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‘PRE-POST-1997’:
PREPOSTEROUS HONG KONG CINEMA

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Pre-Post-1997: Preposterous Hong Kong Cinema

Audrey Yue

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the global prominence of Hong Kong cinema has highlighted its place as a seminal site of cultural production. Rather than reifying the subcultural terrain of the Western cult action cinema fetish or reinforcing the futility of an indigenous disappearing culture, this paper proposes that 'pre-post-1997' can be a new cultural model for making sense of Hong Kong cinema. Pre-post-1997 positions Hong Kong cinema as a travelling and diasporic culture. It describes a consciousness evoked by the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. This consciousness is marked by a politics of re-turn: that is, rather than a return to the 'motherland', a politics of re-turn is marked by a turn away from the motherland, toward a movement of mobility and transformation. Characterised by panic, pre-post-1997 is distinguished by foreboding, an anticipation of loss, separation and reunification, as well as an obsession towards 1997 as a turning point marked by a paradox because the movement forward has already found itself on the other side that it was before. This paper will illustrate this culture through the delineation of a preposterous cinema studied through selected films of Taiwanese-Hong Kong Cantocinema star, Brigitte Lin Qingxia. The site of the preposterous will be mobilised as a point of departure for rethinking the study of Hong Kong cinema.
Pre-Post-1997: Preposterous Hong Kong Cinema

By Audrey Yue

I. Introduction

Pre-Post-1997: An Introductory Summary

This study explores Hong Kong cinema against the backdrop of its transition from British colonial rule to Chinese communist sovereignty. During the 1984-1997 period of transition, the Sino-British Joint Declaration (SBJD) has provoked awareness of Hong Kong as a distinct cultural formation. However, the thrust of this writing locates Hong Kong as fixed and disappearing. This study focuses on Hong Kong as mobile and travelling.

Although Hong Kong cinema is the third largest film industry in the world, there has been limited academic study in this area. The cinema’s impact as a central force in the formation of global Asian and Chinese popular culture and its transnational influence in Hollywood prove that it is an emerging and reconfiguring cultural formation. It expresses how technology is mobilised to respond to local, global and diasporic consumption practices and to produce tactics of self-articulation. Rather than reifying the subcultural terrain of the Western cult action cinema fetish or reinforcing the futility of a disappearing culture, the concept of pre-post-1997 is developed as a cultural model for rethinking the cinema. Pre-post-1997 describes the cinema as a culture of movement.

Pre-post-1997 is characterised by a belated and deferent consciousness of re-turn to the ‘motherland’. Rather than surrendering to Hong Kong’s enforced return, pre-post-1997 is marked by a turn away from the motherland, toward a movement of mobility and transformation. In 1984, the signing of the Declaration was an event that produced a panic in the colony because it authorised Hong Kong’s return to the ‘motherland’ in 1997. Such an event reordered temporal and spatial relations and immediately positioned Hong Kong as postmodern and postcolonial. Delineated by the transition formula ‘one country, two systems’, the Declaration signified the formation of a new chronotope constituted in the topography of return.

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Pre-post-1997 is established as a cultural model for making sense of such a milieu. It describes a panic culture distinguished by foreboding, an anticipation of loss, separation and reunification, as well as an obsession towards 1997 as a turning point marked by a paradox because the movement forward has already found itself on the other side that it was before. Underpinning this model is a temporal future perfect culture that recognises the hybridity of the two systems characterised by an experience of being different to the one system and the other of the other system. This pre-post-consciousness is a form of self-identification constituted in itself-as-other. Such a self-identification is negotiated as a mobile trajectory framed by a heightened anxiety translated into an ambivalent practice of differential repetition.

As a site of enculturation, the post-Declaration cinema expresses Hong Kong’s culture of anxiety. Pre-post-1997 is produced through both form and content: as an intra sensibility, as a form of self-writing, a new world of diaspora culture and a constitution of identity. First, as an intra sensibility, the cinema establishes the movement of migration by displaying the heterotopic position of geography as a cinematic aesthetic, engaging with transition as a mode of narrative and constituting subjectivity through the figures of the migrant, the foreigner and the stranger. This is evident in films such as Chung King Express and Autumn Moon. Second, as a form of self-writing, the cinema functions as a tool for critical historiography and a mobile archive. Films such as 92 Legendary La Rose Noire and Center Stage function as examples here. They retrieve Hong Kong’s subaltern film memory and inscribe themselves as a site for modernity by utilising the device of memory, the spectacle of the body and the interpellation of technology. Third, as a new world of diaspora culture, the cinema, with films such as Song of the Exile, Homecoming and Won Ton Soup, functions as a travelling circuit for maintenance, negotiation, exchange and exhibition. Through the narratives of displacement and re-turn, it expresses a differential imaginary that stages the heterogeneity of Chineseness and reflects the mobility of home. Lastly, as a constitution of identity, the cinema is characterised by a new genre that displays a preposterous strategy of (be)hindsight where the posterior is privileged in order to destabilise positionality. Demonstrated through the critical deployment of queer which mobilises the meta-star as a hypertextual signifier, this is characterised by an absurd and ridiculous movement of differential repetition where front and back, pre and post, and before and after are undifferentiated. Self-parody, auto-referentiality and self-articulation describe the panic culture of mobility and constitute pre-post-1997 as the identity of post-Declaration Hong Kong and its cinema.
Preposterous Hong Kong Cinema

As a culture of movement, pre-post-1997 constitutes an exemplary model for the articulation of identity. This identity is located in the practice of "(be)hindsight" as a strategy of privileging the posterior in order to destabilise normative positionality. "(Be)hindsight" is a "rhetorical substitution of cause for effect or effect for cause, a substitution that disturbs the relationship of early and late, or before and behind." It is demonstrated by the trope of metalepsis. Such a device produces a cause that is presupposed by the effect, and like a loop, it resembles a curved structure that synchronises the past (pre) and the future (post) in such a way that in the movement forward, the destination is reached through a turning point that is the same as the departure point, but on the other side. This device is evident in the formation of post-Declaration cinema as preposterous cinema.

The term 'praeposterus' is a Latin derivative, from 'praec' in the front, followed by 'posterus' at the back. Contrary to nature, reason or sense, preposterous functions as a site for the cinema to articulate the absurd and the belated. Preposterous cinema is characterised by the queer meta-star as a hypertextual signifier. This paper argues that Brigitte Lin Qingxia, as the transsexual martial artist 'Asia The Invincible', is a queer meta-star produced by a meta-textual effect. The term ‘meta’ is the prefix for change and alteration. It is also Greek for 'with' or 'after'. Akin to the deferent 'pre-post' function as a prefix for the postcolonial site of Hong Kong's transition, to 'meta' is to examine that which is situated before but comes after.

To read the queer meta-star as a hypertextual signifier is to investigate three aspects surrounding the function of hypertext. Hypertext is an electronic text comprising blocks of words or images linked together by multiple and opened-ended nodes, paths, networks, trails and webs which directly connect from one position to another. Because the most important feature of the hypertext system is that of connectivity enabled by electronic linking, such a concept emphasises the interface of the link and resonates with post-Declaration Hong Kong’s position as the point of transition. The first aspect underpinning this strategy is to read the queer meta-star as a general concept. The transsexual character of Brigitte-as-'Asia' is

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examined as a link that connects two positions. The performativity of nationality and sexuality highlights the link as an ambiguous signifier that connects two series and two styles of memories that desire and affirm on the one side, and interrogate and repudiate on the other. The second aspect is to read Brigitte-as-'Asia' as an implementation of the movement of connectivity. By examining the incremental and differential nature of how the character of Brigitte-as-'Asia' is repeated and mobilised in the post-Declaration cinema, it is argued that the movement of connectivity consolidates the absurdity of the preposterous as a generic characteristic of the cinema. The third aspect is to read the effects of the link that is produced by the image-world of Brigitte-as-'Asia'. The ambiguity of this image-world functions as a Hong Kong interface that constitutes the virtuality of queer (n)Asian. This virtuality produces a shared diasporic world of an imagined and transnational community connected by Hong Kong's preposterous cinema.

**Hypertextual Signifier 1**

**The Link is The Transition Between Two Points: Transsexual Martial Artist, 'Asia' The Invincible**

Post-Declaration Hong Kong's return from a British capitalist colony to a Chinese communist Special Administrative Region can be demonstrated by the concept of the hypertext. Implicit in hypertext is the link as a code that governs and organises the system. In this system, the link functions as a site that connects two points. Like the structure of the hypertext link that connects two points, the transsexual character that crosses gender, race and nationality highlights post-Declaration Hong Kong as a liminal culture.7

In the film *Swordsman 3: The East Is Red*, the ultra-feminised Brigitte plays a transsexual martial artist character called ‘Asia The Invincible’.8 ‘Asia’ is both castrator and castrated, male and female, man and woman, lesbian and heterosexual.9 As a transsexual, Brigitte-as-'Asia' performs a pansexual tryst that interrogates the places it inhabits as her hypertext navigates from position to position and place to place. The character ‘Asia’ parodies and problematises the region Asia at the same time that ‘Asia’/Asia emerges as an interrogation and affirmation of its place in the world.10 This hyperbolic queer strategy is enabled in two stages.

First, the character ‘Asia’ reproduces the code by which Asia is organised. The relationships of ‘Asia’ to the other protagonists mirror Asia’s connections to different foreign powers...
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(SPANISH, DUTCH), as well as its own Asian (Japanese and Korean) and indigenous (Chinese) counterparts. This interrogation is evident in the elasticity of the ‘Asia’ hypertext link as open-ended and mobile, resonating at the same time as it affirms and exposes what the West has constructed of the East and what the East has constructed of itself for the West.

Second, the character ‘Asia’ highlights the problematic of such a code through performing essentialism. ‘Asia’’s invincibility occurs with the attainment of the ultimate power tool called the ‘Essence Absorbing Stance’. It describes ‘Asia’’s skill to absorb the essences (and life) of her enemies. This syntagm surrounding ‘Essence Absorbing Stance’ highlights its position as that which problematises essence. ‘Asia’’s preposterous position exaggerates the naturalising normativity underpinning essentialism: it denaturalises by exaggerating its nature, twisting it around and exposing the conventions constituting it. Such a hyperbole exposes two constructions of Asia with the East and with the West. The first subjects a traditional Asia to a homogeneous mass dependent on a timeless and irreducible East-West divide in culture and consciousness. The second portrays modern Asia as no longer mythical, authentic and real. Resonating with the current neo-Orientalist debates surrounding Asia, this is not preposterous at all when we consider that in the film, ‘Asia’ has indeed absorbed too much essence so that s/he, as the transsexual incarnated Other, is no longer of any gen(d)eric authenticity. Here, the hypertexted pre-post-1997 Brigitte-as-‘Asia’ icon mobilises the place of the link as a position of re-turn. This strategy turns towards an earlier encounter, back to a position where the borders of authenticity are hegemonically affirmed and naturalised. In its re-turn, it repeats a differential through a hyper artificality that questions and contests the Orientalist, Occidentalist and neo-Orientalist claims surrounding Asia. This ambivalence highlights a constitution that destabilises the fixity and fantasy of the Asia stereotype. ‘Essence Absorbing Stance’ categots as a contingent and provisional stance in such a way that it opens up the challenge to the unravel the (post)modernity of Asia.

These two stages clearly highlights a self-conscious Asia that displaces the orthodox East and West. This code of the link enabled by the hypertextual signifier of Brigitte-as-‘Asia’ connects the historicities underpinning two paradigmatic sites: male/female, hetero/homo, colonial/postcolonial, East/West, Asia/The Rest. In this system, the place of Hong Kong emerges as an ambivalent sign encoded by ‘Asia’. This ambivalence reinvents the post-Declaration cinema as a form of self-enactment that inscribes its topography as it navigates with places. In such a system, there is no need for a narrative beginning because there is no need for a mutable order by which the text is set out, as there is no need for an ending. Hence,
the emergence of a genre of a preposterous cinema that is absurd and ridiculous, as the following will exemplify.

**Hypertextual Signifier 2**

**The Link is The Movement of Connectivity: Preposterous Cinema as Genre through the ‘Asia’ Hypertext**

As an implementation of hypertext, the code of the link highlights the movement of connectivity. Here, by examining the differential and compounded practice of how the link of Brigitte-as-‘Asia’ is repeated and mobilised in the post-Declaration cinema, it is argued that the movement of connectivity consolidates the absurdity of the preposterous as a generic characteristic of the cinema. As a technical code, genre reassures as well as resists through its place as both familiar and different.¹⁴ The emergence of the transsexual martial arts genre driven by the performance and stardom of Brigitte-as-‘Asia’ demonstrates the formation of a preposterous cinema constituted in pre-post-1997 as a culture of re-turn.

Preposterous cinema prioritises the space of the hypertext link as the topography of the Hong Kong cinematic medium. Encoded by the iconic-image of Brigitte, the movement of connectivity characterises preposterous cinema as a ridiculous and absurd practice of differential repetition. By presenting a selected chronology of the Brigitte-as-‘Asia’ hypertext as a way of navigating through the pre-post-map of ‘Asia’, the cut of the jump is emphasised as an ambivalent signifier linking place to place, position to position, and historicity to historicity. The cut of the jump highlights the practice of re-turn, as a form of detour or re-route that hyperbolically repeats as it re-enacts on itself, on the link before, as the space forward. Like the hypertexted code that Brigitte-as-‘Asia’ supercedes, ‘Asia’ functions as an incremental and accumulative development in the technology of its topographic cinema.

After the *Swordsman* series in 1993, Brigitte played the character of a stylish macho butch policewoman called Ching Siu-tung in a Wong Jing parody, *Boys Are Easy*. What is significant and almost preposterous here is the Ching Siu-tung character, which is a compound affect of the default position signified by Brigitte-as-‘Asia’. Such a default position takes the form of the ‘Asia’ hypertext that functions as a link for the preposterous movement of re-turn. This movement inscribes the incremental logic of the genre through mixing and reordering the memories addressed by the subject-positions of the director, the actor, the story, the plot and the industry. The jump of the cut reveals a movement generated...
by a simultaneous self-reflection of the actual and the virtual. Consider for example what is connected by the text of Brigitte-as-'Asia' here. In real life, Ching Siu-tung is the famous martial arts director noted for the *A Chinese Ghost Story* and *Swordsman* trilogies, as well as action sequences in *A Better Tomorrow II*, *A Chinese Odyssey*, *The Heroic Trio*, *The Executioners*, *Moon Warriors*, *Dragon Inn*, *Peking Opera Blues*, *Royal Tramp*, *The Killer* and *City Hunter*. In *Boys Are Easy*, the actor Brigitte as Ching is connected to the director Ching through the hypertexted link of 'Asia'. In other words, it is only when a compounded and incremental 'Asia' mutuality is acknowledged, such as the connectivity of the character Brigitte-as-'Asia' when it meets the link of the director Ching who is responsible for creating Brigitte-as-'Asia', that a meaning surrounding Brigitte-as-Ching can be produced. The link of 'Asia' re-routes the mobility and flexibility of the elastic Asia text: Ching (the creator of 'Asia'), is now his own virtual reproduction through the hypertext of the Brigitte-as-'Asia'. In *Boys Are Easy*, 'Ching Siu-tung' emerges as a performative post-'Asia', a post, which in fact, must come before the 'pre' in order for the character of 'Asia' to be created. The hypertexted repetition of 'Asia' reconfigures, through Ching, a third time-space of multi-linear syntagmatic variations, which alter the stability of the signifieds (Brigitte, Ching, the films he directs, the famous action sequences he is responsible for, the films she appeared in, etc.). This movement enabled by the 'Asia' hypertext highlights the preposterous as an absurd strategy of movement where the pre and post are undifferentiated. Implied here is a refusal to submit to the signifier of return. This is evident in *The Bride With White Hair*.

In 1993, Brigitte also appeared in Ronnie Yu's cult classic period fantasy *The Bride With White Hair*. Again, Brigitte glamourises as she terrorises with the 'Asia' look gazed through the character of the 'Wolf Girl'. The film is an allegory and parody of communist China's most popular 1949 revolutionary-inspired theatrical play, *The White-Haired Girl*. Written in 1943 and reproduced in China as opera, film, ballet and even graphic art, *The White-Haired Girl* set the standard for all revolutionary acts to follow after 1949. In *The Bride With White Hair*, Brigitte-as-'Asia' problematises her role as the wild, hysterical and ferocious Wolf Girl, who is bound by her debt of honour to a cult controlled by Ji Wu Shang, brother and sister Siamese twins joined at the back. Here, examining the hypertext link enabled by Brigitte-as-'Asia' demands a connectivity accumulated by the memories of Mao's 'Wolf Girl'. Rather than the link of a young peasant woman 'tamed' and reunited with her fiance when rescued by the Red Army from the cave, Brigitte-as-'Asia' re-routes the idealistic portrait of the Communist Party as the new guide of the nation. The performative Asia hypertext uses the cut of the jump as a passage that interrogates such a subsumption through a simultaneous
connection that displaces Maoism and reunification. Rather than the spirit of Mao, Brigitte-as-'Asia'-Wolf-Girl fights adversity with (more) adversity. Adversity is hyperbolised through a ridiculous route comprising the same intensity of enigmatic femininity, spiked with the sexy fury of elongated white hair as sheets of blades, slapping, slicing and gashing through the Cantopop grooves and pulped fiction of cave walls, temple totems and river lakes. Not only is the brother-sister-joined-at-the-back Siamese twin dyad a little too absurd (they are far from identical), so too is the narrative of deceit and trust amidst true love, erotic sex, spectacular flying and walking on water stunts, and hyper comic violence. Clearly, the elastic hypertext signalled by Brigitte-as-'Asia'-Wolf-Girl accumulates the preposterous as a fantastic Communist fable incarnate. Such a refusal to submit to the signifier of return re-routes the cinema through a connectivity that links the historicity of the Communist fabled propaganda to the historicity of Canto-cinematic fantasy, highlighting the accumulative strategy of the 'Asia' hypertext as a preposterous practice of re-turn.\textsuperscript{17} This movement of re-turn is a cinema constituted in a transnational virtuality.

**Hypertextual Signifier 3**

**The Link as an Effect of Virtuality: Hong Kong as Queer (N)Asian**

Implicit in the preposterous practice of re-turn is the generic formation of cinema constituted in a transnational virtuality. This is supported by the feature of the link as a text in the hypertext system. As the function of a text is to produce an effect, the investigation here focuses on the hypertextual effects of the Brigitte-as-'Asia' link to highlight the transnational and virtual function of the Hong Kong cinematic interface.

By examining the Brigitte-as-'Asia' hypertextual effects produced in *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* and *Ashes of Time*, the preposterous practice of re-turn is routed and rooted in a direction imagined by the trajectory of 'South'. As a hypertexted effect of virtuality, this trajectory maps the emergent horizon of Hong Kong as a queer (n)Asian. Enabled by the image-world of Hong Kong's preposterous cinema, queer (n)Asian is a shared world comprising an imagined and transnational community, constituted by and is constitutive of the deployments of both 'queer' and 'Asian'.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1993, director Wong Kar-wai released, through his own Jet Tone Production Limited film company, with himself as executive producer, *The Eagle Shooting Heroes*. The Eagle
Shooting Heroes is a film adaptation of the first story in Jin Yong's Condor Heroes trilogy. Eagle is actually a comedy parody of Ashes of Time, Wong's (self-proclaimed) masterpiece released the following year in 1994. When comparing the year of their releases, Eagle can be considered Ashes's preposterous pre-post-parody. Indeed, Eagle is a post that really comes in the time of pre. However, what is significant here is that the principle characters of the Jin Yong story remain.

In both the films, the principle characters are cryptically known as Evil East, Poison West, Northern Beggar and Emperor South. This 'North, South, East, West' spatial metaphor of geography marks the beginning of Wong's cybernetic transnational trope of the crossroad that is repeated in Happy Together. What are pivotal here are the allegorical connotations that are attached to the citation of the spatial sites. In Ashes, both 'East' and 'West' are problematised in this transnational configuration: they are both viruses corrupted by their own toxins. 'East' is a nostalgic mercenary hiding in the desert pining for his true love; 'West' is an amnesiac after insisting on drinking the 'Happy-Go-Lucky' memory erasing wine. 'North' and 'South' are stereotypical, but are also equally challenged: the North is poor, the South rules. This North-South trope is made manifest by the diegetic context which is the late Southern Sung Dynasty. The South, known as Sung Han China, is threatened by the North, known as the Jurchen Chin Empire of the Mongolian Khan.

Exquisitely filmed in the Yuli desert in China, the heterotopia of Hong Kong-in-transition is captured in the sandstormed and bandit-ridden desert. Clearly, as the diegetic site for the plot, the desert functions as a transnational interface caught by the historicity of the forces of North, South, East and West. Becoming pre-East in a post-West within the rhetoric of return, Hong Kong's nostalgia and amnesia are underscored. 'Happy-Go-Lucky' is the Cantonese vernacular for Hong Kong, as a hyper-modernised place where one lives for the moment. Hyper panic Hong Kong, as the epistemological crux that interrogates both East and West, is an oxymoron: nostalgically amnesiac. Becoming post-South in a pre-North within the power invested in the symbolic capital, its anxiety is also highlighted. The beggar from the North is characterised by the hypocrisy underpinning China's post-Socialist Reform: in the film, the beggar turns into a mercenary, devoid of ethics.

Arguably, the most significant trope in Ashes is the 'Asia' hypertext accumulated by the Emperor of the South. Brigitte-as-'Asia' recreates this role as the schizophrenic Murong Yin/Yang Emperor of the South. Here, the trajectory of 'South' is highlighted by the

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Brigitte-as-'Asia' queer (n)Asian trope. A polysexual Brigitte-as-'Asia' performs as both the brother Murong Yang of the sister Murong Yin. 'Are you a man or a woman?' Evil East asks Emperor South in the beginning of the film. Again, Brigitte beguiles with the 'Asia' look, as femmeboy and butchgirl personified. Switching personas almost presposterously from one frame to the next and one line to the next, s/he is seductively masculine and relentlessly feminine. The status of Hong Kong as 'South' is consolidated in Ashes when the hypertexted effects of Brigitte-as-'Asia' is considered. The authenticity of Murong Yin and Murong Yang lies in the fact that, like transitional Hong Kong, one is either the one or the other of the other. At the end of the sequence on Emperor South, we see him/her re-enacting the same pugilistic 'Asia' action stances. This time, like the last time, s/he is on her/his own, as the Defeat-Seeking Loner, fighting and trying to defeat his/her own shadow.

Mireille Rosello reformulates a new geometry using hypertext to reinvent the very notion of 'context', and proposes 'randomness' as a strategy because it promotes a vision of the traveller that departs from that of both the user of maps and the creator of maps. This potential, when applied to the accumulative effect of Brigitte-as-Asia in a hyper space that is going nowhere (but endlessly repeats as a recombinant of and on itself through the link before), is worth noting. Following Michel de Certeau's Practice of Everyday Life where the presence of the wanderer as a collective and virtual presence hovering above the real collapses the distinctions between the story/travel/map from the body of the storyteller/traveller/map reader, Rosello argues that "(t)ravellers who do not go anywhere, apparently, do not need maps....(T)hey subvert the idea of destination." The hypertext of Brigitte-as-'Asia', in this regard, could be "a space where narrative seduction is reinvented as a result of the deterritorialization of stories."

This random new geometry where the context is reinvented through a deterritorialisation of stories is evident on two levels: in the image world of the text, and the shared transnational and physical world of its effects. First, let us consider the parodic play in Eagle. Through a hilarious comedy comprising flying boots running on wheels, human-sized rubber lizards, song and dance combinations, realtime and slow frames, fast forward and rewind edit cuts, and pansexual cross-dressing tropes, characters switch as they hallucinate, fight and perform. Brigitte-as-'Asia' is the prince and princess at the same time, betrothed to the South Emperor (Tony Leung Kar-Fai) who is gay, transvestite and straight at the same time. The film replays as it fast forwards through a random rewind where nothing and no one is who or what they seem to be, real, reel or virtually real. Brigitte-as-'Asia' is the hypertext that dispenses and
atomises the text of *Eagle*: at any one time, s/he is substituted and reproduced as the others in the cast, as Carina, Tony, Leslie and Maggie; or the other characters, as Queen, King, Prince, Princess, Emperor, Foreigner, Indigenous, Woman, Man, Lesbian, Transvestite, Homosexual, etc. Brigitte-as-'Asia'-South-Hong Kong exemplifies the hypertexted signification of such a strategy.

As a queer meta-star that hypertextually signifies, she encapsulates a movement that ceaselessly and randomly repeats as it recites on itself. Like her own shadow, Brigitte-as-'Asia' is the rhetorical moebius loop where the pre and the post are one and the same, but on the other side. This demonstrates the preposterous practice of re-turn. It performs a narrative closure that subverts the idea of the destination. Such a culture re-routes through a virtuality that engages and become events in a shared physical diasporic world.

II. Reflect on Role as Researcher

**Problems posed by the subject and research context:**

**Hong Kong Cinema’s Subaltern Status in Asia and in the West**

For indigenous Hong Kong cinema writers such as Esther Yau, the Hong Kong Film Festival elites and New York-based Ackbar Abbas, the apparition of 1997 has provided fodder for the theorisation of Hong Kong as a cultural formation which culminates towards an end-point: a disappearing and disappeared culture. Here, Hong Kong cinema is reposed romantically, celebrated as emanating from an essential and authentic ‘truth’ which is that of a culture and a product that is vanishing and has perished.27 Such an episteme, when premised on the splitting of the function of 1997 as two distinct categories and stages, appears as a discourse of sanitised purification. It suggests that by protecting the ‘pre’ from the ‘post’, Hong Kong cinema can be demarcated and asserted through a protection from the contamination and subsumption of hegemonic values. This indigenous perspective alludes to a cinema as a form of ‘national’ culture, one that does not allow for the complexities and ambivalence of its place within the transnational contradictions of modernity. Inadvertently, it has the danger of leaving Hong Kong cinema suspended, to be locked, lost and effaced in 1997 time. My study of Hong Kong cinema suggests that one way to rethink the singularity of such a geography is through the concept of diaspora.
The Politics of the Researcher’s (Dis)Location

This study is motivated by the politics of my (dis)location within the paradigms and disciplinary boundaries of the Western, Australian institutional framework in which I have been placed, first as an undergraduate in communications and women’s studies, then as a postgraduate candidate in film studies, and now, as a cultural studies practitioner in an English department. To say that I have been struck by the acute undercurrents of Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism inherent in the ways in which knowledges about the West are endorsed through the ignorance and absence of the non-West runs the risk of denying the efficacy of some of the resistant, alternative and oppositional knowledges that are informed by the politics of, for example, feminism, Marxism, anti-racism, anti-heterosexism and anti-colonialism. Nonetheless, I feel it imperative to point to the hierarchical ways in which these ‘against-the-grain’ discourses construct their epistemologies which privilege some ‘Other(s)’ more than Others.

The historical and theoretical developments of ‘Asian Cinema’ within the (Western) institution is a case in point here. Either as an adjunct to the curriculum distribution in Asian Studies and/or Media Studies, the focus of ‘Asian Cinema’, as a pedagogy, has been situated around the frameworks of cross-cultural reading perspectives and differences in representational systems. Questions raised direct attention to the local discourses around the nature of the film medium, its role in society as well as on narrative strategies and film styles. Whether as an object of pedagogic, ontological, industrial and institutional difference, or as a system of social process which engages in the production of cultural meanings in filmmaking and filmviewing, the value of ‘Asian Cinema’ courses—how it ‘fits’ into a twelve-week format without upsetting the main/malestream distribution, which ‘best’ textbooks are available (in English), what films are ‘most accessible’ (and most ‘representative’ of a society, preferably with ‘grammatically correct’ English subtitling)—highlight both the consumptive and subsumptive statuses accorded to the prioritisation of ‘Asian’ films. Whilst the term ‘Asian Cinema’ is recognised as a misnomer, it is nonetheless constitutive of certain ‘national’ cinemas, namely the classical Japanese films of Mizoguchi, Kurosawa and Ozu, the Japanese New Wave of the 1960’s, the Italian-neorealism-influenced Bengali cinema of Satyajit Ray and the Fifth Generation Reform cinema of post-Mao, post-revolutionary China. Under this system of distribution, the differences of, for example, popular Hindi cinema, with its three-hour-six-songs-and-seven-dances
epic/dharmic performances, the martial arts films of Bruce Lee and the kineasthetic humour of Jackie Chan, or the postmodern nihilistic pastiche of Juzo Itami, Takeshi Kitano and Wong Kai-wai, might be stressed as comparisons. The emphasis is on ‘certified’ award-winning films from international festivals, and ‘authorised’ references from acclaimed Western filmmakers, journals and critics are the measures employed in the value-judgement of these Asian films.²⁹

If there is a term to invoke the marginality of the Other of the Other,¹⁰ Hong Kong cinema is an example which can lay claim to such a status within the rubric of what is ‘Chinese cinema’.³¹ Whilst a few Hong Kong films, like *A Chinese Ghost Story* series and the stylised and slick gangster-thrillers of John Woo and Ringo Lam may enjoy cult-status amongst certain cinema buffs in the West, these films are relegated to the denigratory ‘popular’ and ‘low-art’ streams, not unlike the ‘mindless’ and ‘commercial excesses’ attached to the status of Spielberg-Lucas productions. These films are fetishised as camp in the West, and sensationalist in Hong Kong and Asia. When the films of Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige privilege art-house-month-long-stints, those of Edward Yang’s and Hou Xiaoxian’s merit screenings at festival venues but one still has to resource ‘Chinatown cinemas’ for the films of Stephen Chow, Ronnie Yu, Mabel Cheung, Jeff Lau and Wong Jing, it is telling of the Sino/Mandarin-centric criteria used in the cultural ‘ranking’ of ‘Chinese cinema’.³²

In the context of the institution and its paradigmatic location(s), two related factors concurrently affect the low-value-status of Hong Kong cinema. First, when the form and content of Occidental film theories with their totalising, homogenising and universalising tendencies immediately preclude the selection of any non-Western film texts as basis for analyses and discussions (lest one be accused of cultural imperialism!), these gestures can further accentuate and reinforce some of the self-serving epistemological assumptions employed in the consumption, commodification and deification of (Western) (film) knowledges. Second, when the ‘nationalised’ content pedagogise ‘Asian cinema’ through the neo-colonial global networks of cultural (re)production (festivals, reviews, awards, etc.), the context by which the ‘national’ cinemas of Asia are legitimated sanctions a certain prioritisation which devalues some industries and cinemas more than others.

This instance is perhaps reflective of the broader discursive frameworks by which the epistemologies of knowledges are institutionalised, validated and circulated through the ‘canonisation’ of certain ‘marginal’ texts, theories and theorists. The concept of
marginality, when formulated not only in terms of the hegemonic center and periphery but reformulated in terms of the canonisation of certain margins, needs to be reexamined in order to dismantle its authority and redefine the given arrangements. When Hong Kong cinema exists as it does at the edge of received filmic traditions, posing the existence of Hong Kong films in terms of contemporary critical discourses allows us to retrieve this industry from erasure and recognising its differential nature facilitates the disruption of monolithic categorisations like ‘Third World cinema’, ‘Asian cinema’ or ‘Chinese cinema’. In this sense, this study is an attempt to undo the canonical economy established in the Western institution and the dynamics of its cultural authority.

To say the least, the relationship between the West and the Rest has always been mediated by cinema. When films cross national and international boundaries, any attempt to theorise about filmmaking and cinema spectatorship in the non-West is to evoke the formations of the social and the collective in the making of texts and contexts. From Tsui Hark, John Woo, Clara Law, Ann Hui to Wong Kar-wai, the multiple forms of Hong Kong cinema—training to mentoring to inspiring—can be argued as being influenced by the technology of the Western cinema. The cinema interpellates and also counterinterpellates. In this study, I argue that Hong Kong films, surfacing from their indigenous ‘marginal’ location to one which serves as a critique of their unique position as that which disrupts East and West, inevitably negotiate the thresholds of different modernities across the different histories of colonialism, feudalism, communism and neocapitalism. To a certain extent, this affect expresses the splitting effect between the location of the cinema and its postcolonial diaspora.

Implicit in the politics of my discursive and physical local is also the specificity of my marginal relation to Hong Kong cinema, a position which I can only have the privilege to claim as an otherness residual in that part which constitutes my diasporic South-East Asian British colonial history. Hong Kong’s transition from the British colonial, capitalist West to the Chinese communist, post-socialist East was also marked by the period which separated my early ‘innocent’ viewing of Cantonese, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, Hindi and Hollywood films from within the neo-Confucian confines of the Chinese diaspora in Singapore, to my current diasporic theorisation about Hong Kong cinema from the postcolonial settler colony revelling in the neoconservative and racist currencies of a post-Hansonite Australia. What began as a fetishistic identification with the specificity of the Cantonese vernacular in a Mandarin-normative and Malay-nationalised ‘home’ soon eclipsed to function as a technology for mediating the voluntary ‘exile’ of refashioning the place of an elsewhere.
Both fact and fantasy, the agent of Hong Kong cinema is a heterological process for me. Going south from Hong Kong into Singapore into Australia, the medium of this double (edged) narrative of transition has undoubtedly set into motion the conflicts of personal subjectivity, as well as the multiple subjectivities of the contradictory diasporic screens of Western, non-Western, Asian, local, global and transnational film spectatorships. It involves looking simultaneously to the ‘here’ and ‘there’ of both West and East, idealising, consuming, subjecting, negating, resisting, subverting, and finally, theorising, practising and writing. In this regard, I admit that this project began its roots from the (im)migrancy of my multiple border crossings of marginality, from the contingency of a triple displacement (of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, cartography), seized as an attempt to (re)frame the geography of Hong Kong cinema. Through a radical transformation of an archivistic mobility of its constituencies and its communities, this study aims to engender, in the process, the routes of its belonging. As such, the identity-trope of this study—from the historical frames of colonial Britishness to the provisionality of heterogenous Chineseness in Asia-Australia—unabashedly interrogates as it performs with the decentered movement of travel, from the epistemological and the literal locations of the institution to the discursive to the physical. If such a movement appears as an emphasis on the disjunctive and the disruptive, it is the pre-post condition and consequence of the deconstruction of the power relations between and within the constantly shifting sites of the center and the periphery. Transiting across and beyond the discursive timezones of Hong Kong to Singapore to Australia, it attempts to cathect at the emergence of the third space of a resistant and reinscribed marginality which performs as it remembers, recites and reiterates, through a simultaneous criss-crossing of the fragments of local stories which will inevitably link with the incommensurabilities of global memories. From the discursive recall of a Singapore-identified Taiwanese Brigitte Lin Qingxia to the post-adolescent charges of the queering space metatextualised by Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing, lies the hypertexted Hong Kong transsexual pleasures of ‘Asia The Invincible’, the virtually (real)ised e-raced tomboy desires of Fung Bo-bo and the transnational latex sublime of Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk. Here, I propose that, rather than the futility of a disappearing culture, the significance of what I am proposing as a diasporic Hong Kong culture can offer a point of departure for another beginning of the one and the same postnational, local and global network which also meets at the tryst of the sign that is the self-writing of Hong Kong.
111. The Potential for Application or Practice

1. The Constitution of Postcolonial Postmodernity: The Formation of a Diaspora Culture

This study marks Hong Kong's crisis of sovereignty within the period of its transition as distinctly postcolonial and postmodern, without necessarily experiencing them within the same timeline as the West. Postcolonial postmodernities can be argued as emerging from the catastrophe of an event that simply happens. Colonisation testifies as an example of such an event where the shock of signification is parried through the colonial spectacle of the colonised. Another instance which testifies to the catastrophic nature of such an event is the signifier of the Joint Declaration. Where its signature officially authorises the crisis of transition, the shock effect of such an event, evident in ensuing economic crisis and accelerated migration, is negated through the spectacle of the cinema as a form of therapy and distraction.

Pre-Post-1997 is a cultural model for making sense of such a milieu. In order to approach pre-post-1997 as a temporal-spatial movement, it is necessary to engage with the concepts of time and space. As a temporal concept, postcolonial theory enables a rethinking of Hong Kong through problematising the signifiers such as 'post' and 'colonialism'. While pre-post-1997 shares such similar temporal preoccupations in its postcolonial interrogation of the limits of the 'pre' and the 'post', it is also an attempt to dislodge the linearity of the postcolonial dominant premised on the emancipatory political economy of decolonisation. Rather than a resistant culture caught in the binary homological time-lag, pre-post-1997 reformulates the cinema as an emergent and interstitial culture modulated on a heterogeneous and multiple time. As a spatial concept, the mobility of diaspora enables a rethinking of Hong Kong through destabilising the fixity of its location. Where theorisations of space have focused on the singularity of Hong Kong in relation to different imaginations of geography, locations and place, such theorisations have not intersected with the transnational movement of culture. Pre-post-1997 engages with Hong Kong as a diasporic space where the displacement and the subsequent reinscription of culture highlights the changing economy of location.
2. The Narrative of Transition: Hybridity

Post-Declaration Hong Kong contests the fixity of a disappearing space and the teleology of linear time to emerge as an interstitial border engaging with the mobility of both time and space. It produces a formation of transition that acknowledges the fact of displacement and enables its subsequent reinscription of culture in such a way that permits the transformation of location. As a critical trajectory as well as a space of cultural production, transition attends to the displacement of post-Declaration Hong Kong as a double movement. Such a movement is characterised by hybridity which highlights its condition as a transnational diaspora.

Constituted in an experience of being different to the one of the other (system) and the other of the other (system), such an encounter with the two systems calls for a negotiation with the fact of its excess. This negotiation is articulated as a mobile trajectory because it is characterised by an anxiety heightened by and translated into a form of differential repetition. Differential repetition is a process which highlights an awareness in its incommensurability and an ambivalence in its identification not only with others, but also with itself. In this encounter, hybridity is produced not only as an excess in its double relation to itself; it surfaces as a form of proximity between its anachronistic presence and its consciousness.

The topography of return marks 1997 as a turning point that involves a paradox of time and space: the movement towards 1997 has already found itself on the other side (post), but at the same point that it was before (pre). Here, it can be argued that Hong Kong’s anxiety has produced a temporal future perfect culture that is translational in its function: Hong Kong’s anxiety around 1997 has developed itself into a pre-post consciousness that is a form of self-identification constituted in itself-as-other. This culture is termed as pre-post-1997.

Implicit in such a culture is the emergence of an agency underpinned by the transition formula. It is a recognition of the hybridity of the two systems. Here, the panic of anxiety translates hybridity-as-proximity as both disjunctive and belated. Pre-post-1997 is characterised by this disjunctive and belated sensibility because it is an agency that has precipitated a confrontation highlighted in the legitimation crises of both the Empires of China and Britain.

In such a milieu, Hong Kong functions as the site where uneven and unequal cultural locations are contested through a disjunctive temporality that forces hegemonic China and Britain to question the precariousness of their existence. Here, as a form of belated
consciousness, pre-post-1997 functions as a point of departure for the formation of a supplementary culture that translates and resignifies hegemonic sovereignty. In this formation, pre-post-1997 fixes the subject of the return of sovereignty and yet, at the same time, repudiates it. This disjunction produces a formation characteristic of a third time-space.

3. A Third Time-Space: Transnational Identity

As Hong Kong’s proximity to both China and Britain has displaced both sovereignties to highlight its incompatible and incommensurable difference, such a proximity to both the East and the West opens up a transnational identity that repudiates the antagonistic dual relationship between the East and the West. In its nearness or as the next in time and space, proximity-as-repetition underpins the formula of a global culture that is mobile and self-referentially hypertextual. This is evident in Hong Kong’s postcolonial and postmodern conjunction where the postcolonial local deauthorises the postmodern global at that same time that the postmodern-postcolonial transforms the essential and nativist national into the diasporic transnational. Such a conjunction highlights the absence of an original referent and produces the formation of a transnational diaspora that underscores pre-post-1997. As a city comprising many races and nations populated through different periods of migrations, post-Declaration Hong Kong is clearly a place of transnational encounters. As a part of the Chinese diaspora where many of Hong Kong’s (twice) (im)migrants are themselves also globally transplanted Hong Kong emigrants, post-Declaration Hong Kong clearly signifies diaspora. More significantly, the globalisation of its cinema in recent years has witnessed not just the emergence of its cinema as the center of global popular culture in a diaspora comprising at least 30 million people, but also the formation of its technology for the creation of a diasporic, migratory, archivistically mobile and travelling culture. In this transnationality, the cinema produces a self-identification that is not a celebration of nationalism or de-essentialised metropolitan exilic experience; rather, it articulates an identity that inscribes the transformation of its belonging. Such a transformation is evident in the diaspora where cinemaplexes and video malls in global Chinatowns have not only localised the periphery of the heterogeneity of Chinese belonging; but the subcultural and non-Chinese neo-urban tribes have also appropriated the Canto-cinematic margins for its articulation of non-belonging. Nothwithstanding the globalisation of its culture vis-a-vis the commodification of its form evident in the current chinoiserie kung fu trend from Hollywood to Pepsi to Levis to the Spice Girls, it can be argued that Hong Kong cinema has become a space for the contestation
and acclamation of a diasporic non-belonging, in a milieu where notions of 'home' and 'exile' are as symptomatic and as anachronistic as its impossibility of return.

Clearly, in this transnational diasporic trajectory, the fetishisation of the difference of the Other within the problematics of Oriental and Occidental representation is destabilised through the translation of the archives of the West and the East. In such a process, translation is always belated, and its difference is the result of irreducibilities arising from the proximity of transnational exchange and encounter. Through the translation of anxiety, panic culture emerges as a form of self-identification that is differential; its anxious repetition is only ever a duplicity of the copy, and its proxy is that which stands in as the present absent sign for the original signifier, constituting itself as the alterity which is the citation of Hong Kong. Conditioned by a double movement signalling the awareness of the 'pre' and the 'post' of its handover to 'the motherland' in 1997, pre-post-1997 reinvests the culture of Hong Kong with the panic, the promise and the politics of re-turn.

4. The Politics of Re-turn

As a narrative of transition, pre-post-1997 consciousness is situated around the liminal zone of reclamation. If to reclaim is to return to reterritorialise, it is a performative process that must be done "with the proviso that one moves on," because the process of reinscription is constantly refiguring. Indeed, this movement onwards is a movement forward in time, towards 1997. For most of the people of Hong Kong, the reversion to Chinese rule signifies a symbolic return to one's roots (gen). Yet, within this liminal zone, the search for one's roots must begin within a 'rooting out' (gen chu) of one's already hybridised place in the contradictory histories of colonialisation, capitalism, feudalism and communism. First, to attain the character 'gen' from genchu, one must discard the character 'chu'. In other words, the retrieval of the original referent, 'roots' (gen), must be simultaneously accompanied by a displacement of the sign, 'eradicate' (chu). The deconstructive chu, which calls to task an interrogation of the aforementioned legacies, functions as a prerequisite for the belated arrival of gen. The deferred meaning of gen highlights its original presence as an absent referent, as a form of imitation or copy. Here, the search for roots results in an affect which articulates its condition of possibility as an effect of its condition of impossibility vis-à-vis the impurity or hybridity of roots.
Pre-post-1997 manifests itself as this supplementary emergent in the deferent consciousness of *gen*. To move forward and to accept the panic and promise of return to the motherland is to recognise the direction encountered by the hybridity of its roots. This recognition is characterised by a proximity consisting of a transnational culture of movement. In this consciousness, through the routes of hybridity, pre-post-1997 performs as the irreducibility of the ambivalence between the roots of the East and the West. Clearly, such a consciousness highlights a politics of re-turn: rather than a return to the impossibility of roots, rather than a return to the motherland, a politics of re-turn is marked by a turn away from the motherland. In such a milieu, pre-post-1997 articulates a culture of movement which inscribes itself through the excess of the hybrid, surfacing as the force of the rupture in the space of the diasporic.
Endnotes


3. This paper utilises ‘Brigitte’ instead of the proper institutional citation of surname. ‘Brigitte’ is applied to synchronise with her everyday vernacular popularity in Hong Kong and across the Chinese diaspora. This study stresses that Mikhail Iampolski’s recent mobilisation of the theory of intertextuality in the form of iconographic motifs is slightly different to the mobilisation of the metatext as a belated critical reading strategy. Iampolski argues that cinema’s intertextuality is evident in the site of the hero as an intertextual body that is enabled by the iconographic relationship of cinema to the memory of literary texts. In The Memory of Tiresias: Intertextuality and Film. Trans. Harsha Ram. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 193-220. Where Iampolski’s anagrammatic resignification alludes to the play of titles, subtexts and sound, and consequently the hero is produced through the body-as-sign, the use of metatext here is deployed as a belated strategy that derives meaning not from textual effects, but from destabilising the normative position of textual effects. As will be illustrated shortly, Iampolski’s theory of intertextuality is different to the mobilisation of hypertext because of the emphasis on the meta-star as a function of the link.

4. In The Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy uses the term ‘meta’ to propose that ‘Black’ be re-created as a “new metacultural identity.” See The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness. (London: Verso, 1993), 28. By this, Gilroy is suggesting that alliances that are mobilised around ‘Black’ move beyond stereotypical signifiers such as language, religion and skin colour. For Gilroy, black, as a metacultural identity, insists on a new constitution of black citizenship through the transatlantic history of the slave trade. This study mobilises the term ‘meta’ in the same way.


6. Because connectivity underpins the hypertext system, hypertext theorist George Landow regards electronic linking as the most important feature of hypertext, “particularly as it contrasts to the world of print technology.” In George Landow. Ed. Hyper/Text/Theory. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins

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University Press, 1994). 6. Linking blurs all boundaries as it usurps the conventional notions of completion and a finished product when it connects, for example, fiction with nonfiction, and instructions with the vernacular. It emphasizes the medium’s polyvocality, open-endedness, multilinearity, and highlights the culture as transient, dynamic and indeterminate.


8 Catherine Millot writes that “the transsexual position is ruled by metonymy, whereby a part is taken for a whole.” See Horsesex. (New York: Autonomedia, 1990), 100. See also Morgan Holmes. “Remembering A Queer Body.” Undercurrents. Summer 1994:11-13. The transsexual has a dual relationship with the phallus and the Other as a dyad. This relationship is structured by an instability of positions ruled by what Millot argues as “the law of transitivity.” (Ibid.) In this law, the subject is the Other, and the Other is the subject. In Swordsman II and The East Is Red, the decision to be castrated is motivated by the desire for martial arts prowess. Following Millot, such a transsexual position is metonymically reproduced by the substitution of a phallus with an incarnation of the Other. As an incarnated Other, ‘Asia’ is transformed in such a way that there are no obstacles in the passage from the imaginary phallus to the Other. Hence, ‘Asia’ becomes Invincible.

9 Full of high tech and ancient gadetry such as flying ships, bifurcating hooks, deadly needles, and red cotton thread that can pierce chains of steel, Swordsman II begins with a fierce and macho Highlander warrior called ‘Asia The Invincible’ decapitating an opponent. An epic martial arts period fantasy, the film plays with the signifiers of foreign imperialism such as Spanish and Dutch warships, Japanese ninjas and the corrupt Ming dynasty’s army. Deployed by Brigitte, ‘Asia’ appears feminine. At the beginning of Swordsman II, ‘Asia’ has a deep male voice. Despite this, she uses her newly acquired feminine wiles to flirt with and tease Fox. In the film, she does not have sex with her lover but spends her time sewing. Her weapons are her sewing paraphernalia, the flying needles and the cotton thread. As a female pretending to be male transitioning to female, Brigitte-as-transsexual is an image of hyper-ambivalence. With a turn of her face, ‘Asia’ is capable of transforming instantaneously from seductively calm and child-like demure courtesan singing and sewing to evil blood-lusty monster who severs limbs, detonates mountains and dismembers bodies.


11 In the film, ‘Asia’ reproduces the code of Asia in order to expose the conventions that structure it. Structurally constructed in the films, this code represented by ‘Asia’ functions as a metaphor for Hong Kong’s marginal outsider position vis-à-vis China and Britain. ‘Asia’ hails from the indigenous Highlands, making her/him a marginal ‘outsider’ in the Chinese Han imaginary. This is evident in the narrative of Swordsman 11, which is motivated by the colonised Highlander challenge to corrupt and exploitative Ming rule. As a hypertext link that connects two positions, ‘Asia’-as-Hong Kong functions as the space that interrogates Asia. In the film, ‘Asia’ connotes different meanings to different groups. To the Highlanders, ‘Asia’ is Cult King, God, Demon and Traitor. To the Chinese Ming army, ‘Asia’ is Capital, Destruction, Seduction and Amusement. To the Spanish and Dutch imperialists, ‘Asia’ is the Ancient Resolute Power of the Secret Sacred Scroll which they plot to steal. To the Japanese ninjas (themselves outcasts and murderers in their own country), ‘Asia’ is Double Agent, Distant Friend and Foe. To the Korean hookers, ‘Asia’ is High Queen, Saviour and Manipulator. To Fox, ‘Asia’ is Sexy, Mysterious and Feminine. To Snow, ‘Asia’ is Butch, Sadist, Pleasure, Absolute and Love. Clearly, the code of ‘Asia’-as-Hong Kong, through its function as a hypertext link, problematises the space of (and power within and between the newly realigned and repositioned nation-states of) Asia. As the film unfolds, we learn ‘Asia’ has stolen the Sacred Scroll (the only signifier left intact from the first film in the Swordsman trilogy) to perfect his martial arts skills. As his power increases, he becomes increasingly feminine. Preparing to transform himself into superpower status by castrating himself so he can control the Sun Moon Sect and eventually the world, ‘Asia’ sacrifices his masculinity. Fox (Jet Li) is a drunk who has retreated from the chaotic world of the jianghu. He travels to a reunion of the Wah Mountain School with his tomboy buddy, Kiddo (Michelle Reis), who is in love with him. He, in turn, is in love with a Highlander sect girl, Ling (Rosamund Kwan Chi-lam). Her father, Wu (Lau Shin), imprisoned by his own ambitious and wicked brother, ‘Asia’, is the proper and rightful leader of the Sun Moon Sect. A duel eventually ensues between ‘Asia’ and the Wah Mountain School and Sun Moon Sect coalition. At the end of the film, ‘Asia’ falls off a cliff and Wu resumes his status as leader. But he too, transforms himself, into the evil megalomaniac ‘Asia’. In the sequel, Swordsman 3: The East Is Red, we discover that ‘Asia’ is not dead. She is resurrected and led out of seclusion, only to discover that there are now hundreds of fake ‘Asias’ creating havoc in her name, including her cross-dressing masochistic lesbian lover Snow (Joey Wang). The film chronicles her search for identity as she duels and colludes with Japanese ninjas in submarines, cannibalistic occult Highlanders, Chinese soldiers in secret deals with Spanish warships and female Korean hookers in a camp of wanderers. The East Is Red is filled with gravity-defying action at its hyper best, with jet-powered boots, levitating warships, sky invading kite-like ninjas, and of course, the usual now-mandatory dose of flying needles and fatal strings of red sewing thread.

12 This resonates with what theories surrounding globalisation have called the time-space compression of the accumulation strategies of late capitalism and flexible transnational connections. See David Harvey. The Condition of Postmodernity (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Doreen Massey. “Power—


15 Ching is the martial arts director in The East is Red.


17 When Brigitte unofficially retired from Hong Kong show business in 1994, director Jeff Lau and action director Ching Siu-tung made a film the following year called A Chinese Odyssey Part Two: A Cinderella (Journey to the West II). This film creates a split personality twin with the ‘Asia’ look called Lin Qingxia, or Lam Ching-Ha (depending on whether one reads the Chinese subtitles or listens to the Cantonese dialogue, both are Brigitte’s real name). Clearly, the accumulative strategy of the Brigitte-as-‘Asia’ hypertext highlights the preposterous as a practice where the pre and post are undifferentiated. In becoming hypertexted, Brigitte and ‘Asia’ are now virtually real and really virtual. This is the episteme of the Pandora’s Box, the narrative of a Chinese odyssey, the seduction of Cinderella, the pre-post-map of the pre-post-1997 journey to the West, like Tsui Hark, John Woo, Ringo Lam and Chow Yun-Fat in Hollywood, Clara Law and Eddie Fong in Australia, Maggie Cheung in France, Michelle Yeoh in James Bond, and Yuen Woo-ping in The Matrix.

18 In most neo-Confucian postcolonial Asian cultures, the process of ‘coming out’, visibility and identity are negotiated in at least two ways. First, unlike most Anglo-Saxon post-Stonewall cultures where ‘coming out’ involves a process of leaving the blood family and joining alternative communities, ‘coming out’ in this instance surfaces as a problematic within the networks of kinship and its obligations that make up the blood family, and contain the individual into it. Chris Berry argues that this trope constitutes “a site of cultural hybridity and contradiction in which both selfhood as identity and selfhood as family are rewritten.” Chris Berry. “Asian Values, Family Values: Film, Video and Lesbian and Gay Identities.” Journal of Homosexuality 39:3-4 (1999) (forthcoming). Second, visibility appears as something that is lived in marginal spaces and for the most part, these spaces are not alternative communities. These two levels of negotiation are significant when considering the epistemology of ‘queer (n)Asian’. Within the diasporic Asian queer circuits, queer (n)Asian emerges as a transnational imaginary. It is epistemologised, at least in part, through the incommensurabilities of narrations mapped by the irreversible crossings of marginal spaces of, for example, the privilege of virtual knowledges reproduced in the circuits of electronic mail, the interfaces that charge the underground of ‘invisible’ Asian queer spaces in dominant Anglo cultures, the global economies of heterosexual, homosexual, Oriental and Occidental imaginings, and together, the international itinerary maps which connect shared stories, stories which are ignited in part through common and contradictory desires of consumption, circulation and reproduction of Chinese, Asian, Western, Australian, straight and queer discourses. The concept of ‘queer (n)Asian’ illustrated in this study is a critical strategy that deploys the instabilities of ‘queer’ and ‘Asian’. Similar to the anti-heteronormativity of queer, the mobilisation of the term ‘Asian’ in this study is intentionally strategic. It mobilises the term ‘Asian’ whilst acknowledging the heterogeneities of geographies, histories and times, and the problems of this term. Clearly, there are many different discursive constructions of ‘Asia’, both within and without the geographical region. In this study, ‘Asia’ and ‘Asian’ function both as a discourse of regionality, as well as a performative. The concept of queer (n)Asian as an emergent horizon of transnationality inflects the imagined community engendered by the activist group, Queer Nation. Lauren Berlant explores the in-your-face activist politics of Queer Nation and examines the concept of queer nationality as a form of citizenship. See Lauren Berlant. The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Berlant’s mobilisation of sex and citizenship is worth noting here, as it highlights a liminal and transnational identity discussed in The Geography of Identity. Ed. Patricia Yaeger. (Michigan: University of

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Pre-Post-1997: Preposterous Hong Kong Cinema


19 Again, what is significant here is Wong’s recycling of stars, as well as his play with the meta-hypertexts of these stars, especially those of Brigitte’s. Both films mobilise the same cast, which include the top eight stars in Canto-cinema (Brigitte, Leslie, Tony Leung Chiu-Wai, Tony Leung Kar-Fai, Jackie Cheung, Maggie Cheung, Carina Lau and Charlie Yeung).

20 The same cast from Ashes are in Eagle but they play different roles.

21 Although Ashes is centered around the characters of East and West, as evidenced in its Chinese title, Dongchengxiejiu, which means ‘Evil East and West Poison’, it is argued here that the Emperor of the South is more pertinent when considering the transnationality of Hong Kong in this film.

22 Ackbar Abbas suggests that Murong Yin/Yang characterises “a system of double binds where no real action can take place.” See Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 66. Abbas’s spatial delineation, when underpinned by deja disparu, highlights a fixed disappearing space. This chapter’s reading of the queer trajectory of south repudiates Abbas’s reading to suggest that Murong Yin/Yang enables a culture of mobility.


26 Ibid, 139.


29 An instance of such a reference by Western filmmakers is evident in Quentin Tarantino’s endorsement of Jackie Chan at the 1995 MTV Awards and Wong Kar-wai at UCLA in 1995 at the launch of Chung King Express. Tarantino’s supporting introduction helped launched their transition to Hollywood.

30 The French feminist Luce Irigaray uses the term ‘the other of the other’ in theorising about the possibility of an alternative women-amongst-themselves female homosexual economy (as yet non-existent). For Irigaray, insofar as she already exists, woman as ‘the other of the other’ exists in

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the interstices of the realm of the Same (the hom[m]osexual economy of men where women are the objects of exchange). See *Speculum of the Other Woman.* Trans. Gillian Gill. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 243-264; *This Sex Which Is Not One.* Trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 170-197. When Irigaray’s epistemological assumptions are translated onto the paradigmatic position of Hong Kong cinema within ‘Chinese cinema’ or ‘Asian cinema’, it is easy to note the peripheral ascription of the marginal to Hong Kong cinema in relation the centers assumed by those ‘authorised’ and ‘certified’ aforementioned.

31 See Paul Fonoroffs remarks on ‘Hong Kong cinema (occupying) a distinct third place when compared with the best work coming out of China and Taiwan....’ In “A Brief History of Hong Kong Cinema.” *Renditions* 29-30 (1988):308.

32 I am not suggesting that this example is indicative of normative practices in the West. I want to stress that ‘certified’ Hong Kong films, especially after the ‘authorisation’ of award ‘badges’, do travel within the international festival circuits. This is especially accentuated in the selection of films presented in those few instances where Hong Kong cinema warrants a ‘retrospective package’ or ‘festival highlight’. I also want to point to the commercial interests dominating mainstream film production and distribution in Hong Kong as a factor contributing to the elision of Hong Kong films in the West. However, my point here relates to how the value, in the commodification of certain industrial/cultural practices in the global consumption of Fifth Generation Chinese and Taiwanese ‘New Wave’ cinemas, when used to as a normalising strategy to quantify the ‘worthiness’ of contemporary Hong Kong cinema, affects the pedagogy of Hong Kong cinema in the Western institution.

33 For the term ‘counterinterpellation,’ see Hamid Naficy. “Theorizing ‘Third World’ Film Spectatorship.” *Wide Angle* 18:4 (October 1996):3-26. Here, Naficy suggests the hailing effects of cinematic interpellation is invoked at the same time as it is challenged by the indigenous historical and cultural practices of the spectator who is no longer consuming but producing the meaning of the movie. Although Naficy cites the examples of spectator haggling in the theatre and Western texts in the non-West, I extend Naficy’s counterinterpellation, as a pre-post-1997 identity effect of self-narrativisation, self-fashioning and self-understanding, in the form of a preposterous hypertexted cinema.

34 Singapore is 78% Chinese, 14% Malay and 7% Indian. It has 4 official state languages (English, Malay, Mandarin Chinese and Tamil). English is the official language of bureaucracy; Malay is the official national language; in 1979, the socially engineered and politically sanctioned ‘Speak Mandarin’ Campaign launched Mandarin Chinese. It was designed to erase the heterogeneity of ethnic Chinese, which comprises speakers from Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese linguistic backgrounds. Since then, unless Cantonese films from Hong Kong are dubbed in Mandarin, they are not allowed to be screened in the cinemas.

35 In the foreword to Michel de Certeau’s *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other,* Wlad Godzich writes that heterology is a term that is posed as a philosophical countertradition that could be described as “being deeply suspicious of the Parmenidean principle of the identity of thought and being.” In *Heterologies: Discourses on the Other.* Trans. Brian Massumi. Foreword by Wlad Godzich. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), vii. As this study is not the place to analyse the exhaustive historical emergence of the discourse of the other, I will not elaborate on this here. Briefly, heterology is mobilised insofar as it focuses on a discourse of resistance that interrogates the interplay of the representational and the nonrepresentational, whereby the logic of the other constitutes the discourse’s mode of relation to its own historicity at the site of its utterance. Here, I argue that this discourse requires a double movement of ‘pre’ and ‘post’.


Homi Bhabha’s idea of the hybridity of the proximate encounter supports such a consideration. He writes: “Proximity becomes agonistic in that doubled interstitial maneuver where the tryst of the self and the other results in both less and more than either one, for they are bound in the twinned “excession” of excision of blood and bone that belongs, in a kind of heightened repetition, at once to each and exclusively to neither.” Bhabha. “Editor’s Introduction.” *Critical Inquiry* 23 1997:433.


Leung Ping-kwan. *City At The End of Time*. (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1992), 176.

This study stresses that not all Chinese diasporics speak or understand Mandarin or Cantonese.
