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The New Hong Kong Cinema and the *Déjà Disparu*

Ackbar Abbas

I

For about a decade now, it has become increasingly apparent that a new Hong Kong cinema has been emerging. It is both a popular cinema and a cinema of auteurs, with directors like Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, Allen Fong, John Woo, Stanley Kwan, and Wong Kar-wei gaining not only local acclaim but a certain measure of international recognition as well in the form of awards at international film festivals. The emergence of this new cinema can be roughly dated; two dates are significant, though in very different ways.

The first occurs around 1979, which is when a new generation of Hong Kong-born filmmakers, educated in film schools abroad and with no direct ties with either China or Taiwan, turn to filmmaking after a period of apprenticeship in local television. The result is a cinema that in terms of technical competence and thematic richness represents a qualitative leap forward from what went before. Three films released in 1982 exemplify this moment: Tsui Hark's *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain*, a kung fu film distinguished by its brilliant mastery of special effects; Ann Hui's *Boat People*, about Vietnamese refugees, a courageous use of cinema to deal with pressing social and political issues; and Allen Fong's *Father and Son*, with its quasi-autobiographical story about growing up in working-class Hong Kong, where everyday life is presented by means of a sophisticated film language.

The second date is, I believe, even more consequential for Hong Kong cinema – 1984, the year of Thatcher's visit to China which culminated in the Joint Declaration returning Hong Kong

to China in 1997. The Joint Declaration caused a certain amount of anxiety, even though one of its terms is that the sociopolitical structure of Hong Kong will remain unchanged for fifty years (according to the slogan “one country, two systems”). But it also had one other effect. It made Hong Kong people look at their country with new eyes. It is as if the possibility of the disappearance of this social and cultural space led to seeing it in all its complexity and contradiction for the first time: an instance, as Benjamin would have said, of love at last sight. The new Hong Kong cinema ultimately is interesting, then, not because it has caught up in terms of technical competence and sophistication with the rest of the world but because of the way film is being used to explore and negotiate a problematic and paradoxical cultural space without abandoning its role as popular entertainment. The new Hong Kong cinema claims our attention because it has finally found a subject – it has found *itself* as a subject.

The current fascination with Hong Kong by the people of Hong Kong themselves is in some strange way a new phenomenon. There has, of course, always been widespread interest in Hong Kong on the part of locals and foreigners alike, especially since 1949 when the city embarked in earnest on its spectacular international career. The American conservative economist Milton Friedman, we remember, raved about Hong Kong as a capitalist utopia. But until recently this interest was focused primarily on economics and politics, and to a lesser extent on history (attributable perhaps to colonialist embarrassment). From these perspectives, many studies of Hong Kong are available. However, when it comes to the much more elusive question of Hong Kong culture, all to be found was largely mystification and disavowal. To avoid the issue of Hong Kong culture, locals and expatriates alike used to take refuge behind the image of Hong Kong as a “cultural desert,” as if culture meant only Shakespeare, Beethoven, and the like or even Peking Opera for that matter (the scarcity of all of which was loudly bemoaned). On the question of culture, it was as if the people of Hong Kong lived through a version of what Freud calls the “family romance”: the fantasy of some children that their real parents are not their actual parents. The result is that stories about Hong Kong always turned into stories about somewhere else, as if Hong Kong culture were somehow not a subject. This is a case of what Freud calls “reverse hallucination”: if hallucination is seeing what is not there, then reverse hallucination is not seeing what *is* there.

This reverse hallucination – not seeing what is there – suggests that if Hong Kong cinema may have found itself as a subject, Hong Kong as a subject is one that threatens to get easily lost

again. This time the threat will not be that there is no interest in Hong Kong – Hong Kong is today a pretty hot topic. The threat will be that Hong Kong as a subject will be presented and represented in terms of the old binarisms whose function it is to restabilize differences and domesticate change (among the most pernicious are binarisms like East and West or tradition and modernity). Precisely because Hong Kong is such an elusive subject, there is a temptation to use, and to *believe* in, the established forms of (mis)representation. This is *dis-appearance*, then, in a very specific sense in that it gives us a reality that is not so much hidden as purloined. In the same way, the binarisms used to represent Hong Kong as subject give us not so much a sense of *déjà vu* as an uncanny feeling of what we might call the *déjà disparu*: the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone, and we are left holding a handful of clichés. It is only from this point of view that we can query a remark often made about Hong Kong cinema: that it is the least contemplative cinema in the world. If it is not a contemplative cinema, it is because there is no time for contemplation. *Things move too fast*. The problem that the new Hong Kong cinema faces, therefore, is how to keep pace with a subject that is always on the verge of disappearing.

Both the opportunities and the dangers that face the new Hong Kong cinema can be related to the nature of Hong Kong itself as cultural space, about which I want to briefly make four points, the first of which involves the question of history and its spatialization. As a city, Hong Kong has been very much the plaything and ambiguous beneficiary of history. Colonized by the British in the nineteenth century; occupied by the Japanese in the Second World War; swelled by the influx of refugees from communist China after 1949, which gave it so many of its cooks and tailors and entrepreneurs; taken in hand by the multinationals as it developed into an international city; and now to be returned to China: Hong Kong's history is one of shock and radical changes. As if to protect themselves against this series of traumas, Hong Kong people have little memory and no sentiment for the past. The general attitude to everything, sometimes indistinguishable from the spirit of enterprise, is: cancel out and pass on. (In this regard, it is worth noting that there is as yet no history of Hong Kong written from a post-1984 perspective.) But history exists, if not in surviving monuments or written records, then in the jostling anachronisms and spatial juxtapositions that are seen on every street; that is, history is inscribed in spatial relations. When the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank building designed by Norman Foster was being built, for example, this ultra-high-tech multinational building was surrounded by traditional Chinese bamboo

scaffolding: an image of history as palimpsest. One of the features of new Hong Kong cinema (exemplified most outstandingly in Stanley Kwan's 1988 *Rouge* and 1991 *Centre Stage*) is its sensitivity to spatial issues and its adoption of a spatial narrative both to underline and to come to terms with these historical anachronisms: space as a means of reading a history in the process of its making. We get a better sense of the history of Hong Kong through its new cinema, with its representations of architecture and everyday life than is currently available in any textbook.

Related to the question of space is that of affectivity. In a problematic space, affectivity in turn becomes problematic. It is as if all the ways of relating have somehow shifted, the bonds which join us to others as friends and lovers, as daughters and sons blurring like the lines on a television screen that is not tracking properly. It is not just a question of "traditional" emotional responses versus modern indifference: the opposition between tradition and modernity is already too stable and predictable. Rather what we find represented now are emotions that do not belong to anybody or to any situation – affective intensities with no name. Thus in Stanley Kwan's *Love Unto Waste* (1986), a kind of Felliniesque study of decadence, love is a bad habit or a whim or a weakness, an expense of spirit in a waste of shame. In *Rouge* the most intense emotion belongs... to a ghost. In Wong Kar-wei's *Days of Being Wild* (1991), with its structure of interlapping stories, human relations may still be painful but they have lost all their *serious* aspects and take on instead a *serial* quality of transferences, exchanges, and repetitions – all to the background music of old dance hall songs with their suggestions of faded passions.

From what vantage point can the filmmaker describe this cultural space and sick eros? Certainly not from the outside, from a privileged critical distance. So while there are a number of successful comedies, there are no parodies or ironic presentations of Hong Kong society in the new Hong Kong cinema comparable to, say, Robert Altman's ironic portraits of America in *Nashville* (1975) or *A Wedding* (1978). The position of the Hong Kong filmmaker, then, is what we might call a position of critical proximity, where one is always a part of what one is criticizing. This brings me to a third observation about the new Hong Kong cinema, which concerns the use of genres. Given commercial pressures, it is understandable that even the most independent of filmmakers find themselves working with popular genres like the gangster (or "hero") film, the ghost story, and the kung fu movie. What is remarkable, however, is that these filmmakers produce some of their best work within these genres (this is an example of what I mean by critical proximity). Although most Hong Kong

films are meretricious and formulaic, we also find Wong Kar-wei's 1989 *As Tears Go By* (a "gangster" film), Stanley Kwan's 1988 *Rouge* (a "ghost" film), and Tsui Hark's 1992 *Once Upon a Time in China Part I* (a "kung fu" movie). By no means parodies of their respective genres, these films use the limits of genre as a discipline and a challenge (somewhat like writing a poem in rhyme).

Fourth, the language of the new Hong Kong cinema is Cantonese (or more precisely, that version of Cantonese practiced in Hong Kong). This was not always the case. In the late seventies the sociologist I.C. Jarvie divided Hong Kong film into Cantonese and Mandarin, arguing that Cantonese movies were unwesternized and designed entirely for local consumption, while Mandarin movies were cosmopolitan, technically accomplished, and in touch with the contemporary world. If these observations had some cogency for the early seventies, they have proved to be irrelevant for Hong Kong cinema in the eighties and nineties. The new Hong Kong cinema has indeed gone over to Cantonese, just as has pop music (what is called Canto-rock). But in doing so, it has not simply asserted the importance of the local, it has also changed the way in which the local is regarded. In the older Cantonese movies, the local was an ethos of exclusion: it defined a narrow homogeneous social space where foreigners and foreign elements had no place, which is what gives these old movies, when we watch them now, a certain campy quality. The new localism, on the other hand, investigates the dislocations of the local, where the local is something unstable that mutates right in front of our eyes, like the language itself. Hong Kong Cantonese now is sprinkled with snatches of Mandarin, English, and barbarous sounding words and phrases – a hybrid language coming out of a hybrid space. It is by being local in this way that the new Hong Kong cinema is most international. Conversely, some of the attempts to be "international" – by using a foreign city as background, for example, as in Clara Chung's well-regarded *Autumn Story*, a film about Hong Kong Chinese in New York made in the late eighties – may strike us as awkward and provincial.

The new localism does not just present Hong Kong as a subject worthy of attention, it develops what we might call a new Hong Kong subjectivity as it moves towards a difficult and idiosyncratic form of postcoloniality. Changes in the nature of this subjectivity can be indicated by a brief consideration of the kung fu film – from Bruce Lee to Tsui Hark. In the films of Bruce Lee there is, among other things, a clear but simplistic anticolonial note, which was certainly one of their original attractions. It took the form of beating up Caucasians or Japanese, and of reminding the audience of entrenched racist obscenities (such as the stereotype of

the Chinese as the sick man of the Orient and signs in public parks which read “Chinese and dogs not allowed”). Of course, the more obvious attraction of a Bruce Lee film is the beauty of movement, the way in which the fights are choreographed as a kind of *dance*. But there is something else here that deserves attention. When Bruce Lee fights, it is not just a dance, it is also a *trance* (he seems to go into a trance, making squealing noises, which has since become a kind of Bruce Lee signature). In relation to the question of postcoloniality, this trance-like state is more than a little ambiguous: it is as if whomever Bruce Lee fights against, he is fighting against *shadows*, as if the real enemy were not really clearly defined. By contrast, in Tsui Hark’s *Once Upon a Time in China* Part I, subjectivity is more clearly realized. The film itself is a remake of a well-known series of films about Huang Fei Hung, the Chinese martial arts hero. In the old series, Huang Fei Hung is portrayed by a real-life kung fu master who projects a stern authoritarian persona. Tsui Hark’s new Huang Fei Hung differs in two significant respects: 1) he is portrayed by a *young* actor whose authority derives from his professionalism, not his age, and 2) the main fight, brilliantly filmed, is not between Huang and foreigners but between the progressive hero and a *traditional* kung fu master who is being manipulated by outside interests – postcoloniality, in other words, is also a matter of overcoming traditional prejudices. All in all, in Hark’s *Once Upon a Time in China* the issues are more clearly defined, coming from a postcolonial sensitivity (by contrast with the films of Bruce Lee where the framework is still colonial). Of the four aspects of Hong Kong as a cultural space which I have mentioned, the relationship between the new Hong Kong cinema and postcoloniality is the most important. It can be best discussed in terms of specific films, a number of which I will turn to now.

II

Wong Kar-wei’s debut film *As Tears Go By* may seem an unlikely work to include in a discussion of cinema and postcoloniality. As I’ve already noted, it is an example of the “gangster” genre, known in Hong Kong as the “hero” movie, after the Chinese title of the series of very popular films made by John Woo (the English title of the series is *A Better Tomorrow*). Woo’s film, like his others, presents us with all the expected violent action of the genre and all the sexual stereotypes of macho men and beautiful women. Where it distinguishes itself is in its presentation of the theme of the need for personal loyalties, usually

between male friends, in a crumbling world (this is characteristic of his other films as well). So while the setting may be the tough, urban life of underworld Hong Kong, the sentiment is fairly soft, not unlike that of, say, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." The popularity of this film – and his others – can be largely explained by this collusion between toughness and sentimentality, which binds the narrative together into one cohesive space.

Wong's film is thus partly about bonding – male bonding in a violent world. One main strand of the story deals with the friendship between two local hoods, the hero and his younger friend. The friend is eventually manipulated by gangs to carry out an association that can only lead to his own death. The hero, unable to dissuade or protect him, follows him and gets shot too. But unlike in Woo's series of films, this male space is only one of the spaces in Wong's film. There are other spaces of equal importance, specifically the affective space mapped out between the hero and heroine (the film's title in Chinese – *Mongkok Carmen* – is more informative: Mongkok is the sleazy, vice-ridden district in Kowloon, while Carmen is, of course, the passionate Bizet character). These spaces exist side by side, never quite cohering or supporting one another. And throughout the film we see the characters going back and forth between these spaces, like ineffectual windshield wipers: from Lantau island, a quiet undeveloped part of Hong Kong where the heroine lives, to the mean streets of Mongkok where the hero's friend is always in trouble. Scenes of lovemaking are always interrupted by messages of violence in a disconcerting cadence, so much so that one can become associated and confused with the other. For example, Wong shoots the kiss in a phone booth between Maggie Cheung and Andy Lau – one of the most erotic scenes in Hong Kong cinema – in the same way that he shoots the fight scenes: both these scenes erupt suddenly, it is a violence that comes out of nowhere, and both are shot in slow motion. Slow motion, however, is not being used here to romanticize or aestheticize either love or violence; it is used analytically: to study, to understand. But analysis by slow motion, like analysis by blowup, leads at a certain point only to a blurring of the image, that is, to bewilderment rather than to understanding. The closer you look, the less there is to see. It is as if for Wong the gangster film, with all its clichés, somehow becomes an exercise in a hopeless epistemology; as if every shot has to be closely attended to, because things are always surreptitiously passing you by. This is the *déjà disparu*, a reality that is always outpacing our awareness of it, a reality that the film continually tries to catch up with. Hong Kong critics have called *As Tears Go By* "existential"; they see in it a search for authentic experience even

though experience has shrunk only to a moment. But if even the moment (and hence any possible site of authenticity) has disappeared, then where are we? What Wong gives us is an *anachronistic* existential hero in a postmodern situation.

What is so remarkable about *As Tears Go By* is the way it manages, at the same time, to draw on and to destabilize the standard images and situations of the gangster film. What we notice most about the film – from the opening credits with the shot of multiple television screens incongruously juxtaposed with a neon sign of a China Products department store, to the closing sequence where the shooting of the hero is intercut with one quick shot of a flickering memory of lovemaking – is its visual density, the intelligence of its images: for example, the use of exaggerated reds and blues or of a bleached, almost black and white, screen; the choice of unusual, disorienting camera angles, like shots directly from above or below; the use of closeups and slow motion which functions to define the incoherence of love or violence. But, as I am suggesting, it is not a visual density that coheres or allows us to map out an intelligible space. Rather the images disorient by refusing to stabilize. For example, the film ends, as so many in the genre do, with the hero's violent death; but in the final shot, although the hero is dead the image continues to throb on, like a heartbeat, as if it had acquired a life of its own.

As Tears Go By makes no direct references to the problematic of postcolonialism. However, its filmic practice, particularly in its relation to genre, bears a homologous relation to the political situation of Hong Kong today. The end of British rule and the return of Hong Kong to China does not mean the end of colonial rule. If Hong Kong people must wait for the departure of all the colonial powers before postcoloniality can begin, they will have to wait a very long time. An alternative strategy is to work within the given paradigms (which does not necessarily mean accepting them), all the while working to reuse and reconstellate the existing elements. This would be a postcolonialism that precedes decolonization. We find a transposed version of this in the relationship of Wong's film to its genre. If the formulaic demands of the genre of the "gangster" film imply colonization and self-colonization by clichés, and if subverting the formulaic is not viable for a number of reasons (such as the need to get financial support to make films), there is still a third possibility: that of doing something else with the genre, of nudging it a little from its stable position and so provoking thought. This is postcoloniality not in the form of an argument; it has already become a practice.

A film of a very different kind that *does* have an argument is Ann Hui's *Song of the Exile* (1990), which is set in the domestic space of middle-class Hong Kong and focuses on the relation between a mother and daughter. One of the many interesting features of Ann Hui's film is that it takes us away from the largely male concerns of Hong Kong cinema (Wong Kar-wei is not exempt from this charge). *Song of the Exile* begins with the daughter receiving an M.A. in media studies in London but failing to get an interview with the BBC (while her British classmate does). She decides to return to Hong Kong to attend her sister's wedding, and there she encounters her mother with whom she has never gotten along. There is a flashback to early days in Macau (lovingly recreated): memories of living with her grandparents, of an absent father working in Hong Kong, of a very different mother – quiet, self-effacing, a dutiful daughter-in-law. What has she become now? Just as we thought this was going to be another film – yawn, yawn – about the clash between tradition and modernity, Chinese customs and Western ways, both the daughter and the audience have a revelation: it turns out that the mother is in fact Japanese, that she met her husband during Japan's last days in Manchuria. All the daughter's memories of the past and of her mother's behavior are reassessed in the light of this knowledge. We have another flashback to Macau, to a past which looks the same but which is now understood differently. The daughter realizes for the first time how difficult it must have been for her mother living as an isolated, oppressed subject in Chinese society, set apart by her customs (the grandparents always complained that her food was not hot enough) and by her ignorance of the language, which the daughter misread as quietness. Within the domestic drama, then, we find a historical allegory of a colonial situation with a Japanese (traditionally the Hong Kong image of the oppressor) as the oppressed.

The daughter's sentimental and political education continues in the second part of the film when she accompanies her mother to her home town in Japan. And there it is the daughter's turn to go through the experience of being an alien in a strange country. In one scene she loses her way and wanders into a farm where she picks an apple to eat. The farmer appears and shouts excitedly at her in Japanese. We know from the subtitle that he is warning her not to eat the fruit because it has been sprayed with pesticides. She thinks that he is threatening to prosecute her for stealing and runs away. The more the farmer runs after her to warn her, the harder she tries to run. Ignorance of the language makes her believe that she is a criminal. The episode ends happily, though, as they eventually meet the village's English-speaking

school teacher who explains everything, just as the film itself ends happily with mother and daughter finally achieving some kind of understanding of each other.

The need for understanding – this is Ann Hui’s principal theme. Here is the voice of liberal Hong Kong, which believes that the past and history itself can be changed through the overcoming of misunderstandings and prejudices. Her song of the exile is not a siren’s song that leads to rash actions (as Wong Kar-wei’s film largely is), but a rational song of reconciliation, a song about the end of exile through understanding. This is both the film’s strength and weakness. It offers hope for understanding, but it does not address with sufficient clarity or take far enough the question of how the cultural space of Hong Kong can be understood or grasped. As a result, despite all its insights (for example, that patriotism is a form of ethnocentricity), and its concern with social and political issues, *Song of the Exile* remains just another private story. And the reason for this, it seems to me, is that colonialism is not just a misunderstanding, and explanations alone cannot make it go away.

As with Ann Hui’s *Song of Exile*, in Stanley Kwan’s *Rouge* the history of Hong Kong as a city is woven into the stories of personal relationships. The film cuts back and forth between Hong Kong in the early 1930s and the late 1980s. As with like Wong Kar-wei’s *As Tears Go By*, *Rouge* uses a mixture of popular genres. It has elements of the nostalgia film: the vanished world of the thirties – with its beautiful courtesans, dashing heroes, and baroquely elegant settings – is lovingly recreated. It can be taken as a story about star-crossed lovers. Fleur, the toast of Shek Tong Tsui (Hong Kong’s red-light district in the thirties), falls in love with Chan Chen-bong (also known as Twelve Master), scion of a rich and respectable Chinese business community. The only resolution in the thirties to such a social mismatch is death, and they eventually agree to commit suicide together. This introduces another generic element into the film, the ghost story. Unable to meet up with Chen-bong in the afterlife, Fleur returns to the world after waiting for over fifty years to look for him. She places an ad in a newspaper: “3811. Rendezvous at the usual place” (“3811” stands for March 8, 11 p.m., the time of their suicide). But Chen-bong does not show up at the appointed hour. The journalist Yuen who works at the newspaper and his girlfriend Ah Chor, a fellow journalist, decide after some vacillation to help Fleur in her search for Chen-bong.

Rouge, therefore, is made up of elements very popular with a Hong Kong audience. But to call *Rouge* a “ghost story” is as much off the mark as to call Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West*

a “Western.” For one thing, as a “ghost,” Fleur is presented with remarkable restraint (with none of the use of special effects found in popular ghost films). She can do none of the things that ghosts are supposed to do. She is distinguished only by her silk dress (the *cheong-sam*, rarely seen nowadays as daily wear), by certain mannerisms and old forms of expression, and by her formal style of makeup (emphasized in the film’s opening shots); a *revenant* who has just stepped out of a freeze-frame, “unchanged for fifty years,” as Ah Chor skeptically puts it. (Note here the ironic reference to the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the future of Hong Kong.) Thus in *Rouge*, the genre of the ghost story is being used innovatively as a device for exploring the problematic historical space of Hong Kong culture, for bringing two periods of Hong Kong history together in a historical montage or what earlier I called a spatial narrative.

What at first looks like a series of flashbacks that contrasts past and present is in fact something more original. Flashbacks implicate us in a linear narrative, while the effect of the cutting back and forth is to establish a *double temporal framework* for all actions, allowing “before” and “after” to chase each other. We see some obvious changes and discontinuities: a well-known theater has been replaced by a 7-Eleven, Ti Hung Lu (the pleasure house where Fleur worked) by a kindergarten. But the film also shows us a subtler kind of discontinuity: the discontinuity that exists within apparent continuity. For example, trams and Chinese Opera have both continued to exist from the thirties into the eighties, but their functions have changed. Similarly, human passion is found in all periods of history, but it does not necessarily signify the same thing. This kind of change-within-continuity is the most provocative aspect of the film – its uncanny or ghostly aspect. Fleur’s ghostly passion challenges the noncommittal emotional attitudes of Yuen and Ah Chor. They become more and more deeply involved in Fleur’s search for Chen-bong because they glimpse that the outcome will affect their own lives. “We are as anxious to see Twelve Master as you are,” Ah Chor tells Fleur towards the end. The “ghost story” becomes an exploration of affectivity and the way it unfolds in different cultural spaces.

The love between Fleur and Chen-bong has an intensity that both attracts and appalls the contemporary couple. Their sympathy for Fleur keeps fluctuating. Such passion demands an absolute commitment that they are either unwilling or unable to make. For example, there is one scene which shows Ah Chor and Yuen erotically stimulated by their *discussion* of Fleur’s affair, and they end up making passionate love. But after the lovemaking she asks him in a voice-over: Will you commit suicide for me? No, he says.

And you for me? he asks. No, she replies. On the other hand, the uncompromising nature of passion has a sinister side as well. This emerges as we learn the details leading up to the double suicide. Not only did the lovers swallow raw opium together, but Fleur also put sleeping pills in Chen-bong's wine without his knowledge. This makes Ah Chor accuse Fleur of being a murderess and she drives Fleur from the house. However, on reflection Ah Chor relents, as she realizes that her anger stems from her jealousy of a passion that she lacks. "It is difficult to be a woman.... Who among us has her passion?" In contrast to the old lovers, the contemporary lovers, like contemporary Hong Kong society, find it difficult to commit themselves as they flounder in a confusion of values.

However, the film does not simply set up a neat polarity between commitment and compromise. We still have the ironic ending, where we learn that Chen-bong survived the suicide attempt. He went on to marry a respectable woman whom he did not love, to squander the family fortune, and to survive into the present as a physical and spiritual wreck, working as a film extra. The implication, therefore, is that even in the most intense love there is misjudgment, error, weakness. The cultivation of personal intensities as a refuge from a morally imperfect world that demands constant compromise cannot avoid contamination from such a world. "Who wants to die?" Ah Chor asks Fleur, speaking for survival. But then Chen-bong's survival is also his form of punishment for not keeping faith. A final conclusion to be drawn from the ending is to read it as posing a problem about action and conduct in a Hong Kong uncertain about how to deal with its future, a problem that has as yet no resolution.

How Hong Kong cinema will develop in the next few years is not clear. But what seems clear is that if it is to maintain a direction of its own, it can only do so by developing a new, or let us say, postcolonial subjectivity, which cannot be just another recombination of given elements from East and West. The new Hong Kong cinema and the new Hong Kong subjectivity have one important aspect in common: both pose the question of the postcolonial subject as a problem of self-invention. Such a subject does not yet have a name: it is not Chinese, or overseas Chinese, or internationalist. Nor does it have a language. It exists as yet as a set of contradictions. Nevertheless there are signs that something is happening – in the emergent theoretical discourse on Hong Kong, in some kinds of writing, and perhaps most persuasively in the new Hong Kong cinema, largely because if "reverse hallucination" is the ailment, then cinema is in the best position to reverse

such reversals and reshape our recognitions. The important political role of the Hong Kong cinema would be to help in the self-invention of a postcolonial subject by making good movies.

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