Revista de Lenguas Modernas, N° 19, 2013 / 649-667 / ISSN: 1659-1933

The Histories of Hong Kong: Nation Formation and a Third Identity in the Territory

Lai Sai Acón Chan
Instituto Confucio
Universidad de Costa Rica

Abstract
This article explores the history of Hong Kong from a multidisciplinary perspective in order to explain nation formation and identity formulation processes triggered by the Handover. The pattern recurs through diverse cultural productions released during key moments prior to 1997 as can be observed in articles of my own like "Los efectos (pos)traumáticos del retorno de Hong Kong a la madre patria en 1997" and "Timothy Mo's *An Insular Possession*".

Key words: history, nation formation, Hong Kong, postcolonialism, the Handover

Resumen
El presente artículo aborda la historia de Hong Kong desde cuatro perspectivas disciplinarias distintas-- cine, literatura, arte plástico y arquitectura--con el fin de facilitar la comprensión de los procesos de formación de la nación y la identidad que se dan en el territorio a raíz de su devolución a China. Estos se pueden apreciar como un patrón que se repite a lo largo de diversas manifestaciones culturales en momentos claves previos a 1997, tal y como se aprecia en artículos de mi autoría como "Los efectos (pos)traumáticos del retorno de Hong Kong a la madre patria en 1997" y "Timothy Mo's *An Insular Possession*".

Palabras claves: historia, formación de nación, Hong Kong, poscolonialismo, la Devolución de 1997

> The history of Hong Kong was never a serious topic for academic research, and there was no need for a colonial government to take that seriously either. I think it was a carefully orchestrated political undertaking to rewrite HK history, and to reclaim its history with its "motherland".
>
> Oscar Ho Hing-kay. Interview, November 25, 2007

Recepción:1-7-13 Aceptación: 16-9-13

1. Introduction

Historiographies of Hong Kong abound—whether they are about government politics or about the peoples coexisting in Hong Kong, whether they are written from a British colonial perspective or from a Chinese nationalist perspective or from a Hongkongese local perspective, whether they are intended as myths of origin or as vindication manifestos. My particular "historiography" aspires to examine some pivotal cultural events that led to nation formation and identity formulation processes in Hong Kong. It is about a "quasi-colony" that became a "quasi nation" despite and because of the mainland's neocolonial pretensions during a very traumatic period for its inhabitants. Thus, this historiography spans the last twenty to thirty years of cultural production in former British Hong Kong. The purpose of this article is to introduce the reader to the various histories that have shaped Hong Kong's culture from classical accounts of Hong Kong by Anglophone writers to less "historical" accounts of Hong Kong architecture, cinema, plastic art, and literature.

2. Hong Kong: A Borrowed Place Within a Borrowed Time

A borrowed place living on a borrowed time, Hong Kong is an impudent capitalist survival on China's communist derrière, an anachronistic mixture of colonialism and the Chinese way of life [. . .].

In today's world, Hong Kong is an improbability—one had almost said an impossibility. But it works.

Richard Hughes, *Hong Kong: Borrowed Place—Borrowed Time*

The historiographer Christopher Munn argues that the few original histories of nineteenth-century Hong Kong may be divided into three schools: the colonial school, the Beijing school—largely anti-colonial and Marxist nationalistic, and the Hong Kong school, that goes beyond traditional settler or typical communist narratives and instead "addresses the dynamics of society and politics within Hong Kong, introduces questions of race, class and gender differences, and studies patterns of organization that do not fit easily into traditional colonial structures" (4-9). This particular study fits into the third school's tenets as it is framed within the transitional period (last decades as a British colony) in the history of postcolonial, post-Handover SAR-HK (Special Administrative Region, Hong Kong). In the foreword to *A Borrowed Place: The History of Hong Kong*, Frank Welsh begins the argument of his book in an apologetic tone as he pronounces it to be "one-sided and patchy" as "any history of an Anglo-Chinese enterprise is unhappily likely to be" (xi-xii). He goes on to argue that, just as Chinese scholars who are limited to official documents

from the Historical Archives in Beijing "may well not be alert to the nuances of nineteenth-century British politics and society" (xii), English writers who are not fluent in Chinese will find themselves restricted to translated material and, therefore, to an arbitrary selection of works, making their work "inescapably Anglocentric." Like Welsh, I must defend the choices I made when I let nostalgic memories guide this research about the uneasy confluence of imperialism, geography, history, and culture in Hong Kong. In this chapter, my readings of its history will be largely based on the patterns of cultural production in the colony from the time when it began to noticeably assert itself as an autonomous entity to July, 1 1997.

In *A Borrowed Place: The History of Hong Kong*, Frank Welsh claims that the unexpected birth of Hong Kong was at best what produced a temporary truce amidst the first Anglo-Chinese armed conflict and at worst the twisted answer to the British's demands for a free trade port anchored in China, but controlled by British political and economic interests. The sixth Qing Emperor's assertion that the foreigners who had encamped in Canton from the early 1800s were nothing more than "barbarians always look[ing] on trade as their chief occupation; and [. . .] wanting in any high purpose of striving for territorial acquisition" (qtd. in Welsh 1) may have racist resonations, but it proved to be partially true in the case of the events that led to the infamously called "Opium Wars" and to the cessions of Hong Kong and Kowloon.

The remoteness of the port of Canton (not to mention the remoteness of Hong Kong, a territory about 60 miles south), where trade with foreigners had been going on for centuries, and its own marginality in relation to the northern Manchu dynasty had contributed to the mindless cession of a tip of China to a foreign power. About Hong Kong, Welsh points out that, "On Chinese maps of the Ch'ing period (1644-1911) [it] was either omitted or unrecognizable; its first appearance is on a chart published in 1760, which shows only the west coast of the island" (13). Later, Captain George Hayter of the East India Company's *York* charted the island as two separate islands but, despite his mistake, he was the first to record the name the territory has nowadays: *An-chin-chao* or *He-ong-Kong'* (13-14). In 1842 Hong Kong was only one among hundreds of islands in the Pearl River Delta, did not stand out as the most prominent or the largest either in size or population or the most fecund and, on top, was located in the southernmost tip of the Chinese empire (11). However, it was to become a sought-after haven where traders gave free rein to their greed and rejoiced in the marvels of the *laissez-faire* doctrine. "The rising costs of Indian administration, increasing competition, and a desire to find a market for British exports combined with a growing intolerance of extortion" moved the British Crown to send a negotiation team to Beijing in order to request a slackening of the restrictions on trade (32). However, the proposals of the foreigners clashed with a Manchu definition of sovereignty largely based on xenophobia. Welsh believes that for the Chinese empire the most outrageous of their demands was perhaps "'a small unfortified island near Chusan for the residence of English traders, storage of goods, and outfitting of ships'" (qtd. in Welsh 33). Whether it was to be located

in Chusan or somewhere else, the British had already devised some sort of "insular possession" in the Pearl River estuary from which to make profit with the most appalling of capitalistic transactions, drug traffic, while they conveniently expanded the scope of their empire. The cession of Kowloon and the lease of the New Territories expanded the colonial territory insofar as it was to be regarded a temporary place of sojourn, a borrowed place within a borrowed time.

3. The Opening of a Third Space

In *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self*, Yingchi Chu argues that since its inception as a British holding, Hong Kong kept strong ties to China, so that a unique triangular relationship emerged, "an interdependency that suggests a quasi-national status rather than that of a nation" (xii). It was ironically the early detachment of the colonizer and the closeness to the motherland that later made possible the emergence of a third identity in the midst of the transfer from British colonialism to Chinese neo-imperialism. According to Chu, the colonizer implemented two codes of law in the dependency's initial stages. The colonized were to be governed in conformity with the British laws, but they were not to be protected by them. While Hong Kong prospered economically and attracted mainland triads and other underworld societies, administratively it stagnated. To compensate for the inability of colonial public institutions to cope with the high rates of crime and maintain political and social order, alternative socio-political structures emerged to manage the native's affairs and ensure their safety. While the European community's interests were safeguarded by the Chamber of Commerce, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, the large *hongs*, the Jockey Club, and the Sanitation Board, -which served as Executive Council, Legislative Council, and Civil Service-, the Chinese community was protected by the District Watch Committee, the Tung Wah Board of Directors, a Chinese Sanitation Board, a Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Heung Yee Kuk (a rural assembly), and Po Leung Kuk (a charity organization helping orphans). Thus, the ties to the motherland were never cut off, allowing the Chinese population to preserve their own cultural traditions and beliefs. Ironically, the apartheid practices of the British, while discriminating, set Hongkongers apart from other colonized subjects whose traditions and languages were obliterated by the colonizer.

Freedom of movement from motherland to British colony allowed Hongkongers to keep their culture alive, build an early sense of Chinese nationalism, and protest against British rule, and it also opened a gateway for dissidents and revolutionaries to plot against dynastic power and for wealthy families, first, and then refugees, to flee to the colony. Chu points out that "mainland national political culture was transplanted to and intensified in the colony" (5). Thus, Hongkongers experienced firsthand the anti-Manchu Taiping movement of the 1850s, Sun-Yat Sen's attempts to overthrow the Qing Dynasty in the late nineteenth century, the May Fourth Movement, the Canton-Hong Kong General Strike, the

anti-Japanese war manifestations, the struggles between the Kuomintang and the Communists for power, among other political manifestations (4).

When the borders between the mainland and Hong Kong were closed in 1950, there were about 2.36 million people in the colony (24). The close connection that had previously existed between motherland and colony was suddenly interrupted, causing another type of nation formation process to slowly materialize. The British colonial government and the Chinese Communist government's conjoint decision to discontinue their freedom of movement practices caused a diaspora to emerge. Although Chu argues that "(t)he term 'diaspora' is not commonly used to describe the mainland Chinese in Hong Kong, perhaps because the colony cannot be perceived as 'foreign' territory to China [. . .] the mainland Chinese refugees and migrants in Hong Kong shared cultural characteristics of other diasporic communities" (24). For one thing, post-1949 Hongkongers were suddenly forced to assimilate the fact that they had not been part of the mainland for over a century despite the continuous ties. The closing of the borders enabled a geographical displacement of peoples that was later to be manifested in Hongkongers' cultural dislocation and in their need to formulate an identity. Thereby, the second half of the twentieth century proved to be crucial for nation formation and identity formulation processes in Hong Kong.

While the 1950s generation had strong feelings towards what they considered the motherland, Chu contends that their offspring grew up in a Hong Kong detached from the mainland and, as a result, had no strong nationalistic feelings toward China. This was a generation that "enjoyed better living standards, and achieved higher literacy levels, both in Chinese and English, compared to their parents. Culturally, they were exposed to a variety of products, including films from Europe, Hollywood and national films. By growing up in the era of television, they developed cultural identities resembling the culture of their local communities rather than that of China" (39-40). This was the generation that was making important cultural breakthroughs in the Hong Kong of the 1970s. In fact, so much had changed since the 1950s: the colonial government actively participated in local affairs that assisted the Chinese population; Hong Kong had evolved into one of the economic miracles of Asia and had most of the trappings of a first-world, capitalist nation, and a clearly defined identity, that of the *heonggong yen* (the Hongkonger) had come into existence.

Whereas the economy boomed after the mid-1950s, the colonial government was still lagging in terms of housing assistance, education and health, and working conditions as pointed out by Hopkins (271-314), Podmore (42), and England (220-2). In 1967, taking advantage of the growing restlessness among the Chinese population, left-wing organizations contrived a protest campaign against the government that lasted for about a year and a half and resulted in bloodshed and substantial monetary loss. While it failed at liberating Hong Kong from British imperialism, it ironically broadened the gap between mainland and insular possession, first, because of the Hongkonger´s repudiation of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and, second, because rather than withdrawing from its colony, Britain was forced to reexamine its relationship with the local Chinese

community. A series of political reforms made possible a more fair representation of local interests in the colonial administration and facilitated two-way channels of communication like Radio and Television Hong Kong (RTHK) and the City District Officer Scheme. Programs of social outreach were also launched to improve the living standards of the Chinese population. The colonial government worked hard on narrowing the social welfare and educational gap that had existed since the 1950s: by the late 1970s, 43% of the population had access to the government's public housing programs (Hutcheon, *Hong Kong: Yesterday and Today* 5); there were about 50 hospitals (among government, government-assisted, and private) serving the population (Choa 123-54); one out of three children were attending secondary school (Hinton 145-62); and two new universities had been founded: Chinese University and Polytechnic. Not content with social and political reforms, Chu argues that the Hong Kong colonial government promoted identification with the city through cultural activities and community programs, both of which produced a sense of pride and of belonging to this territory that had become home and contributed to set Hongkongers even more apart from their mainland siblings. That newfound sense of identity was to be manifested in particular cultural forms produced in the territory.

4. Architectural, Cinematic, Plastic and Literary Histories of Hong Kong

4.1 Borrowed Places: Urban Development and Planning in Hong Kong[1]

> Architecture, whether urban or rural, Chinese or Western, is the most honest record of a place, capturing and reflecting the aspirations, values and needs of a people. It is symbolic of both the place and of the moment.
>
> David Lung, *"The Heritage of Hong Kong: Architecture"*

> Political power takes many forms. In addition to the power evinced by a charismatic leader, an indomitable military presence, an entrenched bureaucracy, or an imposing network of laws and statuses, many political regimes make especially powerful symbolic use of the physical environment. Throughout history and across the globe, architecture and urban design have been manipulated in the service of politics.
>
> Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity*

In "The Growth of the City: A Historical Review," Edward George Pryor and Shiu-hung Pau argue that "From the very outset, the development of Hong Kong as a trading centre in southern China has been characterized by an unremitting search for further land suitable for urban development, a pressure imposed by its ever-expanding population and vigorous economy" (98). With an original area of only 72 square kilometers and a varied topography, Hong Kong proved to be a labor of love. Only by October 1841, nine months after the British occupation,

there were about 15,000 people in the island, most of which were Chinese; and by June 1842, according to Captain Arthur Cunyngeheme, a two mile long town stood where brush-wood had reigned before (98). Over the years, upheaval and unrest in the mainland brought waves of people to Hong Kong, not only overcrowding the island and endangering public health, but also putting strains in an inexperienced colonial administration also reluctant to deal with the affairs of the "native" population. While more slum-like living quarters were being built to accommodate thousands of migrants ironically looking for better living conditions, the purposeful erection of landmark buildings and apartheid practices of the colonial government contributed to enforce forms of architectural dominance.

According to Pryor and Pau, "Between 1841 and 1900, some exceptionally fine public as well as private buildings were constructed on Hong Kong Island" (100). Some of them were attempts to not only support the British state apparatus but also display the outreach of Western capitalism in China. Hong Kong was, first and foremost, a territory born because of and for the production, exchange, and circulation of wealth. Yet the presence of armed forces, church, and much later of school could not be ignored. The military presence of the British colonizer was made evident with the construction of the Headquarter House (later renamed Flaggstaff House) of the Commander British Forces, Major George D'Aguilar. The church, another pillar of the British monarchy, made its presence felt at the inauguration of the Anglican St John's Cathedral in 1849. Thus, says David Lung,

> By 1870, the two-mile long stretch of waterfront along the harbour from Victoria (Central) to East Point (Causeway Bay) was already extensively developed with handsome and prestigious buildings [. . .]. There was the P&O Building, the Exchange Building (later to be used as Supreme Court), St. John's Cathedral, Government House, Murray House, Murray Barracks with batteries and weekly parades, the Roman Catholic Chapel, Harbour Master's House, Wardley House (a bank), Lapraik's Clock Tower [. . .]. (40)

A sample of the finest Western architecture was the Hong Kong Hotel (1874), "synonymous with the best accommodation and service in the far East" and strategically built in current Hong Kong's Central District between Queen's Road, Des Voeux Road and Peddler Street (roads that coincidentally bore the name of colonial rulers and administrators and that traversed what nowadays is the executive heart of the island). The first City Hall (1869) was born as a civic (as well as an economic) enterprise of a group of *taipans*, among which stands out Jardine Matheson & Co (who contributed with HK$50,000). More than an administrative building, it was a space exclusively for the British population to consort and form community ties. It had a library, a museum, an assembly hall, a ballroom, a supper room, a theater, and some meeting rooms. The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, built in 1886, was "the largest commercial development to have been built in Hong Kong" (qtd. in Pryor 100) and undoubtedly boasted the

purchasing power of a foreign elite. What the three buildings had in common was their ideological purpose. The architectural style, largely exported from Victorian England, was imposed rather than developed from the unique geography and culture of the territory. Large amounts of money were invested in these venues, demonstrating, on one hand, the desire of the colonizers to perpetuate their elitist and imperialist values and, on the other hand, their detachment from local affairs.

As an entrepôt, Hong Kong was not initially meant to showcase magnificent colonial buildings as British India was. Just as Lord Palmerston underestimated Hong Kong when he called it a "barren rock," early urban planners dismissed the island's potential to become a metropolitan city. They only saw a provincial Hong Kong as an "inconsequential appurtenance of the global imperial domains" (Lung 41), but that was to change as the city skyline began to take its current shape. While the first decades of colonial Hong Kong witnessed the birth of a city in the Western sense of the word and the rise of structures meant to display, not the artistic vision of a people, but only the purchasing power of a few; dramatic urban and architectural changes occurred from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century. Land reclamation projects along the original Praya (currently Central) led to the construction of the Supreme Court, the second Hong Kong Club and five commercial buildings financed by Paul Chater, the Armenian owner of Hong Kong Land Investment Agency Co. Mostly named after British royalty or representing the interests of the colonial elite, the Prince's, St. George's, Queen's, Alexandra and York buildings had a similar architectural style: they were built of brick and granite and had arcades, verandahs, and Victorian façades.

The different cultural groups that populated Hong Kong contributed with and funded their particular architectural vision and that, in turn, bestowed the city a uniquely cosmopolitan touch. Parsees, Christians, Jewish and Muslims not only coexisted peacefully but also built temples, synagogues, and mosques that showcased their faith, culture, and even wealth in some cases. The birth of the Republic of China in 1912 brought about an air of revolution that materialized into the first institution of higher education in the territory: University of Hong Kong. It was created thanks to, on one hand, the social work of Governor Lugard's wife, Flora. On the other hand, its erection was possible due to the generous donations of two local non-White businessmen, one of them a Parsee opium trader and the other one a Chinese businessman.

The age of high-rise, high-tech buildings starts in 1935, when the new HSBC Headquarters were built. Its Art Deco Style with Egyptian, Chinese, and Japanese motifs is a testament to the multiculturalism of the city as well as the jumble of architectural styles that has characterized Hong Kong since its inception. This is also the point that marks the departure from colonial, mostly Greek and Victorian-inspired, classicism and the preference for more contemporary styles that signify the rise of a new world vision and of new contenders for visual as well as political and economic power in the city. While some architects favored Art Deco style, others rooted for European Modernism. Yet,

the flowering of an authentically Asian style took place in the 1930s. "Chinese Renaissance" was "an extension of an emerging movement in the mainland, among a group of architects recently returned from their architectural studies in the West, anxious for self-identity and a national style" (47). Their trademark style combined "reinforced concrete buildings" with traditional Chinese motifs, and some examples of this style can be found in Hong Kong: St. Mary's Church in Causeway Bay (1937), the Methodist Church in Wanchai (1935) and Holy Trinity in Tokwawan (1938).

After this creative and economic surge that altered the skyline of Hong Kong, urban planning aimed at providing housing for postwar mainlander immigrants and local victims of the great fire of 1953. The colonial government devised plans to create new towns and erect massive housing units to lodge a population that had abruptly grown from a few hundred of thousands to about two million people. This style of public housing is known as English Brutalism. Needless to say, functionality prevailed over aestheticism as impersonal buildings mushroomed, densely populating previously undeveloped spaces on both sides of the harbor. The surplus generated by the growing industries from the postwar period to the early seventies became apparent in a skyline featuring true skyscrapers. Once again, it was time to show off the economic power that Hong Kong had acquired in the years since the Second World War. This time, however, the territory's purchasing power was accompanied by generations of true Hongkongers who had been born there and raised with Western, avant-garde ideas. Some of them had been educated in the West and had brought with them a desire to transform their homeland.

Multi-storied structures and modernization projects replaced the last remnants of colonial architecture and changed the map of Hong Kong again and again. Jardine House was the tallest building in Asia when it was completed in 1973 and a most expensive venture developed on reclaimed land with a political and economic purpose: that of restoring the faith of the public in Hong Kong as a corporate destination in the last years of British rule. Especially after the political disturbances of 1966 and 1967. On the other hand, buildings dating back to the turn of the century were being replaced by more modern structures. The Mass Transit Railway project doomed the Hongkong General Post Office to destruction in 1976. A new Hong Kong club building was erected in 1983 where the old Victorian style club once stood. Whether to develop or redevelop, famed architects from the most prestigious architectural firms in Hong Kong and abroad took innovation to the extremes, playing with modern designs and new materials and defying formal and conceptual conventions. The Alexandra building, the Landmark, Exchange Square, the Hong Kong Club, the Lippo Centre, HongkongBank (HSBC), and the Bank of China Tower belong to this era of a dying colonial city trying to insert itself in contemporary economic and cultural conversations while betting on its modernism and cosmopolitanism. These were, nevertheless, mostly the projects of Western architects.

Local art and culture found a vessel from which to reach the increasingly sophisticated Hongkonger in Shanghai-born Tao Ho's Hong Kong Arts Centre

(1978) and in local Simon Kwan's Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (1986), both symbolically built on reclaimed land. Another Kwan design was the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology campus (1992), the college equivalent of financial centers like the Lippo Centre, the HSBC Headquarters, or the Bank of China Tower, not only because of its striking architectural design but also because of the high construction costs that earned it "the nickname of The Rolls Royce Campus" (53). Lingnan College campus represents an attempt to honor its mainland origins as it "recreate[s] the Chinese character, with buildings throughout capped in pitched roofs similar to the old campus buildings in Canton" (53). Corporate images of wealth and power by local architects include Pacific Place (1988-1991), one of the largest shopping malls in the heart of Victoria, the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wanchai (1990) and its Extension (symbolically inaugurated on June 30th 1997), Central Plaza, one of the tallest skyscrapers (1992), the Centre (1998), and Citibank Plaza (1992). All of them stand out as visual metaphors of everything that Hong Kong had become in its last two decades as a British Dependent Territory struggling to become a quasi-nation if not in the political sphere, at least in the cultural and economic spheres. Other landmarks that have made it to the history of twentieth-century Hong Kong architecture are the Upper Peak Tram Station (1996), the airport rail Kowloon Station (1998), and Chek Lap Kok International Airport (1998).

4.2 Hong Kong Cinema: A Nascent Industry[2]

> As Hong Kong has not had all the attributes of a nation, it is not surprising that the cinema does not fit comfortably into the theoretical category of national cinema. And yet, Hong Kong cinema exhibits certain characteristics of a national cinema, which functions as part of a web of economic and cultural institutions within a recognizable and bounded society.
>
> Yingchi Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema*

Stephen Teo traces the origins of a Chinese cinema that has transcended the barriers of a regional film industry to become a transnational one. In 1909, the earliest two-reeler comedies were produced in the territory (Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 3), yet Shanghai was to take the lead in film-making, production, and distribution and as the Chinese version of the dream factory, Hollywood, in the 1930s. However, the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1942) and the civil wars between the Kuomintang and the Communists that ended up in the latter's rise of power in 1949, strategically moved substantial parts of the industry from the convoluted mainland to a relatively more neutral space, Hong Kong. The presence of big studios like Grandview, Universal, Nanyue and Tianyi, and renowned filmmakers like Chiu Shu-sun and Kwan Man-ching in the Hong Kong of the 1930s

boosted the nascent film industry and made the colony emerge as "the base for Cantonese movies with a sizeable overseas market in Southeast Asia and America" (6). While the number of Cantonese films was increasing, their quality and artistry was decreasing to the point that the "clean-up movements" of 1935, 1938 and 1949 were instigated to improve the quality of Cantonese-speaking films, upgrade what was considered a regional industry, clean up the territory's reputation as frivolous, alien, and anti-patriotic, and ultimately emerge as a leading industry.

During the period when China dramatically cut off its links with Hong Kong, the territory's film industry began to take its current shape. A second wave of Shanghainese film-makers fled to Hong Kong from 1946 to 1949, bringing more talent and investments. Most of their films were Mandarin film productions with "grand production values and glamorous casting" or "Shanghai movies made in Hong Kong" (12). Because China imposed a closed-door policy, these film-makers started to cater to South-East Asian, Taiwanese, and overseas Chinese audiences, all of which constitute its current traditional markets. Most important of all, Hong Kong cinema capitalized on the different ideologies, filmic languages, and themes used by left-wing and right-wing studios as well as on the materialistic modernization boosted by studios that aspired to Hollywood-style cosmopolitanism. Thus, anti-feudalism, nationalistic pride, exile, pain, reverence for the past, and Western, glamorous lifestyles were among the most popular themes rendered in the cinema of the 50s, a growing industry. The Cantonese cinema of this decade chose realism as a vehicle not only to express Cantonese values, but also to shatter the conception that only Mandarin productions in the territory could qualify as A films. Soon Cantonese films heavily influenced by the leftist strand of the Shanghai film industry began to gain public recognition. While not hardcore representations of the Communist ideology, these films rendered social themes and issues with genuinely didactic purposes. Thus, they did not push audiences away precisely because ideological conditioning was not the sole intent of these films. Although, as Teo explains, "[b]y 1972, Cantonese production was virtually at a stand-still [. . .] [t]he realist strain of Cantonese cinema continued indomitably, often with modifications—or concessions—to the demands of other genres" (47) like family melodrama, *wenyi pian* (epic romance tragedies), martial arts, opera, and *fenyue* (a new generic mixture of soft-core pornography and light farce).

This move away from the traditional Cantonese melodramas of the 1950s and 1960s and into genres never seen before allowed Hong Kong New Wave Cinema to gradually emerge at this time. In fact, the decade of the 1970s was a breakthrough period for Hong Kong: it was a period of "economic boom and increasing sense of confidence among the Hong Kong Chinese" (137). It was the coming of age of the Hongkongers who grew up in the past two decades as demonstrated by the innovations brought about in the filmic scene. Teo argues that "the kung fu genre's treatment of form, content and character accelerated the break with the kind of realism codified by the Cantonese family melodramas popular throughout the 50s and 60s" (137). This experimentation and themes of

"social relevance" paved the way for a new cinema. By crossing the fixed boundaries between genres, experimenting with cinematographic techniques, and developing controversial themes with more universal appeal, innovators like Lung Kong, Tang Shuxuan, and Michael Hui reinvented Cantonese-speaking cinema. Lung conflated different genres while tackling sensational themes never treated before like prostitution, drug abuse, and social hysteria. Tang was the first to deal with a highly political and politicized theme—the traumatic effects of the territory's return to China—in highly experimental art films. Hui's films not only marked the cinematic revival of the Cantonese dialect, but also revamped Cantonese cinema itself. Unlike former Cantonese films, he addressed both Cantonese-speaking and Mandarin-speaking audiences with universal themes and characters, rather than with local clichés. A new identity was emerging in the territory, that of the Hongkongese individual, whose concerns and aesthetic radically differed from the ones of their mainland relative and whose sympathies lied in the place that they had learned to recognize as home.

It is this concern with personal as well as cinematic identity that produced the bulk of new wave cinema from 1979 to 1982. In keeping with the genre experimentation initiated by Lung, Tang, and Hui, many new wave filmmakers chose to debut with crime thrillers, precisely because of the genre's adaptability, and to cater to the tastes of a more demanding public and a changing world. The audiences of the 1980s were more cynical, on one hand, and more sophisticated, on the other hand, than the audiences of the 1950s and 1960s. Many of them had grown up amid the political disturbances of the 1960s, events that began to shape a distinctively Hongkongese political identity; many of them had even been exposed to Western cultures and ideologies. As 1997 approached, more and more directors started to develop themes that explored the conflicting feelings of Hongkongers in the wake of the return to China. Mostly trained in television, New Wave filmmakers gave Hong Kong cinema a distinctive identity by experimenting with form, content, technique, production, design, and scriptwriting.

4.3 Revolutionary Art: From Canton to Hong Kong[3]

> Cantonese eccentric painters are perhaps more numerous than northern ones, just as Cantonese revolutionaries are also characteristic (the great Taiping Rebellion had its origin in Kwantung, and Sun Yat-sen was a Cantonese, partly educated in Hong Kong).
>
> Nigel Cameron, *"Art in Hong Kong Today"*

As early British colonizers did not intend to transform Hong Kong into a place of cultural pretension, the history of what we could call Hongkongese contemporary art does not start until the early twentieth century with the arrival of people who strongly promoted the arts in the territory. The founding of the

Hong Kong Art Club (1925), the Guangdong Association for the Study of Chinese Painting, Hong Kong Branch (1926), the Lai Ching Art Institute (1928), the Hong Kong Fine Arts Institute (1930) and other organizations, the first special art inset in a newspaper in Chinese (1925), the first "native" art exhibitions in Hong Kong, and the first courses in fine arts in local colleges followed suit. By mid-century the Hong Kong Academy of Arts was founded. And soon after that, art made its way into secondary education, when the Education Department decided to include painting in the examination syllabus for junior and senior students in 1954. The following year, and in order not to lag behind these local forays into the arts, the British Council had no choice but to organize the first Hong Kong Arts Festival. The publication of art magazines (*Outlook*, 1952, *Art-quarterly*, 1973, *Arts Monthly*, 1976, and *Artists*, 1978), the opening of galleries (Hong Kong Cultural Works, Oriental, and Chung Lo, 1954, Chatham and City Museum and Art Gallery HK, 1962, and The Art Gallery, CUHK, 1971, among others) and museums (Fung Ping Shan Library of University of HK renamed Fung Ping Shan Museum and City Museum and Art Gallery restructured into HK Museum of Art and HK Museum of History in 1975), and the founding of Departments of Fine Arts of Kingsway College (1958), Ching Kuo College (1961), Chinese University of HK (1963), Tsing Hua College (1969), and University of HK (1978) followed suit.

However, in order to study Hong Kong art in the nineties, it is first necessary to understand this historical trajectory of the territory's art life. As David Clarke and Oscar Ho argue, the trajectory of Hong Kong's art is diametrically opposed to that of the mainland due to cultural, economic, and political factors that set Southern China apart from the rest of the country and Hong Kong from British colonizer and mainland neo-colonizer. The first influence in Hong Kong art comes from the Lingnan School (1930s), a term used to refer to the Three Masters of the Lingnan School, Eclectic School, or New National Painting, Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng, and Chen Shuren, and their students. This school revived the art of flower and bird painting (one of the three main categories in Chinese painting). Their greatest contribution was "the introduction of social consciousness and criticism into art" (Hinterthür 38). It could be said that because of its distance from the seat of imperial power, Guangdong province was considered backward, peripheral, and rural. As a result, Cantonese people developed a double vision that still nowadays constitutes an integral part of their essence. This, in turn, made them revolutionaries and nonconformists. The Taiping revolution started in Guangdong, the Anglo-Chinese Wars were fought in the South China seas, Sun Yat-sen was from that area. As a "reformist" group, the Lingnan school played with both traditional Chinese and nontraditional Chinese elements in their works to make incisive comments on the political affairs of the country and to rebel against the visual regimes of traditional art. With their anti-dynastic background, they painted scenes that represented resistance to the invaders, the birth of a new order, and the celebration of difference. Hinterthür argues that the Lingnan School was "crucial to the development of Hong Kong painting" with their "bold technical and stylistic innovations, their iconoclastic combination of

Oriental and Western elements, and the socio-political dimension of their art" (48). The Communist takeover brought a flood of Chinese artists who, along with local Hongkongese artists returning from abroad, injected the artistic scene of Hong Kong with new directions. Both groups contribute to create a new type of Chinese art, a precursor of Hong Kong art in the nineties. Some advocated the modernization of Chinese art within the traditional canon, while others leaned towards an artistic fusion of East and West. According to Hinterthür, these post-war artists "heralded the development of modern art as we know it, in Hong Kong" because they were "instrumental in changing the attitudes and directions art would take in the future" (80).

The next generations of artists proved to be more experimental and took more artistic licenses than their predecessors. It was in the year 1956 when Modern Literature and Art Association was founded by writers and poets. Four years later they organized an event to popularize the visual arts in Hong Kong. In the next two decades, a great variety of artistic groups—the Circle group (1964), the Shui-Mo painters (1968), the One Art Group (1970), Visual art Society (1974), Front Group, Hong Kong Sculptors Association (1982), Graphic Society and INGROUP (1974), among others—had emerged and exhibited diverse interests and skills. They worked different media, more often than not, mixing disparate materials, genres, and media. To Hinterthür, the trademark of the sixties is "clash" and the trademark of the seventies is "consolidation," but the eighties are an "open forum" for even more creativity (171). A "more experimental tendency" and "an emphasis on socio-political and environmental problems" was expected from the nineties on (171). And that is exactly the direction that art in Hong Kong has taken since Hinterthür's *Modern Art in Hong Kong* was published in 1985.

4.4 The Literary Scene: What is Hong Kong Literature?[4]

> There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself a witness to the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn [. . .]. The personal vocabulary, the individual melody whose metre is one's biography, joins in that sound, with any luck, and the body moves like a walking, a waking island . . . This is the benediction that is celebrated, a fresh language and a fresh people, and this is the frightening duty owed.
>
> Derek Walcott, Nobel Prize Lecture, 1992

The craggy piece of land that Lord Palmerston once scorned and that China mindlessly ceded after its defeat during the first Anglo-Chinese War, metamorphosed into one of the economic and cultural hubs of Asia. Yet, forsaken by the motherland and never fully occupied by the British, Hong Kong stood as an

orphaned child nobody wanted to claim and as an abducted girl waiting to be possessed by the conqueror. As a result, one hundred and sixty six years after the cession of Hong Kong and ten years after its handover to China, it still suffers an identity crisis produced by the colonial legacy. In the literary world, a bulk of what is done in the field of postcolonial studies revolves around the literatures of former Commonwealth members (several African countries, India, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, some Caribbean countries, some South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka), U.S. literatures, and even Latin American literatures, but has completely ignored the case of Hong Kong . The former status of Hong Kong, not as a colony like English-speaking countries such as India, Australia, Trinidad and Tobago, and South Africa, but as a British Dependent Territory and its current status as a Special Administrative Region of China complicates this panorama even further. As William Tay argues in "Colonialism, the Cold War Era, and Marginal Space: The Existential Condition of Five Decades of Hong Kong Literature," "Although ruled by the British for a century and a half, Hong Kong differs from Africa, India and the Caribbean in that it does not have a tradition of literary writing in English" (Tay 31). Indeed, Tay's article itself belongs to a critical survey not of, say, Commonwealth literature or Hong Kong literature, but of Chinese literature. Furthermore, in *Hong Kong's Colonial Legacy*, veteran journalist C.K. Lau takes an extreme position in affirming that "there is absolutely no English-language Hong Kong literature" (111).

Literati are less radical. In the foreword to *City Voices: Hong Kong Writing in English, 1945 to the Present*, well-known academician and poet Louise Ho voices the feelings of isolation of those who write in English in Hong Kong: "there is no English-language literary community from which to draw some kind of affinity or against which to react. There is insufficient writing in English here for a critical mass to have formed" (qtd. in Xu xiii). It might be true that Hong Kong literature is not composed of a strong body of works written in English, but the tradition certainly exists. It is that scantiness that should precisely push the meager community of HK writers in English to, in Mike Ingham's words, make use of the collaborative efforts of local publishers, academics, expatriate writers, emerging voices, and the Hong Kong Writers' Circle, and promote this new wave of English writing (Xu 1). To his co-editor, Xu Xi, "city voices in English have existed and continue to do so" (17).

Some theories have been offered to extricate the origins of this weak literary tradition of Hong Kong writing in English. Ingham argues that "In a community that is approximately 98 percent Cantonese speaking and one that is, in theory at least, post-colonial in consciousness, it is clear that for the population at large and for the burgeoning Chinese-language literary scene, local English writing must be seen at best as an irrelevance, at worst an irritating excrescence generated by the colonial era" (Xu 1). Lau believes that the colonial failure to transform Hong Kong into a truly bilingual society is to blame for. The city has undeniably become a global city, yet English has only been but the language of administration, commerce and law (*Hong Kong's Colonial Legacy*

101). In countries with several ethnic groups and languages or dialects such as India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka or Singapore, English did become a lingua franca that allowed colonizers to communicate with the colonized, but not in a society where the majority of the Chinese population has always been of Cantonese extraction. Another problem that did not pave the way for English to become ingrained in the island was its unusual status as a "borrowed place" within a "borrowed time." England was never able to take over the whole China. Throughout centuries, trade in limited Chinese ports and then exclusively in Canton was the closest thing for the British Empire to colonizing that country. As a result of the Anglo-Chinese Wars, Hong Kong, then Kowloon, and finally the New Territories were added to the British Empire. Throughout the years, a flood of immigrants were coming from and going to the mainland, so that there was not a sizeable stationary population. Then, the 1960s marked the beginning of Hongkongese massive immigration to the West (my parents and other relatives included among those) mainly because of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the threat of Communism. The temporary status of Hong Kong as a British Dependent Territory must have also encouraged its citizens to resist linguistic domination. As Lau contends, they belong to a special breed who at times will side with the motherland when confronted with the foreign invader, but other times will claim their own individuality on the grounds of dialect, degree of Westernization, and historical experiences. These are special conditions that partly explain the scant literature written in English in Hong Kong.

What is Hong Kong literature? Is it a body of writings by and about Hongkongese authors writing in Chinese? Or is it a body of writings by expatriates living in Hong Kong or former Hong Kong residents living in other countries? Should literary works always be written in Chinese or in the language of the colonizer or even in other languages? Should they always be about Hong Kong, its history and stories, and its people or about other less local themes? Tay does not answer all of the above questions, but at least sheds some light on the origins of a truly local Hongkongese literature:

The existence of literature in Hong Kong has always depended on newspaper literary supplements, magazines, and publishing houses. Seen in the context of the ideological battle of the Cold War years, these forums for literature can be subsumed under three categories: those with foreign economic (and political) backgrounds, those produced by in-house writers' groups and enjoying relative independence, and those aimed strictly at profit. (34)

What Tay calls the "premodern" era of Hong Kong, the 1950s and 1960s, was a very active period for the literature written in Chinese. The leading leftist newspapers *Wenhuibao*, *Dagonbao*, and *Xinwanbao* had long been publishing weekly supplements on literature and the arts (obviously with a political agenda). The main right-wing newspaper *Xianggang shibao* (*Hong Kong times*) had its own literary supplement, the "Qianshuiwan," (Repulse Bay), speaking on behalf of modernism in the territory. However, many contributors to these sections were mainland writers as well as writers from Taiwan. Even (pro-Taiwan) commercial newspapers like *Xingdao ribao* (*Sing Tao daily*) and *Huqiao ribao*

(*Overseas Chinese daily*) had supplements that periodically featured literary pieces. In the 1970s, the decade that some critics like Tay identify as the beginning of the modern era in Hong Kong (33), a new generation of local writers began to emerge. Thus, the writings of emerging figures such as Xi Xi and Ye Si (a.k.a. P.K. Leung) were serialized.

Regarding literary magazines, the competition between left and right triggered by the Cold War was represented by two diametrically opposed magazines of the 1950s: *Renren wenxue* (*Everyone's literature*) and *Wenyi xinchao* (*New waves in literature and art*). In the next decades, the works by leading Taiwanese writers, leftist writings, translated pieces, and critical articles took prominence in Chinese language magazines in Hong Kong. Whether in commercial or literary, comprehensive or specific, rightist or leftist magazines or journals, contributors had plenty of options to publish their works, and the literary scene in Hong Kong was definitely growing.

These historiographies show an intriguing pattern in regards to nation formation and identity formulation processes. All of them point to the transformations brought about by China's closed border policy. Besides, all of them describe the decade of the seventies as the time when noticeable changes were being effected in the fields of architecture, film, art, and literature. My intention in drawing these relations between different aspects of Hong Kong's cultural history is to reveal this pattern of cultural production in synchronization with the emergence of the Hongkongese identity and quasi-nation at the imminence of the transfer of sovereignty.

Notes

1 All the information in this section comes from Pryor and Shiu, and Lung.

2 All the information in this section comes from Teo (2011), *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions.*

3 All the information in this section comes from Hinterthür (1985), Clarke (1996) and Ho (1995, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2007), and "Chronology of Hong Kong Art Development."

4 All the information in this section comes from Xu and Ingham (2003), Lau (1997), and Tay (2000).

Bibliography

Cameron, Nigel. "Art in Hong Kong Today." *Art and Australia* 18.2 (1981): 169-73. Print.

Choa, G.H. "Medical and Health Services." *1951-1976 A Quarter Century of Hong Kong: Chung Chi College 25th Anniversary Symposium*. HK: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1977. 123-32. Print.

Chu, Yingchi. *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. Print.

Clarke, David. *Art and Place: Essays on Art from a Hong Kong Perspective*. Hong Kong: HKUP, 1996. Print.
England, Joe. "Industrial Relations in Hong Kong." Hopkins 207-59. Print.
Hinterthür, Petra. *Modern Art in Hong Kong*. Ed. Nina Corazzo. Hong Kong: Myer, 1985. Print.
Hinton, Arthur. "Secondary Education." *1951-1976 A Quarter Century of Hong Kong: Chung chi College 25th Anniversary Symposium*. HK: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1977. 145-62. Print.
Ho, Oscar. "A Curatorial Journey for an Identity." *Art Journal* 57.4 (1998): 39-43. Print.
_____ . "A Poverty of Space." *Art and Asia Pacific* 2.1 (1995): 36-37. Print.
_____ . "City of Make Believe." *ART Asia Pacific* 25 (2000): 46-49. Print.
_____ . E-mail interview. 25 Nov. 2007. Print.
_____ . "Inventing History." *Hong Kong Art Review*. Eds. Eric Wear and Oscar Ho. Hong Kong: AICA, 1999. 46-53. Print.
_____ . "The Long Road Back Home: Hong Kong in 1997 and Beyond." *ART Asia Pacific* 15 (1997): 48-53. Print.
Hopkins, Keith, ed. *Hong Kong the Industrial Colony*. HK: Oxford UP, 1971. Print.
Hughes, Richard. *Hong Kong: Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time*. N.Y.: Praeger, 1968. Print.
Hutcheon, Robin. "Hong Kong: Yesterday and Today—A Personal View." *Hong Kong 1981*. HK: Government Printer, 1981. 1-15. Print.
Lau, Chi Kuen. *Hong Kong's Colonial Legacy: Hong Kong's Chinese View of the British Heritage*. Hong Kong: the Chinese University UP, 1997. Print.
Lung, David. "The Heritage of Hong Kong: Architecture." Owen 32-57. Print.
Magnano Lampugnani, Vittorio, ed. *Hong Kong Architecture: The Aesthetics of Density*. Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1993. Print.
Munn, Christopher. *Anglo-China: Chinese People and British Rule in Hong Kong, 1841-1880*. Great Britain: Curzon, 2001. Print.
Podmore, David. "The Population of Hong Kong." Hopkins 21-54. Print.
Pryor, Edward George and Shiu-hung Pau. "The Growth of the City: A Historical Review." Magnano 97-110. Print.
Tay, William. "Colonialism, the Cold War Era, and Marginal Space: The Existential Condition of Five Decades of Hong Kong Literature." *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey*. Eds. Pang-Yuan Chi and David Der-Wei Wang. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000. Print.
Teo, Stephen. *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. London: BFI, 2001. Print.
Vale, Lawrence J. *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*. New Have, Yale UP, 1992. Print.
Walcott, Derek. "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory." Nobel Prize in Literature Lecture. Prize Award Ceremony. Stockholm Concert Hall. Sweden. 7 Dec. 1992. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html

Welsh, Frank. *A Borrowed Place: The History of Hong Kong*. New York: Kodansha International, 1993. Print.
Xu, Xi and Mike Ingham, eds. *City Voices: Hong Kong Writing in English 1945 to the Present*. Hong Kong: HK UP, 2003. Print.