsiveness and capacity to capture the local:

> Comedies by Michael Hui can provide audience with surprising comedic effects and the feeling of watching his movies is almost the same as going to the market.

This sense of engagement with a robust and endlessly fascinating local culture is enhanced by the Hong Kong retention of locally-trained film-makers, still dominant within the industry (Morton, 2001, p. 84):

> There is a close relationship between Hong Kong cinema and its production culture. There are fewer people who have qualified or studied in foreign countries.

It might seem that such a local focus could produce an over-homogeneous culture: one too tightly tied to home audiences, and unable to achieve innovation on its own terms, let alone in response to new markets. In fact, as Tsui Hark immediately points out, there is extremely broad diversity, and even contestation, within the industry, and within a single production team.

> It is so various that it can't be summarised in one word. It is very flexible and good at combining the best elements with its own characteristics.

Like the market-scenes he thinks of when trying to describe Michael Hui's work (see above), film making in Hong Kong involves a noisy collaboration of professionals working half in concert, half in competition with one another.

> Different people insist on different ideas. The screenwriters think that they are looked down upon, and the directors say that there are no good scripts. The bosses feel that both are lacking. The big productions don't come to Hong Kong, and they have to combine investment deals from Taiwan and the Mainland. The small potatoes do their best and just want to get in on the formal production chain as soon as possible...

Out of this seeming chaos there has emerged a vibrant film community: one still endlessly hopeful of providing audiences with the rare treat of an unexpected cinematic treasure – but at heart just wanting to keep their industry alive and productive. Like every other respondent to this set of interviews, Tsui Hark sees the commercial orientation of Hong Kong film as an inherent part of its culture:

> Creativity is part of commercial behaviour and there is no contradiction between them. Movies which are not commercial yet considered classics have not appeared in Hong Kong yet.

To some extent this may rest, at least in Tsui Hark's view, on exactly the same cultural predispositions which make for that deep-seated competitive spirit. If Hong Kong experience builds into Chinese culture a dynamic entrepreneurial and venturing tendency, it has also, perversely, limited and constrained the range of its expression. Public life is largely confined to business only. In Hong Kong public life has been sequestered from political activity or any expression of national identity by first British colonialism, and then Beijing-centred Party control (Chu, Yingchi, 2003, p. 26). This has left a surprisingly narrow range of experiences open to the sorts of investigation that more serious film making attempts. For Tsui Hark film making confined to Hong Kong's crowded but mono-focus society can limit different sorts of creativity, even while it encourages it as a commercially-oriented industry paradigm.

> The narrow life style means that some practitioners won't attempt new thinking and creativity. Too many people think in the same way and lack creativity.

A dangerous level of standardisation develops, which deflects the responsibility for real experimentation to others – and especially to those 'licensed' to import influences from elsewhere.

> Some Taiwanese filmmakers went to study in Europe, and their work affected the Hong Kong industry. Besides this, the European orientation also influenced the younger practitioners.

Real creativity is now becoming a central demand, inside an industry under pressure globally, both from rival production cultures, and from world-wide audiences led by the recent large-scale success of joint-venture 'Chinese' films out of Hong Kong, and needing to produce innovative product. The good news for Tsui Hark is that this new demand seems to have appeared at the right moment for Hong Kong:

> It was not until the 1990s when the practitioners started seeking out further development that the subject matter began to experiment.

This new mix of mainland and global markets is being met, at least in some instances, by this new, more experimental spirit. What is required next is, much as Ng See Yuen, among others, has suggested: an industry-wide re-orientation towards innovation, beginning not at the point of the creative pitch, but inside the financing foundation which propels the industry forward. What is needed now is

... the insight of investors. They should be the ones to really *want* good movies, and pass production power to the best artists.

Tsui Hark is not alone in this view. John Chong, once a script writer, now a director and an investor in films, shares Tsui's background in television production – and has a very similar vision of how the early success of film production in the 1980s 'Golden Era' for Hong Kong now means an urgent need for a re-direction and a re-building of the production culture, at a fundamental level.

9.2 John Chong: 'Lack of knowledge of the real world is not good for creativity'.

1. Please briefly introduce your career path since 1980.

John Chong, a movie script-writer who became a producer and an investor. After graduation in 1980 worked as a research writer in TV8 till 1983. Jumped across to Cinema City Enterprises to work as copywriter and part-time screenwriter. Directed movies at Star TV in 1993 and created Media Asia Films in 1994. Has been working as a producer since then.

2. How would you evaluate the development of Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s on? What are its milestones and turning points? What are its main characteristics?

In the 1980s Golden Princess Film Distribution became the third in line operator after Golden Harvest and Shaw 8rothers. At the time the new cinema network appeared the market was flourishing and the new wave was born. The best was *BOB* - and the star system came to life. It was all very hot - and later the series of *Police Story, Young Master* and *A Better Tomorrow* were the most popular.

3. Can you talk about your impressions of Hong Kong film culture? What marks its production culture at the local level?

The past was quite different from nowadays. In the 1970s and 1980s there was no system or special technique, but people were flexible and created many innovations.

At the beginning 8ruce Lee came back from America and went to Shaw 8rothers to ask for a similar salary. He was rejected and later his employer Golden Harvest even had to decrease his salary in order to adjust to the market.

It was becoming more and more professional after the 1980s and 1990s. The practitioners became familiar with film language and skills. So I think the essence of Hong Kong film culture lies in the phrase: 'moving pictures are the only success in terms of a Hong Kong cultural industry'.

4. What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films of the 1980s, the 1990s and those after 2000?

Some bad productions appeared at the end of the 1980s, but they still produced good returns. For example, a movie starring Andy Lau could return 5 million dollars, but actually what he got was much less than that. The market has declined since then and has not risen again. Only a few pictures or some of Stephen Chow's works can gain larger audiences. From 2002, *Infernal Affairs, Shaolin Soccer* and the *Kung Fu* series have been milestones. The major companies include Media Asia Films, China Star Entertainment and Mei Ah Film Production. The local market is becoming smaller, but the opening of the mainland market has strengthened people's confidence. All in all, big productions are more welcome.

5. What do you think are the main elements which have affected the creative development of the Hong Kong film industry?

In the old days there was no other entertainment but films. Then the appearance of video let people watch DVDs at home. In the 21st century people are busy with Internet surfing and they watch films online. The birth of pay TV makes up some of the costs. However, the diversity of kinds of entertainment including digital has had a huge impact.

6. How would you define 'creativity' in Hong Kong cinema? Is it related to the subject, format, content, or style of a film, or is it something else?

In the past there were so few overseas movies to be used as references for local creativity. The New Wave directors came from foreign countries, but used their techniques to shoot local subjects, like the situation in Korea now. The combination of [imported?] film techniques and local culture was successful. Now there are too many overseas movies and this has affected the creativity of local creators, because they ignore local characteristics.

7. What do you think are the main influences on the creativity of Hong Kong cinema?

There is more bad than good influence. More entertainment modes and more overseas movies are not beneficial. The local and the Chinese character [of our films] is good for us. Many productions which mimic the West have failed. Youngsters read fewer books and focus only on the digital world. A lack of knowledge of the real world is not good for creativity.

8. What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films and others? As 'the Hollywood of the East', what are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood?

They are similar in that both are based on the local, but different in their cultural background. We have emphasised a mixed background and use both languages at the same time. 'The Hollywood of the East' means that we were the third-largest film exporter. Most practitioners lack professional training and just think in *si fu* style [8]. This is even worse than the set formula productions from Hollywood. We lack resources. Most of the world-wide markets accept American

[8] *Si-fu* refers to professionals working with beginners, teaching them traditional, technical skills.

production for all movies, but only accept Chinese for kung-fu movies. The distribution networks and recognition systems have not yet matured.

9. *How do you think the local profession views 'creativity'?*

Mature film managers understand the creativity difference in Hong Kong. Many practitioners understand that the creativity in Hong Kong movies is quite different from overseas movies. We get great creativity in many ways, but the films still don't look good. So trust in creative talent is very important. The training provided in the university now is good for future development.

10. *Can you talk about international evaluations of the 'creative' in films from Hong Kong?*

The international market has in fact emphasised the local nature [of Hong Kong films]. They appreciate the originality of *Infernal Affairs*. The world has emphasised the creativity [of this film, an element] which is lacking all over the world. They re-edited it and made it welcome in America. They are interested in the concept of the 'double agent'. We are very productive in this field. *Made in Hong Kong* and *The Mission* were very special.

11. *How about local audience responses towards the 'creative' within Hong Kong films?*

They don't know much about all this and just judge the films good or bad. They know little about creativity and are curious about it. The moving picture is just another commercial product in Hong Kong. *Butterfly Murders, As Tears Go By* and *Isabella* were all full of creativity, but their box-office was just so-so. The audience notices the stars more than any other element.

12. *Please list three Hong Kong films which are quite 'creative' in your view, and provide reasons.*

The first is *Infernal Affairs*. Its concept of the double agent was an innovation and the script detailed exactly how the gangsters send a spy into the police department. It follows the basic principles of scriptwriting. The second is *Made in Hong Kong* which tells stories of the poor, and it's very Hong Kong. The third is *A Better Tomorrow* which abstracts the gangster's emotions - and its shooting was excellent. It was the beginning of romancing the hero genre.

13. *Please list one or two films which you've worked on which are especially 'creative' in your view. As one of the producers, could you please talk about the production processes used and how you made these films more 'creative' than usual?*

Besides *Infernal Affairs*, the last story of *Last Dinner*, 'The Sushi' was excellent, and it shows how to produce movies and how to manage the creativity. I created part of it. We talked together at that time and exchanged our experiences with each other. It emphasised details.

14. *The primary objective of mass culture is to maximise the interest and entertainment of audiences. So how do you plan to combine business profit and creative spirit in the production process?*

Good creativity needs good packaging. If *Infernal Affairs* had changed its main players to Francis Ng and Sean Lau, it might not have received so much notice.

15. *What do you think of the current situation of Hong Kong cinema? What is its future and how might it come to boom again?*

Now it is coming once again to a crossroad. There are fewer good movies and most active practitioners are 40 to 60. The major practitioners are around their 50s. They have generation gap problems with the youngsters. They were hard working in their day and had not much material. However, the youngsters don't have that kind of spirit.

16. *What are your feelings overall about the years of Hong Kong cinema's boom and decline? What do you plan to do to help it develop?*

I joined the industry by accident and am looking for my ideal position all the time. I want to discover more practitioners and more energetic directors like Pang Ho who is hard working and never gives up.

9.2.1 John Chong - *'Coming once again to a crossroad'.*

Like Tsui Hark, John Chong sees the Hong Kong industry being pulled away from local cinema circuits and into the global flows of mainland and world audience demands – and that means a different type of movie:

> The local market is becoming smaller, but the opening of the mainland market has strengthened people's confidence. All in all, big productions are more welcome.

This is in itself problematic for an industry such as Hong Kong's, developed in the first instance to serve an entirely local film-going community, and so marked – most feel indelibly – by the cultural predispositions of that locale. Now called to serve first mainland Chinese audiences, and then increasingly enthusiastic global cinematophiles, Hong Kong film is having to innovate and expand and diversify the scale of its focus – perhaps risking that all-important 'integrity' of vision identified by Hsui Hark (see above) and Pang Ho (see below). John Chong explains the problem this way:

> In the past there were so few overseas movies to be used as references for local creativity. The New Wave directors came from foreign countries, but used their techniques to shoot local subjects, like the situation in Korea now. The combination of [imported?] film techniques and local culture was successful. Now there are too many overseas movies and this has affected the creativity of

local creators, because they ignore local characteristics.

Here Chong is speaking of the language of film: those techniques used in cinematography, directing and even editing and post-production, to structure and 'colour' the stories which are told. Left largely to its own devices, never anticipating that its products might become popular and commercially viable beyond its own shores, Hong Kong film evolved and operated, as we have seen, its own filmic repertoires – largely built straight over local community values and cultural preferences.

It successfully incorporated these into its own production culture as well, producing a more than usually collaborative production style, built in part on the ensemble performance training of its greatest actors (see above for instance for an account of Jackie Chan's theatre training); but also developed in the television-industry backgrounds of many of its better directors – including, as mentioned above, John Chong.

This is the industry integrity outlined by Tsui Hark, underlined in so many of these interviews, as Hong Kong's film creatives work to formulate a description of what it is that makes their industry distinctive. Each in his way has stressed how it was the early days of this production culture which built-in these locally-derived predispositions. Chong's account of the industry's 'Golden Era' history is no exception:

> The past was quite different from nowadays. In the 1970s and 1980s there was no system or special technique, but people were flexible and created many innovations.

What they were not able to create within such a culture was the more focused and directive type of innovation: that which can create what Andy Lau (above) defined as a 'second' kind of creativity; perhaps better called 'originality'. In Chong's view Hong Kong's strong cultural relation to its society enhances a responsive and collaborative creativity: one which keeps product commercially oriented, and which builds a heavily 'reproductive' industry, able to sustain its own preferred genres and techniques, and in this case, to have its most successful professionals cross roles into directing, producing, and even financing local film.

What it has been less successful in doing is to think 'outside the box' – to confront the wider range of film genres and styles introduced by the vast audience demand of mainland and global markets, and to meet them with constantly shifting, trend-adaptive production. The deeper levels of expression of vision needed to brand this degree of distinctiveness have not been fostered in the Hong Kong 'local' film production culture – so that the new demands sweeping into the industry and re-defining 'creativity' have to be interpreted and introduced across all aspects of the industry.

To some degree John Chong, like many of his colleagues in this study, finds that Hong Kong professionals have been equal to these new challenges.

> It was becoming more and more professional after the 1980s and 1990s. The practitioners became familiar with film language and skills.

Quality overall has lifted – and production skills have spread across the industry – especially with film training now spreading into Universities, where the reproduction of bad or limited techniques is less likely to occur. But at the same time the strongly collaborative production culture still retains a tendency to inhibit individual progress, and to limit the introduction of new possibilities:

> Most practitioners lack professional training and just think in *si-fu* style. This is even worse than the set formula productions from Hollywood...

For Chong this has introduced a significant and dangerous generation gap, with younger film makers more likely to follow international than local trends:

> Now it is coming once again to a crossroad. There are fewer good movies and most active practitioners are 40 to 60. The major practitioners are around their 50s. They have generation gap problems with the youngsters.
>
> They were hard working in their day and had not much material. However, the youngsters don't have that kind of spirit.

The danger, as has been stated again and again in these interview responses, is that this second, globally-oriented New Wave will lead new-generation productions too far from that 'Tradition' based local cultural orientation which originally gave – and still gives – Hong Kong film its cachet. Chong points out, as have so many of his colleagues in this study, that it is this which actually produces the global audience – and the critical enthusiasm - for Hong Kong film. The local, so central to these films, must not be lost – either from the films, or from the reforms within industry practice. It is a matter of keeping the best, but lifting standards overall – from story conceptualisation to post-production and digital effects.

> Mature film managers understand the creativity difference in Hong Kong. Many practitioners understand that the creativity in Hong Kong movies is quite different from overseas movies. We get great creativity in many ways, but the films still don't look good. So trust in creative talent is very important.

In fact, so important is this formula of what could be called 'the local, expanded' – a formula which, as many have pointed out, contains within itself a cultural orientation towards flexibility – that Chong is able to remind us that when it comes to the new creative industries movement, it is Hong Kong's film industry which will act as the model for all future developments.

> I think the essence of Hong Kong film culture lies in the phrase: 'moving pictures are the only success in terms of a Hong Kong cultural industry'.

If Chong is right, then his formula should be showing up in both the work and the understandings of the industry expressed by these younger, second-New Wave film professionals, considered able to lift production standards, respond to global demands, and at the same time, accede to the best qualities inherent in this distinctively Hong Kong film culture.

9.3 Johnnie To Ki Fung: 'No money: no good films, and no talent: no good ideas...'

Johnnie To Ki Fung – another who joined film production from a background in television – provides the opportunity to examine how successfully this re-combination can be achieved. With some of the more recent industry successes under his belt, To acts as representative of the new generation of Hong Kong film makers.

1. *Please briefly introduce your career path from 1980.*

   Johnnie To Ki Fung. A TV-trainee, later became a successful movie director. First film *The Enigmatic Case* received poor box office - went back to television until 1988, then finished a second movie *Eighth Happiness:* box office champion that year. Now a mainstream director in the Hong Kong industry. Productions were box office champion in 2001, 2003 and 2004.

2. *How would you evaluate the development of Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s on? What are its milestones and turning points? What are its main characteristics?*

Commercial business supported the development of cinema in the 1980s. The four big companies which included Shaw Continental, Golden Harvest, Cinema City and D&B Films all possessed their own film studios and cinema chains. This helped promote the industry. After the mid 1990s, the Return in 1997 and the flourishing of fade DVD these four companies transferred their attention to new formats, or even closed down entirely. The industry declined and there are no big companies in the 21st century. The others are doing it hard and the market remains depressed.

3. *Can you talk about your impressions of Hong Kong film culture? What marks its production culture at the local level?*

Hong Kong films emphasise expense and quality. They are an entertainment product. Once the professionals make a name for themselves in the industry, they work hard to create positive messages in every movie, just what a good citizen should do in the community...

4. What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films of the1980s, the 1990s and those after 2000?

Films in the 1980s and 1990s focused on the superstar, and their content was determined by who would be the protagonist. By the 1990s and into the 21st century, the older stars were aging or had changed career direction, but

younger ones were not yet fully prepared to take up these positions.

5. *What do you think are the main elements which have affected the creative development of the Hong Kong film industry?*

Resources and talent are the main elements. No money: no good films, and no talent: no good ideas. There will be an audience if the films are creative.

6. *How would you define 'creativity' in Hong Kong cinema? Is it related to the subject, format, content, or style of a film, or is it something else?*

Creativity means innovation. It means new expression, new ways of telling stories, new camera techniques, new performance skills or new styles. Creativity can be seen in every role and it is the essential element of the industry's development.

8. *What do you think are the main influences on the creativity of Hong Kong cinema?*

It depends on human ingenuity. All creativity is good for the industry because that's at core, what is appreciated by audiences.

8. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films and others? As 'the Hollywood of the East', what are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood?*

Almost the same. The differences lie only in the different requirements from different people.

9. *How do you think the local profession views 'creativity'?*

They are thirsty for creativity. However, they also understand that it is not something you get only by dreaming.

10. *Can you talk about international evaluations of the 'creative' in films from Hong Kong?*

They appreciate it and so invite many Hong Kong directors to develop their career in Hollywood.

11. *How about local audience responses towards the 'creative' within Hong Kong films?*

Creativity means innovation and the audience loves to see new things.

12. *Please list three Hong Kong films which are quite 'creative' in your view, and provide reasons.*

I don't want to discuss others' productions.

13. *Please list one or two films which you've worked on which are especially 'creative' in your view. As one of the producers, could you please talk about the production processes used and how you made these films more 'creative' than usual?*

I don't want to talk about finished work, no matter whether it is mine or others'.

14. *The primary objective of mass culture is to maximise the interest and entertainment of audiences. So how do you plan to combine business profit and creative spirit in the production process?*

I think there is no contradiction. The commercial also needs creativity. However, there are no fixed rules for directing and I relied on inspiration.

15. *What do you think of the current situation of Hong Kong cinema? What is its future and how might it come to boom again?*

It's going backwards. No talent for further development. And I think that backstage talents are more important. If there are good screenwriters or directors, even ordinary people can be good players in a story. So it's quite upsetting that no professional college is willing to do the training work. The future is bleak. Not only have films from South-East Asia surpassed the quality of our productions, the mainland market has almost been taken over by Korean pictures.

16. *What are your feelings overall about the years of Hong Kong cinema's boom and decline? What do you plan to do to help it develop?*

Of course I hope that the industry can boom again. The government did not support us enough - or helped us in the wrong way. The industry does not need the $300 billion for individual productions, because independent productions will only choose the same kind of artists to suit the tastes of the market... In order to promote the industry we need to provide opportunities for the older and the younger to learn from each other. That's the right way to bring about long-term development.

9.3.2 Johnnie To – 'We need to provide opportunities for the older and the younger to learn from each other'.

To's emphasis on rapprochement between older film makers and the new generation reasserts the need for 'balance' between tradition and innovation, the local and the global, introduced throughout the 'new emergence' section of this study.

> In order to promote the industry we need to provide opportunities for the older and the younger to learn from each other. That's the right way to bring about long-term development.

Despite some degree of pessimism about the immediate future of the industry, To is keen to see a system-wide recognition of how production values need to be lifted. Every professional role within filmmaking needs to be reoriented towards the new creativity which will guarantee survival and success.

> Creativity means innovation. It means new expression, new ways of telling stories, new camera techniques, new performance skills or new styles. Creativity can be seen in every role and it is the essential element of the industry's development.

To does not espouse the vision of the director as the sole force behind a creative production. Like John Chong, who detailed how team-based production discussions helped develop innovative practice, To sees creativity as needing to be industry-wide – but at the same time, needing sound foundations upon which to build, and a firm hand controlling every project:

> I think that backstage talents are more important. If there are good screenwriters or directors, even ordinary people can be good players in a story.

Beyond that, the industry itself needs to be returned to a firm footing: not perhaps the Big Four monopoly of the 1980s (L. Cheuk-to, in Browne, & Yau, 1994, p. 123), which most interviewees have agreed produced a conceptually limited, if successful, film repertoire; but a sustained funding flow which allows for experimentation, and stops the few most profitable genres and properties dominating the field.

> Resources and talent are the main elements. No money: no good films, and no talent: no good ideas. There will be an audience if the films are creative.

Quite what constitutes the requisite creativity, To is unwilling to venture. Creativity is everywhere: at once part of the commercial ethos behind Hong Kong's earlier success, and in every layer of film production. Beyond that, he relies personally upon 'instinct' – perhaps a response to life experience; perhaps to industry models – but To comes closer than any other interviewee to a view of creativity as invested in talent. Thus his reticence in discussing new productions – either his own, or those of others; and his insistence that to the widely-accepted need to acknowledge past traditions of excellence, must be added a willingness of those already established in the industry, to learn anew from the young.

More than any other interviewee, To urges the need to find new directions – and to ensure that the entire industry remain open to cycles of regeneration. It is this, alongside the depth of his pessimism in assessing the industry's capacity to compete globally without thorough-going change, which positions him as a voice of the 'new emergence'. He is not however by any means its sole advocate.

9.4 Andrew Lau Wai Keung: *'Creativity lies in real life'*

Andrew Lau Wai Keung is a well-known cinematographer, now working as a creative director. From a career founded in the Shaw films of the Golden Era, he has moved on to the riskier path of his own production house – so has as much invested in the long term economic future of Hong Kong film as actor Andy Lau. The degree to which, as a director, he remains close to the processes of film making, produces in his responses to the following questions a very detailed and grounded overview of what is impacting upon contemporary productions. For Andrew Lau the Hong Kong film tradition itself is a fundamental key to its possible futures.

1. *Please briefly introduce your career path since 1980.*

Because I was not good at studies, I wanted to start my career even before finishing secondary school. After graduation, I worked hard to find a job as a camera assistant. In 1981, Shaw Intercontinental needed a film production assistant. I thought there was a close relationship between camera and cinema, so I wrote to apply. After three interviews, I got the position.

From then on, I worked as a camera assistant, photographer's assistant, and finally became a photographer - and my first work was *Mr. Corpse.* I became a film director from 1989 and my first moving picture was *Against All.* In 1995 I started my own company BOB with Manfred Wong and Jing Wong. I left BOB in 2000 and joined Andy Lau's Teamwork. I also took on administrative work there. I started my own company Base in 2002 and my productions include *Infernal Affairs, Initial D* and *Daisy.*

2 *How would you evaluate the development of Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s on? What are its milestones and turning points? What are its main characteristics?*

In the1980s Shaw Intercontinental produced dozens of films every year and it was its golden time. Its productions reached the South-East Asian market and were quite popular - because watching movies was the main entertainment channel at that time. There were many superstars at that time including Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan. After the rise of kung fu cinema martial arts comedies boomed.

Later Hong Kong cinema declined and the South-East Asian countries developed. What's more, mainland China developed its industry as well. So the need for Hong Kong films decreased. Actually, the quality of Hong Kong cinema is not the main reason for the decline; it retains its own character. Now the mainland market is opening, we must make changes to face up to the new situation.

3. *Can you talk about your impressions of Hong Kong film culture? What marks its production culture at the local level?*

The culture of Hong Kong cinema is quite local. Many excellent productions make use of local culture, including *Aces Go Places.* The making of martial arts films is also local, and *Infernal Affairs* made by me is the same. Hong Kong people enjoy the Gangster genre and this has been widely influential.

4. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films of the1980s, the 1990s and those after 2000?*

Not much difference in terms of production. The resources were better than nowadays and this let many kinds of genres come into being. There were some mini companies which specialised in producing genres. The markets were full of all kinds of cinema and the fierce competition also brought progress. Nowadays there is much less cinema in the big festivals. This summer the number of Hong Kong films is so small. Some reasons involve the Hollywood films. However, in my opinion, there's still plenty of space for good movies.

5. *What do you think are the main elements which have affected the creative development of the Hong Kong film industry?*

In the old days movies were welcomed no matter what quality they were. For the time being, even excellent movies lack audience. The competition is so sharp that directors have to find their space flexibly.

6. *How would you define 'creativity' in Hong Kong cinema? Is it related to the subject, format, content, or style of a film, or is it something else?*

Creativity is everywhere. In the *Young and Dangerous* series the creativity came from cartoons. Cartooning is one of the sources of creativity. Actually there is much more subject matter in Hong Kong than in foreign countries. Some films are local, such as the film *Cagemen.* The investors dare not invest in new genres - including for instance the story of a prostitute. On the other side, many practitioners stay in the same position and don't realise that the industry needs innovation. Some need a rest - but I don't. This is the talent difference. I like walking around Mong Kwok, surfing online, watching the film making and reading newspapers... Creativity lies in real life. And it needs technology and skills as well. Some audiences are quite professional and they need the new techniques to create a feeling of the new. The film *Infernal Affairs* has a good concept in itself, but it also needs technological help when it comes to production.

7. *What do you think are the main influences on the creativity of Hong Kong cinema?*

The main point lies in the resourcing. The opening of mainland markets is good for us and it helps promote our reputation. However, it may limit the films' characteristics as well. The local market is too small and it definitely needs expanding.

8. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films and others? As 'the Hollywood of the East', what are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood?*

Most are almost the same. The time for script writing is very short. Foreign films were once produced over one or even two years. There are many writers writing the scripts there. The film *Young and Dangerous* used only one writer and a half month for the whole process.

9. *How do you think the local profession views 'creativity'?*

They respect creativity. However, whether it gets through into production depends on how well the producers sell the story.

10. *Can you talk about international evaluations of the 'creative' in films from Hong Kong?*

The situation is better. Recently *Infernal Affairs* - the American version - has received a good response. Hong Kong cinema still has a space there.

11 *How about local audience responses towards the 'creative' within Hong Kong films?*

They respect cinema and will choose good movies such as *Infernal Affairs.*

12 *Please list three Hong Kong films which are quite 'creative' in your view, and provide reasons.*

One is *Aces Go Places* produced in the 1980s. It added some new elements into the traditional action movies. *Yes Asia* made in the 1990s re-created a familiar story into a modern one. There were many innovations in that movie such as the choice of actors and use of skills. *Infernal Affairs* in the 21st century is a mixture of creativity and technology. It's very un-traditional with many different camera skills.

13 *Please list one or two films which you've worked on which are especially 'creative' in your view. As one of the producers, could you please talk about the production processes used and how you made these films more 'creative' than usual?*

The Storm Riders used many pioneering technologies and I learned much at that time. I learned from the Hollywood masters and the new computer software. That was a bold trial and it took two years to finish.

14 *The primary objective of mass culture is to maximise the interest and entertainment of audiences. So how do you plan to combine business profit and creative spirit in the production process?*

There's no contradiction here and creativity needs commercial support.

15 *What do you think of the current situation of Hong Kong cinema? What is its future and how might it come to boom again?*

Now is a difficult time for Hong Kong cinema and it needs our hard work to get through it.

16 *What are your feelings overall about the years of Hong Kong cinema's boom and decline? What do you plan to do to help it develop?*

I will try my best with every project...

9.4.2 Andrew Lau - *'The local market is too small and it definitely needs expanding'.*

For Andrew Lau too the core of Hong Kong movie-making lies in its cultural origins:

> The culture of Hong Kong cinema is quite local. Many excellent productions make use of local culture, including *Aces Go Places.*

He sees his own creativity as intimately connected to the everyday life of his society and its distinctive locations, drawing inspiration directly from the life of its urban streets, and then working it into the broader information flows of a modern digital mediascape:

> I like walking around Mong Kwok, surfing online, watching the film making and reading newspapers...
> Creativity lies in real life.

In fact Andrew Lau sees this focus on the local as serving the Hong Kong film industry especially well: a richly creative and complex urban society furnishing an equally rich set of film narratives.

> Actually there is much more subject matter in Hong Kong than in foreign countries. Some films are local, such as the film *Cagemen.*

This for Andrew Lau is what has created the inventiveness of Hong Kong film: a locally-oriented product, founded on a society generating its own narratives, with a rich production base, allowing the production culture to include innovation and experimentation – all acceptable in the early days at least, to a voracious cinema audience:

> In the1980s Shaw Brothers Studio produced dozens of films every year and it was its golden time. Its productions reached the South-East Asian market and were quite popular - because watching movies was the main entertainment channel at that time.

With a seemingly endless supply of material and an enthusiastic audience, Hong Kong film was able to innovate, creating entirely new types of viewing.

> The resources were better than nowadays and this let many kinds of genres come into being. There were some mini companies which specialised in producing genres. The markets were full of all kinds of cinema and the fierce competition also brought progress. Nowadays there is much less cinema.

To some extent this *embarras de richesses* eroded quality, with the Hong Kong industry becoming over-confident and losing production value. Andrew Lau wonders how far this endless chain of low-budget production may have become enshrined within the film culture more generally, blocking the opportunity for longer and more carefully planned projects.

> Foreign films were once produced over one or even two years. There are many writers writing the scripts there. The film *Young and Dangerous* used only one writer and a half month for the whole process.

He fears that audiences too have begun to make unfavourable comparisons, drawn to the high production values, more profound plots and characterisation and special digital effects of films from outside Hong Kong. If this view becomes habitual, it will continue to constrain Hong Kong film making.

> In the old days movies were welcomed no matter what quality they were. For the time being, even excellent movies lack audience. The competition is so sharp that directors have to find their space flexibly.

Nor is it solely audiences who are turning away from the sorts of risky innovation in which the industry once specialised. Not only have the economics of film financing changed, limiting opportunities for launching new concepts, but film makers themselves are more inclined towards safe propositions:

> The investors dare not invest in new genres - including for instance the story of a prostitute. On the other side, many practitioners stay in the same position and don't realise that the industry needs innovation.

All of this is especially problematic since it has occurred at precisely the moment when movie making is undergoing a major adaptation to digital techniques and introducing expensive special effects into post production. Today's audiences expect the most advanced levels of visual impact – and these add new demands to the filmmaking process. Contemporary film for Andrew Lau is about much more than a clever narrative concept. A film needs technology and skills as well.

> Some audiences are quite professional and they need the new techniques to create a feeling of the new. The film *Infernal*

Affairs has a good concept in itself, but it also needs technological help when it comes to production.

The major difficulty is to locate financing which can meet the costs of extensive digital post-production, and still reach profit within a relatively small community of film makers. Since, as Andrew Lau, comments, 'the local market is too small and it definitely needs expanding...' the focus must turn to Hong Kong's regional and international markets – and that, in turn, according at least to his formula, must be achieved without compromising the strength of ongoing connection to local issues, local perceptions – local culture. How this is to occur remains a dilemma – although Andrew Lau remains optimistic that the adaptability which has always been central to Hong Kong film making will once again emerge, and allow it to negotiate the necessary relationships and distribution access – without endangering the distinctiveness of the product.

He is not the only one feeling the lack of a definitive onward direction for his industry.

9.5 Pang Ho Cheung: *'I am the kind of person who just progresses step by step...'*

In the following interview Pang Ho Cheung, a 'new generation' writer-director, has worked in ways which are rather closer to the *auteur* role than is the case with many others. His experiences and insights have the potential to reveal how far this newer, more autonomous form of creativity might be possible.

1. *Please briefly introduce your career path from 1980.*

Pang Ho Cheung, a novelist, who became a new-generation movie writer-director.

I attended a scriptwriting course at the end of the 1980s and started writing scripts for television stations in the early 1990s. After selling the first script, *Full Time Killer* I started working on short films from 1999. I worked as a screenwriter from 2000 to 2001. And then I began to work as a director from 2001 and my first moving picture was *Maai Hung Paak Yan.*

2. *How would you evaluate the development of Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s on? What are its milestones and turning points? What are its main characteristics?*

It reached its peak around 1992 to 1993. In the following days it kept developing, and then the pace picked up in the year 1997. The 1980s cinema was produced for the midnight audience, and this lead to its unstable quality. When fade DVD appeared, people gave up going to the cinema almost at once and that destroyed the development of the market. At the same time, the speed of training is too slow and no new generation is available to take over.

3. *Can you talk about your impressions of Hong Kong film culture? What marks its production culture at the local level?*

Hong Kong people are flexible and know how to find chances between the lines. This can be both good and bad. The decline is related to the Golden Era. They needed few resources to produce good output, but did not create a complete system for further development [of the industry]. The quality of the cinema remains low, and this will definitely affect our reputation.

4. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films of the1980s, the 1990s and those after 2000?*

I think it's more difficult to access the mainland market at this moment. It needs collaboration with the mainland and with Hong Kong actors, and adaptation to strict censorship. The result may mean a loss of the local market, with no success on the mainland.

Actually fewer and fewer people walk into the cinema: they just stay at home with the DVD instead.

5. *What do you think are the main elements which have affected the creative development of the Hong Kong film industry?*

Hong Kong cinema needs more diversified audiences and relevant training for the younger generation. The director needs to take care of the whole process, not the shooting part only. And he should not be too flexible, so that we lose the integrity of the whole story.

6. *How would you define 'creativity' in Hong Kong cinema? Is it related to the subject, format, content, or style of a film, or is it something else?*

Creativity means flexibility, but this has also become the excuse for giving up on principles. So it has merit, but at the same time affects our development.

7. *What do you think are the main influences on the creativity of Hong Kong cinema?*

Flexibility is good for introducing new things - and also the excuse for being irresponsible.

8. *What are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong films and others? As 'the Hollywood of the East', what are the similarities and differences between Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood?*

We are too flexible - and this has become an excuse. Hollywood cinema possesses a stable system and insists on the quality of its scripts and productions. Its structures control the quality of its output. Hong Kong lacks this kind of system, and this degree off freedom only works with a talented director.

9. *How do you think the local profession views 'creativity'?*

They just pay it lip-service. Actually there is no security for our creativity, and no system for bonus distributions. So all these aspects allow talent to escape.

10 *Can you talk about international evaluations of the 'creative' in films from Hong Kong?*

They often buy the re-write rights from us if we have good stories. They know that we haven't made the best use of them.

11. *How about local audience responses towards the 'creative' within Hong Kong films?*

They don't know how to point out good or bad features systematically and they just respond in terms of intuitive or felt judgments.

12 *Please list three Hong Kong films which are quite 'creative' in your view, and provide reasons.*

One is *A Better Tomorrow* because it created a new style for kung fu films. Another is *The Mission* by Jonnie To. He definitely tells the story through the image and this is rare in the local market.

13 *Please list one or two films which you've worked on which are especially 'creative' in your view. As one of the producers, could you please talk about the production processes used and how you made these films more 'creative' than usual?*

The first one is *Men Suddenly in Black.* I tried to combine the 'little couple' comedy and *jiang hu* film. I want to develop a new genre which is not the same as those in work by Jing Wong. It did not need exaggerated behavior and the laughs come from the content, the shooting skill and the music. I wanted to direct a *jiang hu* film after *Maai Hung Paak Yan,* but the investors wanted comedy. So I tried to combine them in order to satisfy both.

14. *The primary objective of mass culture is to maximise the interest and entertainment of audiences. So how do you plan to combine business profit and creative spirit in the production process?*

A film production always needs the market, but the languages used by investors and creators are not the same. The directors need balance. However, they should also understand the relationship between income and expenses, and find out where the market is.

15. *What do you think of the current situation of Hong Kong cinema? What is its future and how might it come to boom again?*

The future is not promising. Income has declined by half and there is less and less local audience. This leads to lower

production fees and evolves into a vicious circle.

16 *What are your feelings overall about the years of Hong Kong cinema's boom and decline? What do you plan to do to help it develop?*

I am the kind of person who just progresses step by step. I will try to insist on what I want and just choose the stories I like. I think I am quite lucky because I was able to start my career at a good moment, and I can finish doing what I want. I don't know how to change the macro environment and so just try my best to finish my own work.

9.5.2 P ang Ho Cheung - *'We are too flexible...'*

Pang Ho Cheung states the problem outright, as he pinpoints the difference between that creativity gained from a 'flexible' adaptiveness to any number of production constraints – what Ng See Yuen would see as a collaborative creativity – and a directed creativity, able to pursue a vision for a film which is fully focused upon the integrity of the production in hand.

> Creativity means flexibility, but this has also become the excuse for giving up on principles. So it has merit, but at the same time affects our development.

Pang Ho Cheung introduces an equally paradoxical solution: a more disciplined industry, which would then permit the individual vision of writers and directors to emerge intact.

> We are too flexible - and this has become an excuse. Hollywood cinema possesses a stable system and insists on the quality of its scripts and productions. Its structures control the quality of its output. Hong Kong lacks this kind of system, and that degree of freedom only works for a talented director.

Within such a culture that 'talented director' is generally thought of as someone who can hold the production together – manage it through to completion, responding to the diverse inputs and influences of the collaborative and adaptive approach. The sorts of production-wide quality control possible in a more systematic industry would relieve directors from this burden, and allow them to refocus upon the true creativity of perfecting their vision for the film.

> The director needs to take care of the whole process, not the shooting part only. And he should not be too flexible, so that we lose the integrity of the whole story.

Meanwhile, those industry figures and policy formulators who speak of creativity have no real understanding of what it means within film production, and no commitment to sustaining that talent which does exist. Creativity for Pang Ho Cheung is too often discussed and too rarely supported:

> They just pay it lip-service. Actually there is no security for our creativity, and no system for bonus distributions. So all these aspects allow talent to escape.

Worse: those films which do succeed are too often re-worked – and improved – outside the Hong Kong industry, by global producers.

> They often buy the re-write rights from us if we have good stories. They know that we haven't made the best use of them.

So what lies behind this failure to build upon Hong Kong's capacity – a capacity which bubbles up even within a relatively disorganised industry – to keep producing successful movies? Can the Hong Kong industry in its current form exert full creative control over its product? For Pang Ho Cheung the answer so far appears to be 'no' – and the origins of the problem lie in those very features of the local film-making culture which others have praised as 'flexible' and 'adaptable', and which arose in the era of greatest success.

> The decline is related to the Golden Era. They needed few resources to produce good output, but did not create a complete system for further development [of the industry]. The quality of the cinema remains low, and this will definitely affect our reputation.

Pang Ho Cheung's view is one of an industry still alive with creative talent, but as yet unable to harness it in ways which both signal its inherent and distinctive creativity to global audiences, and sustain its production capacity and its product quality - and so its reputation and markets... The industry is, for him, immature, and in many ways blocked by its own early successes, and its failures to foster talent for the future. The overall capacity is there – but is being wasted by poor industry-wide planning, and a failure to recognise itself for what it already is. 'Integrity' is a word which Pang Ho Cheung considers as he tries to outline the need for the creative vision to be recognised as central to both the individual production, and the entire industry – and in his view the dominant value of Hong Kong cinema, the much cherished 'flexibility', has been allowed to erode that integrity. It has become an excuse for adulterating the vision within a film, and the overall planning behind the industry.

How might this creative 'integrity' be achieved within an industry formed within the Hong Kong context: one so strongly influenced, as all respondents to date have made clear, by its local cultural predispositions – including both a tendency towards collaborative productivity, and the close attention paid to market forces in an industry always commercially oriented? The discussion is taken up in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER 10:

Can collaboration and a commercial orientation guarantee creativity?

10.0 Surviving the creative decline of Hong Kong film

The many transformations evident from the Golden Era of both local and international success in Hong Kong filmmaking to the current 'Extinction' period of falling box-office interest, increased regulatory intervention from mainland markets, and declining funding for any 'risky' departures from established formulaic plots or genres have led this study to question whether something entirely new: something perhaps unprecedented, may prove necessary to any potential renewal of a specifically Hong Kong movie industry, or culture. The questions which have emerged from analysis of the various 'industry snapshots' set out in this study: indicators drawn from the statistics of box office successes – and failures; profiles of industry awards and critical evaluations in film reviews; and especially the 'insider' summations of a sampling of dominant industry figures, strengthen the curious tone of indirection which appears rife within the industry. There is, it appears, little sense of where things might be headed, and instead only a vague sort of hope that 'more of the same' might ensure survival. Hong Kong filmmakers mostly seem to trust that tried and true techniques will prevail; even that what may be emerging is perhaps a mature industry, confronting a need to find ways to sustain itself, while it awaits some form of cyclical return to the heights of its earlier success.

Here the study will attempt what no one sampling of experiences or opinions has yet appeared able to do: to question the outcomes of any quiescent, 'wait-and-see' policy, in terms of both motivation, and likely outcomes. What is it that renders Hong Kong's most creative, dynamic, and successful talent so seemingly at a loss, when it comes to their future leadership of the industry to which they have committed their lives, and which has in turn offered them such rewards? Why has Hong Kong's apparently native capacity for adaptation to circumstance: its ability to turn anything to advantage; its fiercely competitive and entrepreneurial spirit, and its energy and delight in the new, abandoned it? Are the suggestions made by the industry creatives interviewed here enough to turn things around – or even to keep this relatively small local industry going, in the face of competitor entertainment brands, such as digital gaming, or the rise and rise of renewed gambling and total-packaged entertainment products from the US, via Hong Kong Disneyland or the Las Vegas-sponsored casino and theme park hotel investment in neighbouring Macau.

Even competitor national film industries, such as the rise of the Korean movie, or the ongoing flooding of competitor product directed to the tastes of the mega-audience nations, China and India, need to be considered. Is the apparent indecisiveness and loss of nerve in the Hong Kong industry shown here, perhaps a part of this too-sudden need to reassess changes outside itself: the new realities of Hong Kong cultural politics and the economics of mass-audience appeal, as it adapts to its

reincorporation into China. And what does Hong Kong film intend to contribute to those new social-technologisations of screened entertainment which have already gone beyond film and its massed cinema-going audiences: the shift to home-entertainment centres; large plasma screens in the living room; time-shifted DVD viewing; mobile delivery, download and even viewing via laptops; as well as cross-promotion and multi-use of products via personal mobile wireless networks, and the need to incorporate new product into the informal and shifting social groupings which now regulate and 'mass' popular tastes.

Having discovered elements of each of these dilemmas outlined in the data assembled for this study, it is time to suggest that it may be *the unprecedented combination of these factors* which is producing the seeming paralysis current in the industry. When it comes to change perhaps even Hong Kong, noted for its orientation to the new and ever-confident of its own ability to rise to a challenge, has simply seen too much, too fast.

In what follows, this study suggests that the advice offered by the sample of movie creatives, each in his way recommending slow, careful restructuring, and indicating what could be seen as a steadfast refusal to be panicked into precipitate action; may in fact hold the promise of a new future – and one congruent with that very specific culture of creativity which produced Hong Kong's last moment of film-making fortune. Within the findings from each section of this research there has been surfaced a set of conditions and predispositions which, if properly understood and directed back into Hong Kong's own modes of hyper-creativity, could build a sustained and sustainable, rather than boom-or-bust, film industry. Perhaps this time it may prove less a stand-alone, or even peak creative sector, but one instead integrated into co-operative relationships with other 'creative industries', in ways which will offer it indemnity against the sense of failure with which it currently grapples.

10.1 What has been learned from reviewing the annual best-selling films across the eras of 'success' and 'decline'

To begin the focus on the eight outstanding Hong Kong film-makers whose success and failure from 1985 to 2005 centre this study and characterise the achievement and reputation of Hong Kong film production from the Golden Era to the Extinction Period, this study located the three best-seller films for each year. Together these helped identify a number of major impacts upon Hong Kong film production in this period.

Each has then been significantly expanded in the comments made by the eight film creatives in their Interviews, supplemented by insights which have emerged from within those film studies based upon Hong Kong products which have sought to analyse what is distinctive in its cinema production. In one way or another, focus has been consistently directed to the following:

1. **The specifics of the cultural background**, including the emerging recognition of a specific 'Hong

Kong' rather than a more generalised 'Chinese' cinema.

2. **Levels of professional knowledge within the film industry itself,** with particular emphasis on the relative informality of entry to any of the industry's production roles.

3. **Life-style issues impacting upon audiences,** including anxieties related to the 1997 return of Hong Kong to China, and changing focus on entertainment selections as the digital information technologies came to dominate everyday life.

4. **Economic transformation,** especially in relation to increased costs of special-effects post- production, but also taking into account changing patterns of distribution, promotion, and cross-sector pre-production deals.

5. **Diversified audiences,** with the declining, and demographically limited, local audiences leading producers to seek larger mainland, international or international/diasporic sales, as well as catering to the emergent new digital technologisations of film viewing; including home viewing and mobile/wireless formats;

6. **Sources of film funding,** from relative levels of availability to the various pressures exerted by different funding sources.

7. **The professional status of film creatives,** together with new calls for University-level training, an increased critical focus for reviewers, and the linking of the film industry into broader agglomerations of the 'creative industries', via both cross-merchandising deals, multi-platform pre-production and international distribution /co-production contracts, and 'incubator zone' creation/production facilities.

8. **Computer graphics,** catering to the demands of game-player audiences, as well as those of filmmakers largely locked-in to the most successful Hong Kong genre films: martial arts and action/fantasy, or the use of enhancement effects for dynastic plots. Comparatively heavy use of computer graphics not only increases expense and slows down post-production, but it has tendencies to displace key younger creatives into the competitor games industry.

9. **The influence of the age of information,** with its re-technologisation of both entertainment itself, and its creation of a more demanding audience member, wanting more streams of film viewing, more 'background' information on production, different types of consumption of film product, more complex pathways for advertising and promotion, and so on. At the same time, global competitor industries have alternative pathways for accessing local markets, such as that in Hong Kong, with what were once very much minority and art-house cinema tastes, now able to go mainstream. This section in particular will raise the question: why has Hong Kong, with a highly mobile population and large tourist turnover, not proven as able as some other cultures to stream creative product through the new global networks?

This study now moves to integrate all these major views on 'the condition' of Hong Kong filmmaking, by returning them into a much deepened and more detailed narrative of the contexts within which that industry works.

10.1.1 Cultural background

At the beginning of the 1970s cultural activities in Hong Kong focused predominantly upon the conventional popular entertainment sectors, with the community's mostly a-political and conservative social atmosphere leaving its citizens seeking stable jobs and a focus on everyday pursuits, rather than on the glamour of nightlife or intense recreational experiences.

As the economy developed, especially through light industry and commerce, teenaged cohorts became the central pillars of the social economy. They were the real consumers within the film market, and increasingly the arbiters of popular taste. With no need to devote massive levels of physical energy in the workplace, and most of them still without family responsibilities, these new consumer demographics had disposable income, after-work leisure, and energy a-plenty. Movies became their primary and most popular entertainment, eclipsing radio drama, TV soap operas, the novel, cartoons, and live theatre – even sport. This was the era which drove the rise of Hong Kong film – and it was very much a young person's genre, around which their favoured sociality and their easy access to Hong Kong's urban cinemas was able to construct a fast-paced, new, urban film repertoire, suited to the experiences of its young audience.

By 1985, regular access to consumer forms of organised entertainment had become indispensable for Hong Kong youth. Movie makers, recognising youth as their main target audience, revised their production priorities to achieve a more commercial product. This rising 'Golden Era' of guaranteed mass audiences, all too willing to be entertained by exciting, preferably emotionally- saturated narratives and effects, allowed filmmakers the relatively easy path of drawing on existing repertoires of past cinema successes.

Many movies which had pleased earlier audiences were reprised, such as *Chinese Ghost Story* (1987), adapted from the ancient Chinese novel the *Ghost Story* by producer by Tsui Hark; or *Husband Diary* (1988) which he revised from the radio drama of the same name. *Wild Seven* (1993) was developed from the cartoon by Ching Sui Tui. *All Corners of the Country* (1988) directed by Wu Kam Chun, was adapted from the Hong Kong Swordsmen novel by Kam Yung; *The Lengend of Wong Fei Hung* (1991) was drawn from black and white films produced and directed by Tsui Hark, while *I Have A Date With Spring* (2003) was based on a stage play supervised by Ko Chi Sum.

Two observations need to be stressed. Firstly, this youth audience of relatively inexperienced film goers, massed by a flourishing urban economy of light-industry and commerce and so cashed-up and eager to be entertained on a regular basis, can be seen to have pushed a film industry faster than it could produce entirely new creative concepts. Their demand drove it to 'strip mine' its existing cultural resources, revising old material rather than devising new screenplays (see Bordwell, 2000, p. 102).

At the same time however, this rapid consumption and re-badging of established successes assured local film makers that their entertainment culture had depth. Formulae which had worked in the past, or in other entertainment formats, worked reliably with new generations. A confidence developed within the film industry – perhaps even an over-confidence. Not only did local material work: film producers appeared to have the capacity to predict what would be successful. A film's 'originality' came to be seen to hinge not on its conceptualisation, but on its production values: the ways it was realised as film, including its design, settings, costuming, acting, and effects.

As this internal culture evolved, it seemed as if Hong Kong film had found a certain formula of its own, producing distinctively formatted features, guaranteed to please local audiences. The attraction instantly gained for any announcement of a new re-badged production persuaded the film industry that it had taken up a central role in the culture's new pre-occupation with itself: that it had only to release details of its next production, and the saturating media attention which would ensue could carry the entire venture forward, attracting everything from investment to pre-booked distribution. In what are widely known as 'stunts' within the industry, Hong Kong productions came to dedicate more and more of their real creativity to the announcement of their next feature's concept: a process regarded by many professionals with near superstitious awe, as a guarantee of a film's success (see especially Keane, 2006, p. 3).

The illusion was not to last. As these movies entered the Extinction Period, every year the success of the 'revised' formula movies decreased. Three series of the *Young and Dangerous* sequence (1998), revised from the cartoon and directed by Andrew Lau Wai Keung, and *Chinese Heroes, Constant Changes, Before and after* and *First Love* (1997), revised from radio drama and produced by Wong Kar Wai, continued the adaptation model – but overall the number of movies drawn from other media-format successes greatly reduced. While films revised from cartoons continue to address the child and youth audience, it was already evident that the revision format had limitations (Bordwell, 2000, p. 102).

Was this simple exhaustion of good source materials, or had the fashion for movies somehow changed? Once again, the major cause appears to be economic, with movie makers responding to, rather than driving, consequent changes to the culture of production. Having become accustomed to an enthusiastic response from new, young audiences to safely pre-tested 're-badged' productions, many now drawn from their own generational cultural past in comic books or television dramas, producers suddenly confronted a significant across-the-board drying up of both cross-media source materials, and cash-flush young workers seeking regular evening entertainment. Having returned to the Chinese homeland in 1997, the Hong Kong economy's ensuing uncertainties affected its cultural productivity, and produced a slow-down in social confidence. Not only were movie plots from other popular media less available, film-makers, having ceased to regard themselves as the certain touchstones of a film's success, had become over-reliant upon earlier cultural media as temperature indicators, using them to attract funding to expensive film projects.

Certainly, this 're-mediation' formula, which analysts of the new digital media, including Bolter and Grusin (2000, p. 73) have indicated is the marker of all immature media production cultures, guaranteed this new and high-achieving generation of Hong Kong film makers broader and larger audiences. It draw a new audience to cinema, catering to tastes established elsewhere in a media-saturated popular culture, and drawing this new urbanised demographic to centre its

social life upon regular film going. To this extent it was entirely successful. The shortcomings were however revealed once this seemingly flourishing cultural *inter-medium*, driving both the content and the audience's taste formations, proved to be little more than a particular social vogue. It was one which contained the seeds of its own demise, for if film could succeed with cross-media adaptations, so too could those other media – and even more menacingly, their new digital successors. As the popular-content focus of the entire local culture came to settle obsessively upon its own prior product, real creativity faltered. In this case, it also failed to note the new reversed, 'flow-out' capacities of the rising digital media. Cinema audiences – and especially those young audiences who had been so firmly connected to the Golden Era of Hong Kong film – had already begun to seek out the path-less-travelled: the more personalised, special-interest categories of entertainment product offered online. While film-makers feverishly attempted to rebuild their dwindling audience attention with big-ticket 'stunt' productions, their continued focus upon the past led them to miss what was happening around them: a general stampede, led by the youngest, to the 'new' digital media, and their individualised, on-demand entertainment. Initial success in reading, and capturing, a cultural tendency towards reworked popular media product in the first phase of Hong Kong's emergent local culture had hardened all too quickly into a formula, with all involved in guaranteeing a movie's originality: producers, directors, and script writers, seeing the popular cultural heritage as their source of inventiveness – yet missing the degree to which that culture was already headed down the path of change. What media analyst John Hartley (2005, p. 56) has called in another context 'rear-view-mirrorism', or the tendency to move forward only by looking backwards, had already come to bedevil the Hong Kong film industry. Its consequences were to become very quickly evident.

10.1.2 Cultural literacies, and the changing tastes of film audiences

As societies develop, shifting under the influence of forces as various as their economic profile; demographic trends making this or that age or ethnic cohort dominant; migration bringing in new cultural impacts; political or religious reform changing social attitudes and behaviours, cultural tastes move in and out of prominence. Pastimes, activities, entertainments, are in no way excluded from such influences, tending rather to reflect, albeit in sometimes complex ways, the dominant modes present across a society. Any given cultural artifact then – such as a film – is reliant upon its representations of the dominant cultural preferences of the day, since its audiences, themselves formed within those same tendencies, will be more or less attuned to it, as it takes up and reflects back the matters which preoccupy them, in the ways in which they mostly prefer to be addressed.

What results is a form of cultural literacy, which enables those within a culture to access its texts and activities with ease – even with enthusiasm – while making those from outside itself, or from an earlier era, more difficult. From this perspective, it becomes important to understand the specifics of the cultural literacies of successive Hong Kong film audiences, in order to explain first their support, and then their rejection, of the 'revision' formula outlined above. What made the 1970s-1980s audiences so receptive to the new, localised populism within the cross-media offerings producers chose – and more importantly, why did this stop?

Box-office surveys of the period accessed for this study show that the vast majority of younger film-goers in the 1980s were teenaged blue-collar workers, mostly in transportation, restaurants and other service industries (Fu, 2000, p. 73). They were regular films-goers, for the most part still living in the parental home, mostly a crowded space in this era before Hong Kong's family planning campaigns had reduced family size to two children. Still, the 'safe autonomy' of social movement which Castells *et al.* (2007, p. 58) have identified in more recent use of personal wireless mobile telephony was already available to the young in a 1980s highly urban Hong Kong, with its cheap and safe public transport and a highly reduced land mass. Younger family members were easily able to escape parental control of their TV viewing or selection of social acquaintances by centring their sociability on regular movie going. Cinemas, for a relatively affordable single fee, offered a form of high-excitement entertainment which required none of the formal education demanded by theatre, art or literature; no skill input or special equipment, such as dancing or sport; no constant expenditure, such as at bars, casinos or games arcades. A young blue-collar worker on a standard wage could afford a film ticket – and perhaps one for a girlfriend; a cheap meal and transport there and back, several times each week. Meanwhile the film provided endless conversational material, as well as individual entertainment, using press, magazine or TV celebrity interviews, pin-ups or posters, music soundtracks, and so on (Bordwell, 2000, p. 41).

It is this combination of age and income among audiences which dictated the successful genres of the day. Comedies and action movies, and so directors and stars such as Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung and Tsui Hark catered for young audiences. The resultant formula: an idol to star, lots of comedy, plenty of acrobatic fighting, was designed purely to please – as the saying went at the time: 'Only striving for happiness, not taking any trouble'. The most famous producers of the period: Wong Jin, Barry Wong Pui Yat, Wong Pai Ming, and Cheung Kin Ting, together referred to as the 'Three Wong, One Cheung' cartel, commissioned any and every script writer who excelled at high-action situation comedy. From the mid 80s to the mid 90s, most movies produced were formula based, enlisting superstars, famous kings and queens of song, good-looking men and beautiful woman to propel the Hong Kong movie industry ever forward, not only monopolising its native market, but sweeping through Southeast Asia, into Europe and America, and pushing local movies into their Golden period of ascendancy *(ibid.,* p. 53).

When a change – perhaps inevitably – arrived, it too proves to have been founded on social changes impacting upon audiences. From the 1980s on the Hong Kong government, mindful of both its limited housing space and finite resources, and perhaps too with an eye on its already negotiated return to China in 1997, had encouraged family planning. With families of only two children, most households of the 90s were able to offer whatever was desired in relation to education or cultural development. Quality and cost were no longer a consideration, with most households supported by a dual income, wages consistently rising, and inland immigration increasing demand for goods and services. Most Hong Kong youth were now expected to have some form of higher education, and to develop whatever wider interests that might appeal to them. This was an infinitely more demanding market: not only better educated, but far more diverse in its tastes, increasingly used to the best in consumer items, and wanting similarly distinctive products in their entertainment choices,

Added to this already demanding audience however was the unexpected inflow of mainland immigrants, licensed after the 1997 handover and required when a serious consumption slump resulted from the flight of Hong Kong citizens who feared

the erosion of their wealth and security under the new regime. To survive, film-makers had to somehow attract new immigrant audiences, without losing the demanding and style-conscious locals. With Asian investment markets down across the board by the late 90s, the Hong Kong film industry was running out of funds on all fronts. Only by adjusting to these new realities: researching and understanding the more complex new audience tastes, and developing a less formulaic, less imitative, and infinitely more creative and nuanced product, could the industry survive.

The creative orientation shifted accordingly, its new motto: 'Only when the intention is paramount, will the outcome please'. While the storylines might seem surprising; mainly police and gangster combat action, from the likes of Johnnie To Ki Fung, or Stephen Chow Sing Che, at least in the later period an intelligent humour emerged as the principal element. These movies had complicated plots, betraying an increasingly sophisticated big-city morality, and an ever-improving set of techniques for representing the pace, complexity and many contradictory layers of modern Hong Kong life. From the dilemmas within its own decline, the industry was beginning to produce a newer, more directly socially-engaged product. What remained to be seen was how this might play with those problematic new audiences *(ibid.,* p. 82).

10.1.3 Lifestyle issues impacting upon audiences

For Hong Kong residents the '97 return to China represented a watershed in relation to lifestyle and career prospects. Before '97, most were optimistic, but saw little point in making long-term plans. There was no chance of influencing the handover politically, and attempts to predict the social or economic consequences seemed contradictory at best, and confusing for most. As the return date approached, the media began to foreground stories about changes to Hong Kong, and as general anxiety increased, recreational entertainment tastes changed as well.

Through the '80s the dominant demographic among movie goers had aged. Now they were adults, shouldering the burdens of family, as breadwinners and home-owners; married, and with the next generation of very demanding children. Even if they had the cash, and the time, to return to the cinemas, they were no longer relaxed and chasing good times. Those works which were popular from the middle of the 1980s to the early '90s no longer interested them. The big production companies of the era: Mak Kar, Dean Shek, Wong Pai Ming's Cinema City, Raymond Chow's Golden Harvest, Dickson Poon's Dickson, and the many independent operations, fell on hard times.

Until the decline they had produced each year more than 100 films, shown in the four major cinema chains, each chain with 20 cinemas distributed across the various city neighborhoods. Movies had been vastly entertaining: comedies centered on everyday knockabout characters, full of pranks and outlandish fortune, and exactly calculated to appeal to a younger market which wanted distraction. But from the mid '90s things turned serious. In mainland China, the movie industry reported having lost up to 95% of its regular audience: in part the rise of competitor media forms, but also the response of a new, socially aspirational demographic, no longer satisfied by the production styles of the day, and wanting rather more for their entertainment investment than a crowded, 90 minute movie.

In Hong Kong, sensing many of the same concerns, movie makers shifted the emphasis, creating more contemporary themes,

responding to social anxieties with plots where all the characters were shown to achieve successful outcomes, even entirely against the odds. Winning the lottery; being rescued by some successful tycoon; inheriting an unexpected fortune – each was a classic 'happily ever after' storyline. Hong Kong audiences, rational and all too experienced at calculating the numbers when it came to the workings of chance, stayed away in droves. Even the fantasy workshop of their younger days could not make their dreams come true. The more flexible movie makers turned in another creative direction.

The new digital technologies were surging to prominence, with the computer already an indispensable necessity. It not only provided data at home and at work, but opened all kinds of new modes of entertainment provision, from mobile music to self-select DVD; blogging to video-exchange; free international phone calls to online shopping. The information age produced not only an expanded range of DIY entertainment; it was altering the ways in which that entertainment was selected, and delivered. In places like Hong Kong, with an educated, affluent, highly concentrated urban population, very exposed to the consumer market and attuned to the status consequences of keeping up to date, the new digital media and the products and services they carried proved irresistible.

Nobody however anticipated the ways in which the arrival of the information age would impact upon the techniques of Hong Kong movie making; indeed, upon their entire orientation towards technology.

At first, movie-makers understood only that, somehow, the creations which had formerly delighted local audiences, were now missing the mark. They began to realise that at least in part, this was to do with their failure to update to that huge portion of everyday life now centred on the new technologies. Film audiences no longer wanted to listen to aging police detectives griping about new computerised systems, or even watch high-action fight sequences, when they could access better effects, and interact with them, on their home games console. The new audiences wanted to see today's life on screen – and that included plots revealed by CCTV; chase-sequences controlled by GPS; heroes rescued by a single cell-phone call – and especially digitally-enhanced special effects, layering animatronics and fantasy morphs over more conventional film techniques. But Hong Kong filmmakers had traditionally avoided such things. High-quality techniques were considered too expensive, and incurring too much delay in post-production – perhaps even a handover of creative control to technicians. Worse: technical procedures in general, referenced in the film's narrative, mostly focused on the *outcome,* not the *action.* If a villain underwent identity-changing plastic surgery, viewers saw only the before-and-after. If an alien creature came to life, its birth process was strictly off-stage. But the new audiences, avid watchers of science and exploration documentaries and the new reality TV shows, were hungry for technical details. Their intellectual curiosity entirely awakened, they claimed the voyeuristic right to 'access all areas'.

For the first time in films like *Infernal Affair* (2003) by Andrew Lau Wai Keung and Mak Siu Fai, we watch how both the police and the thieves work as they infiltrate their agents into each other's operations – and our sense of tension and danger is heightened accordingly. In comedies such as *Buying the Ominous* (2001) directed by Pang Ho Cheung we get updated forms of ingenuity as, driven by desperation, the videocamera becomes a make-do weapon.

Hong Kong film makers began to focus on the details, using them to enrich each section of the plot, taking audiences into

zones usually accessed only by technical experts, and introducing ever more up-to-the-minute technologies and applications for their characters to deploy.

Having led the renewed Hong Kong focus on everyday culture and popular formats, movie makers had learned to their cost that they too now had to follow it – and with a generation undergoing the pressures of rapid economic growth and the emergence of Chinese culture in general into global prominence, that meant, if anything, staying ahead.

10.1.4 Economic transformation

As a result of the '97 return Hong Kong residents all sensed the end of an era, and a release into a new responsibility for their own destiny – not of course political, having for the most part shifted from one form of distant, non-consultative administration to another; but financially, in relation to both the future of their city, and of themselves.

Individuals became personally ambitious, eager to command the sort of fortune which guaranteed status and power. Investment in the stocks and shares markets sky-rocketed, moving from an expert profession or the interest of a few wealthy businessmen, to a widespread popular pastime and the concern of every resident with disposable income. Some followed the markets around the clock, including foreign currency exchange, futures markets and so on. Once investments matured, it was the turn of real estate, with developers rushing to keep up with price rises. It was the heroic age of business: College students enrolled in MBAs, dreaming of large salaries and glamorous international lifestyles in powerful global corporations – if not the ultimate accolade of being CEO of their own successful company. Ninety minutes to watch a film was now entirely too long – even if they increasingly used it to SMS their broker on their mobile phone. Cinemas closed, dismantled so that their large inner-city lots could be rebuilt for more profitable - corporate - use.

Films too had to reflect these changing values. The *Kiss Me Goodbye* series (1991) directed by Gordon K.S. Chan, well-known for his cheap films in the Golden Era, gave way to series such as *Suddenly in Black* (2003), supervised by Eric Tsang Chi Wai. Each depicts the good times of its day – but it is a very different day. Main characters in the '80s bow down to their womenfolk, recognising the rule of everyday domestic life – but by the '90s they have themselves become big men, controlling everything. Even the martial arts film, seemingly a total fantasy genre, responded to the economic transformation, its high budgets leached away into investment portfolios, and its audiences across Asia turning to more serious pursuits. Take *Drunken Fist 2* (1994), with Jackie Chan starring and directing, compared with *The Legend of Wong Fei Hung 2* (1993) with Jet Li. Chan's film, embedded as usual in cultural traditions, shows in painful detail how Wong Fei Hung becomes a master of Martial Arts. Li's film, more in tune with the values of younger professionals, shows how Wong Fei Hung arranged for Kung Fu to be passed from generation to generation, building his own reputation into posterity. Success was no longer considered something attained by long years of disciplined hard work, but a *fait accompli,* best shown in terms of social recognition, status, and power over others.

With the focus of Hong Kong's economy shifted from the manufacturing and service sectors to retail and import-export, films too became just another industry, dependant upon investment, and responsive to the current tastes of audiences.

Economic transformation impacted directly upon the creation of films, leaving them exposed to the vagaries of the market. How though were markets to be read for their influence upon audiences? What were the indicators, to which the film industry should respond? While other sectors had long engaged in the sorts of market research which provided early indicators of change, filmmakers had relied upon box office returns, combining them with the availability of concepts and scripts, in a relatively loose set of predictions – often resting more on reputation than on reliable forms of evidence. What then can be learned from audience formation across this era of instability, which might lead to a safer means of selecting film projects?

10.1.5 Diversified Audiences

From the outset this venture is complicated by the degree to which movies today need to take into account a diversified potential audience – both locally, with mainland immigrant labour still a factor to be considered, and in terms of flow-on markets, across Asia and the world.

While Hong Kong movies had always aimed primarily at local Hong Kong audiences, using them as indicators of potential success in wider South East Asian markets, the levels of success achieved actually complicated future planning. It was almost exclusively Chinese kung fu action movies which broke into international markets, with action superstars such as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Jet Li able to take the product even into Africa, and US film companies lining up to buy the copyright. But because each of these stars had seen success first in Hong Kong, and the kung fu genre was, at least before the rise of China's film industry, seen as a Hong Kong product, the ratios of income from the local Hong Kong market came to control investment in all Hong Kong movies. It was as if the Hong Kong audience had become not merely the first to respond to this dynamic new genre, but somehow an infallible barometer of taste, providing early warning of any new mass trend in movie going. Hong Kong movie producers catered to their target Hong Kong audience as before – but in the belief that this would bring them international break-out returns. They failed to consider how far what had happened to Hong Kong film, understood within Hong Kong to be due to the distinctive nature of the product; its specific local traits and qualities, was viewed elsewhere as being quintessentially a *Chinese* product, providing new and exciting forms of martial-arts combat and action, to audiences seeking the usual relatively short-term mix of new talent, exotic settings, and high-action thrills.

Not only did the Hong Kong industry then not entirely understand its international success, it had still not learned the lesson dealt it by the first incidence of rapid change in audience demographics. In the 90s, as a decade before, the relatively transient Hong Kong population had undergone significant change. A large number of comparatively wealthy middle-class families had emigrated, replaced by less affluent but aspirational incomers immigrating from mainland China. Movie producers began aiming product to this new group, following Industry research which had calculated the major target audience as:

10.5.1. Citizens from 16 to 35, subdivided into three categories:

(a) teenagers and students ;

(b) younger office workers;

(c) new immigrants.

10.5.2. The four main influences propelling these three demographics:

(a)The Internet;

(b) Fashion trends;

(c) Market Values;

(d) Population Migration.

10.5.2 a The influence of the Internet

Once Internet' use had become widespread, the life style of teenaged students, younger office workers and new emigrants supported by relatives in Hong Kong changed dramatically.

Teenaged students were the fraction most infatuated with the Internet, spending a great deal of time on it, checking email, chatting online 4 to 5 hours a day, as well as spending several further hours searching for information or playing computer games.

Apart from the loss of leisure time and the shift in the mode of interpersonal connection, the Internet proved a boon to media piracy. Movies, like music files, became a prime target, seemingly free for download and home viewing. With Hong Kong copyright law still under development in the 80s and 90s, even the most law-abiding citizen had little compunction in using boot-leg movies. By 2000 things had changed. Customs authorities enforced the law on importing pirated DVDs; cinemas worked to prevent the recording of movies by patrons with handheld camcorders, and anyone uploading pirated movies on the Internet was taken to court.

It proved less easy to counteract the Internet's legal impact, by producing feature films to rival its attraction to young audiences. Producers studied and produced movies with plots and effects related to computer games, such as *Game Boy* (1994), with Andy Lau as a computer games player, or *Sixty Million Dollar Man* (1995) with Stephen Chow using special computer-generated action to comic effect. Was this sustainable? How many such movies could be made – and how long would the novelty hold audiences?

10.5.2 b Fashion trends

With audiences spending time – and money - on alternative entertainments, from karaoke to DVD download for the home screen, and younger people playing computer games, only office workers visited cinemas in large numbers. Working in those

urban centres retaining the new megaplex cinemas, they found it convenient to call into a film on their way home – but once again there was a serious problem in the composition of this audience.

With young male office workers needing to save more and more money to support their families, or return the credit which had funded their education, it was increasingly the female office worker, a serious and educated woman not catered to in the booming computer game market, who chose to watch movies at the cinema. Often denied access to the all-important remote control which selected entertainment in the family home (Gray, 1992), and responsible for more than an equitable share of the after-work household chores, she was more likely to regard the home as a place of domestic work rather than of leisure. As the 21st century progressed, experienced Hong Kong producers started making more films for young women – noting that on those few occasions when younger males did return to the cinema, it was probably with their movie-loving girl friend. Movies such as *Needing You* (2000), *Love on a diet* (2001) and *Running on Karma* (2003), co-directed by Johnnie To Ki Fung and Wai Ka Fai, all took between HK $26,000,000-40,000,000. Not only were Hong Kong movie makers attending to their audiences, they were extending the range of their successful genres, improving the longer-term sustainability of the industry, and building back some of that cherished Hong Kong adaptability. The issue was however, did these movies have the capacity to break into markets beyond Hong Kong? Was this a strictly local audience – or was a similar demographic emerging elsewhere?

10.5.2 c Market Values

For all this ingenuity and new appeal to emerging audiences, gross earnings had a long, sharp return to address, having decreased from HK$1,431,115,027 in 1994 (Hong Kong Kowloon & New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd.) to HK$892,600,368 in 1999 .

Having discovered the retreat of their mainstream audience from movie going, producers began to explore a wider range of movie types. New types of superstar, new production techniques, and more focus on story and plot created movies such as *Infernal Affairs* (2002), co-directed by Andrew Lau Wai Keung and Alan Mak Sui Fai, with receipts of HK$55,046,706.00 (Hong Kong Kowloon & New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd.) in 2002. *Escape from Hong Kong Island* (2004) directed by Jackie Chan and *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) directed by Stephen Chow both did well, while *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) directed by Stephen Chow took HK$60,736,667 (Hong Kong Kowloon & New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd.).

This time it was not only the local audiences who returned.

International movie deals were now being negotiated, as buyers globally, facing much the same decline of cinema audiences, sought product from an industry like Hong Kong's, with a track record of global break-out success. The best and most innovative of these Hong Kong movies were able to on-sell their copyright at high prices, for subsequent re-production. While the continued appeal to the local still limited world distribution to art-houses and curated festivals, the formula was now seen as globally transferable. Hong Kong movies were finding the new channels which their products needed.

10.5.2 d Abrupt population change

Although middle class consumers have continued to leave Hong Kong, the population overall continues to rise. Visitors still travel to Hong Kong in large numbers. With incomers making up a further audience for local movies, producers have focused on comedies as the most immediately accessible genre. Ko Chi Sum has even produced a series of comedies reflecting the lives and experiences of mainlanders entering Hong Kong, including such titles as *Mr. Coconut* (1989), *All's well End's Well '97* (1997), *Happy gangs* (1993) and *It's a Beautiful Life (1994).* Movies never shown on the mainland, such as *Young and Dangerous* (1998) directed by Andrew Lau Wai Keung, have become important in producing changes in film content, directed to these new audience fractions.

These movies are aimed at both Hong Kong and Asian markets, in terms of subject matter and content – and their box office revenue and critical reputation suggest that the formula has been successful. In the local Hong Kong market alone, income has exceeded more than 10 million Hong Kong dollars. As a result some of the more far-sighted Hong Kong movie producers, including Jonnie To and Wong Jin, have begun to produce movies to meet audience tastes both in Hong Kong, and across other areas of Asia. However, these topics remain too sensitive to be shown publicly in mainland China. Following earlier Golden Era practice, they are angling for support from mainland movie sponsors, who will see the business benefits of adaptations or re-edits: cutting sensitive content, dubbing or re-writing dialogue, and perhaps re-shooting the ending, creating either a fantasy outcome – or at least the certainty of evil being punished. Thus, an edgy Hong Kong/East Asian film becomes politically correct in mainland Chinese terms.

With these techniques in place, Hong Kong movies with their contemporary tendency towards sensitive content but excellent craftsmanship, can serve audiences in Hong Kong, Asia, Europe, America - and the Chinese mainland. That is how the gamble is currently calculated – and there are signs that it may pay off.

Sir Run Run Shaw, the most far-sighted of the Hong Kong-produced film businessman and the first home-grown movie mogul, also put the focus first on promotion, and only then on profitability. Although his film empire Shaw Studios has ceased production, Celestial Pictures has been set up to re-package their films. The visual and auditory elements of these films are digitalised. Subtitles in many different languages are being added. Former stars are being invited to re-introduce and promote these movies, as they are made into DVDs to be distributed worldwide and through Cable TV channels available across Asia and on the mainland of China, on non-stop loop. As a result, even European and American tourists in hotels throughout the Asian region can access these movies.

This fully-integrated, cross-platform, digital-flow promotional method has not only increased the value of the original assets of Shaw Studios, but will make Hong Kong movies of the Golden Era evergreen. These movies will leave an indelible impression on future audiences, adding momentum to the recovery of the Hong Kong movie industry overall. They will also

however cement into place those aspects of the local which have been the foundation of Hong Kong's creativity – suggesting that, even as this production culture reaches out to mainland and global markets, it will sustain its distinctive cultural bias. What remains to be seen, is how that production culture adapts its thinking – as it has done to re-badge product in these ways for the mainland market – to locate and even establish new ways of positioning product through the many new global digital flows. Further, and crucial to financial sustainability: how might it construct entirely new flows of revenue return, to support not only new feature-film production, but the costs of multi-badging, promoting films within these new flows of product?

10.6 Sources of film funding

As the old mass cinema-going audiences have dispersed, formerly successful Hong Kong production companies had to adapt – or go under. Shaw Studios stopped movie making altogether, transferring their focus to TV8 television. Golden Harvest sold their stock to Christian Holdings, and ceased production outright. Cinema City and Dickson both went bankrupt. Hong Kong movie projects could no longer depend on local investors, and had to seek funding from other countries and territories, including the Chinese mainland, the US, Japan and Korea. In 2005 *Daisy*, directed by Andrew Lau Wai Keung, used Korean investment and Korean stars; while in 1990, *Terracotta Warrior* directed by Ching Sui Tung and starring Gong Li was jointly funded by mainland China and Hong Kong. Peter Chan's movie *The Warlords*, 2007, featuring Andy Lau, Jet Li and Takeshi Kaneshivo, was a joint capital venture by China, the US and Japan.

Strictly speaking, movies with off-shore investment cannot be classified as Hong Kong productions. Once a film is produced for audiences beyond the local market, the creative concept inevitably changes - especially in relation to mainland China, where strict codes still regulate content. Any movie venture with mainland Chinese investment will have to obtain political certification before launching, so that the usual free-wheeling creativity within Hong Kong's movie-making becomes immediately constrained. This means that in recent years only *You shoot, I shoot* (2001), *Beyond our Ken* (2004), and *Trivial Matters* (2007), all directed by Pang Ho Cheung, can be classified as Hong Kong movies, made exclusively for the local market. These movies, founded closely on Hong Kong culture, are filled with verbal gags, local features and local issues. Hong Kong audiences feel their familiarity – but they are more than usually inaccessible to offshore movie goers.

Is the gamble of the local-but-global 're-badged' production seriously corrosive of Hong Kong's preferred creativity? Note the interesting observation that under the new Creative Industries funding model, only the newer film creatives – best represented in this study by Pang Ho Cheung – will receive Hong Kong based Government funding. Does this suggest that the goal of the new funding models is to foster this 'traditional' form of creativity in productions test-bedded in Hong Kong itself, only negotiating co-sponsored deals and re-badged 'flow' production once a formula or production team has proven successful? If so, does the Hong Kong industry have the structures in place to accommodate this layered, upwards progression of its creative talent?

10.7 The professional status of film creatives

Most of the successful producers interviewed for this project agreed that careful planning, accurate judgments and constant analysis are indispensable to the movie making process. Yet to date, most filmmakers in Hong Kong have entered the industry as comparatively young film enthusiasts, highly talented at various technical aspects of film production, but seriously inexperienced when it comes to judging creative concepts. Too dependent on delivery of good material from outside their own projects, they have relied, as shown earlier, on revised classics, cross-media sourcing, and 'band-wagon' annexation of film genres and styles, imitating the success produced by others. With no way of developing or protogee-ing creative materials and concepts from within the industry, or commissioning them from outside, planning has been uncontrolled, developing project-by-project, leaving the industry more than usually vulnerable to the sorts of audience and taste change investigated above. What this reveals, as many Interviewees indicated, is a creativity within the industry which remains 'in(ter)ventive' in its reliance on either traditional materials or those currently popular with colleagues, and at the same time, overly pragmatic: attentive always to the task-in-hand, with less focus on the longer game or macro position of the entire industry.

Failure to implement longer-term planning, especially in relation to the generation of distinctive local creative content, risks the ultimate collapse of this once-proud industry – and leaves Hong Kong, a core part of China's future planning as an international 'entrepot' access-point for Chinese/global projects, unable to guarantee a flow of product which will represent to competitor markets a distinctive brand of high-action creativity (Lu, 1997, p.138). But what are the ways forward? What was it which drove Hong Kong's success, locally and globally, in its movie-making past – and how might this best be adapted into the future?

As shown in the interviews for this study, many successful film makers are now concerned that while their own generations achieved success without formal education in film, they did have two advantages: sustained training in various forms of performing arts, often from childhood, and a less formal but nonetheless crucial 'apprenticeship' with experienced industry figures, either in film or in related industries, such as television. Neither of these pathways exists today in quite the same ways. Most young Hong Kong citizens with talent are immediately directed towards higher degrees. The capacity to learn simply by being around production crews, fighting your way into employment by sheer tenacity or some form of 'natural' talent, is no longer possible – yet it is how the interviewed creatives for this study, one after another, related their own recruitment into the industry. . Places are vanishing, even as movie production re-groups – and at the same time Government, driven by international moves towards the recognition of a productive 'creative industries' economy, is considering how best to build educational and professional pathways towards the sorts of 'incubator zone' collaborations which will foster creative content not simply for one creative industry, but for all of them.

This suggests that the film industry, rather than looking specifically to its own future within existing structures and systems, should be considering collaboration with sectors it has for too long considered competitors: computer gaming, live theatre, television – even publishing and graphic arts. Together, these 'media arts' professions can not only produce exponential growth in the creativity they each need to feed their own production, but can achieve cross-media platforms to promote and market those concepts to the broadest possible audiences. This means of course not only developing creative content

instruction through systematic guidance and study, using academic courses and credentials as well as industry internships and advisory panels, but including educational programs on Hong Kong 'cultural production' at all levels of schooling, and for all citizens. Related professionals: bankers; lawyers specialising in intellectual and creative property rights; accountants and managers handling project financing; architects, builders and developers designing new civic entertainment precincts; travel and tourism operators attracting visitors to 'the Hong Kong experience', media workers, Public Relations practitioners and advertisers, selling Hong Kong to the world – all will be properly grounded in exactly what it is that makes Hong Kong distinctive, alluring, and worthwhile – and aware of how best to package that for their own professions and industries. With this in place, all citizens, schooled in the traditions of their own creativity, will be more likely to seek out new creative product – perhaps restricting this to their own preferred formats, but with developed tastes within what Bourdieu (1977, p. 118) termed 'cultural capital': the accumulated knowledge and exposure which it takes to understand and appreciate a particular form of cultural expression.

In the meantime, how far has the Hong Kong film industry displayed a pre-disposition towards sharing its creativity in such ways – even with fellow 'creatives' from related media-arts industries? One useful test-case has been computer-generated graphics, very much part of the contemporary movie-maker's art – but not yet fully embraced by Hong Kong professionals. It is important to discover not only why this has been so, but ways past it.

10.8 Computer graphics

Following the rapid development of digitised computing applications in the late twentieth century, the special effect capacities within film making made a giant leap forward, with audiences demanding ever more spectacular action and fantasy sequences. This was not however considered to be part of the art of the film maker. Apart from some changes to understandings of how set-construction, action-sequence choreography and lighting would have to adapt to admit the new effects, most of the work was undertaken by specialists in computer graphics, working in post-production.

The limitations this single fact imposed upon creative movie making mostly remain poorly understood; discussed endlessly among film professionals – a relatively small field – but rarely moving beyond concerns over how much financing is eaten up in the effects processing. For those film makers – still the majority – whose skills were acquired largely before the computer graphics era, 'creativity' in a film project is still centred primarily upon the screenplay. Until directors and the entire creative team beside them amass the same levels of understanding and experience with graphic effects as held today by younger professionals, and until producers, and even financiers, understand exactly what is being pitched to them, the full inventiveness of the new technologies cannot be realised.

At one level Hong Kong has been fortunate. Like many of its Asian neighbors, the rapid development of its economy has seen strong investment in those electronics industries which have promoted and enabled sophisticated graphics production, while a relatively youthful population, ever enthusiastic in their pursuit of the new, has acquired its own depth of experience in graphic applications.

The difficulty has been in first of all combining the two: linking the new graphics talent into an industry with its own understandings of what is, and is not, 'creative'. All too aware of the inroads made on film-going audiences by the huge success of the computer games industry, movie makers have not been notably keen to recruit from a rival field. At the same time, with computer-generated effects understood among these early generations of users as largely involving the application of pre-designed software, granting full creative recognition to graphics practitioners has not been automatic. Hong Kong filmmakers, themselves still struggling into artistic credibility, have not been enthusiastic over sharing their status with 'technicians'. Only when it has been possible to customise Hollywood based systems to produce new and original graphics, unique to Hong Kong films, has full creative status been granted. *Seven Swords* (2005), directed by Tsui Hark, is a good example. While Chinese martial arts films have long been acknowledged for the special verve of their action sequences, it took computer graphics, adapted to the fast-paced swordplay of the Chinese tradition, to produce the peak sensation and energy directors had sought. Since the emergence of computer graphics the originality of Hong Kong actions films has become internationally recognised. Yet so far the graphics designers who worked alongside Tsui Hark have not been seen as full-fledged 'film creatives'.

Despite this lag in recognition of their importance, the work of graphics specialists is having a number of important industry impacts. Not only has the discovery of how to apply, and modify, standard effects software into Chinese martial-arts action made the new effects available across a wider range of films – and at a cheaper cost – but writers, directors and graphic artists together have begun to apply them to entirely new scenarios and genres. The phrase 'Chinese Martial Arts' in relation to Stephen Chow's film *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) has added a whole new dimension (Xie Shi-ming, p.16). Here, where the originality of the cinematography and its graphic enhancements outmatches the story, Hong Kong film has entered a new phase.

From this point on it has become clear that movie making, along with every other aspect of modern life, has entered the 21st century and the age of information. New knowledge, new information, new entertainment forms – all are equally available in Castells' (1996, p. 76) 'space of flows', where digitised content shifts weightlessly around the world, in and out of the various networks through which we all access our preferred data and entertainment types. Films, digitised in both production and their ever-expanding repertoire of screening options, flow right alongside everything else, open to the wide world, and keeping pace with the demands of every new society or social sub-set they encounter. While traditional dramas, deeply embedded in the local cultural context, continue to find audiences – in fact accessing them more efficiently and effectively than ever before - they can also adapt to the new circumstances, and the new tastes that come along with them. The Hong Kong film *The Eye* (2000) tells the story for instance of new medical procedures which allow the transplant of a pair of corneas, subsequently helping a blind man to see - but in his case to see *ghosts*. The film combines the traditional with the new – superstition, with techno-bioscience. At this level at least, the local industry appears to be maturing: finding its feet once more, in the fast-paced and often unpredictable global ebb and flow of taste and demand.

10.9.1 The age of information

One key impact of the Internet has been to speed up the churn rate of style generations, with analysts now suggesting significant taste changes, amounting to a generation gap, every 3 years. The tendency for copycat production, labeled outright plagiarism by several of the Interviewees in this study, was clear for instance in the mid 1990s; prime time for Hong Kong movies – still 3 years before the Internet really took hold. *My Lucky Stars* (1985), directed by Sammo Hung, set a Box Office record of HK $30,748,643 (Hong Kong Kowloon & New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd.), with most movies which followed imitating its central comic elements. When the film *Better Tomorrow* (1986), directed by John Woo, took HK $34,651,324, all the movies out of Hong Kong began to feature underworld roles. When *Gold of gamblers* (1989) directed by Wong Jing took the next record at HK $36,294,029, Hong Kong made gambling movies.

Trends today move so quickly that the scramble to produce in time to ride the wave of fashion has seen an even more frenetic, and even less critical form of the 'rear-view-mirrorism' identified in the earlier period of Hong Kong's movie success. Film making, inevitably costly, with cumbersome production techniques and expensive multi-personnel crews, can never hope to keep pace with the DIY 24/7 rush of the Internet.

How then should it respond to this competitor medium, and how far should it accommodate its influences within its own work? Given the multiple, simultaneous flows of the Internet, with its capacity to engage its users one-on-one, in a personalised selection from an endless and ever-renewing range of possibilities, what can film's creativities offer, that remains distinctive, desirable, and likely to drive the consumer to the act not only of purchase, but of *regular* purchase. In particular, what can Hong Kong film offer, to compete for that act of purchase, with not only every other film production culture across the globe, but every other film culture that ever existed, and every rival entertainment product able to flow through the new networks.

To answer those questions in the 'human' terms which the interviewed film creatives for this study urged as the sole true criteria for judgement of what was worthwhile, this inquiry is going to take one last – perhaps surprising – turn.

10.10 *Whatever happened to the sense of excitement?*

At this point I want to introduce into this study a discussion of the concept of creativity within film which draws upon my own experiences in the industry.

It is time to step forward, into the spotlight.

It is time to acknowledge, once again, that I am myself a Hong Kong screenwriter, with more than twenty-five years in the industry.

My work has been part of Hong Kong's Golden Era. I won the 1987 Golden Horse Award for Best Script, for Leslie Cheung's *Chinese Ghost Story.* In fact I have written more than forty best-selling screenplays, including Jet Li's *Wong Fei Hung,* Jackie Chan's *Drunken Fist 2,* Stephen Chow's *Fight Back to School 2,* and even my own autobiography, filmed by Cheung Ka Fai: *Time 4 Hope.* I produced and directed as well as wrote Sonia Kwok's *Hot Cops in the City* - so I have been fully immersed in the creative culture of Hong Kong film for the major period under examination here.

Now, drawing on that involvement, I want to try to capture from within my own understandings of that experience, what it is that makes for a creative product in the eyes of the Hong Kong film professional: one who works, as we all do, somewhere between the reputation of our last project, and the innovation required to 'guarantee' production of the next. This involves some degree of analysis of the 'major claimant' concepts introduced so far, as possible explanations for how Hong Kong filmmakers regard the creative process.

10.11 Competition makes for creative work

Since this paper centres squarely upon the transformation of Hong Kong's film production culture, first of all, I would like to talk about the ideas behind a given movie: *the concept,* which is what initiates a production.

Despite the artistry of the performances, or the technical skill of the production staff, what all movie makers hope for is that they will somehow seize the audience's soul: transport them, with some completely new, unforgettable *concept.* The various artists involved in a film all work to transmit this *concept* - all of them consequently known as *creators.* This focus however upon collaborative production – one which specially marks the Hong Kong industry, as we have seen – leaves problems for any final assessment of creativity itself; at least within the schematics, however various, offered by Pope, as the central theorising text guiding that element of this study.

Certainly, all movie producers have their own views when it comes to a new film project. But does 'independent thinking' necessarily mean something new, or fresh, or original?

Certainly whenever independent thinking occurs, distinctions between the old and the new will come into being, so that works similar to those already in existence will need *creativity* to avoid being considered derivative, unimaginative, or just plain dull. Comparison between the old and the new inevitably produces competition. *But competition, in turn, brings about creativity* – as so many of the Interviewees for this study affirmed.

Consequently, movie production fosters the creation of the new: the constant transcendence of what is already in existence. The old and the new, closely related to each other, form a creative dynamic. It is this dynamic which makes creativity within this applied, generically formulaic or industrially harnessed type of work – which as we have seen, is a foundational part

of Hong Kong's film production culture, with many still considering it the major source of its success.

There are of course other forces in play. Apart from the competition within and across a profession such as movie-making and its rival media sectors, there is the artist's personal quest for perfection: perhaps a form of competition with one's own past; but undeniably caught up with both professional reputation and self concept. These forms of self-transcendence (Hartley, 2005, p. 103) are powerful motivators, and are likely to be operating – not always harmoniously – at various levels within a collaborative *creative project.*

Film is closely related to life – inherently, as Badiou has pointed out, an 'impure' form, drawn not only from any number of related artistic techniques, appropriated to its goals; but from an ultimately unpurifiable stratum of lived experience (2005, p. 84).

As argued above, the trend for constant innovation within life itself, whether as contemporary identity politics founded upon consumerism (Rose, 1996; 1999) or through the intensive millennial period of digitised technologisation (Castells, 1998) has also become a major driving force for movie innovation. As a result, new technology, new selves and new socio-cultural values have impinged directly or indirectly on all forms of creative work. Today's consumers prefer the new, so that market value has become a particularly powerful driving force. Change itself has become the greatest creative force of the 21st century (Florida, 2002, p.63).

10.12 The unexpected

None of this however answers the question: What is creativity?

When we are used to viewing something in the given way - and suddenly someone introduces another point of view or a different method, we call it *creativity* (Bohm, 1998, p. 51). Here 'new points of view' refer to new ways of doing things – familiar things. 'New ideas' seem to refer to new packaging of ideas we already recognise – certainly, we make instant sense of these 'new ideas'. In movie making terms, whatever an audience 'wasn't expecting' will be regarded in these ways as 'new' – and so as a kind of creativity.

In movie culture then, 'an entirely new perspective' amounts to an unexpected starting point. To be frank however, even here this unexpectedness must be reasonable, and not too extreme. Otherwise, too many in the audience will not accept it - and all the creativity in the world will become little more than clever irrationality.

Movie production, as shown in earlier sections of this study, rests therefore on trends – and trends are established within the complex socio-economic pressures of contemporary culture. Since the major trend within global culture today – and especially in Hong Kong - is for constant innovation, this is currently also the main driving force within movies. Consequently, new technologies, new human experiences or practices or behaviours, new social values, little-known societies and hidden sub-cultures are all considered 'creative' content for movies.

Does this mean however that old material can have no creativity? Of course the answer is just the opposite. As long as 'the old' is considered in 'new' ways, there will be surprises; another form of movie creativity. But where do these 'new views' come from?

10.13 Keeping it fresh...

Those in the movie industry, charged with the problem of endlessly 'renewing' its content, talk of creativity more as this process of 'renewal'. As we saw in the Interviews for this study, they are more intent upon *renovation* than *innovation;* constantly negotiating a careful path between those traditional products which guarantee audience, and keeping up with ever-evolving tastes. What they seek is a fresh treatment of the tried-and-true – but how is this to be achieved?

Whatever is new to a given society: a new topic, new figure, new political event - can be regarded as bringing a form of 'renewal' (Guilford, 1950, p.28). Movie producers love to seize on these 'new points of view', wrapping them like new packaging, into the known and tested generic frames of their dramas. Audiences get a fresh perspective on a recognisable human problem, cut from fashionable new cloth - and treat it as 'a new idea'. If handled well enough, this form of 'the new' may even engender 'new thinking', influencing large numbers of people to see things in 'new' ways: 'creating' social change, political reform – or at least, new strands of behaviour.

But to do this, 'the new' must first be processed through the particular forms of creativity which film making itself carries into the equation – for the backbone of a movie is the success of its dramatic treatment. Thus the motto of movie producers: 'sense out of unexpectedness', meaning that whatever is new must be reasonable, and result from a logical extension of the old.

Because movies are based on team work, a movie's creativity is collective. Each post must contribute its own independent creativity. As the movie industry sees it, the task is to give the audience 'a shock that they have never before experienced.' Yet to do this, they must not only embed that experience in what is possible, but align it with each level of creative renewal, contributed by their fellow professionals. If the experience is not feasible, the shock fails.

10.14 Things without creativity wither and die...

How then do audiences respond to creativity?

As we have seen, the Hong Kong movie industry in the past 20 years has experienced both a Golden Era of audience support, and a near- Extinction period, when support was massively withdrawn. Does this mean then that the majority of Hong Kong movie viewers have had two totally different requirements of movie creativity? Or has Hong Kong's movie creativity somehow worn out? Or been misdirected, away from audience tastes? Have they perhaps been *too* creative – running too far ahead of audiences, in the quest for endless renewal? Or has a 'new new' obliterated movies, now receding as a sign of modernity:

a medium over 100 years old, succeeded by too many rather *newer* leisure pursuits?

Hong Kong movie viewers of the Golden Era ('85—'94) were not considered to be too particular about movie creativity. Once they had fallen in love with one type of movie, whether comedies, gambling movies, cops and robbers shoot-'em ups, and so on, they would indulge again and again. No-one asked for a new perspective, or wanted to see a new treatment of the same subject. As long as they could sit comfortably in the cinema and regain the sense of excitement of watching a movie, they were satisfied.

Hong Kong movies made hay while the sun shone. The same creative crew would be behind the scenes; the same actor, director and script writer... Once the team assembled, they would produce two or three movies simultaneously to the latest popular formula, and always within the shortest possible time.

And so - audiences lost interest. Even the most famous stars could no longer guarantee box-office returns. Movies without creative ideas lost the audience's interest - and the movie industry itself came close to being destroyed. For all the talk of economic or political pressures; demographic change; funding problems, at core the decline of Hong Kong movie-making stemmed from a failure to balance the old with the new: to maintain the edge of creativity in the product.

Since the Extinction Period ('95—'05), movie makers, as we have seen in the Interviews, have begun to explore whole new sets of creative concepts, seeking to revitalise the movie industry. And audiences have responded. Hong Kong movie consumers – and now wider regional and global audiences - have recognised that conscious creativity, as opposed to cynical duplication of successful formulae, can bring a gratifying movie-viewing experience. The magic wasn't lost: it had simply suffered an unfortunate eclipse. As Hong Kong movies entered the 21st century, audiences began to treat creativity in film as *the* indispensable element. But they did so, as shown again and again in this study, from a very particular perspective.

10.15 The sense of excitement as the source of creativity

The creativity of Hong Kong movies is different from that in other places. Although our creativity is presented through the same movie medium, the creative languages are different. Yet this is only indirectly brought about by the cultural contexts in which each arises – and is nothing to do with language, *qua* language.

Of all the movie industries all over the world, only those in Hong Kong, Hollywood and India's 'Bollywood' put commercial packaging in first place. These movies design their creative languages around a commercial imperative. If, in recent years, movies on the Chinese mainland have become increasingly similar to those of Hong Kong, it is because in response to their economic reforms, they have followed Hong Kong movies in subject matter, interpretation, and approach. Their creativity too is market-driven. Their audiences have come to live with the same rapid pace and commercial orientation as Hong Kong – and their movies, like ours, reflect it in detail (Hui, 2003, p. 73).

As so many of the creatives interviewed for this study have explained, Asian audiences overall are not very demanding when it comes to a movie's artistic techniques. They focus instead on a character's emotion, or the ethical relations portrayed through the action. Consequently, the creators of Hong Kong movies have learned to express these ethical relations in commercial ways. What matters is dialogue, and plot – and above all else: *action.*

So it is that the creativity of both Hong Kong movies and mainland Chinese movies is mostly built into the screenplay - and while that creativity contains many elements, primarily what it must do is to *create action which excites the audience.* Emotional conflict, comic performance, visual effects – all can build in this sense of excitement (Caves, 2000, p. 83). The trick to it all – since, as explained throughout this study, there is a balance somewhere between the old and loved, and the new and exciting – is to simultaneously *master the tradition,* and achieve the *breakthrough into the surprising.*

How then is the Hong Kong industry going to cement this formula: the *new emergence* - into its entire operation? Can the 'creative solution' for the individual production, extend to the entire industry?

CHAPTER 11:

Not the conclusion...

11.0 The business of producing excitement.

Some time after the Interviews arranged for this study had been completed and written up, I met by chance Hong Kong producer-director Wong Kar-Wai, who knowing of this study, began to talk about his own views on the future of creativity in Hong Kong movies.

Having directed Andy Lau in *As Tears Go By* in '86, Chang Zi Yi in *2046* and Norah Jones in *Blueberry Nights,* Wong Kar-Wai has developed some very different view-points on this subject. His analysis, produced quite independently from my own, outlined an organic process impacting upon the whole of the Hong Kong movie-making culture: a distinctive industry-wide influence, which he explained – as this study has also done - as having originated from practices and attitudes arising in the earliest days of Hong Kong film-making.

Since my human subject research ethics clearance for this project had provided for unscheduled follow-up interviewing, I asked permission to keep notes as we talked, and later wrote up his account of the industry's development. It deepened considerably the perspectives produced so far in relation to Hong Kong's distinctive movie culture. Beyond this however, it led me to focus on a form of creative endeavour which I had not considered at all as a possible factor in Hong Kong movie making – and yet which may be the first of a whole new range of cross-media, cross-industry complementarities, developing in precisely the spaces predicted in the theorisation behind the creative industries movement, used as one of the central hypotheses for this study.

I therefore append Wong Kar-wai's comments as a Postscript to this study – and final glimpse of what might already be *happening next* to Hong Kong's cinema.

11.1 Wong Kar-wai: Looking back to the richness of Hong Kong film's dual tradition

Early Hong Kong movies were relatively crude in their production – not that this mattered to the strictly local audiences. Film makers aimed for the most part at Southern inland China, with a possible secondary market of overseas Chinese: themselves mostly emigrants from the Southern sea-going and estuary provinces. The sympathetic chord of cultural nostalgia was struck for both these audiences through use not only of the Cantonese language, but the deliberate inclusion of dialects

and the rich speech habits of the ordinary people, fused into narratives built around familiar themes from traditional folk tale or the movie versions of favourite dramas (see also Jarvie 1977, pp. 13-21).

During the Sino-Japanese War, with Hong Kong a colony of the UK, politics and the economy remained relatively stable, attracting massive inland population shift, official and unofficial – especially after 1937, when China's economic powerhouse; and incidentally its movie production centre, Shanghai, was seized by the Japanese. Movie makers fled to Hong Kong, establishing it as the temporary base for their film-making. For the first time Hong Kong film addressed the whole Chinese nation, as distinct from the earlier local work. This time the films used the national language [Mandarin], with themes centred primarily on patriotic and anti-Japanese topics, and local Hong Kong producers acquiring a whole new repertoire of film making techniques and genres. Perhaps too, they learned a capacity for accommodating the demands of boom-times in their industry: a flood not only of talent and new ideas, but of audience demand – and a lesson in rapid gearing-up which they would not, it seems, forget. *(ibid.,* pp. 58-71).

After 1949, because of the political power change on the mainland, large numbers of Northern Chinese swarmed into Hong Kong - but part of the Shanghai film industry also moved in – permanently. Cantonese and the national language audience co-existed in the colony, although the main population still primarily spoke Cantonese. The influence of the Shanghai film professionals and their Mandarin-speaking émigré audience of largely educated and business-oriented Northerners drove a wedge into Hong Kong film production, dividing it into a *quality* and a *populist* range. Mandarin movies focused on character studies, playing to the migrant nostalgia through dance action and knight-errant genres, while Cantonese films stayed with modern, realist, action plots.

The industry experience of the Mandarin movie producers began to show. They introduced studio production, in fully commercialised operations, laying a solid foundation for Hong Kong film expansion into overseas markets in future years. At the same time Cantonese films, less well organised and without the same levels of immigrant support, were achieving less success – a trend which challenged local movie workers, ambitious to re-organise around the models provided by film companies such as Zhonglian. They set out to create more serious works, even while staying true to the realism of Cantonese popular genres. In a slower, more evolutionary process, they worked to build a sustained flow of Cantonese films for local Hong Kong audiences, integrating all they could of the rival Mandarin production techniques and 'quality' features, but without losing sight of their own audiences' preferences *(ibid.,* pp. 79-91).

By the 1970s, with the rise of the television industry and patterns of mainland immigration declining to allow second generation localisation of the population, Cantonese films regained their lost ground. New influences from overseas reworked the Hong Kong movie. The old studios and their production formulae declined, the massive sets were dismantled, and a more immediate, more modern, and far more distinctively Hong Kong movie style began to emerge. With more independent production, newer themes were chosen – and the still-loyal overseas Chinese audience began to be joined by foreign audiences, for the first time taking an interest in 'Chinese' film *(ibid.,* pp. 93-113).

Given this long history of adaptive success, why did Hong Kong movie making by the 1990s begin to enter what is known

as its Extinction Period?

For Wong Kar-Wai the industry as a whole, and not the creatives, wrong-footed itself. With independent film-makers now contracting direct to overseas distributors, Hong Kong film re-oriented its productive capacity, catering to the distributors' demands. What emerges is a form of passivity within the industry: a too-willing stereotyping to successful formulae, in themes; in story angles; in styling; in technique... Worse: the traditional appeal of Hong Kong film; its populist earthiness and street-wise authenticity, founded upon its Cantonese cultural roots, is out-of-step with the young overseas market – mostly Mandarin speakers in the diasporic audience, and oriented as a predominantly young audience, away from the folksiness of Cantonese film's love of comedy (see also Teo, 1997, p. 73).

With both their cultural foundation and their industry models now failing them, Hong Kong film makers faced not only a need to re-organise, but to relocate a strand of creativity which would lead them not back to the local, but to the global-within-the local: elements which will excite overseas audiences as relevant, innovative and modern, at the same time as carrying to them the colour of a distinctively Hong Kong production. What is needed is novelty, yet securely branded - a film-product or style to be sought out again and again *(ibid.,* p. 124).

Are there then any signs that this lesson has been learned: that Hong Kong film makers recognise their dilemma, and have the capacity to apply once more – in new ways - the core qualities that have characterised their work for so long: flexibility, realism, dynamic activity, innovation? By 2000, the reverse seemed the case. With the movie market opening vast opportunities on the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong's film-making certainly began to change – but not in the right directions. Once again, as in the 1940s and 50s, content turned to safe, traditional plots: dynastic costume dramas and knight-errant action pieces. While the overseas market has once again emerged to dictate to Hong Kong film-makers, their response has been towards short-term gains, disregarding the lessons of their own history, and failing to address future needs (Cheung & Chu, 2004, p. 76).

Are there however any 'bell-wether' films: productions which might be signaling an individual success or a directional shift, which could be used to develop a new direction for the industry as a whole? For Wong Kar-Wai a short list of innovative works has produced a profound influence on his own way forward – but once again, *these are not contemporary works.* Rather than suggesting however that this means nothing good is being produced, it raises the possibility that Hong Kong film now has, at the disposal of its own local creatives, a fully-fledged archive of inspirational models, from which new direction may be taken. He lists in his own case the following, each drawn from a different era of the Hong Kong corpus:

1. Hu Jinquan — *New Dragon gate inn* (1967)
2. Johnny Mak — *Long Arm of the Law* (1984)
3. Tsui Hark — *Wong Fei Hung* series (from 1992)

In each case, these selections highlight not so much the 'pivotal' role I was myself seeking, in establishing the box-office successes of each era, but instead what was typically Hong Kong, from decade to decade. As a glance at an annotated

reference guide to Hong Kong film will reveal – such as Fonoroff's collection of film reviews (1998), or Cheuk, Law and Ng, (1997) – Hong Kong has indeed successfully altered, or 'adapted', its approach to film, in response to its own changing fortunes – *and may be doing so again,* this time in completely unexpected ways.

11.2 Looking back even further – The re-introduction of *live theatre...* To Kwok Wai's *Only you.*

In an altogether unanticipated move, live theatre has re-emerged in Hong Kong. *Only You* (2006) was produced by Hong Kong film makers Ko Chi Sum and To Kwok Wai, who have collaborated in the formation of Spring Time Stage Production Limited, which has since developed very rapidly into a popular success. This curiously retro-active move, from film to live theatre, refocuses the issues identified throughout this study, and those isolated by Wong Kar-Wai's ideas – for in opening a new space for local creativity it challenges film-makers to re-assess the entire purpose of their industry, and to evaluate how far they may have moved from the interests and demands of their audiences.

In examining trends such as these, once again the cultural context is paramount. As mentioned in the introductory sections of this study, Hong Kong recreational consumers mostly centre on the entertainment medium, and in recent years, with income rising and new facilities provided, live theatre has become a favourite with Hong Kong audiences. All forms of live performance are prospering, especially when mainstream stars perform, when every inch of theatre space will be occupied, with audiences demanding endless encores and providing wild applause.

Only You (2006) is a good example, supported both backstage and in public by the Hong Kong film élite, including Chan Po Chu, popular Southeast Asian movie star of the 60s and 70s, and the (now deceased) 70s television actor Cheng Sui Chau, who has been acting leading roles. Theatre professor Chung King Fait was director for *Only you,* a man who has placed many of his graduates – and ongoing disciples - in the film and television industries. The playwright, To Kwok Wai, is himself a shareholder in Spring Time Stage Production Limited, and a No. 1 writer both in Screen and Theatre.

The play begins with a strange wedding ceremony. During the Ming Dynasty, south of the Yangzi River, a great bachelor whose family name is **Meng,** is marrying his daughter, **Meng Lijun,** into the rich and powerful family of the Emperor, **Liu Kuibi.** But while this should be a happy event for the bride, she has tears streaming down her face, and wears hempen garments... After a richly complex set of plots and counter-plots; martial arts combat; political intrigue; exile, disguise; family vengeance, forced marriage, and murder – love and justice prevail. The play has achieved unprecedented success on the stage – so why is there no film version? Another Spring Time Stage Production property, *I Have a Date with Spring* (1994) had similar stage success – and since *Only you* is a much stronger production overall, why has it not been translated onto the movie screen?

I discussed this directly with To Kwok Wai, playwright for both. He sees the success of the stage version as relating to the traditions of Hong Kong film, still so strongly part of the cultural capital of Hong Kong audiences, even as they attend live drama. Many of the staged sequences are indebted to memorable scenes in the movies, especially when it comes to combat

and acrobatic fighting, where Hong Kong films developed the styling for modern entertainment tastes. Add to their influence on the staging of battles, their tendency to introduce complex comic plots and romantic love entanglements designed to endlessly defer any real scenes of romantic involvement, and you arrive at a formula that works equally well on stage or screen – and is even being adapted into mainland Chinese and foreign movies. *Mulan* (1999) has gained good box office results, proof that if stage plays such as these transfer to the screen, they too have potential.

There is however one further feature of the success of *Only you* which is of great significance to this study, as it questions the possibilities of a return to creativity and innovation within the Hong Kong film industry. To Kwok Wai reports that investors in the stage production commissioned detailed research into audience tastes and responses to the production; research which suggested that it was the *liveness of the performance* which aroused and then escalated audience enthusiasm. Wave after wave of cheering and applause built from the actors' rapport with the audience, creating an exchange of emotional response, the actors guiding the audience's mood, swinging their own excitement and energy back to the audience, time and time again. This for To Kwok Wai is the key: the collective expression of direct emotional response, transacted between actors and audiences, signaling directly where the greatest responses lie, and releasing – as Hong Kong movies used to do – the social and cultural pressures of living which they share.

To Kwok Wai goes further, identifying within this specific play the distinctive elements evoking that audience response. Here, in a rare allusion to the emotions of mature adult life, a hero and heroine over 50 talk of love, flirt with one another, and manage a troubled relationship, shifting the conventions of the romance genre from the rut of 20-something, relatively unformed characters, into the complexities and richness of middle age. On the screen, where every physical feature is enlarged, and every blemish shows, this is less possible. It is the stage, where distanced actors enlarge their gestures, using movement and vocality to evoke a scene, which allows audiences to transact close-up intimacy in their own imaginations: and which consequently, brings romance to every audience member. The formula, for the first time, unlocks the restrictions imposed on the staging of romance in the Golden Era of Hong Kong films, where younger audiences, predominantly 18-25, demanded a reflection of themselves and their own major life preoccupations. Live theatre, free from the realist-illusion cathexis of the large screen, can broaden the range of both action and characterisation, and open the repertoire to the entertainment of a wider generational audience.

A film written by To Kwok Wai, also revised from live theatre, has already become very popular throughout Southeast Asia. *Hu Du Men* (1996) unites Chan Po Chu with hot superstar Sui Fong Fong. This plays consciously across the illusory potential of theatre itself, set backstage and onstage at the Cantonese Opera. In a parallel to the problems confronting Hong Kong film, it shows the difficulties of Cantonese Opera as it confronts the modern world with all of its rival entertainment formats. At the same time it details the dilemmas of modern entertainers in a traditional medium who are, like their audiences, facing family problems, and worrying over changes in their social conditions relating to the '97 return. While the plot may seem familiar enough, the mix of everyday family life and Chinese traditional opera accessed two distinct audiences, and so obtained very high box office figures. The capacity to cue audience responses: to lead those unused to the formal conventions of Chinese opera, firstly into a sympathetic connection to the modern characters, and then, through that identification, into a deeper engagement with their trials and tribulations inside the operatic plot, reprises a technique used in Hong Kong film

production of the Golden Era. To introduce something new, focus it first through the known and loved – the star actor; the genre sub-plot; the undertow of references to familiar Cantonese quips. Case after case of this film-industry-internal strategy can be provided – so that To Kwok Wai's identification of the same technique at work in this renewed crossing between stage and screen suggests a cross-sectoral deployment of a tried-and-true Hong Kong tactic.

Once this set of renewed capacities to re-work established conventions has been established, many of the Hong Kong movies which have most impressed or moved their audience can be shown to relate to action and characters and plotlines developed from traditional entertainment formats - such as Chinese Kung Fu and local operas (Cheuk & Law, 1997, p. 41). Take for example, Hong Kong ghost comedy movies of the 1980s, especially those best-selling movies which were supervised, directed and played by Sammo Hung, including *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* (1981), *The Dead and the Deadly* (1983), *Hogus Pogus* (1984), *Mr. Vampire* (1985), *Mr. Vampire 2* (1986), *Ultimate Empire* (1991) and so on. Even when there is no direct relation between traditional operas and these films, many performance elements are drawn from Chinese operas, including the choreographed and largely symbolic rivalries enacted through Chinese martial arts acrobatics, or the seemingly endless capacity to introduce the spontaneous joke. Chinese opera gives us the paper figures used in funeral immolations, a favourite comic trope in Hong Kong film, while the presence of ghosts as stock characters in the opera made them a welcome plot device in movies. With regulation of the Chinese mainland movie market labeling ghost stories 'religious superstition', Hong Kong movies have lost yet another familiar convention – one which could be welcomed back onto the live stage, replete with all of the staging conventions preserved in Chinese opera.

One element which can be retained from the cultural repertoire is the martial-arts action for which Hong Kong film became world famous – and which has now gone on to influence action sequences in film from every industry *(ibid.,* p. 57). As argued earlier, because the most famous Hong Kong directors and players in Kung fu movies, such as Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Corey Yuen, and Yuen Woo Ping, underwent training in professional opera Chinese martial arts their performances cemented both the quality of the action, and the immediacy of its connection with Chinese audiences. Sammo Hung, Corey Yuen, Jackie Chan, Yuen Bao, and Yuen Wah became the so-called 'Seven Lucky Kids' from the Beijing Opera school managed by action stuntmaster Yu Jim Yuen. Yuen Woo Ping's father Yuen Siu Tin was the first person to introduce Beijing Opera action into Cantonese Opera, while Kwan Tak Hing, the person who introduced the famous folk hero Wong Fei Hung into Hong Kong's big screen movies, is also from the Cantonese Opera. *Bruce Lee* was the son of Lee Hoi Chun, also a major star from the Cantonese Opera, while director Lau Ka Leung, the first person to have film actors float through the sky, is son of superstar Lau Charm. Finally director Ching Siu Tung, expert in films related to sword and falchion, is the son of Ching Kong, famous director of Hong Kong films in the 1960s. In a word, most of the action experts in today's Hong Kong films, whether players or directors, are related to Chinese opera performers. *Tradition* then, within Hong Kong's performing arts, is not just *in transition* – it has already found the values of its *new emergence.*

During the one hundred year history of Chinese film, Hong Kong has enjoyed a special and important status. Most notably from the decade of the 1940s to the 1980s, while China confronted inner turmoil and foreign aggression, Hong Kong sustained a Chinese movie production centre which proved capable of world-wide popularity and influence, and which carried

key formulae of Chinese culture to both diasporic Chinese and foreign audiences (Fu, 2000, p.57).

Since the re-emergence of mainland China, the Hong Kong industry has struggled. The obvious interpretation: that its role as a special enclave of Chinese cultural expressivity and marketing access is over, and that it now faces re-absorption into a resurgent mainland industry, may however prove altogether too simple, as an account of the future trajectory of Hong Kong film making. This is not the first era of decline in Hong Kong film – and nor do current productions, for all their apparent failure to regain earlier market dominance or critical recognition, display any signs of retreat from the capacity to produce innovation and surprising new film making: as tightly produced, edgy, starkly on-message and full of dynamic energy as ever (Chu, 2003, p.123).

During the decades of its ascendancy, the Hong Kong film industry accumulated a wide range of incisive film-making skills. Editing has perfected the well-knit feature, building in a sense of an expressive locale and fast-paced action which have come to characterise not just Hong Kong film, but Hong Kong itself. Films such as the *Infernal Affairs* series show a new level of sophistication in characterisation, plot construction and direction, which together capture something of the dilemmas of late modern life, not just in Hong Kong but in any urban setting worldwide (Cheuk, 2003, p. 82). The skills of directors like John Woo, Tsui Hark and Andrew Lau Wai Keung have seen them invited to Hollywood to direct films for the US and world markets. Cinematography has developed to the stage where cameraman Peter Pau Tak Hei won an Oscar in 2002, while Hong Kong actors - Jackie Chan, Chow Yun Fat, Michelle Yeong among them, have all entered international superstardom. Hong Kong's creativity, even while no longer totally filling the needs of the demanding local audience, has more than met world level standards, and entered a period of international interchange, with extensive co-production and franchise partnerships.

What remains problematic is that ongoing retreat of the local audience – and the degree to which so many famous directors and film creatives, in considering the questions posed for this study, revealed that they most of all miss the experience of watching films common during the middle 70s decade and on into the 1980s. At that time, the core years of the Golden Era, audiences would stand in line to watch the next film. Movies directed by Chang Chit, the father of Hong Kong action film, or Lau Ka Leung, the master of Chinese Kung Fu, would drive audiences to a frenzy of excitement, calling out and literally jumping from their seats. In the 80s, watching the next generation of films by John Woo, they would applaud and cheer, filling the cinemas with indescribable levels of excitement – the sorts of behavior which today appear reserved for live theatre.

It is this sense of excitement which is ultimately the most precious thing in cinema; which makes the audience reluctant to leave, and eager to return, again and again. It is a social response: a collective cultural act, which can only be tasted in the packed cinema, and not while viewing the DVD at home, no matter how good or how large the screening technology. If there is one final message to Hong Kong filmmakers – or indeed, all filmmakers – from the problems experienced by this small but dynamic creative industry, it is this: we are in the business of producing excitement. There is no one perfect formula, and nothing, it seems, is forever. But whatever the context, whatever the tastes of the day, whatever the competition for audience, it remains possible to build within this medium not just a one-off success, but a sustained and self-renewing creative brand.

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37. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wong_Kar-wai
38. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Lau
39. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnnie_To
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41. http://mymui.com/film-judge.html

Filmography

1. Days of Being Wild 阿飛正傳
   Director: Wong Kar Wai
   Executive Producer: Alan Tang

Cast: Leslie Cheung, Maggie Cheung
Company: Hong Kong: In-Gear Film Production Co. Ltd.,
Release date: 1990

2. *Chungching Express (Chungking Express)* 重慶森林
Director: Wong Kar Wai
Executive Producer: Chan Pui-wah
Cast: Brigitte Lin, Tony Leung Chiu Wai, and Faye Wong
Company: Hong Kong: Jet Tone Production Co., Ltd.
Release date: 1994

3. *Made in Hong Kong* 香港製造
Director: Fruit Chan
Executive Producer: Andy Lau, Doris Yang
Cast: Sam Lee, Neiky Yim Hui-Chi
Company: Team Work Production House Ltd.; Nicetop Independent Ltd.
Release date: 1997

4. *Full Moon in New York* 人在紐約
Director: Stanley Kwan
Executive Producer: Henry Fong
Cast: Sylvia Chang, Maggie Cheung
Company: Shiobu Film (H.K.) Co.; Golden Glory Production Co.
Release date: 1990

5. *Song of the Exile* 客途秋恨
Director: Ann Hui
Cast: Maggie Cheung
Company: 高仕電影股份有限公司; 中央電影事業股份有限公司
Release date: 1990

6. *Star Wars* 星球大戰
Director: George Lucas
Executive Producer: George Lucas
Cast: Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford
Company: Lucasfilm Ltd.
Release date: 1977 (US)

7. *The Extras* 茄哩啡
   Director: Ho Yim
   Executive Producer Jimmy Yip
   Cast: Idy Chan, Hoi San Lee
   Company: 影力電影製作有限公司
   Release date: 1978

8. *The Butterfly Murders* 蝶變
   Director: Tsui Hark
   Executive Producer: Ng See-yuen
   Cast: Siu-Ming Lau, Michelle Mee
   Company: Seasonal Movie Company
   Release date: 1979

9. *The Secret* (Fung gip)瘋劫
   Director: Ann Hui
   Producer: Law Hoi Mok
   Cast: Sylvia Chang, Angie Chiu
   Company: 比高電影有限公司
   Release date: 1979

10. *Father and Son* 父子情
    Director: Allen Fong Yuk-ping
    Cast: Yu-Ngor Cheung, Shek Lui
    Company: Phoenix Movie Company
    Release date: 1981

11. *Election* 黑社會
    Director: Johnnie To
    Executive Producer: Dennis Law, Johnnie To
    Cast: Simon Yam, Tony Leung Ka-fai, Louis Koo
    Company: Milkyway Image (HK) Ltd. One Hundred Years of Film Co. Ltd.
    Release date: 2005

12. *Warlords* 投名狀
    Director: Peter Chan
    Executive Producer: Peter Chan
    Cast: Andy Lau, Jet Lee

Company: Media Asia ; Morgan & Chan Films ; China Movie Company
Release date: 2007

13. *Daisy* 雛菊
Director: Andrew Lau
Executive Producer: Andrew Lau
Cast: 全智賢, 鄭雨盛, 李誠宰
Company: I Love Cinema Co., Ltd.; Surprises Ltd ; IMM Cinema Fund
Release date: 2006

14. *A terra cotta warrior* 秦俑
Director: Ching Siu-tung
Executive Producer: Kam Yeung-wah, Lo Fook-yuen
Cast: Zhang Yimou, Gong Li, Yu Yungkang
Company: Art & Talent Groupe Inc
Release date: 1989

15. *You shoot, I shoot* 買兇拍人
Director: Pang Ho Cheung
Producer: Lau Sin Hing
Cast: Eric Kot, Cheung Tat-ming
Company: Golden Harvest Entertainment Company Limited
Release date: 2001

16. *Beyond our Ken* 公主復仇記
Director: Pang Ho-cheung
Executive Producer: Pang Ho Cheung
Cast: Daniel Wu, Tao Hong, Gillian Chung
Company: Mei Ah Film Production Co., Ltd.
Release date: 2004

17. *Trivial Matters* 破事兒
Director: Pang Ho Cheung
Producer: Cat Kui
Executive Producer: Pang Ho Cheung, To Man Chek
Cast: Eason Chan, Lam Hoi Fung
Company: Ching Joy Movie
Release date: 2007

18. *Shaolin Soccer* 少林足球
Director: Stephen Chow
Producer: Yeung Kwok Fai
Cast: Stephen Chow, Zhou Wei, Ng Mang-tat
Company: Universe Entertainment Limited; Star Overseas Limited
Release date: 2001

19. *Center Stage* 阮玲玉
Director: Stanley Kwan
Executive Producer: Willie Chan, Tsui Siu-ming
Cast: Maggie Cheung, Tony Leung Ka-fai , Chin Hang
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 1991

20. *My Lucky Stars* 福星高照
Director: Sammo Hung
Producer: Leonard Ho, Sammo Hung
Cast: Jackie Chan. Sammo Hung, Yuen Bao
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd
Release date: 1985

21. *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* 運財至叻星
Director: Wong Jing
Cast: Anita Yuen, Nick Chan
Company: Jing's Movie
Release date: 1996

22. *Merry Christmas* 聖誕快樂
Director, Clifton Ko Chi-sum
Producer: Nan-sun Shi
Cast: Karl Maka, Paula Tsui, Danny Chan, Loretta Lee, Leslie Cheung
Company: Cinema City Movie Company Ltd
Release date: 1984

23. *A Better Tomorrow* 英雄本色
Director: John Woo
Executive Producer: Tsui Hark

Cast: Ti Lung, Leslie Cheung, Chow Yuen-fat, Emily Chu
Company: Cinema City Movie Company Ltd
Release date: 1986

24. *The Millionaires Express* 富貴列車
Director: Sammo Hung
Producer: Leonard Ho
Cast: Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao, Rosamund Kwan, Johnny Wong
Company: Paragon Films Limited
Release date: 1986

25. *Aces Go Places IV* 最佳拍檔千里救差婆
Director: Ringo Lam
Producer: Karl Maka
Cast: Samuel Hui, Karl Maka
Company: Cinema City Movie Company
Release date: 1986

26. *Armour of God* 龍兄虎弟
Director: Jackie Chan
Executive Producer: Leonard Ho
Cast: Jackie Chan, Rosamund Kwan
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 21st January 1987

27. *It's Mad Mad World (It's a mad, mad, mad world)* 富貴逼人
Director, Clifton Ko Chi-sum
Producer, Linda Kuk
Cast: Bill Tung Pui, Lydia Sung
Company: D & B Films Co., Ltd.
Year: 1987

28. *An Autumn's Tale* 秋天的童話
Director: Mabel Cheung Yuen-ting
Producer, John Sham
Cast: Chow Yun-fat, Cherry Chung, Danny Chan
Company: D & B Films Co., Ltd.
Release date: 16th July 1987

29. *Eighth Happiness* 八星報喜
Director: Johnnie To
Executive Producer: Raymond Wong
Cast: Chow Yun-fat, Fennie Yuen, Fung Poo-poo
Company: Cinema City Film Production Co. Ltd.
Release date: 11th February 1988

30. *Police Story II* 警察故事續集
Director: Jackie Chan
Producer, Leonard Ho
Cast: Jackie Chan, Maggie Cheung
Company: Golden Way Films Ltd.
Release date: 20th August 1988

31. *Dragon Forever* 飛龍猛將
Director: Sammo Hung
Executive Producer: Leonard Ho
Cast: Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Yuen Bao
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 11th February 1988

32. *God of Gamblers* 賭神
Director: Wong Jing
Executive Producer: Hong Wah Sing
Cast: Chow Yun Fat, Andy Lau
Company: Wins Movie Company
Release date: 14th December 1989

33. *Mr. Canton and Lady Rose (Miracle)* 奇蹟
Director: Jackie Chan
Producer, Leonard Ho
Cast: Jackie Chan, Anita Mui, Bill Tung, Gua Ah-leh, Anders Nelsson
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.; Golden Way Films Ltd.
Release date: 15th June 1989

34. *Mr. Coconut* 合家歡
Director: Clifton Ko Chi-sum

Executive Producer: Clifton Ko Chi-sum

Cast: Michael Hui, Raymond Wong

Company: Hui's Movie Company Ltd

Release date: 21st January 1989

35. *All for the Winner* 賭聖

Director: Corey Yuen, Jeff Lau

Executive Producer: Corey Yuen, Jeff Lau

Cast: Ng Man-tat, Stephen Chow, Sandra Ng, Sharla Cheung

Company: Seasonal Film Corporation; Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.

Release date: 18th August 1990

36. *Hearts Into Hearts* 三人新世界

Director: Stephen Shin

Executive Producer: Stephen Shin

Cast: Maggie Cheung, George Lam, Carol Cheng, and Vivian Chow

Company: D & B Films Co., Ltd.; Mega One Ad. & Prod. Co

Release date: 24th January 1990

37. *Fight Back To School* 逃學威龍

Director: Gordon Chan

Executive Producer: Wong Jing

Cast: Stephen Chow, Sharla Cheung, Ng Man-tat

Company: Win's Movie Production & I/E Co

Release date: 18th July 1991

38. *Armour of God II* 飛鷹計劃

Director: Jackie Chan

Executive Producer: Leonard K. C. Ho

Cast: Jackie Chan, Kenneth Low

Company: Golden Way Films Ltd.

Release date: 7th February 1991

39. *To Be Number One* 跛豪

Director: Poon Man-kit

Executive Producer: Stephen Siu

Cast: Ray Lui, Kent Cheng

Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.; Johnny Mak Production Ltd.

Release date: 5th April 1991

40. All's Well Ends Well 家有囍事
Director: Clifton Ko Chi-sum
Executive Producer: Clifton Ko Chi-sum, Raymond Wong
Cast: Stephen Chow, Maggie Cheung, Sandra Ng, Raymond Wong,
Company: Regal Movie Company ; Mandarin Movie Company
Release date: 25th January 1992

41. *Royal Tramp* 鹿鼎記
Director: Wong Jing
Producer: Sui Yor Yuen, Hong Wah Sing
Cast: Stephen Chow, Ng Man Tat
Company: Wins Entertainment Company
Release date: 30th July 1992

42. *Flirting Scholar* 唐伯虎點秋香
Director: Lee Lik Che
Executive Producer: Sui Yor Yuen
Cast: Stephen Chow, Goni
Company: Wins Movie Company
Release date: 1st July 1993

43. *C'est La Vie, Mon Cheri* 新不了情
Director: Derek Yee
Executive Producer: Alexander Chan
Cast: Lau Ching-wan, Anita Yuen
Company: Film Unlimited
Release date: 11. 11. 1993.

44. *God of Gambler's Return* 賭神 2
Director: Wong Jing
Executive Producer: Hong Wah Sing
Cast: Chow Yun Fat, Leung Kar Fai
Company: Wins Entertainment Company
Release date: 15. 12. 1994

45. *Drunken Master II*醉拳 II

Director: Lau Ka-leung

Executive Producer: Leonard Ho

Cast: Jackie Chan, Anita Mui, Chin Ka-lok

Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.

Release date: 03. 02. 1994

46. *It's a Wonderful Life* 大富之家

Director: Clifton Ko Chi-sum

Executive Producer: Raymond Wong

Cast: Leslie Cheung, Tony Leung Ka-fai, Anita Yuen, Lau Ching-wan

Company: Mandarian Films Ltd.

Release date: 06. 02. 1994

47. *Rumble in the Bronx* 紅番區

Director: Stanley Tong

Executive Producer: Barbie Tung

Cast: Jackie Chan, Anita Mui

Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.

Release date: 21. 01. 1995.

48. *Thunderbolt* 霹靂火

Director: Gordon Chan

Executive Producer: Leonard Ho

Cast: Jackie Chan, Anita Yuen

Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.

Release date: 05. 08. 1995

49. *Sixty Million Dollars Man* 百變星君

Director: Yip Wai Man

Producer: Wong Jin, Ching Nam

Cast: Stephen Chow, Gigi Leung

Company: Wins Entertainment Company

Release date: 1995

50. *First Strike* 警察故事 4 之簡單任務

Director: Stanley Tong

Executive Producer: Barbie Tung

Cast: Jackie Chan, Annie Wu, Lau Hok-yin
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd
Release date: 10. 02. 1996

51. *Forbidden City Cop* 大內密探零零發
Director: Stephen Chow, Vincent Kok
Executive Producer: Wong Jing
Cast: Stephen Chow, Carina Lau
Company: Win's Entertainment Ltd.
Release date: 16. 02. 1996

52. *God of Cookery* 食神
Director: Stephen Chow, Lee Lik-chi
Executive Producer: Yeung Kwok-fai
Cast: Stephen Chow, Karen Mok
Company: The Star Overseas Ltd.
Release date: 21. 12. 1996

53. *Mr. Nice Guy* 一個好人
Director: Sammo Hung
Executive Producer: Chua Lam
Cast: Jackie Chan, Richard Norton, Miki Lee
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 31. 01. 1997

54. *All's Well End's Well 97'* 97 家有喜事
Director: Cheung Kin Ting
Executive Producer: Raymond Wong Pai Ming
Cast: Stephen Chow, Raymond Wong
Company: Che Tung Media Company
Release date: 06. 02. 1997

55. *Once Upon a Time In China & America* 黃飛鴻之西域雄獅
Director: Sammo Hung
Executive Producer: Tsui Hark
Cast: Jet Li, Rosamund Kwan, Xiong Xinxin, Chan Kwok-pong
Company: Win's Entertainment Ltd.
Release date: 01. 02. 1997

56. *Who Am I* 我是誰'

Director: Benny Chan, Jackie Chan

Executive Producer: Barbie Tung

Cast: Jackie Chan, Michelle Ferre

Company: Golden Harvest Pictures Limited

Release date: 17. 01. 1998

57. *Young and Dangerous* 古惑仔之人在江湖

Director: Andrew Lau

Executive Producer: Manfred Wong

Cast: Ekin Cheng Jordan Chan, Gigi Lai

Company: Jing's Production Ltd.

Release date: 25. 01. 1996

58. *King of Comedy* 喜劇之王

Director: Lee Lik-chee, Stephen Chow

Executive Producer: Yeung Kwok-fai

Cast: Stephen Chow, Karen Mok, Cecilia Cheung, Ng Man-tat

Company: The Star Overseas Ltd.

Release date: 13. 02. 1999

59. *Gorgeous* 玻璃樽

Director: Vincent Kok

Executive Producer: Stephen Chu, David Chan

Cast: Jackie Chan, Tony Leung, Shu Qi

Company: GH Pictures (China) Limited

Release date: 13. 02. 1999

60. *A Man Named Hero* 中華英雄

Director: Andrew Lau

Executive Producer: Manfred Wong, Barbie Tung

Cast: Ekin Cheng, Shu Qui, Kristy Yang, Nicholas Tse

Company: GH Pictures (China) Limited; Centro Digital Pictures Limited ; BoB & Partners Company Limited

Release date: 17. 07. 1999

61. *Needing You* 孤男寡女

Director: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Executive Producer: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai
Cast: Andy Lau, Sammi Cheng
Company: One Hundred Years of Film Co. Limited
Release date: 23. 06. 2000

62. *Tokyo Raiders* 東京攻略
Director: Jingle Ma
Executive Producer: Stephen Chu
Cast: Tony Leung, Ekin Cheng, Kelly Chen, Cecilia Cheung
Company: GH Pictures (China) Limited
Release date: 28. 01. 2000

63. *Summer Holiday* 夏日的麼麼茶
Director: Jingle Ma
Executive Producer: Stephen Chu
Cast: Richie Jen, Sammi Cheng, Michael Wong
Company: Gh Pictures (China) Limited
Release date: 10. 08. 2000

64. *Shaolin Soccer* 少林足球
Director: Stephen Chow
Executive Director: Lee Lik-chee
Cast: Stephen Chow, Zhou Wei, Ng Mang-tat
Company: Universe Entertainment Limited; Star Overseas Limited
Release date: 5th July 2001

65. *Love on a Diet* 瘦身男女
Director: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai
Executive Producer: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai
Cast: Andy Lau, Sammi Cheng
Company: One Hundred Years of Film Company Limited
Release date: 21. 06. 2001

66. *Hero* 英雄
Director: Zhang Yimou
Executive Producer: Dou Shou-fang, Zhang Wei-pin
Cast: Jet Li, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Maggie Cheung, Zhang Ziyi
Company: Elite Group Enterprises Inc.; Miramax Films

Release date: 19. 12. 2002

67. *Marry A Rich Man* 嫁個有錢人
Director: Vincent Kok
Executive Producer: Vincent Kok
Cast: Sammi Cheng, Richie Jen
Company: SML (Hong Kong) Limited
Release date: 09. 02. 2002

68. *The Twins Effect* 千機變
Director: Dante Lam
Executive Producer: Carl Chang
Cast: Ekin Cheng, Charlene Choi, Gillian Chung, Edison Chen
Company: Emperor Multimedia Group
Release date: 24. 06. 2003

69. *Running on Karma* 大隻佬
Director: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai
Executive Producer: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai
Cast: Andy Lau, Cecilia Cheung
Company: Beijing Youth Film Studio; One Hundred Years of Film Company Limited
Release date: 27. 09. 2003

70. *KungFu Hustle* 功夫
Director: Stephen Chow
Executive Producer: Bill Borden, Zhao Haicheng, David Hung
Cast: Stephen Chow, Yuen Wah, Yuen Qiu
Company: Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia Limited; Huayi Brothers & Taihe Film Investment Co., Ltd.; Beijing Film Studio of China Film Group Corporation
Release date: 23. 12. 2004

71. *Fantasia* 鬼馬狂想曲
Director: Wai Ka-fai
Executive Producer: Wai Ka-fai
Cast: Cecilia Cheung, Louis Koo, Lau Ching-wan, Jordan Chan
Company: One Hundred Years of Film Company Limited
Release date: 15. 01. 2004

72. *Escape from Hong Kong Island* 墨斗先生

Director: Lui Yu Young

Executive Producer: Wong Kit Fong

Cast: Chan Sui Chung, Cheung Yi

Company: Mandarin Movie Company

Release date: 23. 09. 2004

73. *New police story* 新警察故事

Director: Benny Chan

Executive Producer: Willie Chan, Solon So, Barbie Tung, Benny Chan, China Film Co-production Corporation

Cast: Jackie Chan, Nicholas Tse, Charlie Young

Company: JCE Movies Limited; China Film Group Corporation

Release date: 24. 09. 2004

74. *Initial D* 頭文字 D

Director: Andrew Lau, Mak

Executive Producer: Andrew Lau

Cast: Jay Chow, Wong Chau Sang

Company: Media Asia Films (BVI) Limited; Raintree Pictures Pte. Ltd. ; Eastern Dragon Film Co. Ltd.

Release date: 25. 06. 2005

75. *Wait Till You're Older* 童夢奇緣

Director: Teddy Chen

Executive Producer: Teddy Chen, Cheung Chi-kwong

Cast: Andy Lau, Karen Mok

Company: Media Asia Films (BVI) Ltd.; Sil-Metropole Organisation Ltd.

Release date: 29. 09. 2005

76. *The Myth* 神話

Director: Stanley Tong

Executive Producer: Jackie Chan, Kim Hee-seon, Tony Leung Ka-fai

Cast: Jackie Chan, 金喜善

Company: JCE Movies Limited; China Film Group Corporation

Release date: 23. 09. 2005

77. *Young Dragons* 鐵漢柔情

Director: John Woo

Producer: Leonard Ho

Cast: Yu Young, Woo Kam
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 1975

78. *Money Crazy* 發錢寒
Director: John Woo
Executive Producer: Raymond Chow
Cast: Richard Ng, Ricky Hui
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 29. 07. 1977

79. *Justice, My Foot* 審死官
Director: Johnnie To
Executive Producer: Mona Fong
Cast: Stephen Chow, Anita Mui
Company: Shaw Brothers Studio
Release date: 02. 07. 1992

80. *Flirting Scholar* 唐伯虎點秋香
Director: Lee Lik Che
Executive Producer: Sui Yor Yuen
Cast: Stephen Chow, Goni
Company: Wins Movie Company
Release date: 01. 07. 1993

81. *Royal Tramp* 鹿鼎記
Director: Wong Jing
Executive Producer: Sui Yor Yuen
Cast: Stephen Chow, Ng Monk Tat
Company: Wins Movie Company
Release date: 30. 07. 1992

82. *Love on Delivery* 破壞之王
Director: Lee Lik Che
Executive Producer: Mona Fong
Cast: Stephen Chow, Ng Monk Tat
Company: Shaw Brothers Studio
Release date: 03. 02. 1994

83. *Seven little valiant fighters* 橫掃江南七霸天
Director: Long To
Cast: Sammo Hung, Yuen Bao, Jackie Chan
Company: Tai Wing Pictures
Release date: 1962

84. *The Love Eterne* 梁山伯與祝英台
Director: Li Han-hsiang
Executive Producer: Run-run Shaw
Cast: Betty Loh Ti, Ivy Ling Po
Company: Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Release date: 03. 04. 1963.

85. *A Touch of Zen* / 俠女(上集)
Director: King Hu
Executive Producer: Hsia Wu Ling-fung
Cast: Hsu Fong, Shih Chun, Pai Ying, Tien Peng, Hsueh Han
Company: United Movie Company
Release date: 18. 11. 1971

86. Fist of Fury 精武門
Director: Lo Wei
Executive Producer: Raymond Chow
Cast: Bruce Lee, Mui Ho Sau
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 07. 1973

87. Enter the Dragon 猛龍過江
Director: Bruce Lee
Executive Producer: Raymond Chow
Cast: Bruce Lee,
Company: Golden Harvest (HK)Ltd
Release date: 07. 1975

88. *New Fist of Fury* 新精武門
Director: Lo Wei
Executive Producer: Lo Wei

Cast: Jackie Chan, Nora Miao, Chan Sing, Cheng Siu-siu
Company: Lo Wei Motion Pictures Co., Ltd.
Release date: 08. 07. 1976

89. *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* 蛇形刁手
Director: Yuen Woo-ping
Executive Producer: Chang Chuan
Cast: Jackie Chan, Yuan Hsiao-tien
Company: A Ocean Films
Release date: 01. 03. 1978

90. *Drunken Master* 醉拳
Director: Yuen Wo Ping
Executive Producer: Ng See Yuen
Cast: Jackie Chan, Yuen Sui Ting
Company: Seasonal Movie Company
Release date: 05. 10. 1978

91. *Half a Loaf of Kung Fu* 點止功夫咁簡單
Director: Chen Chi-hwa
Executive Producer: Lo Wei, Hsu Li-hwa
Cast: Jackie Chan, James Tien, Lung Juen-er, Dean Shek
Company: Lo Wei Motion Picture Co., Ltd.
Release date: 01. 07. 1980

92. *Spiritual Kung Fu* 拳精
Director: Lo Wei
Executive Producer: Lo Wei
Cast: Jackie Chan), James Tien, Wu Wen-siu, Li Tung-chuen, Li Kuen
Company: Lo Wei Motion Picture Co., Ltd.
Release date: 23. 11. 1978

93. *Fearless Hyena Part II* 龍騰虎躍
Director: Chan Chuen
Executive Producer: Lo Wei
Cast: Jackie Chan, Dean Shek, James Tien, Austin Wai, Yam Sai-kun,
Company: Lo Wei Motion Picture Co., Ltd.
Release date: 04. 03. 1983

94. *Battle Creek Brawl* 殺手壕
Director: Robert Clouse
Executive Producer: Raymond Chow
Cast: Jackie Chan, Jose Ferrer, Kristine Debell
Company: Golden Harvest Company Ltd.; Warner Bros
Release date: 16. 10. 1980

95. *Young Master* 師弟出馬
Director: Jackie Chan
Executive Producer:
Cast: Jackie Chan, Yuan Biao, Wei Pai
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 09. 02. 1980

96. *Dragon Lord* 龍少爺
Director: Jackie Chan
Executive Producer: Leonard Ho
Cast: Jackie Chan, Mars
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.; Lo Wei Motion Picture Co., Ltd.
Release date: 21. 01. 1982

97. *Wheels on Meals* 快餐車
Director: Sammo Hung
Executive Producer: Raymond Chow
Cast: Jackie Chan, Yuen Biao, Sammo Hung
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 17. 08. 1984

98. *Police Story 4: First Strike* 警察故事 4 之簡單任務
Director: Stanley Tong
Executive Producer: Barbie Tung
Cast: Jackie Chan, Annie Wu, Lau Hok-yin
Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.
Release date: 10. 02. 1996

99. Rumble in the Bronx 紅番區
Director: Stanley Tong

Executive Producer: Barbie Tung

Cast: Jackie Chan, Anita Mui

Company: Golden Harvest (HK) Ltd.

Release date: 21. 01. 1995.

100. *Rush Hour* 火拼時速

Director: Brett Ratner

Executive Producer: Jay Stern

Cast: Jackie Chan, Chris Tucker

Company: New Line Cinema; Roger Birnbaum Productions

Release date: 15. 10. 1998

101. *Young and Dangerous* 古惑仔之人在江湖

Director: Andrew Lau

Executive Producer: Manfred Wong

Cast: Ekin Cheng Jordan Chan, Gigi Lai

Company: Jing's Production Ltd.

Release date: 25. 01. 1996

102. *The Storm Riders* 風雲雄霸天下

Director: Andrew Lau

Executive Producer: John Chu

Cast: Aaron Kwok, Ekin Cheng

Company: GH Pictures (China) Ltd.; Centro Digital Pictures Ltd.; Tian Shan Film Studio

Release date: 18. 07. 1998

103. *A Man Named Hero* 中華英雄

Director: Andrew Lau

Executive Producer: Manfred Wong, Barbie Tung

Cast: Ekin Cheng, Shu Qui, Kristy Yang, Nicholas Tse

Company: GH Pictures (China) Limited; Centro Digital Pictures Limited; BoB & Partners Company Limited

Release date: 17. 07. 1999

104. *Infernal Affairs* 無間道

Director: Andrew Lau, Alan Mak

Executive Producer: Andrew Lau

Cast: Andy Lau, Tony Leung, Anthony Wong, Eric Tsang,

Company: Media Asia Films (BVI) Limited; Raintree Pictures Pte. Ltd.
Eastern Dragon Film Co. Ltd.
Release date: 2002

105. *Infernal Affairs 2* 無間道 2
Director: Andrew Lau, Alan Mak
Executive Producer: John Chong, Daniel Yun, Ma Baoping
Cast: Edison Chen, Shawn Yue, Anthony Wong, Eric Tsang, Carina Lau
Company: Media Asia Films (BVI) Limited; Raintree Pictures Pte. Ltd. Eastern Dragon Film Co. Ltd.
Release date: 01. 10. 2003

106. *Infernal Affairs 3* 無間道 III 終極無間
Director: Andrew Lau, Alan Mak
Executive Producer: John Chong, Han Hongfei
Cast: Andy Lau, Leon Lai, Tony Leung, Chen Daoming, Kelly Chen,
Company: Media Asia Films (BVI) Limited; Tianjin Film Studio; Eastern Dragon Film; CMC Group
Release date: 12. 12. 2003

107. *City on Fire* 龍虎風雲
Director: Ringo Lam
Executive Producer: Karl Maka
Cast: Chow Yun-fat, Danny Lee Sau-yin, Sun Yeuh, Carrie Ng
Company: Cinema City Co. Ltd.
Release date: 13. 02. 1987

108. *Naked Killer 2*
Director: Ching Siu Tong
Executive Producer: Ching Sui Tong
Cast: Lam Hei Lui, Maggai Q
Company: Jing's Production Ltd.
Release date: 07. 1993

109. *Young and Dangerous* 古惑仔之人在江湖
Director: Andrew Lau
Executive Producer: Manfred Wong
Cast: Ekin Cheng Jordan Chan, Gigi Lai
Company: Jing's Production Ltd.
Release date: 25. 01. 1996

110. *The Storm Riders* 風雲雄霸天下

Director: Andrew Lau

Executive Producer: John Chu

Cast: Aaron Kwok, Ekin Cheng

Company: GH Pictures (China) Ltd; Centro Digital Pictures Ltd.; Tian Shan Film Studio

Release date: 18. 07. 1998

111. *The Park* 咒樂園 (2003)

Director: Andrew Lau

Executive Producer: Andrew Lau, Robert Li, John Chong

Cast: Bo Bo Chan, Tiffany Lee, Derek Tsang, Cheung Wing-hong

Company: Base Production Ltd.; Hype Films Co., Ltd. ; Menfond Electronic Art & Computer Design Co. Ltd. ; Mega Star Production Ltd.

Release date: 23. 10. 2003

112. *The Flock* 強捕犯

Director: Andrew Lau Wai Keung

Cast: Richard Gere, Carolie Dance

Release date: 29.11.2007

113. *The Legend of Zu* 蜀山傳

Director: Tsui Hark

Executive Producer: Tiffany Chen, Charles Heung, Brian Cox, Anant Sngh, Harvey Wensten, Bob Westen

Cast: Ekin Cheng, Cecilia Cheung, Louis Koo,

Company: One Hundred Years of Film Co. Ltd.

Release date: 09. 08. 2001

114. *All About Ah Long* 阿郎的故事

Director: Johnnie To

Executive Producer: Kenneth Ng, Ise Cheng

Cast: Chow Yun-fat, Sylvia Chang, Huang Kun-husen

Company: Cinema City Co. Ltd.

Release date: 16. 03. 1989

115. *Election 2* 黑社會 2 以和爲貴

Director: Johnnie To

Executive Producer: Lo Sau Yat, Johnnie To

Cast: Yim Tat Wah, Kuen Tin Lok

Company: Milky-way Image; One Hundred Years of Films Co. Ltd.

Release date: 2006

116. *The Mission* 鎗火

Director: Johnnie To

Executive Producer: Johnny To

Cast: Francis Wong, Anthony Wong

Company: Milkyway Image (HK) Ltd.

Release date: 19. 11. 1999

117. *Fulltime Killer* 全職殺手

Director: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Executive Producer: Shirley Lau

Cast: Andy Lau), Takashi Sorimachi

Company: Teamwork Motion Pictures Limited; CMC Magnetics Corporation

Release date: 03. 08. 2001

118. PTU

Director: Johnnie To

Executive Producer: Johnnie To

Cast: Simon Yam, Maggie Shiu, Lam Suet, Ruby Wong, Raymond Wong, Ko Hung, Lo Hoi-pang, Jerome Fung, Frank Liu

Company: Mei Ah Film Production Co., Ltd.

Release date: 17. 04. 2003

119. *Breaking News* 大事件

Director: Johnnie To

Executive Producer: John Chong, Yang Buting

Cast: Richie Jen, Kelly Chen, Nick Cheung

Company: Media Asia Films Ltd.; China Film Group Corporation

Release date: 10. 06. 2004

120. Mad Detective 神探

Director: Johnnie To, Wai Kar Fai

Executive Producer: Chan Ming Ying

Cast: Lau Ching Wan, Lam Hei Lui

Company: One Hundred Years of Films Company Ltd.

Release date: 2007

121. *Mad Monk* 濟公

Director: Johnnie To

Executive Producer: Mona Fong

Cast: Anthony Wong, Maggie Cheung

Company: Cosmopolitan Film Productions Co. Ltd.

Release date: 29. 07. 1993

122. *Needing You* 孤男寡女

Director: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Executive Producer: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Cast: Andy Lau, Sammi Cheng

Company: One Hundred Years of Film Co. Limited

Release date: 23. 06. 2000

123. *Love on a Diet* 瘦身男女

Director: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Executive Producer: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Cast: Andy Lau, Sammi Cheng

Company: One Hundred Years of Film Company Limited

Release date: 21. 06. 2001

124. *Running on Karma* 大隻佬

Director: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Executive Producer: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Cast: Andy Lau, Cecilia Cheung

Company: Beijing Youth Film Studio; One Hundred Years of Film Company Limited

Release date: 27. 09. 2003

125. *My Left Eye Sees Ghosts.* 我左眼見到鬼

Director: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Executive Producer: Johnnie To, Wai Ka-fai

Cast: Sammi Cheng, Lau Ching-wan

Company: One Hundred Years of Film Company Limited

Release date: 13. 07. 2002

126. *King of Comedy* 喜劇之王

Director: Lee Lik-chee, Stephen Chow

Executive Producer: Yeung Kwok-fai

Cast: Stephen Chow, Karen Mok, Cecilia Cheung, Ng Man-tat

Company: The Star Overseas Ltd.

Release date: 13. 02. 1999

127. *The Monkey Goes West* 西遊記

Director: Ho Meng-hua

Executive Producer: Run-run Shaw

Cast: Ho Fan, Elliot Yueh Hua

Company: Shaw Brothers Studio

Release date: 18. 01. 1966