

Re-Negotiations of the “China Factor” in Contemporary Hong Kong Genre Cinema

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Abstract

Given the long-existing and multifaceted negotiations of the “China factor” in Hong Kong film history, this article centers on the political function of genre films by exploring how contemporary Hong Kong filmmakers utilize filmmaking as a flexible strategy to re-negotiate and reflect on the China factor concerning current post-handover political dynamics. By focusing on several recent Hong Kong genre films as case studies, it examines how the China factor is negotiated in *Vulgaria* (低俗喜劇 *Disu xiju*, 2012) and *The Midnight After* (那夜凌晨，我坐上了旺角開往大埔的紅VAN *Naye lingchen, wo zuoshang le Wangjiao kaiwang Dapu de hong van*, 2014), considering the politics of languages alongside the imaginary of the disappearance of Hong Kong’s local cultures in the post-handover era. It also highlights two post-Umbrella-Revolution films, *Trivisa* (樹大招風 *Shuda zhaofeng*, 2016) and *The Mobfathers* (選老頂 *Xuan lao ding*, 2016), to explore how the China factor is negotiated in light of the collective anxieties of Hongkongers regarding the handover and controversies in the current electoral system of Hong Kong. By doing so, this article argues that the re-negotiations of the China factor in contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema have become more and more politically reflexive given the increasingly severe political interference of the Beijing sovereignty that has violated the autonomy of Hong Kong, while forming a discourse of resistance of Hongkongers against possible neo-colonialism from the Chinese authorities in the postcolonial city. Crucially, in contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema, filmmaking functions not only as filmmakers’ flexible strategy to convey political messages, but also as an ongoing process of cultural production and negotiation between the film and the shifting socio-political context.

Keywords

the China factor, contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema, Hong Kong genre films, post-Umbrella-Revolution cinema, *Vulgaria*, *The Midnight After*, *Trivisa*, *The Mobfathers*

Introduction

In studies of Hong Kong genre cinema, scholars and critics have utilized the term “China factor” to describe industrial, generic, aesthetic, thematic, and other connections of the Hong Kong film industry to China throughout Hong Kong film history, as well as the multifaceted manifestations and negotiations of the Chinese imaginary in differing periods of Hong Kong cinema. Given the long-existing and heterogeneous negotiations of the China factor in Hong Kong film history, especially from the 1940s to the early 2000s, there is a research gap regarding the study of cinematic manifestations of the China factor in the contemporary period of Hong Kong genre cinema. Recently, Hong Kong has come to prominence on the world stage once again following the 2014 Umbrella Movement, and the China factor has drawn much international attention in the wake of the 2019 anti-extradition protests. Considering the contemporary socio-political conditions of Hong Kong in general, the China factor refers to the procedures of assimilation and political interference from the PRC government and the influences and forces from Beijing economically, politically, and socio-culturally. Accordingly, in response to the zeitgeist of contemporary Hong Kong, this article aims to focus on the cinematic manifestations and re-negotiations of the China factor vis-à-vis the current socio-political vicissitudes of Hong Kong and how contemporary Hong Kong filmmakers utilize filmmaking to negotiate political interference from Beijing.

Given that the China factor has long existed and been negotiated in the history of Hong Kong cinema as a contested site wherein “‘China’ has been a material, cultural, and ideological presence” (Lee 163), the manifestations of the China factor in Hong Kong cinema history have been examined from differing aspects in numerous scholarly works in the field. For instance, Cheuk-to Li states that the China factor appeared in Hong Kong cinema in the 1940s and 1950s, when a group of Chinese filmmakers moved from Shanghai to Hong Kong due to the Sino-Japanese War and Chinese Civil War (8). This marked “the historical connections between Hong Kong and Shanghai (China’s ‘film capital’ before 1949) and the interflow of capital, technology, and production and acting talents,” as Vivian Pui-yin Lee points out (163).

The China factor has also been studied regarding the notion of “the creation of an ‘imaginary China’” in Hong Kong genre cinema, particularly “the historical epics and martial arts films” (Lee 163) in the 1960s and 1970s. The most predominant representative examples would be the film productions of the Shaw Brothers Studio, which used Mandarin as its official language, aiming to construct a pan-Chinese

culture in the Chinese diasporic communities (Fu 12). Moreover, the genre film productions by the Shaw Brothers encompassed romances, folklore, and martial arts films (after 1965), such as Li Han-hsiang's (李翰祥) *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (江山美人 *Jiangshan meiren*, 1959), *The Love Eterne* (梁山伯與祝英台 *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai*, 1963), Chang Cheh's (張徹) *One-Armed Swordsman* (獨臂刀 *Dubi dao*, 1967), and King Hu's (胡金銓) *Come Drink with Me* (大醉俠 *Da zui xia*, 1966). Notably, as Poshek Fu remarks, "the main characters in these films are all invested with values and desires closely paralleled with an idealized morality supposedly existent in traditional China: notably filial piety, chastity, purity and loyalty," showcasing an "imagined changeless China" for ethnic Chinese audiences worldwide to identify with despite their personal displacements and diasporic lives (13).

Furthermore, the China factor is negotiated through the "new manifestations of this China imaginary in film and television during the 1980s and 1990s, the years of political transition from British to Chinese rule" (Lee 163). For example, the Hong Kong local TV serial *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (網中人 *Wangzhong ren*, 1979) launched the comedy genre of "A Can movies."¹ In these films the Mainlander character A Can (阿燦), which became a nickname commonly used to describe the Mainlanders who visited Hong Kong, was depicted as a clown or fool who is "stupid, slow on the uptake, backward, poor, shallow and a country hick" in comparison with Hongkongers, who are "clever, savvy, progressive, rich and modern," as Yu Cheng suggests (98-99).

On the other hand, another stereotype of the Mainlanders represented in Hong Kong genre cinema in the 1980s would be the "Big Circle" (大圈仔 *daquanzai*) gangsters in the *Long Arm of the Law* (省港旗兵 *Shenggang qibing*) series produced by Johnny Mak (麥當雄).² These Big Circle Mainlander gangsters, who went to Hong Kong to commit crimes, were depicted as "totally ruthless, sadistic and insatiably avaricious for money" (Cheng 100). In particular, Cheng points out that the violent images of the Mainlanders in the *Long Arm of the Law* crime film series became objects of fear (101), showing an attitude of panic of Hongkongers toward

¹ These "A Can movies" include *The Story of a Refugee* (阿燦正傳 *A Can zhengzhuan*, 1980), *The Prohibited Area* (阿燦有難 *A Can younan*, 1981), *The Sweet and Sour Cops* (阿燦當差 *A Can dangchai*, 1981), and *An Honest Crook* (阿燦出千 *A Can chuqian*, 1981).

² The *Long Arm of the Law* series refer to *Long Arm of the Law* (省港旗兵 *Shenggang qibing*, 1984), *Long Arm of the Law II* (省港旗兵 2: 兵分兩路 *Shenggang qibing 2: bingfen lianglu*, 1987), *Long Arm of the Law III* (省港旗兵 3: 逃出香港 *Shenggang qibing 3: taochu Xianggang*, 1989) and *Long Arm of the Law IV: Underground Express* (省港旗兵 4: 地下通道 *Shenggang qibing 4: dixia tongdao*, 1990).

Mainlanders before the handover. However, in contrast to the brutal images in the *Long Arm of the Law* series, Mainlanders were depicted as close relatives of Hongkongers (Ma and Tsang 136) in the *Her Fatal Ways* (表姐，妳好嘢！ *Biaojie, nihaoye!*) series of films directed by Alfred Cheung (張堅庭) in the 1990s.³ These Hong Kong genre films in the 1980s and 1990s display not only the collective anxieties of the Hong Kong people but also the expected new relations between Hong Kong and the Mainland in regard to the forthcoming handover.

In the wake of the socio-political changes in the post-handover era, the ways of negotiating the China factor in contemporary Hong Kong cinema have altered in comparison with the aforementioned examples, reflecting the current socio-political conditions between Hong Kong and the Mainland. For example, the images of Mainlanders represented in Fruit Chan's (陳果) *Little Cheung* (細路祥 *Xilu Xiang*, 1999), *Durian Durian* (榴槤飄飄 *Liulian piaopiao*, 2000), and *Hollywood Hong Kong* (香港有個荷里活 *Xianggang youge Helihuo*, 2002) have become heterogeneous in terms of the increasingly complex cross-border movements between Hong Kong and the Mainland after the handover, as Eric Kit-wai Ma and Chung-kin Tsang state (136).

Regarding the aforementioned long-existing and multifaceted negotiations of the China factor in Hong Kong film history from the 1940s to the early 2000s, it should be noted that there is a research gap in terms of the study of cinematic manifestations of the China factor in the contemporary period of Hong Kong genre cinema. Accordingly, this article will focus on four genre films from contemporary Hong Kong cinema: Pang Ho-cheung's (彭浩翔) comedy *Vulgaria* (低俗喜劇 *Disu xiju*, 2012), Fruit Chan's sci-fi and horror film *The Midnight After* (那夜凌晨，我坐上了旺角開往大埔的紅VAN *Naye lingchen, wo zuoshang le Wangjiao kaiwang Dapu de hong van*, 2014), Frank Hui (許學文), Jevons Au (Man-kit Au) (歐文杰), and Vicky Wong's (黃偉傑) crime film *Trivisa* (樹大招風 *Shuda zhaofeng*, 2016), and Herman Yau's (邱禮濤) gangster film *The Mobfathers* (選老頂 *Xuan laoding*, 2016). Significantly, although these films can be categorized as genre films in general, since this article attempts to situate these filmic texts into the broader socio-political realm in order to consider their political implications, the theme rather than the genre of these selected films will be highlighted. Hence, instead of foregrounding genre theory, this article aims to examine how themes and other cinematic elements and

³ The *Her Fatal Ways* series include *Her Fatal Ways* (表姐，妳好嘢！ *Biaojie, nihaoye!*, 1990), *Her Fatal Ways II* (表姐，妳好嘢！續集 *Biaojie, nihaoye! Xuji*, 1991), *Her Fatal Ways III* (表姐，妳好嘢！3之大人駕到 *Biaojie, nihaoye! 3 zhi daren jiadao*, 1992), and *Her Fatal Ways IV* (表姐，妳好嘢！4之情不自禁 *Biaojie, nihaoye! 4 zhi qing bu zijin*, 1994).

strategies employed in these Hong Kong genre films can reveal political messages and manifest the China factor on screen. Using these four recent genre films as case studies, this article centers on the political function of Hong Kong genre cinema by examining how contemporary Hong Kong filmmakers utilize filmmaking as a flexible strategy to reflect on the changing political dynamics in recent years, while interrogating how the differing manifestations of the China factor in contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema can shape a discourse of resistance against the potential neo-colonialism in the postcolonial city.

Specifically, this article will explore the ways in which the China factor is negotiated in *Vulgaria* and *The Midnight After* in light of the politics of language as well as the imaginary of the disappearance of Hong Kong's local cultures, respectively. Furthermore, it will focus on two post-Umbrella-Revolution films, *Trivisa* and *The Mobfathers* to examine how the China factor is negotiated in terms of the collective anxieties of Hongkongers regarding the handover and the controversies in the current electoral system of Hong Kong. In doing so, this article argues that the re-negotiations of the China factor in contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema have become increasingly politically reflexive given the increasingly severe political interference from Beijing that has violated the autonomy of Hong Kong in recent years, while forming a discourse of resistance against possible neo-colonialism from the Chinese authorities in the postcolonial city. Significantly, this article aims to provide a form of political reading of contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema in which filmmaking functions not only as a flexible strategy of the local filmmakers to convey political messages, but also as an ongoing process of cultural production and negotiation between the film and the shifting socio-political context.

Negotiating the Politics of Language in the Post-Handover Era

On 29 June 2003, the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) was passed and its supplementary clauses were implemented in ten stages from 2004 to 2013 in order to facilitate a closer economic and business collaborative network between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and the Chinese Mainland market (Trade and Industry Department of Hong Kong). Given the particular regulations of the CEPA on film industries, Hong Kong filmmakers have been provided with more access to the broader Chinese Mainland film market in various dimensions of film production, distribution, and exhibition. Under the CEPA framework, Hong Kong-produced films (港產片 *Gangchan pian*) or Chinese-

language films produced in Hong Kong⁴ can enjoy the same status as films domestically produced in the PRC and are no longer restricted by the annual limited quota of imports (Yau 18).

The gradual opening of the Chinese Mainland film market and the loosening of regulations on film production, distribution, and exhibition after the passage of the CEPA have attracted more and more Hong Kong filmmakers to “go north” to make co-productions in the Mainland. The number of Hong Kong-China co-produced films has thus steadily increased in the wake of the passage of the CEPA—there were 26 co-productions in 2003, 31 in 2004, and 29 in 2005 (L. Pang 416). These filmmakers either from Hong Kong or China have been actively involved in making co-produced “*dapian*” 大片 or “big pictures,” which refers to big-budget, commercially-oriented blockbuster productions aiming at box office success in Chinese-speaking regions.⁵ Furthermore, given the box office records in Hong Kong, the percentage of the co-produced films’ revenues has increased from 7% (0.3 billion HK dollars) to 67% (2 billion HK dollars) in the entire Hong Kong cinema box office between 2003 and 2010 (B. Wu 42-43). From these facts it can be inferred that Hong Kong filmmakers’ trend of co-productions with the Mainland has inevitably occurred as the most significant shift in post-CEPA Hong Kong cinema.

Despite the dominant trend of Hong Kong-China co-productions in the film industry, there are many Hong Kong filmmakers who are still engaged in Hong Kong-produced films. Not only viewed as one of the representative directors of contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema, Pang Ho-cheung also acts as a multi-disciplinary artist: a scriptwriter, novelist, actor, and contemporary art and visual designer. In addition to his comedy film *Vulgaria*, he has directed several Hong Kong-

⁴ According to the clauses of the CEPA, the definition of Chinese-language films produced in Hong Kong refers to the films produced by the production companies established in Hong Kong and approved by the HKSAR government, and the production companies own over 50% of the copyright of the given film. It further requires that the main filmmaking team needs to be composed of more than 50% of Hong Kong residents in this category (Trade and Industry Department of Hong Kong).

⁵ The representative examples of *dapian* produced in the co-production model include Zhang Yimou’s (張藝謀) *Hero* (英雄 *Yingxiong*, 2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (十面埋伏 *Shimian maifu*, 2004), Feng Xiaogang’s (馮小剛) *A World without Thieves* (天下無賊 *Tianxia wu zei*, 2004) and *The Banquet* (夜宴 *Yeyan*, 2006), Stephen Chow’s (周星馳) *Kung Fu Hustle* (功夫 *Gongfu*, 2004) and *CJ7* (長江七號 *Changjiang qihao*, 2008), Chen Kaige’s (陳凱歌) *The Promise* (無極 *Wuji*, 2005), John Woo’s (吳宇森) *Red Cliff* (赤壁 *Chibi*, 2008), Peter Chan’s (陳可辛) *The Warlords* (投名狀 *Touming zhuang*, 2007) and his produced film *Bodyguards and Assassins* (十月圍城 *Shiyue weicheng*, directed by Teddy Chan [陳德森], 2009). Notably, in the light of the filmic themes and characteristics, these co-produced *dapian* are mostly “*wuxia* martial arts, historical costume pictures and boast famous stars, spectacle and high technology” (Yeh and Davis 44).

produced genre films such as his renowned romance trilogy, *Love in a Puff* (志明與春嬌 *Zhiming yu Chunjiao*, 2010), *Love in the Buff* (春嬌與志明 *Chunjiao yu Zhiming*, 2012), and *Love off the Cuff* (春嬌救志明 *Chunjiao jiu Zhiming*, 2017). It is surprising that *Vulgaria*, the successful small-budget “made-in-Hong Kong film,” was shot in only twelve days, unexpectedly gained 30 million HK dollars (approximately 3.8 million US dollars) at the box office (HKfilmart, “*Disu xiju*”), and acquired tremendous popularity among the local audience. After his various successes and experimentations, Pang is considered to be a prolific director who is able to perfectly strike a balance between art-house styles and commercial genre productions.

I will begin to examine how Pang Ho-cheung uses filmmaking as a strategy to reflect on the China factor in the wake of the post-handover Mainlandization process by considering the politics of language and its use in *Vulgaria*. In December 2011, the government of Guangdong Province enacted several prohibition rules that prevented Cantonese from being used in schools, media, and by the government, with only standard Mandarin being able to be used in these public areas (BBC, “Guangdong”). Significantly, this language policy has shed light on the Beijing authorities’ attempt to marginalize Cantonese cultures by eliminating dialect and promoting the “orthodox” language—*Putonghua* 普通話 (Common Speech). It has aroused abundant critique among Cantonese-speaking society and even protests of “Supporting Cantonese” (撐粵語 “*Cheng Yueyu*”) in Guangdong Province since 2010 (Branigan). It is in this context that director Pang Ho-cheung began to contemplate the crisis of the disappearance of Cantonese caused by suppression from the Mainland. In his account of the production of *Vulgaria*, Pang states: “As a descendant of the migrants from Guangdong Province to Hong Kong, Cantonese is my mother tongue. I have been long worried about the various administrative means to promote Mandarin yet at the same time indirectly oppress dialects by the Mainland government” (H. Pang n. pag.).⁶

Pang hence decided to make a purely Cantonese-speaking comedy that aims to preserve and promote the endangered Cantonese. In this regard, a large number of vulgar, colloquial words in Cantonese, used only in Hong Kong, are deployed in *Vulgaria* as a contrast to the rather “official,” “orthodox,” and “dominant” PRC’s standardized *Putonghua* that works as a form of cultural hegemony. By the strategy of using the colloquial Cantonese language, Pang reminds the audience that Hong Kong’s marginalized position of voicing itself under the hegemonic power structure of Beijing should be paid attention to and this hegemony should be questioned.

⁶ This passage is based on Pang’s account on his personal website.

Furthermore, Pang's cinematic strategy effectively highlights the fact that the vulgarity of Cantonese, used with comedic effect in the film, embodies authentic Hong Kong local culture in response to the invading *Putonghua*-led cultural influences of the post-handover era.

The story of *Vulgaria* begins with the protagonist, film producer To Wai-cheung (杜惠彰, played by Chapman To [杜汶澤]), who is invited to a college lecture to share his experiences in film production. He reveals his worries to the students: he is divorced yet unable to pay alimony to his ex-wife; and his daughter, still very naive at her young age, tells him that she hopes to see him appear in some television interviews so that she can inform her classmates that her father is a genuine film producer. Thus, it is his daughter's words that support him to continue being a film producer.

In addition, To further discloses his ridiculous experience in which he works on a collaborative project with a Mainland Chinese investor, who attempts to remake the famous Hong Kong porn film *Confession of a Concubine* (官人我要 *Guanren wo yao*, 1976), turning it into "*Confessions of Two Concubines*" and starring the same actress, Siu Yam-yam (邵音音), who is the investor's childhood idol. However, since Siu Yam-yam has become too old to play the role, producer To comes up with the idea of using a substitute. He turns to the much younger Popping Candy (爆炸糖, played by Dada Chan [陳靜]) and asks her to act as Siu's body double. To articulates his bitterness about being a film producer in the lecture theater and reveals to the audience of students the scandal that this emerging actress has to sleep with the film producer and director in exchange for an opportunity to perform in the film, this being a "hidden rule" of the film industry.

In *Vulgaria* the China factor vis-à-vis the political dynamics of post-handover Hong Kong is manifested by the pivotal flashback scene in which the film producer To and his friend Lui Wing-shing (雷永成, played by Simon Lui [雷宇揚]) are having dinner with Tyrannosaurus (暴龍, played by Ronald Cheng [鄭中基]), a Guangxi triad leader as well as the Mainland film investor mentioned above, in order to seek an investment for To's film. Pang deliberately highlights one of the key comedic effects in the film—the weird dishes, including unusual meat and animal genitals, that Tyrannosaurus intends to treat To and Lui to during the banquet, but they hesitate and cannot eat them. The story becomes even more ridiculous when Tyrannosaurus requests the two guests to have sex with a mule as a condition for his investment in their film; otherwise, he will not agree to their collaboration. Consequently, the protagonist To is forced to acquiesce to Tyrannosaurus's command.

By showing his bizarre tastes and sexuality so directly, Tyrannosaurus is

portrayed as a figure symbolizing the uncivilized and irrational “others” from the Mainland in contrast to the rather “modernized” and superior Hongkongers, thereby consolidating the foundation of local identity for Hong Kong (Huang 58). Furthermore, by sensationalizing the behavior of Tyrannosaurus as one of the prominent comedic elements in the film, this scene effectively reflects the widespread phenomenon of Hong Kong-China clashes or controversy, which derives from the differences between Hong Kong and China. Notably, it also implies Hong Kong’s social and political impotence alongside the reluctance of Hongkongers (represented by producer To and his friend) against being absorbed into China when facing its hegemonic forces.

Considering the editing, it should be highlighted that the flashback scenes of producer To arranged between the beginning and the ending college lecturing scene in *Vulgaria* can also be viewed as a parody of the reality of the Hong Kong film industry wherein Hong Kong filmmakers have to accommodate and tolerate any unreasonable commands from the Chinese investors, and the film content should cater to these investors’ tastes and be approved by the ideological censorship of the Chinese authorities in the post-CEPA era.⁷ The conditions of film production in Hong Kong in *Vulgaria* can further refer to the reality of the relations between Hong Kong and China, in which Hong Kong has been increasingly economically and ideologically controlled by China. By employing a series of close-up shots to enable the protagonist to speak to the spectators in the beginning and the ending lecturing scene, as if breaking the fourth wall, Pang’s use of meta-cinematic devices blurs the reality whereby this comedic satire can be interpreted as an analogy of China’s hegemonic domination in both Hong Kong’s film industry and the broader socio-political realm.

Its surprisingly brilliant box office results enabled *Vulgaria* to be acclaimed as one of the local miracles in recent Hong Kong cinema, denoting that despite the film’s small budget, which was less than eight million HK dollars (He), it still became a blockbuster. According to Pang Ho-cheung’s personal account, he describes the phenomenon of *Vulgaria* as a “counter-attack of Hong Kong films,” declaring: “the

⁷ In 2006, the SAPPRT enacted several regulations imposing censorship on Chinese domestic media, including Hong Kong-China co-production films and Hong Kong-produced films distributed in the Mainland. The SAPPRT further obliges filmmakers to cut their films if they include sensuous content like sex, prostitution, homosexuality, vulgarity, terrorism, ghosts and spirits, details of violence, murder, drug use, torture, gambling, bloody scenes, etc., as well as content that disgraces or defames Chinese national leaders, heroes, army, or police. All of these are banned by the SAPPRT in domestic film production (SAPPRT). Hong Kong filmmakers should obey these rules while being involved in Hong Kong-China co-productions.

aim of *Vulgaria* is to let those Chinese language film investors know—the Hong Kong-China co-production model is not the only way for Hong Kong cinema” (H. Pang n. pag.). This shows Pang’s attempt to use filmmaking, particularly such a triumphant comedy film, to resist the prevailing trend of co-productions that has dominated Hong Kong cinema in the post-CEPA era, despite his own involvement in several co-production projects.

As Evans Chan remarks, *Vulgaria* is “politically reactionary” and is a “smart film arriving at the most sensitive moment of a socio-political tug-of-war between Hong Kong and the mainland” (219-20). Consequently, the discourse of resistance against the Mainlandized process and any possible neo-colonialism in Hong Kong that is embedded in *Vulgaria* works on two levels: firstly, the box office result highlights the success of Pang Ho-cheung’s refusal of the inevitable evolution of the Hong Kong film industry in the wave of post-CEPA co-productions. Secondly, the politics of language is highlighted in the film as Pang’s cinematic strategy to use authentic Cantonese vulgar words as a weapon to challenge the predominant socio-political forces of “Mandarinization” in contemporary Hong Kong and simultaneously to reconstruct local consciousness and Hong Kong subjectivity in the post-handover age.

The Imaginary of the Disappearance of Hong Kong’s Local Cultures

In addition to Pang Ho-cheung, Fruit Chan is another key figure in Hong Kong cinema who has been involved in Hong Kong-produced films from around the period of the handover. Chan is a festival favorite renowned for his *Hong Kong Trilogy* (香港三部曲 *Xianggang sanbuqu*) or *Trilogy of 1997* (九七三部曲 *Jiuqi sanbuqu*), which includes *Made in Hong Kong* (香港製造 *Xianggang zhizao*, 1997), *The Longest Summer* (去年煙花特別多 *Qunian yanhua tebie duo*, 1998), and *Little Cheung* (細路祥 *Xilu Xiang*, 1999). These have been internally and internationally acclaimed as some of the most successful independent art-house films in the history of Hong Kong cinema (Cheung 114). Due to his realist aesthetics and attempt to portray the anxieties of ordinary Hongkongers toward the handover, Fruit Chan’s cinematic works have received attention from international scholars and critics (Cheung 129).

Fruit Chan’s *The Midnight After* (2014) is a more genre-driven commercial production than many of his previous films, combining various cinematic genre elements of sci-fi, horror, comedy, and cult film. This film is adapted from the web

serial novel *Lost on a Red Mini Bus to Taipo* by a young Hong Kong writer who uses the pseudonym “Mr. Pizza” from the popular online forum HKGolden. Due to the novel’s online popularity, the film quickly gained fame among the local audience and achieved a triumphant box-office record of 21.3 million HK dollars (approximately 2.72 million US dollars) (HKfilmart, “2014”).

In the remainder of this section, I will explore how Fruit Chan’s genre film *The Midnight After* can function as a political metaphor in the way it depicts the disappearance of Hong Kong’s local cultures in the post-handover era. *The Midnight After* narrates a story about sixteen passengers and one driver on the same red public light bus heading from Mongkok to Taipo, and after passing through the Lion Mountain⁸ Tunnel, they discover that the entire population of Hong Kong has disappeared and they seem to be the only ones alive. As the film progresses, more and more people within this seventeen-person group mysteriously die from an unknown virus resulting from a nuclear crisis. The survivors drive their red van away from Taipo to Taimou Mountain via Kowloon to try to seek help and figure out the truth behind the disappearance of the city’s population.

Fruit Chan represents the political dynamics of Hong Kong in *The Midnight After* by using extreme wide shots to capture the emptiness of the city as a metaphor for Hong Kong’s disappearing local cultures. With the use of the extreme wide shots that provide a vast field of view, the frightening emptiness of the entire city is emphasized. It should be noted that this can be associated with the political concerns of the disappearance of Hong Kong’s local cultures in the current socio-political assimilation processes conducted by the Beijing authorities. Perhaps Ackbar Abbas’s account of Hong Kong’s culture in 1997 may still be valid for today’s Hong Kong to some extent. As he argues, the culture of Hong Kong is “a culture of disappearance because it is a culture whose appearance is accompanied by a sense of the imminence of its disappearance, and the cause of its emergence—1997—may also be the cause of its demise” (Abbas 70-71). Furthermore, the notion of “the disappearance of Hong Kong” can be interpreted in another sense. As Yiu-wai Chu argues, Hong Kong’s culture has not disappeared in the strict sense; instead, it “became lost in transition,” which means that “it has changed after 1997, but the changes have by far been negative” (*Lost in Transition* 4).

In an interview, Fruit Chan asserts his persistent concerns about the socio-political issues of Hong Kong:

⁸ Lion Mountain is typically used to refer to the “old Hong Kong spirit”, which comes from a famous Cantonese popular song “Under the Lion Rock Mountain” (獅子山下 “*Shizishan xia*”) (Chu, “Xianggang” 280-81).

When I shot *Made in Hong Kong*, I just gained a little attention from only the film critics rather than the common audience, because at that time most people were indifferent to politics, so they were not that interested in my films which focused on political and social issues. But now, . . . *The Midnight After* has gained much attention amongst the whole of society, and it is difficult to imagine the changes of Hong Kong over these ten years, whereas my concerns about Hong Kong society have not changed during this time period (Chen n. pag.).

Based upon his persistent concerns toward the city, Fruit Chan has created a cinematic space for rich socio-political interpretations of the symbols used in *The Midnight After*. It is noteworthy that the passengers on the red van come from various social classes among Hong Kong society: for instance, the protagonist Yau Tsi-chi (游梓池, played by Wong You-nam [黃又南]) and the four university students stand for the typical young generation; A-Shun (阿信, played by Chui Tien-you [徐天佑]) represents a middle-class engineer; the driver (played by Lam Suet [林雪]) functions as an ordinary figure from the working classes; and Airplane (played by Ronny Yuen [袁浩揚]) and Glu-Stick (played by Kelvin Chan [陳健朗]) refer to the gangster communities in the Mongkok area. *The Midnight After* hence displays a form of hybridity that epitomizes Hong Kong society, showing the hallmark of collective anxieties and helplessness of contemporary Hongkongers in regard to Hong Kong's disappearing democracy, freedom of speech, law, justice, and local cultures in the post-handover era.

Furthermore, in light of the symbolic meaning of the soundtrack used in the film, a significant scene in *The Midnight After* portrays one of these sixteen passengers, Auyeung Wai (歐陽偉, played by Jan Curious), playing and singing British rock star David Bowie's well-known song "Space Oddity" in the main filming location, a traditional-style Hong Kong Tea Restaurant located in Taipo. The use of this song plays a key role recurring throughout the film, functioning as distinguished incidental music that holds a symbolic meaning for Hongkongers: "For here / Am I sitting in a tin can, / Far above the world. / Planet Earth is blue, / And there's nothing I can do" (Bowie n. pag.).

The lyrics of this soundtrack should be highlighted since the "tin can" here suggests that Hong Kong people have been trapped in the city with its disappearing local cultures after the handover and also that there is nothing that Hongkongers can do to resolve this problem when they are faced with such socio-political dilemmas.

In addition, Bowie exemplifies Westernized popular culture among the generation of the 1970s and 1980s in colonial Hong Kong before 1997, which implies that cultural influences from Britain on Hongkongers in the postcolonial city still linger, positing the unique history of Hong Kong that is different from Mainland China's.

Subsequently, Fruit Chan presents a frightening scene in which the character Airplane is stabbed and lynched by other passengers because he raped one of the characters, Lavina (played by Melodee Mak 麥紫筠), to death. Thus, the passengers decide to punish Airplane by themselves since law and social order no longer exist. Here, the condition of this small social group of red van passengers gathering in the Hong Kong Tea Restaurant turns into a state of anarchy in which legal rules are no longer applicable and only the rule of man remains. This scene also highlights the notion of the "disappearance of Hong Kong," which further denotes the disappearance of law, social justice, and moral ethics in Hong Kong as influenced by the forces of assimilation with the Mainland, while reinventing a political analogy that "Hong Kong is gone" corresponding to the current socio-political conditions of the PRC's invasion and surveillance.

On the other hand, released in April 2014, just five months before the outbreak of the large-scale social movement launched by Hong Kong citizens in September of the same year, *The Midnight After* can be viewed as foreshadowing the upcoming Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong. This is exemplified by the usage of props and costumes in the scene where the passengers, including the driver, decide to fight against the unknown condition by equipping themselves with masks and plastic raincoats as protection against the fatal virus. Interestingly, the equipment these figures wear is considered similar to the outfits protesters wore during the Umbrella Revolution. The reason the protesters wore masks and raincoats in the movement was to stop the attacks from the Hong Kong police who were using tear gas, water cannons, and pepper spray against them (BBC, "Hong Kong"). This coincidental similarity provides a prediction of the future, implying that these passengers on the red van who have been gathered in a coalition are the embodiment of Hong Kong society, corresponding to Hongkongers' endeavors to stop the local cultures of Hong Kong from disappearing in the post-handover era.

Notably, considering the setting, Fruit Chan further uses a political metaphor in another sequence of shots in which the van loaded with the passengers encounters a shower of blood red, heavy rain that soaks the flag of the van. This setting of red, heavy rain provides abundant symbolic meanings for Hongkongers. That is to say, this sudden and inevitable blood red shower represents the violence and possible neo-colonialism caused by the increasing interference of the Beijing authorities in the

politics of Hong Kong, since red is regarded as the representative color of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Thus, the red rain here can signify the term *chihua* 赤化, which literally refers to “reddening” and has a further connotation of “communization” in Chinese. It can also symbolize the scene in which the Hong Kong police brutally dispersed bleeding protesters both in the Umbrella Revolution and the 2019 anti-extradition protests. Furthermore, while being soaked in the blood red shower, the characters in the film start to recall the good old days before they got on this red van. Again, these reflection scenes can emblematically manifest postcolonial nostalgia for the British colonial past embedded in the collective consciousness of contemporary Hongkongers.

Fruit Chan’s use of filmmaking as a flexible strategy to reflect on the China factor and post-handover Hong Kong politics can be further shown in the final take of *The Midnight After*, which functions as a key shot in which the surviving passengers on this red van decide to drive away from Taipo and head to Taimou Mountain via Kowloon to seek help from others, if possible. The final shot leaves an open ending for the audience, and no one knows what will happen to these passengers on the red van in the next phase. It should be also noted that this open ending can signify the unknown condition of Hong Kong’s future, and the difficulties involved in navigating through post-handover socio-political conditions. Notwithstanding such an unknown situation confronted by the passengers, their endeavors to fight back and figure out the solution also symbolically articulate Hong Kong people’s resistance against the disappearance of autonomy, democracy, freedom of speech, law, justice, and local cultures as well as against potential neo-colonialism in post-handover Hong Kong.

Reflecting Hongkongers’ Collective Anxieties vis-à-vis the Handover

In response to the trend of co-productions in Hong Kong cinema after the passage of the CEPA, Mirana May Szeto and Yun-chung Chen characterize the corresponding rise of a group of local young Hong Kong directors as the “Hong Kong SAR New Wave”:

We use this term to refer to the generation of directors who are either (1) new directors coming of age and garnering serious local critical attention after Hong Kong becomes a Special Administrative Region of China (HKSAR); or (2) directors who have joined the industry

earlier and may have substantial experience, but have only gained serious local critical attention and/or acclaim after 1997; but most importantly, (3) they are directors who are consciously and critically aware of themselves as working from a local condition very different from the pre-1997 Hong Kong. (122)

These Hong Kong SAR new wave filmmakers are considered to provide an alternative route for recent Hong Kong cinema with the production of small-budget, authentic, independent Hong Kong local films that manifest Hong Kong identification in contrast to the predominant Hong Kong-China co-production model.

If the renowned independent political film *Ten Years* (十年 *Shinian*, 2015) can be viewed as the direct response of Hong Kong filmmakers to the vicissitudes of Hong Kong politics in the wake of the 2014 Umbrella Revolution, other Hong Kong feature films also made after the movement—such as *Trivisa*, *The Mobfathers*, and *Weeds on Fire* (點五步 *Dian wu bu*, 2016)—have also raised attention toward Hong Kong politics amidst Hong Kong society, while marking the advent of Hong Kong post-Umbrella-Revolution cinema (後雨傘電影 *hou Yusan dianying*) as local film critics have pointed out (Chang; Tam). To be specific, Hong Kong post-Umbrella-Revolution cinema addresses political issues in regard to the current socio-political conditions in post-Umbrella-Revolution Hong Kong.

In addition, the Hong Kong Fresh Wave (鮮浪潮 *Xianlangchao*) can be seen as another pivotal example of local productions as the filmmakers' response to the trend of Hong Kong-China co-productions over the past decade. Having become an independent organization led by Johnnie To (杜琪峯), the Fresh Wave Short Film Festival was launched in 2005 by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council in order to promote local short films. It aimed “to promote and encourage local short film production, and to discover and nurture young talents by providing funding support and a platform for showcasing their work, while enhancing their technical skills and quality through training” (Fresh Wave n. pag.). After developing filmmaking skills from the short film competition, these Fresh Wave directors have presented their feature-length film debuts and achieved success at the Hong Kong Film Awards as seen in the cases of Frank Hui, Jevons Au (Man-kit Au), and Vicky Wong's *Trivisa* (2016), as well as Steve Chan Chi Fat's (陳志發) *Weeds on Fire* and Wong Chun's (黃進) *Mad World* (一念無明 *Yinian wuming*, 2016) (Hong Kong Film Awards). These successful cases may imply that producing local small-budget films can be an alternative route that is able to distinguish itself from the mainstream co-produced blockbusters, reinforcing the unique characteristics of Hong Kong subjectivity and

local consciousness. In this section of the article, I explore how these young Hong Kong filmmakers utilize filmmaking as a flexible strategy to convey political messages, while examining how the collective anxieties of Hongkongers concerning the handover are manifested on screen in their collaborative film *Trivisa*.

Trivisa is a crime film produced by Milkyway Image's Johnnie To and Yau Nai-hoi (游乃海), and co-directed by three Hong Kong emerging directors: Frank Hui, Jevons Au (Man-kit Au), and Vicky Wong. Adapted from the real-life story of three notorious Hong Kong mobsters, *Trivisa* tells the story of three top Hong Kong mobsters: Yip Kwok-foon (葉國歡, played by Richie Jen [任賢齊]), Kwai Ching-hung (季正雄, played by Gordon Lam [林家棟]), and Cheuk Tze-keung (卓子強, played by Jordan Chan [陳小春]). In early 1997, Cheuk Tze-keung comes up with the idea of uniting himself with the other two top mobsters, who never met each other before, to plot a serious crime together before the forthcoming handover. Intriguingly, apart from the final sequence, the three different stories about the three protagonists in *Trivisa* were shot separately by these three directors, and it was only after shooting was completed that it was edited together by Allen Leung Chin-Lun (梁展綸) and David Richardson to become a completed feature-length film (L. Wu).⁹ The film won several significant prizes in the 36th Hong Kong Film Awards in 2017, including best film, best director, best screenplay, best actor, and best film editing awards.

Trivisa raised socio-political attention both in Hong Kong and China due to its story featuring sensitive issues relating to collusion with Chinese officers and the corruption of the Chinese authorities. In fact, the filmmaking team submitted their screenplay to the censorship system of the SAPPRFT, but it was not approved to be screened in the Mainland. Subsequently, *Trivisa*, like *Ten Years*, was banned in the Mainland not only due to the topic but also because one of the directors of *Trivisa*, Jevons Au (Man-kit Au), also the director of *Dialect* in *Ten Years*, has been blacklisted by Beijing. Moreover, footage of *Trivisa* winning awards during the television broadcast of the 36th Hong Kong Film Awards in 2017 was cut by the Chinese online video platform iQiyi (愛奇藝) (Lin; Liberty Times Net), a clear display of the political power of Beijing intervening in the sectors of film production, distribution, and exhibition in contemporary Hong Kong cinema.

In *Trivisa*, the directors' negotiations of the China factor can be firstly showcased by the way one of the protagonists, Yip Kwok-foon, colludes with a Chinese official. He was named as wanted by the Hong Kong police in connection

⁹ For *Trivisa*, Allen Leung Chin-Lun and David Richardson won the best film editing award in both the 53rd Golden Horse Awards in 2016 and the 36th Hong Kong Film Awards in 2017 (Golden Horse Awards; Hong Kong Film Awards).

with robbery and a gunfight. After that, he flees to Guangzhou and changes his name, opening up a business of smuggling counterfeit electronics. In order to sustain the business and make a fortune in China, Yip Kwok-foon chooses to bribe the Chinese officials with help from his friend (played by Lam Suet). In the following key scene, Yip Kwok-foon is colluding with the Chinese customs officer with a priceless antique china, but the customs officer mocks and humiliates him at the banquet. Notably, a conspicuous political allegory is manifested through the power relations in this scene. The Chinese officer symbolizes the political influences of the PRC, and Yip Kwok-foon embodies the common Hong Kong people who have been forced to be subordinated to the Chinese authorities, thereby demonstrating the inferior state of the Hong Kong people in the socio-political hierarchy after the handover.

Subsequently, Yip Kwok-foon is determined not to endure the humiliation from the Chinese officers and tries to move back to Hong Kong, pick up his gun and commit a crime once again in an attempt to join the union of the three top mobsters organized by Cheuk Tze-keung. However, he fails to fight back for his dignity and is killed by the policemen in the end. Notably, again, the downfall of Yip Kwok-foon can be read as the epitome of the tragic destiny of Hongkongers who have tried to strive for democracy and autonomy in the Umbrella Revolution and other social movements over the past decade, whereas the Chinese authorities have not been willing to make any further concessions vis-à-vis alterations in policies or the legal system.

The directors' negotiations of the China factor can be further manifested in the sequence in which Kwai Ching-hung, who uses several pseudonyms to hide his real identity, employs the name of "Taishan Boy" to buy weapons from one of his friends, an underground arms dealer named Master Sai (師傅細, played by Lau Ka-yung [劉家勇]), in preparation for his upcoming scheme of robbing a local jewelry shop. In this scene, his friend tells him that Cheuk Tze-keung is looking for Yip Kwok-foon and Kwai Ching-hung for the assembly of the three top mobsters, while suggesting to him that "because the handover is imminent, you have to do something big. After the handover, it will be slim pickings, idiot" (00:53:54-00:54:01). Intriguingly, these lines indicate the collective anxieties of the Hong Kong people by referring to the unknown future in relation to the political-economic predicament after the handover.

Crucially, in addition to the stories of the two main figures, Yip Kwok-foon and Kwai Ching-hung, the filmmakers' negotiations of the China factor are also articulated from the very beginning of *Trivisa*. In the opening sequence, after Kwai Ching-hung commits the crime of killing a policeman, he is sitting and smoking in a hotel room. Meanwhile, the footage of the Sino-British Joint Declaration agreed by

the UK and the PRC in 1984 is displayed on the television screen in the hotel, with the voice-over of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher stating the Agreement: “The arrangement for Hong Kong contained in the agreement are not measures of expediency. There are long-term policies which will be incorporated in the Basic Law for Hong Kong and preserved intact for fifty years from 1997” (00:02:33-00:02:51).¹⁰

In the next frame, a close-up shot is used to show Kwai Ching-hung burning his Hong Kong identity card, with the continuing voice-over of the Chinese representative Zhao Ziyang in the Sino-British Joint Declaration: “it is in the common interests as well as shared responsibilities of China and Britain to ensure the Joint Declaration is fully implemented with no encumbrances” (00:02:52-00:03:07). Notably, the use of the voice-overs of Margaret Thatcher and Zhao Ziyang during the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which aimed to maintain the Hong Kong Basic Law for fifty years from 1997, manifests the directors’ negotiations of the China factor in Hong Kong’s politics and history while ironically operating as the filmmakers’ response to the current violation of the “one country, two systems” framework by the Chinese authorities. Moreover, the image of the burning identity card can also be read as a sign of the loss of Hong Kong identity after the handover, again shedding light on the collective anxieties of Hongkongers.

With regard to the strategy of editing, the use of historical footage at the end of the film is one of the things that politicizes *Trivisa* by framing the time set between 1984 and 1997, two pivotal years for the sovereignty and destiny of Hong Kong. By the end of the film, the failures of all three top mobsters are revealed by the death of Yip Kwok-foon, the surrender of Cheuk Tze-keung, and the capture of Kwai Ching-hung by the police, while signifying the doomed fate of the city in the post-handover era. These three top mobsters never actually meet in the film until they encounter each other in a Chinese restaurant by chance at the end of the film. During this chance meeting, the voice-over of the last British Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, in his farewell speech on 30 June 1997 is used in this final scene. He states, “we should not forget you. And we should watch with the closest interests as you embark on this new era of your remarkable history” (01:32:29-01:32:40).¹¹ This once again marks the beginning of the post-handover era and the destiny of Hongkongers.

Moreover, after the voice-over of Chris Patten, the directors use historical footage of the Hong Kong handover ceremony on 1 July 1997 and end the film with

¹⁰ The statement by Margaret Thatcher here is quoted from the English subtitles featured on the Hong Kong DVD release of *Trivisa*.

¹¹ The statement by Chris Patten here is quoted from the English subtitles featured on the Hong Kong DVD release of *Trivisa*.

TV static noise and a snow screen image following the historical footage. Significantly, the final frame of *Trivisa*, with the use of this static noise and snow screen, manifests the filmmakers' profound political positions throughout the film. Despite the fact that the advent of the handover marks a new period for Hong Kong, the static noise and snow screen can also be regarded as a symbol of the unknown era characterized by the destiny of Hong Kong, which contains endless worries, fears, and despair. The dotted pixels over static noise that appears during the disrupted transmission of the handover ceremony can even be seen as the melancholic end of the golden years for Hongkongers. By doing so, the three young Hong Kong directors have wisely addressed the negotiations of the China factor via collaborative filmmaking in their crime film project *Trivisa*.

Political Implications of the Controversies over the Hong Kong Electoral System

In addition to *Trivisa*, Herman Yau's gangster film *The Mobfathers*, the other representative post-Umbrella-Revolution film, addresses the political implications of recent political dynamics in post-handover Hong Kong. It tells the story of the election of the Dragon Head (the leader) of a Hong Kong triad gang that is about to be held. The current Mobfather of the triad (played by Anthony Wong [黃秋生]) is deciding which of two candidates will be his successor, but he is still actively engaged in manipulating the entire electoral process. The protagonist A-Chuck (阿七, played by Chapman To), who has just been released from prison, showcases his attempt to become one of the candidates, and this results in a confrontation between A-Chuck and his opponent Wulf (豺狼, played by Gregory Wong [王宗堯]).

In a similar way to *Trivisa*, *The Mobfathers* also raises the awareness of Hong Kong society due to its political implications, which draw an analogy between the election of the leader of a triad and the Chief Executive election of Hong Kong. It is not the first gangster film in Hong Kong cinema that uses the election of the leader of a triad as a metaphor for the political situation of Hong Kong. Johnnie To's *Election* (黑社會 *Heishehui*, 2005) and *Election II* (黑社會：以和為貴 *Heishehui: yiheweigui*, 2006) can be seen as prominent examples that address the election of the chairman of a Hong Kong triad gang and the manipulative power from the Chinese authorities behind the scenes (Teo 180). In addition, Felix Chong's (莊文強) *Once a Gangster* (飛砂風中轉 *Feisha fengzhong zhuan*, 2010) ridicules the unfair electoral system of Hong Kong by mixing the genres of comedy and gangster film. In comparison with the previous three exemplars, *The Mobfathers* provides a more

nanced metaphor of the political configuration of Hong Kong on screen vis-à-vis the structure of the electoral system, the China factor, and the counter-response of the public.

First of all, Herman Yau utilizes the gangster film to articulate the negotiation of the China factor in *The Mobfathers* by alluding to the electoral system of Hong Kong in the sequence in which the Mobfather and three other elder leaders of the triad—uncle Sky (天叔, played by Danny Summer [夏韶聲]), uncle Earth (地叔, played by Lee Lung-kei [李龍基]), and uncle Man (人叔, played by Albert Cheung [張武孝])—gather in a club to discuss the coming election of the triad’s leader. A political allegory of the Hong Kong Chief Executive electoral system is suggested when uncle Sky remarks that “we have been playing a little skin-deep democracy” in the last triad’s leader election, and the Mobfather also indicates that “only four of us can decide on the candidates” (00:15:58-00:16:11).

The skin-deep democracy refers to the controversial “fake” democracy in Hong Kong’s Chief Executive electoral system, in which only candidates approved by Beijing are eligible for the election. In other words, all prospective candidates have to be screened by the Chinese authorities in advance and thus the candidate must certainly be in the pro-Beijing camp no matter who is elected. Significantly, the political allegory of Hong Kong’s electoral system in *The Mobfathers* sheds light on the China factor exemplified by Beijing’s political interference into the city’s autonomy.

Intriguingly, Herman Yau further manifests the negotiation of the China factor in *The Mobfathers* by the sequence in which, on the day of the triad’s Dragon Head election, the protagonist A-Chuck interrupts the election process. He asks, “why are only nine men eligible to vote when it comes to picking a Dragon Head?” (01:07:43-01:07:46). In this way he challenges the existing system where only the five young leaders and four elder leaders of their triad gang can vote. In front of the triad members, A-Chuck subsequently proclaims that “if we have to vote, every one of us should be eligible” (01:07:48-01:07:50) for striving for the principle of “one person, one vote.” The system A-Chuck objects to here can be seen as an allusion to Hong Kong’s current controversial electoral structure—the so-called “election by the small groups” (小圈圈選舉 “*xiaoquanquan xuanju*”) by which Hong Kong’s Chief Executive is elected by a privileged committee composed of around 1,200 people from the sectors of business, trade, and academia, who generally represent all of Hong Kong and vote in accordance with the request of Beijing.

Crucially, in the next sequence, the viewers can see that the protagonist A-Chuck’s appeal for “one person, one vote” is highly welcomed and supported by the

members of the triad. It should be noted that Yau uses several consecutive pan shots to capture the passionate crowds who cheer along with A-Chuck's appeal by shouting out that "I do [want to vote]!" (01:09:36-01:10:10). Considering the function of the camera movement, which uses pan shots that move horizontally and gradually capture the scene of the crowds of people in continuous movement, a sense of unity showing the collective desire to vote is created. Furthermore, the passionate crowds who are striving for the right to vote function as the embodiment of the fervent supporters and participants who were fighting for universal suffrage during the Umbrella Revolution in 2014, while manifesting the filmmaker's response to the current socio-political dynamics in Hong Kong.

Amidst the final street battle scene in which the protagonist A-Chuck and his opponent Wulf kill each other at the end of *The Mobfathers*, Herman Yau juxtaposes another scene in which the Mobfather of the triad is colluding with an officer from the authorities, asserting that "everything is in good order, harmonious and stable" (01:24:31-01:24:34). In this frame, it should be noted that the old Mobfather symbolizes the Hong Kong Chief Executive or the Hong Kong government working in collaboration with the officer who never shows his face in the scene—in other words, the real manipulator behind the scene, the invisible control from Beijing. Using the gangster film as a vehicle to create these symbolic sequences that allude to Hong Kong's electoral system, social movements, and political status, Herman Yau has successfully constructed a cinematic space to enable reflections on the China factor in the wake of the political dynamics of Hong Kong in recent years.

Conclusion

With regard to the long-existing and multifaceted negotiations of the China factor in the differing periods of Hong Kong's film history, this article has examined the ways in which contemporary Hong Kong filmmakers re-negotiate the China factor in four recent genre films. With *Vulgaria* and *The Midnight After*, the marginalized position of Cantonese in comparison to the dominance of *Putonghua* as well as the imaginary of the disappearance of Hong Kong's local cultures in the post-handover era have been considered. On the other hand, the two post-Umbrella-Revolution films, *Trivisa* and *The Mobfathers*, display cinematic negotiations of the China factor regarding the collective anxieties of Hongkongers vis-à-vis the handover and controversies over the current electoral system of Hong Kong. By analyzing the aforementioned Hong Kong genre films in the context of the broader socio-political realm, this article has argued that contemporary Hong Kong filmmakers have been

using filmmaking as a flexible and effective strategy for revealing political messages in response to the socio-political vicissitudes in the era of post-handover Hong Kong. This allows them to shape the discourse of resistance against either the trend of Hong Kong-China co-productions in the film industry or the severer socio-political assimilation process of Mainlandization.

Accordingly, this article has three layers of contributions to the field. First, it foregrounds the political function of genre films by situating contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema within a broader socio-political realm. Second, it provides a consideration of cinematic manifestations of the China factor in the contemporary period of Hong Kong genre cinema, building up a connection with the existing literature on the China factor in Hong Kong film history. Third, it offers a perspective that allows us to regard contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema as both a flexible strategy for filmmakers and an ongoing process of cultural production that links films to the changing socio-political context of post-handover Hong Kong. To conclude, this article has argued that the re-negotiations of the China factor in contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema have become more and more politically reflexive due to the severer political interference of Beijing, which has violated the autonomy of Hong Kong. At the same time these films construct a discourse of resistance for Hongkongers against the potential neo-colonialism of Chinese authorities over the postcolonial city. Notably, in the case of contemporary Hong Kong genre cinema, filmmaking can not only serve as a medium for local filmmakers to articulate political consciousness, but it can also be seen as a continuing process of cultural production and a site for dialogues to emerge between film and shifting socio-political conditions.

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