# STRUGGLE AND ESCAPE - AESTHETIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND CONTEMPLATION OF MAINSTREAM FILMS

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**Abstract -** In this paper, the phenomena of absence of contemplation is found through the analysis of post-97 films covering Echoes of the Rainbow (2010), Vulgaria（2013）, Golden Chicken Series 1 and 2 (2002/2003), You Shoot, I Shoot（2001), Jackie Chan's Who Am I (1998), Stephen Chow's King of Comedy (1999) and From Beijing with Love (1994). In the past, people took a focal point on post-97 Hong Kong films, limited attention has been paid to mainstream everyday life films. From the viewpoint of the aesthetization of everyday life, this paper tries to explore how these mainstream everyday life films self-portrait Hong Kong people from early 90's to the end of 2000's, more significantly, to show that not all films are unaware of post-97 crisis but they failed to contemplate the future of Hong Kong in the most critical period around 1997.

**Keywords -** Escape, Struggle, Aesthetization of Everyday Life, Nostalgia

## I. INTRODUCTION

Unlike any other previous colonies, such as Malaysia, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan etc., Hong Kong is an unprecedented experiment and continues to work as a vassal passed from British to China. Hong Kong, once was like 1994's From Beijing with Love's dinosaur skull scrambled by different powers. "Instead of priding itself on the purity of culture in the form of a continuous folk, Hong Kong's cultural productions are thus often characterized by a particular kind of negotiation. This is a negotiation in which it must play two aggressors, Britain and China, against each other, carving out a space where it is neither simply the puppet of British colonialism nor of Chinese authoritarianism."

By analyzing Echoes of the Rainbow (2010), Vulgaria（2013, Golden Chicken Series 1 and 2 (2002/2003), You Shoot, I Shoot（2001, Ashes of Time（94, Stephen Chow's King of Comedy（2001）and From Beijing with Love（94. In the past, people took a focal point on post-97 Hong Kong films, limited attention has been paid to mainstream everyday life films. From the viewpoint of the aesthetization of everyday life, this paper tries to explore how these mainstream everyday life films self-portrait Hong Kong people from early 90's to the end of 2000's, more significantly, to show that not all films are unaware of post-97 crisis but they failed to contemplate the future of Hong Kong in the most critical period around 1997.

To avoid preconception, I will show that Hongkongers have thought about 1997 in some mainstream films so that my discussion on early 90's to the end of 2000's films absence of contemplation can stand. We take a look at 1983 released film Zu Warriors from the Magic Mountain," Tsui Hark plays the ideas encompassed by Deng Xiaoping's "One country, two systems" vision of handover in the early 1980's; "Tsui applies the confusion, excitement and tension of this momentous period of his homeland's history to every aspect of Zu: mythology, characterization, art direction, gender, and genre play."

The film was shown after the Governor of Hong Kong, Murray MacLehose, visited Beijing in March 1979 and after the visit of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, to China in September 1982. Tsui applies drama of this historical period of Hong Kong to the film.

Di Ming-qi (Biao Yuen), a character who cannot decide whom to obey when his two commanders order him to launch opposing attack strategies on their enemies. In his rush to escape he meets Yi Chen (as Hoi Man). After the seniors' failure, he realizes that they are the ones who can really save themselves. "I was waiting for someone to end the war but the so-called righteous refuse to be united." "We this generation can only depend on ourselves to save the world." Especially, the two eventual heroes of the film, Di Ming-qi and Yi Chen, are only able to defeat the Blood Demon when they become of the same mind, eventually being able to speak and think in unison. This showed what people understood about what happened in Hong Kong, what they knew, how they perceived—be united when facing 1997 deadline.

## II. STRUGGLE FROM SMALL POTATOES

Just like what Edward W. Said said, "It is historical fact that nationalism-restoration of community, assertion of identity, emergence of new cultural practices--as a mobilized political force instigated and then advanced the struggle against Western domination everywhere in the non-European world. ……China or Japan, natives banded together in independence and nationalist groupings that were based on a sense of identity which was ethnic, religious, or communal, and was opposed to further Western encroachment."

But what interests us is that Hong Kong films or people did not fight against Britain colonial

governance in a fierce way, which pushes back against the above argument. Stipulated by "One Country, Two System." Hong Kong was like an orphan seized by two giants. What Hongkongers have done is countering authorities by making funny faces through everyday life.

Even early in Farewell My Concubine, a 1985 novel by Lilian Lee (Li Bihua), deliver the representational trope of gender identity to Hong Kong identity before 1997. The main actor Douzi attaches himself to Shitou and is trained to play dan (main actress) roles. When Douzi practices the line "I am by nature a girl, not a boy", he keeps mistaking the line into "I am by nature a boy..." The novel and the film are all about the confusing identity rather than thinking about where I am from, where I should go, shall I leave my master and become independent.

In early 90's, Mo lei tau develops in Hong Kong. Mo lei tau (literally: "nonsensical") is a type of slapstick humor associated with Hong Kong popular culture. Under 89 Tiananmen Square protests and 97 tension, the escapist nature of Mo lei tau led to a surge in Hong Kong. As typified by Stephen Chow's 1990s movies, Mo lei tau developed into an "anything goes" form of nonsensical humor that can and does ignore narrative conventions.

If we compare Stephen Chow's films to Bruce Lee or Chow Yun Fat's, it is different from Bruce Lee's Heroes of Chinese Ethnicity and the tough hero images of Jackie Chan, the characters in Stephen Chow's comedy movies are closer to the everyday life of Hong Kong people, which are far away from grand narratives. In these films, the aura of traditional heroes transforms to grassroots. This transformation also reflects the evolution of people's values. The transition from big shot to no body manifests the changing process of Hong Kong people mentality in the past years.

Stephen Chow called his works a tragicomedies, in which he showed his sympathy to embarrassment of the small beers who survived in the world. His works often make people laugh with tears, which is the projection of Hong Kong audience's inner self. His films focus on small people who need to survive but have the ability to laugh at life and comfort themselves.

In King of Comedy, Wan Tin-sau (Stephen Chiau) is a struggling actor who has devoted his life to the study of his craft, but unfortunately the moment he gets on a film set, disaster usually strikes. However, Wan refuses to give up. Piu-piu (Cecilia Cheung) is a bar girl who wants to be able to feign a greater interest in her customers, so she hires Wan to give her private acting lessons. They fall in love and break up soon.

The life difficulties and refusal of Piu-piu make Wan Tin-sau feels that life has already rushed him to the future, love, out of reach. Wan chooses to counterattack like Jedi. Similar characters repeatedly appeared in Stephen Chow's films many times. However, these small potatoes are brave enough to challenge the authority. Both Wan Tin-sau and Piu-piu from lowest social ladder say "NO" to the offers from the rich man or powerful woman. Wan Tin-sau' motto sounds like Hong Kong spirit, "Work hard! Fighting!"

In everyday life films, the ordinary people resist with tradition, dogma and even power,. Just like what Jackie Chan said in Who Am I, "I might have amnesiac but I am not stupid" after he knew that he was betrayed by the westerners. They started to fight back.

Edward W. Said said "That many nationalists are sometimes more coercive or more intellectually self-critical than others is clear, but my own thesis is that, at its best, nationalist resistance to imperialism was always critical of itself."

However, the target of this kind of films is nowhere. The counterstrike is incomplete. People are distracted by its humor which arises from the placement of surprising and incongruous elements, and the complex interplay of cultural subtleties. In He's a Woman, She's a Man (1994), Wing (Anita Yuen) is desperate to meet her idols, seizes this opportunity and enters the contest disguised as a male and falls in love with a pop record producer and songwriter Sam (Leslie Cheung). However, at the end, Wing discloses her identity as a woman. The film still discusses the gender/identity issue in Hong Kong. The critic target is not a concrete thing like how British affects Hong Kong people during the colonial period. How should Hongkongers build up their own subjectivity? How should Hong Kong people face the difficulties ahead? How should Hong Kong people cope with the mainlanders' coming after 1997?

What we described above is phenomenon, from the perspective of value judgment, the deeper meaning of the proposition of anesthetization of everyday life is actually the whitewashing and decoration of reality. It cuts off the connection between people and the reality, and immerses people in a false and superficial aesthetic illusion, in which people misunderstand that the reality they are exposed to is the reality.

The word "representation" that culture studies is keen to use means that our world is composed of the symbols. The multi-faceted reality is thus surreal or unrealistic. The world is actually like Dreamimage stuffed with commercial goods behind the aesthetics of everyday life which hides the secrets of commodity principles and economic strategies. And most importantly, for Hong Kong, this kind of aesthetics of everyday life deprivie people of their perception of contemplation of realities under the situation of de-colonialization or re-sinisization in Hong Kong.

In realities, Society-related comics are comics that reflect societal issues and topics. In Hong Kong, some of them are about social satire; some talk about daily lives of Hongkongers. These comics are often seen in different social media such as Facebook,

Twitter, Blogs and Instagram and newspapers. Netizens or editors make a dig at a social issue but do not want to make it directly, so they use comics to convey the message in a humorous way.

The old muddled series is typical example. Famously ironic, it was launched by "sub-culture hall" in 2000. It is a political comic series. The cover of the comics depicts a seemingly old Tung sitting naked on the toilet. The comics used irony to depict the first SAR Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa's failure to manage the society.

German historian Rudolph Herzog's DEAD FUNNY: Humor in Hitler's Germany is a monograph on German jokes during the Nazi period. The jokes of German daily life may be just jokes to themselves. What they didn't realize was that these jokes gave them an excuse to tolerate, obey, and even assist Nazi's totalitarian rule.

The vast majority of German jokes do not criticize the Nazi system, but merely scorn and ridicule some of the personal shortcomings or human weaknesses of Nazi leaders. These shortcomings or weaknesses mentioned only because their appearance on the "leaders". The crimes committed by these Nazi leaders are rarely noted in jokes.

This paper is intended as a return back to what is thought of as Mo Lei Tau age, to give people new reminder on the critical moment of contemporary Hong Kong .We hope the aesthetics critique of everyday life enables people to re-experience, contemplate illusion of hope and their own lives.

## III. ESCAPE: FROM NOSTALGIA TO INDIGENOUS MENTALITY

Edward W. Said "But we must also focus on the intellectual and cultural argument within the nationalist resistance that once independence was gained new and imaginative reconceptions of society and culture were required in order to avoid the old orthodoxies and injustices. "

Nostalgia is one of the ways to restore the community, the identity and keep the language-Cantonese in Hong Kong. Nostalgia is related to temporality and memory. Just like Jackie Chan said in Who Am I, "I wanna know my past!" Hong Kong's nostalgia also has its own characteristics, the characters are most ordinary people. We love ordinary people because they look like ourselves since we are only small potatoes, the world has not changed because of our will.

Entrenched between the two great powers, Hong Kong is a small potato who has no say. Originally, Hong Kong is a buyer and service provider for western world and China. In Golden Chicken 1, we will never forget the motto, "Nowadays, this kind of service is not good enough", which was a line around 2000 proposed by Hong Kong government.

Kam (Sandra Ng) is making a withdrawal from an ATM on New Year's Eve when she's held up at knifepoint by the desperate Bong (Eric Tsang), who is distressed to know that Kam doesn't even have enough money in her account to make a withdrawal. Kam tries to cheer Bong up with amusing stories as a prostitute. This leads to a conversation that lasts through the night, and flashbacks depict Kam's evolution, from underage "fish ball girl" to popular showgirl to masseuse to long-in-the-tooth hooker. This film as a nostalgic film is not a reconstruction of a past era, it is to recreate some of the past era of art.

Everyday life is an important part of culture. Richard Hoggart, believes in the use of literacy that the British working class in the 1930s had a strong interest in the details of everyday life. They enjoyed everyday life and did not want to escape everyday life. This kind of culture is the culture of public self-entertainment, basically a culture created by the workers themselves. Hoggart described in more details: the workers walking around the store, drinking drinks, eating ice cream, joking each other, men even deliberately lined up in front of the women's toilet to make everyone laugh. He believes that such a culture is the most energetic.

Compared to Stephen Chow's films (around or before 1997), films around for after 2000 are much more different. Both depicted small people, Stephen chow's films' tension comes from social ladder. The latter's tension is about poor life in Hong Kong due to the financial crisis, such as Golden Chicken Series 1 and 2(2002/2003), You Shoot, I Shoot（2001）, which are about how one supports own living and gain or escape the way out by looking back in the past, from which the indigenous awareness has been developed.

In 2012, Vagaria, the film extreme spontaneity is the result of the intentional use of slang, coarse language, local political incorrectness, which is not hard to see the strong local appeal since the film pivots around Hong Kong characters. In order to get money movie producer To Wai Cheung meets tyrannosaurus, a GuanXi based triad head and movie investor with peculiar taste, who orders them to eat weird dishes, such as mule's reproductive organs. This is an indigenous mentality of Hong Kong people, who now faces a reversed world with mainlanders, who now is the rich boss pumping Hong Kong people money, supporting some people's life and career.

In reality, nostalgia really exerts its strength until the 10 years after handover. In 2006, the Central Star Ferry Pier was defended. In 2007, the Queen's Wharf was defended. A group of protesters sat in the dock, gathered, camped, read poetry, etc. to participate directly. The democratic way is to "regain space." They also reinterpreted the space of the Queen's Wharf with their own actions. As a result, "local" gradually gained new interpretation, it is no longer mixed, nostalgic, marginal but public space, cultural conservatism, historical value, and even collective memories.

Hong Kong films as a part of social history, which record Hong Kong's own story - time, memory, identity, future, interweaved in everyday life. Some may say that there is a film depicting everyday life; it does not escape and even affect the government's administration. The 2010 Echoes of the Rainbow is both a memory and a nostalgia of those old days. The film, as directed by director Alex Law, said, "In life, time is the biggest thief, who takes our most beloved, most valued and heartbroken memories." Although, the this is a sad story, Law Chun-yi' s happy childhood, Desmond Law's first love, Law's family is warm and touching. Family life that supports each other is to give happiness, value, hope and encouragement.

Nostalgia is very important to form a complete self especially Hong Kong has been considered as an Other at such a long time. No matter what was good or bad in life, it is a process that affects our state of existence. Nostalgia can make us recognize ourselves and rebuild ourselves. Therefore, it maintains the integrity of my present life, or gives me the present life has a special role in a certain meaning. This is also one way how Hong Kong filmmakers respond to the question of "Who am I?" Therefore, the rise of Hong Kong people's everyday life movies is to establish a more complete self-existence in the post-97.

Studying "mainstream everyday life films" can therefore have a critical historical and sociological significance. It looks at and discovers from ordinary perspectives what Hong Kong people understand about what happens in their world, what they know, what they perceive, and to what extent. Because codes of metonymy, metaphor, allegory or irony are the result of understanding and perceiving Hong Kong's situation. Mo Lei Tau and cynics are similar and connected in their understanding and behavioral responses. They all understand that no long-term practical action is taken.

Therefore, there are two ways to contemplate on Hong Kong's realities. One is inward, just like the localization develops after 2003 in Hong Kong, another is outward. Compared to the early stage of post-97, Hong Kong people have started to think about their situation through nostalgia and conservation of cultural heritage. However, people in Hong Kong never take thought "keep 50 years unchanged is out of date" seriously. As Rey Chow argued "But what kind of wish, promise, and threat is it to say that we should make sure that the Hong Kong of tomorrow is like the Hong Kong of today? It is a strange notion – a curse even – to want any place to remain the same for fifty years." After 20 years, Hong Kong people still reject to think about what they should do under such a big change in China and the world. How can they fit into "50 years unchanged" and to fit into the changing reality?

## CONCLUSION

Studying 90's to 2010 films is a question from a special perspective about what kind of moral responsibility Hong Kong people should assume for today's Hong Kong. Many of Hong Kong people are not directly involved, but they are aware of what the future will be like. Modern cynics are cautious and they have integrated into society in this way. Most of them do this for self-protection because of their self-selection as well as environment.

Focusing on the locality of Hong Kong is not only an entertainment, but the internal digestion and salvation of Hong Kong people after seeing the pause of upward mobility and development. In this way, Hong Kong films retain a spirit of dialogue with Hong Kong culture, in which there are playfulness, compromises and commercialization.

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