

# **Mutual Gazing and Self-Writing:<sup>1</sup> Revisiting the Tale of Hong Kong and Shanghai as Global City-Regions<sup>\*</sup>**

Tsung-yi Michelle Huang  
National Taiwan Normal University

## **Abstract**

Juxtaposing Wang Anyi's and Wong Kar-wai's tales of the link between Hong Kong and Shanghai as global city-regions, we find the cities' gazes at different historic moments reveal the impact of capital reorganization. The narrative strategies in a sense legitimize geopolitical changes for the city-users. Wang Anyi's writings suggest that during Shanghai's period of drastic transformation, which began in the early 1990s, Hong Kong offers a vision of what a globalized Shanghai might look like and also gives the nod to urban development. On the other hand, going as it is through a political and economic crisis, post-1997 Hong Kong needs to assure itself of its importance as a global city like New York and London at this "restless moment." It is at this point that the history of the Hong Kong-Shanghai link looms large, becoming the ideal mirror image of Hong Kong's future. We could argue that what characterizes the contemporary narrative of Hong Kong and Shanghai as cities "linked at birth" is that not only do they serve as one another's past, as one another's roots, but they also serve as the promised future in the mirror of globalization. In other words, the concepts of linkage and network provide a language in which users of global city-regions may articulate their fears and desires in the process of identity formation, in response to the geopolitical contingencies of our time.

## **Keywords**

globalization, global city-regions, critical geography, cultural flows,  
Hong Kong, Shanghai, Wong Kar-wai, Wang Anyi

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<sup>1</sup> The word "gaze" as it is used in this essay is neither a Foucauldian gaze nor a Lacanian one. What I mean by "gaze" is a kind of geographic imagination, the way global cities and city-dwellers (re)envision their identities in relation to a visually objectified Other as a result of the changing geopolitics of globalization.

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The only cosmopolitan city that remains outside the revolutionary maelstrom is Hong Kong, and it takes one city to understand another.

—Leo Ou-fan Lee

## **I. From Global Cities to Global City-Regions: Revisiting the Hong Kong-Shanghai Link**

Academic geographers now do not just pay attention to individual global cities such as London, New York, or Tokyo. They have brought our attention to the emergence of the global city-region, which embodies on a more inclusive scale the relationship between globalization and cities. Global city-regions generally take one of the three following forms: “the basic figure of a central metropolitan area with a hinterland,” “conurbations, spatially overlapping or converging urban areas,” and “alliances of geographically distinct but proximate urban centers” (Scott 4). For Allen J. Scott, the global city-region is “a new regionalism” (1). John Friedman calls it “a new form of urban landscape” (123). Sir Peter Hall defines this “precursor of a new scale of urban organization” as being “networked externally on a global scale and internally over thousands of kilometers” (74). There seems to be a broad consensus among geographers that a new matrix of global cities is on the rise.

Yet as Henri Lefebvre reminds us, urban development (the representation of space) and city-users’ experiences (the representational space) are never quite in sync. Geographic scales do not necessarily correspond to how people perceive or live the concrete space of their everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Global city-regions, the latest form of regionalism, therefore beg such questions as these: If globalization is a process of geographical reorganization in response to capital flows, as David Harvey and Saskia Sassen point out, how does such a new geography of global city-regions reshape the lived space?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For Lefebvre, representation of space, “the dominant space in any society,” is the “conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers.” Representational space, “the dominated” and “passively experienced” space, is the “space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users.’” It is also the space of some artists, writers or philosophers (38-39).

<sup>3</sup> Harvey defines contemporary globalization as an on-going process of territorialization and reterritorialization of capitalism:

Time and time again it [capitalism] has turned to geographical reorganization (both expansion and intensification) as a partial solution to its crises and impasses. Capitalism thereby builds and rebuilds a geography in its own image. It constructs a distinctive

Does the global city-region, defined and molded by the matrix of global networking and urban linkage, engender new images or symbols and suggest different ways for the city-users to perceive the relationships between self and other? For example, do global city-regions give rise to new imagined communities? Furthermore, to what extent does this “new scale of urbanization” challenge city-users’ cognitive mapping of their urban space? What are some of the possibilities and problems for articulating and representing people’s experience of living in global city-regions? In sum, how do we capture the cultural logic as well as the reality of this new regionalism of globalization? I argue that one possibility for rethinking and translating the global city-regions that geographers have theorized is to bring cultural questions into the discussion of political economy, for example by exploring the reflections and consciousness inspired by cultural texts and practices of everyday life. In the remarks that follow, I will employ the long-standing “tale of two cities” of Hong Kong and Shanghai as a case study to discuss how the representational space of global city-regions could be grasped through an analysis of a few micro-personal accounts of the inter-urban relationships of our time.

The inter-city relationship between Hong Kong and Shanghai has a long history: sharing a similar past of fishing-village-turned-port city and later a colony, these two metropolises have been construed as a tale of two cities in East Asia, “the Pearl of the Orient” vs. “the Paris of the East.” The cultural and historical significance of the Hong Kong-Shanghai link has continued to attract academic attention. For example, theorizing the forms of cosmopolitanism as seen in contemporary Hong Kong and Shanghai, Ackbar Abbas traces the bond between these two cities:

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geographical landscape, a produced space of transport and communications, of infrastructures and territorial organizations, that facilitates capital accumulation during one phase of its history only to have to be torn down and reconfigured to make way for further accumulation at a later stage. (54)

Sassen uses the term “new geography of centrality and marginality” to explain how global geography is (re)defined by capital flows:

The global economy materializes in a worldwide grid of strategic places, from export-processing zones to major international business and financial centers. We can think of this global grid as constituting a new economic geography of centrality, one that cuts across national boundaries and across the old North-South divide. It signals the emergence of a parallel political geography of power, a transnational space for the formation of new claims by global capital [...]. This new economic geography of centrality partly reproduces existing inequalities but also is the outcome of a dynamic specific to current types of economic growth. (xxv)

Hong Kong and Shanghai have always had a special relation to each other, if only through their relationship to the rest of the world [...]. Both cities were essentially created by Western colonialism in the aftermath of the Opium Wars: Shanghai as a lucrative treaty port and Hong Kong as a British colony and a staging post for trade with China. For better or for worse, *the two cities seemed to have been linked at birth, which makes it possible sometimes to read what is tacit in the history of one city in the history of the other.* (“Cosmopolitan De-scriptions” 773; emphasis mine)

Leo Ou-fan Lee in the epilogue of his *Shanghai Modern* also elaborates on the “symbolic link” between these two cities, defining Hong Kong and Shanghai as mirror images of each other (333). Juxtaposing Shanghai writer Eileen Chang’s Hong Kong stories and Hong Kong directors’ Shanghai films in the late 1980s, he contends that the cultural texts of one city make those of the other more intelligible.<sup>4</sup>

Abbas’s and Lee’s insights on the cultural links between Hong Kong and Shanghai are inspiring since the concept of the “mirror image”—to construct selfhood by observing the Other—registers a common logic of the prevailing discourse of “two cities.” Yet the contemporary matrix of globalization actually demands a more nuanced reading of inter-city relationships than simply mirror reflections of each other. For one thing, the narrative of “two cities,” to be sure, foregrounds the close relationship between these metropolises, but the nature of such a connection calls for a more explicit articulation: Are they neighboring cities lying close to each other as twin cities, closely associated because of a shared history and culture, or are they inseparable due to their economic interdependence? Truly, what does it mean for two cities to be “linked at birth” as Abbas describes it? We must not only inquire into the ways these “two cities” are connected but also contextualize “two cities looking at each other” as a convenient vehicle through which contemporary metropolises may imagine a community and (re)define the relationship between self and other. For example, in the face of the global tide of urban restructuring, how do we understand the two cities as what Lee calls mirror images of each other? What animates the quest for one’s identity and how do the mirror images work? At a time when the “global city” has become a

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<sup>4</sup> Lee analyzes Tsui Hark’s *Shanghai by Night* (上海之夜 *Shanghai zhi ye*), Stanley Kwan’s *Ruan Lingyu* (阮玲玉) and *Red Rose and White Rose* (紅玫瑰白玫瑰 *Hongmeigui baimeigui*) (333-39).

generic model for urban planning, does it still make sense for a city to look for its own image in a specific Other if there seems to be more than one mirror in the world?<sup>5</sup>

Geographically speaking, Hong Kong and Shanghai qualify as global city-regions in the sense that they are not only metropolises with hinterlands but closely connected urban centers, and increasingly so after Hong Kong's handover and Shanghai's rise as a global city-region.<sup>6</sup> To illustrate the cultural significance of "two cities," a form of linkage against the background of rising global city-regions, I propose to analyze a few representative fictional texts produced after the 1990s, including Shanghai writer Wang Anyi's essay "Looking for Shanghai" (尋找上海 *xunzhao Shanghai*), her novel *Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong* (香港情與愛 *Xianggang qingyuai*) and Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai's film *In the Mood for Love* (花樣年華 *Huayang nianhua*).<sup>7</sup> By analyzing these cultural texts, I will survey the intricate connections between this new geopolitical regionalism and a specific mode of self-writing of global city-regions, in which linkage becomes a framework for articulating the identity of these two cities whose morphology, hierarchy, and ways of networking are changing as a result of the reorganization of capitalist geography.

## II. In Search of the Global City: Wang Anyi's Quest for Shanghai in the Image of Hong Kong

In Wang Anyi's essay "Looking for Shanghai," the linkage between Hong Kong and Shanghai provides a framework for Wang's articulation of her otherwise unspeakable experience of urban upheaval brought about by global urban restructuring. Her essay suggests that (mis)representations of otherness are a means to construct selfhood: the "creative destruction" of Old Shanghai during the global-city campaign is rationalized through a comparison with Hong Kong's spectacular global-city vistas. At first glance, Wang seems to devote much of the essay to showing the negative consequences of remaking Shanghai into a global city: the mushrooming high-rises of concrete and steel alienate people from one another and from their city, liquidating

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<sup>5</sup> For the concept of "generic city," see Koolhaas 1248-64.

<sup>6</sup> For Shanghai's transformation into a global city, see Yeung and Sung; Olds; and Wu.

<sup>7</sup> *Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong* is Tang Xiaobing's translation.

histories and demolishing such traditional lived spaces as *longtangs* in the name of development.<sup>8</sup> A strong sense of estrangement from the city permeates the writing:

In a nutshell, Shanghai is not sensual any more. New buildings construct a new cover for it, which separates the city from the physical senses of its inhabitants. Such a fancy cover, however, does not fit perfectly. There is always some empty space in between the exterior and the real thing. Or maybe it is due to the fact that we are too close to the city and it happens to be undergoing drastic changes. All the views are blurred. In the end, only some after-images can be grasped. (*Sister* 221; my translation)

At this point Wang impresses on us the fact that she finds Shanghai's recent development to be unsettling because of the gap between inhabitants' sensory experiences and those new buildings. Those who have seen the transformation of Pudong, Shanghai, from a rural piece of land to a global capital and cultural showcase would find the author's lament over the disappearance of a city one calls "home" readily understandable.

But there are, it turns out, contradictions within her writing on the lost city; these allow us to further comprehend the contemporary Hong Kong-Shanghai link in relation to globalization. At the end of the essay the glittering skyline of Hong Kong Island seen from the five-star Regent Hotel in 1997 drives the writer to reflect on the future of Shanghai. Wang, to our surprise, goes so far as to admire the sublimity of Hong Kong. This window-scene of Hong Kong, narrated as a legend of "civilization born out of a barren island," reminds her of the genesis of Shanghai in a book on the city's archaeology: "What a spectacular scene! Shanghai rises from the ocean slowly. With the fogs disappearing, the city seems to be closer and closer. I walk into what I see, buried by the detailed writing, and finally everything becomes indiscernible" (*Sister* 222; my translation). The excited tone here seems to make her earlier melan-

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<sup>8</sup> Shanghainese call the *lilong*, their characteristic residential design, *longtang* (alley houses). "Long" means alley or lane and "tang" parlor or hall. "All houses are facing the lanes and lanes become the public space used by all residents. Enclosed, the whole *longtang* area seems to be a closed 'city within the city.' The bustling and noisy city is separated from the *longtang*. Once one enters the *longtang*, it is as if he had already been half at home" (23 November 2003; 10 August 2004 <<http://www.chinawindow.com/shanghai/longtang/culture/fengqing.html>>).

choly unintelligible: the disappearing Old Shanghai should be retrieved in the grandiose Kowloon. How do we explain such a drastic shift of tone at the end of the quest?

To answer this question we will have to examine the mechanism of Wang's touristic gaze at the Other. Fundamental to her mode of urban self-writing is the link between Hong Kong and Shanghai, yet what enables this linkage to work as the framework of her tale of two cities could be described as "peer pressure," and on top of that a moment of crisis, a period of traumatic urban transformation in the history of Shanghai. First of all, Wang's gaze in a sense is mobilized by the rivalry between these two cities. Hong Kong and Shanghai are conventionally construed as twins, equals "linked at birth" with similar tracks of historical development as Abbas describes it. What has been overshadowed by the kinship ideology that prioritizes natural binding are some other forms of connection such as competition and pressure, which might not be readily recognizable or openly admitted but are none the less important for understanding the complexity of linkage in narratives of two cities. In fact, Hong Kong as the Other of Shanghai should be more precisely redefined as its "peer" and especially in the context of globalization. Those who have paid attention to the recent geopolitical dynamics between Hong Kong and Shanghai will know that the unresolved tension between these two metropolises is escalating, particularly after the latter's rise as a global city-region in the 1990s. Therefore, Wang's representation of Hong Kong in a sense could be interpreted as a "peer evaluation" conducted by a cultural observer from Shanghai, one who postulates Hong Kong as a fixed reference point to which her Shanghai may always be compared.<sup>9</sup>

The peer mentality accounts for the seemingly contradictory tones of the essay. The link between the two cities invites Wang to project the spectacle of a global city onto Hong Kong, a process of constructing Shanghai's subjectivity by gazing at the Other as a peer, one who serves simultaneously as a predecessor and a model as far as global urban restructuring is concerned. Seen in this light, the final montage of Hong Kong and Shanghai, derived from and reinforcing the rhetoric of the two cities as being inseparable from each other, truly points, through the magic mirror of the dazzling skyline of Victoria Harbour, to a deeper yearning to envision Shanghai as a global city. Once the birth of Old Shanghai can be miraculously traced in the urban spectacle of Hong Kong, the linearity of history implies that the future Shanghai will resemble that "splendor on the sea" right before our eyes (*Sister* 222). If globalization

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<sup>9</sup> Wang was born in Nanjing and moved to Shanghai at the age of two.

means the fastest and the only route to being (re)connected with the world, a “reality” that government officials and urban planners celebrate, the Shanghainese shouldn’t have to look further for what a better tomorrow looks like than the glamorous urban space of Hong Kong, which has long shared a single identity with Shanghai in this tale of two cities. A single look at Hong Kong could thus overcome Wang’s lingering doubts, persuading her that both the ruins of *lilong* houses and the urban jungle of hyper-modern city high-rises are there for a good cause—Hong Kong has been there and is doing fine. From the skyscrapers radiates a faith that in the long run re-development will not be a total loss, despite the unprecedented scale and speed of demolition. The anxiety that haunts the essay is ultimately displaced into a vague expectation of the future, a kind of epiphany.

Notably, what the peers’ own desire leads Wang to see is by no means Hong Kong as it is, an urban sociality subject to the tug-of-war between the forces of the global and the local. Rather, the Hong Kong Wang looks at is mediated by an image not put into words but widely disseminated—that of an ideal global city, represented, as it often is, by shining skyscrapers. Such an ideal image of a global city partly explains why, at the end of “Looking for Shanghai,” Hong Kong shows up as a picture-perfect city of high-rises. The city’s distinctive “locality” is reduced to a synecdoche of a global cityscape to symbolize the “civilization born out of barren rocks” and further function as a medium by which the observer may envision global-city vistas (*Sister* 222). In other words, the Other here is imagined as an “Ideal-I,” a blueprint for the transformation of Shanghai into a global city, one whose much-publicized landscape is what Sassen calls an “urban glamour zone” (xxxiii).

If the touristic gaze at Hong Kong at the end of “Looking for Shanghai” is Wang’s epiphany, her visualization of the form of Shanghai’s future, in her novel *Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong* the city allows the author to imagine new Shanghai’s content, a highly commercialized, capitalized urban life. *Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong*, like Eileen Chang’s “Love in a Fallen City” (Wang is seen as Chang’s literary heir), chronicles a chance encounter and separation in Hong Kong. The male protagonist, Lao Wei, a middle-aged Chinese businessman flying back and forth between his home in San Francisco and Hong Kong, meets a Shanghai woman named Fengjia, who comes to the city to look for a chance to emigrate to the United States. While describing the two of them going through the motions of a love affair that is first based on practical needs and then on true affection despite the final split up, Wang

meticulously presents details of Hong Kong's urban life to such a degree that the setting, not the characters, appears to be in the spotlight.

Critical discussions of this novel have challenged Wang's extensive representation of Hong Kong, often finding the image of Wang's Hong Kong problematic. For Yin-ha Chan, "Wang appears to see Hong Kong from the periphery, focusing her story on transients and new immigrants, but paradoxically she totalizes Hong Kong with a logo-centric perspective" (96; my translation). She argues that Wang's Hong Kong is "a city of transients, a city dominated by such a port mentality that everything is *ad hoc*, transitional, and temporary, be it sovereignty, sociality, lifestyle, or interpersonal relationships. Mutability seems to be the norm of Hong Kong" (92; my translation). Dung Kai-cheung also criticizes the novel as "not a love story that takes place in Hong Kong but one that utilizes Hong Kong as a signifier." In other words, Hong Kong is at best an empty sign: "If there is truly a Hong Kong in the novel, that Hong Kong is constructed with Wang's rhetoric, a city without any stable appearance but subject to change with her whims and flows of words." Just like her own protagonist Lao Wei, Dung argues, Wang is "merely one among Hong Kong's millions of transients" and her portrait of Hong Kong "exposes the limitation of her perspective as an outsider" (174-75; my translation). Chan and Dung, critics from Hong Kong, are quite right to point out Wang's problem of perpetuating the stereotype of their hometown as a volatile city of transients, yet I would contend that it would be more instructive to consider the mechanism of this Shanghai writer's gaze in the context of the tale of two global city-regions rather than just take Wang's overtly simplified (mis)representation of Hong Kong as it is.

The significance of Wang's representation of Hong Kong in *Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong* has been insightfully theorized by critic Tang Xiaobing. Tang identifies the fundamental motive forces at work in Wang's gaze. He points out that the importance of the image of Hong Kong in this novel lies in the fact that it presents, in the post-revolutionary period, an alternative to a socialist revolution deeply rooted in the rural:

These observations [of Hong Kong] by themselves may not be profound or original, and some of them already have been made—for instance, in Zhang Ailing's stories about Hong Kong and Shanghai in the 1940s—but in the context of contemporary Chinese social discourse, the Hong Kong that Wang Anyi narrates here is undoubtedly a purposeful metaphor for a

cultural choice. As a geographical embodiment of the social imaginary, Hong Kong indeed stands as a city of the future. It offers itself as an ideal instance of the heterotopian urban life that the Chinese postrevolutionary culture seems anxious to understand and eventually to acquire. (134)

To extend Tang's argument, I hasten to add that the details of everyday life in the novel, with which Wang attempts to paint her picture of Hong Kong, have to be discussed side by side with her works on Old Shanghai. In her gaze at the details of daily life on Hong Kong streets, the author also sees the banality of Shanghai life in *lilongs*. An example drawn from her prize-winning novel *The Song of Unending Sorrow*, a powerful effort to chronicle the lifestyle in *longtang*s that attends to every little detail of life, shows the cultural space of *lilongs* that Wang superimposes on Hong Kong: "Old Shanghai was very cosmopolitan, a city where you find splendor from every corner of the world. But, what matters fundamentally is not the glory outside of the window but what lies inside—the roots and basis of everyday life [...]" (349; my translation). Wang shows how Shanghai's glamour finds its foundation in the alley houses and thus has everything to do with daily life. The spaces of the *lilongs* are tangible and intimate: "*Longtang*s in Shanghai are sexy: one feels as intimate with the space as with one's own body, as if the *longtang*'s warmth and coldness are tangible." "The back lanes of *lilongs* are winding into people's hearts." In short, "the emotional power of alley houses lies in the sights and sounds of everyday life [...]" (*The Song of Unending Sorrow* 20; my translation). The Hong Kong narrated in *Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong* is in essence a montage of such *lilong* life and global cityscapes. For example, the narrator describes a scene with Lao Wei and Fengjia looking at the street life from a double-decker bus. The apartment windows and neon lights, representing the mundane trivia of Hong Kong, seem to be at our fingertips:

These windows reveal the most sincere, most practical ways of sustaining life; these are ways that will remain unchanged forever, as permanently as rivers flowing and the sun and the moon revolving. They belong in the same category as the sky and the ocean beyond the lights in Hong Kong, as the rocks standing in the sea water. They are the solid foundation of the marvelous spectacle of Hong Kong. Here you find the most ordinary life, as ordinary as the intriguing spectacle of Hong Kong can be. (qtd. in Tang 133)

The language here resonates strongly with Wang's representation of Shanghai's *longtang*s in *The Song of Unending Sorrow*. For Wang, the seemingly banal daily life which constitutes the bedrock of Shanghai culture is what turns Hong Kong into a hotbed of affinities and affections.

Through the juxtaposition of Hong Kong's ever-more-busy streets and the disappearing Shanghai *longtang*s, Wang implies that there are, even in the most commercialized urban space, solid building-blocks of everyday life. Skyscrapers might replace the old *lilongs* in Shanghai as a result of the global-city campaign, yet just as the author has witnessed on the Hong Kong streets, the banal yet savvy *lilong* life and the Shanghai essence it represents will be engrained in the new urban space, behind the neon lights and the millions of apartments in the high-rises. While the skyline of Hong Kong in "Looking for Shanghai" provides the image of an urban glamour zone for Wang's mapping of the future Shanghai, this mapping cannot be complete until she finds a way to solidly anchor the spirit of the new Shanghai, derived from the legacy of Old Shanghai culture, in the concrete lived space of the city. The Hong Kong-Shanghai montage here could thus be interpreted as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, a projection of the writer's ideal global city.

The down-to-earth wisdom of everyday life, the source of the glamour of Wang's ideal global city, is represented by her female protagonist as well as by the Shanghai *lilongs*. Specifically, Fengjia's diasporic experience as a new immigrant from Shanghai permits Wang to connect the lifestyle of Shanghai with the urban landscape of Hong Kong. Wang has repeatedly described Fengjia as "a woman who is capable of transforming everything intangible into something concrete. She can make Hong Kong dreams come true even if they are merely visions reflected from the surface of crystal glass. She will just turn these reflections into real things with bricks and dirt" (*Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong* 553; my translation). This Shanghai woman is a combination of practicality and genuineness: "Fengjia defines such things as the purpose of life, meanings of mundane trivia, or rules of behaving oneself in terms of practical interests, yet because of her genuineness and directness, the practicality takes the form of sincerity" (*Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong* 506; my translation). As the plot unfolds, we see how she gets to know Lao Wei and care for him. They live together as a family in a rented apartment in the city, and continue their relationship based on a contract for one year before he helps her move to Australia. As part of the Shanghai diaspora, Fengjia tells a story which demonstrates how Shanghainese might resort to their inherent wisdom of practicality in a global city like Hong Kong.

Seen from the perspective of the relationship between globalization and city regions, Wang's Hong Kong stories could be compared to the adventures of Alice walking through the looking glass. The mirror image of Hong Kong as a peer and quintessential global city gives the new Shanghai a recognizable shape for its inhabitants. The linkage formed by the massive human flows of tourists (herself in the Regent Hotel) and immigrants (her protagonist Fengjia) offers Wang a language in which to tell stories of the Hong Kong-Shanghai bond.<sup>10</sup> In her tale of two cities, Hong Kong has been abstracted as a global city—the epitome of consumer society and the ultimate stage of urban life. This simplified representation of Hong Kong is to some extent an unwitting attempt to transform the power of homogenizing globalization into an intimate cultural space, one familiar to the locals. Wang's writings thus suggest how she is driven to address the crisis of the disappearing Shanghai subject and cultural space during a time of urban reconstruction on a colossal scale.<sup>11</sup>

### **III. Rise and Fall of Global City-Regions: Wong Kar-wai's Mood for Old Shanghai**

Wang's *Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong* tells the story of Shanghainese in Hong Kong, a projection of the writer's mapping of a highly capitalized Shanghai by gazing at Hong Kong as the global city *par excellence*. Interestingly, Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai's film *In the Mood for Love* (2000) also narrates (almost) a love affair between two members of the Shanghai diaspora in Hong Kong. The film opens with the following title, which bears uncanny resemblance to Wang Anyi's blurred vision of the new Shanghai that concludes her quest for home in "Looking for Shanghai": "It is a restless moment [...]. That era has passed. He remembers those

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<sup>10</sup> In a recent public speech on Hong Kong, Wang says that it has been a fascinating city to her since her first visit in 1983: "Hong Kong is like a movie to me." She reinforces the connection between Hong Kong and Shanghai, saying that

many things she experienced in Shanghai from childhood have been closely related to Hong Kong. Such bondage results in an inexplicable Hong Kong complex. Despite the fact that she has gone back and forth between the two cities many times, Hong Kong never fails to surprise her each time she visits the city. Her reflections on Hong Kong thus gradually show up in her writings on 'bright lights, big cities.' Like Shanghai, Hong Kong to her is a city for everyday life [...]. (9 July 2004; 10 August 2004 <<http://book.news.sohu.com/2004/07/09/11/article220931144.shtml>>).

<sup>11</sup> Seen in this light, Wang's gaze at Hong Kong is a "shock defense" in Walter Benjamin's terms.

vanished years [...]. Nothing that belonged to it exists any more. As though looking through a dusty window pane. The past is something he could see, but not touch. And everything he sees is blurred and indistinct.”<sup>12</sup>

Set in Hong Kong in the 1960s, *In the Mood for Love* is Wong’s tale of the Hong Kong-Shanghai link. While dramatizing the sexual tension between the protagonists Chow Muyun and Su Lizhen, neighbors who find themselves falling for each other after discovering an affair between their spouses, Wong shows us the aura of Old Shanghai. For instance, the title of the film is taken from 1930s-1940s Shanghainese singer Zhou Xuan’s famous song “*Huayang de nianhua*” (花樣的年華 The prime time), the predominant setting is an apartment building inhabited by people from the Shanghai diaspora in Hong Kong, the major cast members are Shanghainese (Rebecca Pan, Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung), and the female protagonists’ beautiful *qipaos* symbolize the elegance of Shanghai ladies.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the “dusty window pane” through which the director sees the past is a highly stylized Old Shanghai.

Specifically, in the film there are two distinctly different and incongruent forms of gaze at the two cities: a diasporic look back at the hometown and reflections on the rise of Shanghai versus the decline of Hong Kong as a global-city region. First of all, the filmic representation of Old Shanghai through the eyes of those who have left it signifies a certain mode of cultural articulation, a “looking at each other” in the joint discourse of Hong Kong-Shanghai. The massive flow of Shanghainese to Hong Kong around 1949 had a strong impact on Hong Kong’s culture and economy.<sup>14</sup> It is against this historical background that Wong frames the story. In a way reminiscent of Wang Anyi’s narrative strategy of postulating her female protagonist Fengjia as a new immigrant from Shanghai in *Love and Sentiment in Hong Kong*, Wong utilizes his own identity as a member of the Shanghai diaspora to tell a story of old Hong Kong, whose image is seen through a lens squarely focused on Old Shanghai. Moving to Hong Kong with his parents at the age of five, Wong sees the film as an attempt to trace his childhood memories. These Shanghai immigrants in Hong Kong, as the director remembers, tried to lead their life as if nothing had changed. Therefore in the film we

<sup>12</sup> This opening title as well as the final one is taken from Hong Kong novelist Liu Yichang’s (劉以鬯) *Duidao* (對倒).

<sup>13</sup> As Natalia Chan points out, “the film’s nostalgia is an overlapping space of Hong Kong in the 60s and Shanghai in the 30s” (“Pretty Women” 136). For a historical account of the presence of Shanghai in Hong Kong cinema, see Zhang.

<sup>14</sup> “The massive influx of immigrants from the mainland brought a sharp increase in Hong Kong’s population: from 1 million in 1945 to more than 2 million in 1950. It also brought money and capital from Shanghai” (Lee 330).

hear people speak Shanghainese (Mrs. Suen), prepare Shanghai food (Amah), wear *qipaos* (Su Lizhen, Mrs. Suen). No less important to Wong are the interpersonal relationships that characterize the spirit of this “Shanghai community,” a shame culture in which people closely watch each other—under the apparent politeness and sense of intimacy lie judgment and gossip.<sup>15</sup> In an interview, Wang elaborates on the distinctive Shanghai culture of Hong Kong in the 1960s:

I like this period of time though I was only a kid. The film reflects the huge amount of rumors, lies and gossip widely spread around in Hong Kong society at that time. Unlike today, in the 1960s, we get to talk to our neighbors. I shot the film in a Shanghai community, where people know each other, doing their best to present themselves as decent and respectable and hide the dark side of their life. (Sumi 43; my translation)

Notably, the subject of the gaze here is a child, one who barely remembers the Shanghai that his parents left behind. Mediated through the memory of a diasporic space, Wong’s longing for Old Shanghai tends to be somewhat exaggerated and sentimental.

It is the history of the diaspora that allows Wong to retell the story of Hong Kong and Shanghai, and provides the context by which a Hong Kong audience may relate to the film. As Long-tin Sham observes, “In the name of the 1960s, he [Wong] shows a world of a specific group of people” (73; my translation). The “specific group of people” are members of the Shanghai diaspora in Hong Kong. Rey Chow also notes that “[e]specially for audiences acquainted with the Hong Kong of the 1960s, these ethnographic details arguably constitute a kind of already-read text, one that evokes, in the midst of the contemporary filmic rendering, the sense of a community that has been but no longer is” (646).

Nevertheless, Wong’s diasporic gaze bypasses history to a large extent. It is blatantly obvious that his image of Hong Kong in the 1960s is a far cry from being a realistic account of that specific period of time. Rather, this period piece is all about atmosphere.<sup>16</sup> Juxtaposing Wong’s interview and the film, we can easily identify the tension between the director’s intention and its effect: Wong on the one hand

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Mrs. Suen once says disapprovingly about Su Lizhen, “Why bother to dress like a queen to buy noodle soup?”

<sup>16</sup> For details, see Chow; Chan’s “Pretty Women”; and Audrey Yue.

emphasizes the historical significance of the 1960s, but at the same time he erases the historical events on the screen. For example, he argues that “1966 marks the turning point in Hong Kong history. The Cultural Revolution forces Hong Kong people to think about their own future” (Sumi 45; my translation); however, neither the Cultural Revolution nor the significant 1967 riot in Hong Kong is represented in the film in any specific way.<sup>17</sup> Hong Kong in the 1960s in fact takes on the look of a theatrical stage; scattered across it is a mélange of fragmentary, narrow interiors—apartment corners, hotel rooms, offices, corridors, stairways—and a limited number of outdoor urban spaces like alleys, a noodle stand, and a street lamp.<sup>18</sup> As Wong Ainling argues, what Wong Kar-wai ultimately illustrates is merely “a psychological space disassociated from social reality”: “the film was shot in Bangkok, Thailand, by no means a faithful representation of Hong Kong in the 60s. The only prop that signifies old Hong Kong are the posters of Chinese medicine on the walls of the streets” (72; my translation).<sup>19</sup>

In other words, *In the Mood for Love* might pose as a period piece, but paradoxically the past is retold by aestheticizing and fragmenting history. I would like to further examine this postmodern historicism using Jameson’s terminology in the context of the diasporic link between Hong Kong and Shanghai. A close look at Wong’s cinematic gaze at the Shanghai diasporic community in the 1960s Hong Kong shows that not only is the history of old Hong Kong rendered elusive, but that of Shanghai is abstracted as a “mood” or “aura” so that the camera may capture the Old Shanghai glory in its extreme. What attract Wong’s attention and allow him to stylize the history of both cities in the film are two cultural images of Old Shanghai: first, Shanghai people’s meticulous attention to the details of everyday life, and second, the stereotype of Old Shanghai as “the Paris of the East” in the 1930s, a fertile land of legend and stories. Such cultural specificities maximize the camera’s capacity to fragment history into routine life and further transform the seemingly simple, commonplace activities of daily life into sensuous snapshots for visual consumption.

<sup>17</sup> Yue also points out that “[t]he setting of the film in 1962 is significant because the 1960s marked the beginning of Hong Kong’s post-colonial modernity. Historian Frank Welsh dates Hong Kong’s ‘official’ period of ‘autodecolonisation’ to 11 April 1963, when Hong Kong’s House of Commons reviewed post-war Hong Kong” (132).

<sup>18</sup> Chow argues that in the film “the everyday functions as artifice, as stage props” (649).

<sup>19</sup> Wong talks about shooting on location in Thailand: “It is very difficult to find buildings from the 1960s [...]. This time, we hope the audience would be convinced that Bangkok is Hong Kong” (Sumi 44; my translation). Wong’s remarks reflect not only the intensifying trend towards an international division of cultural labor as theorized by Toby Miller, but also the compression of time and space at work in the film: contemporary Bangkok is Hong Kong in the 1960s, which is supposed to show Shanghai in the 1930s.

Viewed from this perspective, Wong's a-historical representation of the old Hong Kong is an example of riding the wave of "Shanghai fever," a romantic longing for Old Shanghai often embodied in the commodity fetish, emerging with Shanghai's urban development since the 1980s. *In the Mood for Love* is to some extent a cinematic expression of such a fetish, abstracting Shanghai into an aura, aptly summarized by the title of the song/film "*Huayang de nianhua*." Therefore, in contrast to the simplifications of history, details of everyday life loom large and represent the "old days." The camera romanticizes the seemingly trivial objects and actions of life; for example, Su Lizhen's beautiful *qipaos* and embroidered slippers, Chow Muyun's smoking of a cigarette, the Western style food they eat in the restaurant, the noodle stand downstairs, the street lamp in the rain, the clock on the wall in Su's office and the shadows cast on the ground, just to name a few. The abundant details of ordinary life constitute glamorous spectacles that satisfy the eyes. To "represent the authentic Shanghai diaspora community in the 60s, Wong even hires a Shanghainese cook for the crew and personally composes a menu '*Huayang Nianhua*' for all seasons of the year" (Sumi 40; my translation). The obsession with the old Hong Kong, i.e., the Old Shanghai culture, as seen in the film thus qualifies not only as "nostalgia" but as what Natalia Chan (Lok Feng) defines as "retro fashion," "the passion and predilection for things from the past such as antiques, architecture or clothing" (*The Decadent City* 62).

Amidst the over-stylized scenes is another significant form of gaze, one which might elude immediate recognition and has to be seen as the subtext of the film. Such a gaze is driven by a sense of Shanghai's rise and Hong Kong's decline, in other words, by a historicity engendered by the reorganization of global capital geography in East Asia.<sup>20</sup> As mentioned in my previous reading of Wang Anyi's works, the kinship ideology inherent in the tale of Hong Kong and Shanghai often downplays the factor of peer pressure. Likewise, the tale of these two metropolises as global city-regions, which often define geopolitical relationships in terms of cooperation and linkage, also tends to keep such competition at bay. For example, Shanghai ex-Mayor Xu Kuangdi

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<sup>20</sup> Like many cultural texts produced around the millennium, *In the Mood for Love* endeavors to articulate the relationship between China and Hong Kong. Yet, the gaze at China in the film is a complicated mechanism overdetermined by the condition of contemporary globalization as well as the handover complex. That is, though the subject of Sino-Hong Kong relations is nothing new in Hong Kong cinema, in terms of its production time, the dynamics between Hong Kong SAR and China as seen in *In the Mood for Love* are not only tied to national imaginaries and sovereignties but also to a new geopolitics since the 1990s, one that tremendously affects Hong Kong's status as a regional and global financial center. For Hong Kong's filmic gaze at China, see Yau.

(徐匡迪) assures us in an interview in Hong Kong that Shanghai and Hong Kong are two players on the same team:

You don't have to worry about Shanghai replacing Hong Kong; or that because of Hong Kong, Shanghai is not going to become a financial centre. They play different roles [...]. In the future, their relationship will be like two good forwards in a football team. They will pass the ball to each other and both will do their best to score more goals. But they are on the same team—China's national team. (qtd. in Abbas, "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions" 778)

Current Mayor Han Zheng (韓正) also addresses the issue, saying that despite the fact that Shanghai and Hong Kong both play leading roles in the economic development of the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta respectively, they have different characteristics and strong points.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that Chinese officials have been trying to allay the tension between Hong Kong and Shanghai actually suggests their keen competition. As a matter of fact, since Deng Xiaoping's visit to the south in 1992, Shanghai has been designated as the new capitalist showcase of China, whose speedy development in the 1990s and recent entry into the World Trade Organization require new global city-regions as nodal points to organize and manage capital flows. As Abbas points out, "China's rapid integration into the global economy [...] means that Hong Kong has to make some adjustments to its image of itself. It has to reassess and abandon the in-between position it once had as the only global city in the world that was also a colony" ("Cinema, the City, and the Cinematic" 149). Shanghai's rise as a global city-region is inevitably driving Hong Kong to readjust its function as the dominant link between China and global trade. A report on Hong Kong's and Shanghai's future in *The Economist*, entitled "Rivals More than Ever," specifically explores the rivalry between these two global city-regions and proposes that "to remain superior to both Shanghai and Shenzhen," Hong Kong "will have to reinforce both its strengths: its legal independence, and its economic interdependence" (21).

On top of the competition between city-regions, Hong Kong has been plagued by an economic crisis since 1997. As Chi Hung Kwan notes,

<sup>21</sup> 21 February 2003; 10 August 2004 <<http://www.ettoday.com/2003/02/21/91-1415509.htm>>

Average annual economic growth in the five years since reversion has been about 2.5 percent—a far cry from the 5 percent that was seen in the five years prior to 1997. Conversely, unemployment, which stood at 2.2 percent in 1997, has surged to currently stand at 7.5 percent. In addition to a series of external shocks such as the 1997-8 Asian financial crisis and SARS, the Hong Kong economy is being further hit by the decline of its predominance in intermediating China's international trade.

Given the economic downturn and the threat of being replaced by Shanghai, it seems that more than ever Hong Kong has to remain flexible in the network of global city-regions to stay competitive.<sup>22</sup>

Such geopolitical change has reshaped Hong Kong residents' imagination of Shanghai as well as their relationship with the urban space of their own everyday life. In this sense, *In the Mood for Love* can be seen as artistic reflections on a geographical reshuffling, that is, on the change in the global city inhabitants' imagined identity from superior and autonomous to uncertain and dependent. The filmic gaze at the vanished time and space of Old Shanghai, I argue, is a projection of Hong Kong's identity as a global city in crisis. Film critic Bono Lee expresses Hong Kong people's frustration: "Hong Kong reality today [2000] is that people here come to realize for the first time since 1997 that they are no longer blessed" (qtd. in Po 55; my translation). Indeed, in the year 2000, many Hong Kong residents might rightly have felt overwhelmed by a sense of being out of place: the golden age of "the Pearl of the Orient" had drifted away, its luster as a first-tier global city eclipsed by Shanghai as China's promise to keep Hong Kong's social and economic systems intact for fifty years after the handover soon proved to be more an ideal than a policy.<sup>23</sup> The identity crisis brought about by the harsh social, political, and economic realities makes looking back at the good old days a reasonable cultural response.

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<sup>22</sup> The high unemployment rate has been another symptom of Hong Kong's economic setback. A report from Association for Asian Research in 2003 notes that "[t]here is growing public discontent toward the Hong Kong chief executive officer Tung, as the economy has been losing its competitiveness" (22 May 2003; 10 August 2004 <<http://asianresearch.org/articles/1377.html>>).

<sup>23</sup> "According to the Basic Law resolved in 1990 by British and Chinese leaders, Hong Kong will maintain its existing social and economic systems for fifty years subsequent to this transition" (10 August 2004 <<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/H/htmlH/hongkong/hongkong.htm>>). On 1 July 2003, more than 500,000 Hong Kong people demonstrated against the proposed internal-security bill known as Article 23 of the Basic Law.

We are left with the question: why does Old Shanghai become the focus of the film's nostalgic gaze at this specific time? I have argued elsewhere that the most important factor contributing to the nostalgic gaze at Old Shanghai is the fact that, in the global era, Old Shanghai designates the future of the global city as well as its past. To put this in another way, Old Shanghai offers a historical context that legitimizes the urban redevelopment here-and-now and further envisions the future. Its colonial history inscribes what Abbas defines as "a cosmopolitanism of extraterritoriality" on the urban space ("Cosmopolitan De-scriptions" 774), which easily enables urban planners and government officials to rationalize why Shanghai should be reconstructed as a global city like New York or London. Such a discourse often appropriates Old Shanghai's history of cosmopolitanism as firm proof that Shanghai was born as a global city, so that the new urban development is needed to regain its status as a "world city" in the 1930s. The promoters of Shanghai's globalization endeavor to persuade the inhabitants that the shortcut to a prosperous future is simply to pick up where they left off in the 1930s, and relive the old glory. As the fairy tale goes, Shanghai is just like the sleeping beauty waking up to carry on her life as a princess.

The film's nostalgic gaze at Old Shanghai thus suggests a double vision—a montage of Old Shanghai and Shanghai as a global city-region on the rise. The former is the form and content of the film, the latter the subtext and context. The logic behind this double vision is that if the past of the global city Hong Kong is interlocked with that of Old Shanghai, Hong Kong's future is likely to be anchored in this emerging nexus of global capital flows. The skeptics will only have to see how the "Manhattanized" Pudong shares a glittering skyline with Hong Kong's Central, or how the successful joint venture "Xintiandi Shanghai" (上海新天地) points to a possible future direction for Hong Kong's capital flow. Seen in this light, the nostalgic aura of the film could be understood as a narrative strategy that attempts to sustain the status of Hong Kong as a global city while describing Old Shanghai fetish with its sugarcoated diasporic homesickness. Abbas's and Sham's readings of the final scene in Angkor Wat help us to consider how Wong's gaze links two global city-regions. Towards the end of the film, years after their affair, the male protagonist Chow tells the secret, whatever it is, to a tree hole in Angkor Wat. Abbas believes that the appearance of Angkor Wat, "the ruined city," at the end of the film suggests that "[w]hat it [the time frame of *In the Mood for Love*] shows us is not a history carefully preserved as spectacle but rather the aftermath: the ruins or remains of the spectacle" ("Cinema, the City, and the Cinematic" 151). Sham holds that Angkor Wat here symbolizes the prime time of Cambodia in the

1960s: “Like the old glory of the Angkor dynasty buried in the tropical rain forests, so is *In the Mood for Love* a myth, a memory of Hong Kong’s golden years” (74; my translation). I hasten to add that a closer look at Wong’s Hong Kong myth reveals that the hope for “the Pearl of the Orient” to shine as brightly as it did in the past few decades lies not in the ruins of Angkor Wat but in the new Shanghai in its prime time, *huayang nianhua*, as one of the emerging city-regions in the global network of capital.

Juxtaposing Wang Anyi’s and Wong Kar-wai’s tales of two cities in the context of globalization and emerging city-regions, we find that the cities’ gazes at different historic moments reveal the impact of capital reorganization. The narrative strategies in a sense legitimize the geopolitical changes for the city-users. Wang Anyi’s writings suggest that during Shanghai’s drastic transformation, which began in the early 1990s, Hong Kong offers a vision of what a globalized Shanghai might look like and also gives the nod to urban development. On the other hand, going through its own political and economic crisis, post-1997 Hong Kong needs to assure itself of its importance as a global city like New York and London at this “restless moment.” It is at this point that the history of the Hong Kong-Shanghai link looms large, becoming the ideal “mirror image” of Hong Kong’s future. We could argue that what characterizes the contemporary narrative of Hong Kong and Shanghai as cities “linked at birth” is that not only do they serve as each other’s past, each other’s roots, but also as each other’s promised future in the mirror of globalization. In other words, the concepts of linkage and network provide a language with which the users of global city-regions may articulate their fears and desires in the process of identity (re)formation. By examining these cultural texts, I hope to (re)situate the contemporary Hong Kong-Shanghai link in a complex framework of capital reorganization and regional geopolitics in this age of globalization.

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### **About the Author**

Tsung-yi Michelle Huang received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from State University of New York at Stony Brook. Her works on cinema, literature, cultural studies, and global cities have been published in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* (《台灣社會研究季刊》) among others. Her book *Walking between Slums and Skyscrapers: Illusions of Open Space in Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Shanghai* was published by Hong Kong UP in March 2004. Recently she has been working on a project that defines specific East Asian metropolises, analyzing them as "linked cities" which are still distinctive global centers, mapping the various tensions within these domains. She is currently Assistant Professor of English at National Taiwan Normal University.

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