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In the Mood for Travel:

**Mobility, Gender and Nostalgia in Wong Kar-wai's
Cinematic Hong Kong**

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Doctor of Philosophy

University of Sussex

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be,
submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of
any other degree.

Signature_____

Acknowledgement

“Making films is just like holding water with your hands. No matter how hard you try, you will still lose much of it.” Chinese director Zhang Yimou expresses the difficulty of film making this way. For him, a perfect film is non-existent. At the end of my doctoral study, Zhang’s words ran through my mind. In the past several years, I worked hard to hold the water in my hands – to make this thesis as good as possible. No matter how much water I have finally managed to hold, this difficult task, however, cannot be carried out without the support given by the following people.

First of all, this thesis cannot be done without my supervisors Sue Thornham and Ben Highmore. If working with supervisors can possibly be one of the most knotty parts in doctoral studies, I am lucky enough to have them as my supervisors since they are responsible, responsive, helpful, thoughtful and inspirational. I remember when Sue was going to take a research leave for one term a couple of years ago, she said that her leave “does not include not seeing me” and promised to meet me and read my writings during her leave. I also remember in the early stage of my study, every time after supervision, Ben took care of my emotion by asking how I felt. One day in the future, if I have the opportunity to be a thesis supervisor, I just hope I will be as good as Sue and Ben.

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After all, my doctoral study is not only about the subject matter of my thesis, but also about love and the understanding of life.

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DPhil, Media and Cultural Studies

In the Mood for Travel: Mobility, Gender and Nostalgia in Wong's Kar-wai's Cinematic
Hong Kong

Summary

The director Wong Kar-wai has been widely recognized as a key figure in contemporary Hong Kong cinema. His films have been seen through a number of critical lenses: as auteurist artworks (Brunette, 2005); as creative popular cinema (Bordwell, 2000); as highly political texts responding directly to the 1997 handover (Stokes and Hoover, 1999). Rather than focusing on an aesthetic, technical or political (in a narrow sense) interpretation, this thesis, using the approach of textual and contextual analysis, seeks to bring Wong's films into dialogue with contemporary cultural theories about the nature of space, mobility, gender and nostalgia. In this way I hope both to re-position the films within the cultural context to which and of which they speak, and to show the ways in which they also speak to contemporary cultural concerns which far exceed it. Thus my argument is that these are globally significant films because of the paradigmatic nature of the specific Hong Kong culture which they explore, a culture which embodies in heightened form characteristics seen as typifying modern urban experience. In light of Bhabha's theories of post-colonial culture (1994), Abbas' suggestion of Hong Kong culture as indefinable "postculture" (1997), and Rey Chow's analysis of Hong Kong's post-colonial self-writing (1998), this thesis seeks to show how a marginal culture not only survives, but also creates a speaking position for today's global culture through Wong's cinema. The thesis is structured around three major themes, those of mobility, gender construction and nostalgia, all of which are both regionally specific concerns and global issues. Today, we see the dual trends of nationalism and globalization; the former brings exclusivity and the latter brings homogeneity. Wong's films displays the creativity of Hong Kong's post-colonial culture, whose hybridity and ambivalence defy these conservative trends and shed light on the future of global culture.

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Introduction:

The Future of Cinema and the Future of Culture

First of all, I need to make the confession that Wong Kar-wai is my favourite director. I started watching his films when I was in junior high school. I've watched and re-watched these films whose apparent subjects are love stories, and they touch me every time. For years, I never doubted that these love stories were the reason for my admiration of his films. However, in my doctoral study of the films, I have found another factor – there is something more than love stories embedded in these urban romances. I am also attracted to his films because they touch me with the recurrent themes of physical mobility, fluid identities and hybrid cultures, which make my thesis not only about Wong Kar-wai's films, but also about myself. I too was born in a colony; I grew up without national identity; my culture is a marginal one.

Three Passports and Identities

I am from Macau, an ex-Portuguese colony handed over to mainland China in 1999, two years after Hong Kong's handover. I earned my Bachelor's Degree in Taiwan, which has been politically separated from mainland China since the end of the civil war in 1949. Because of this life history, I have three passports: a Portuguese passport that was given to me when I was born; a Macau SAR (Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China) passport that was given to me after the handover; and a Taiwanese (Republic of China) passport that was given to me when I was a student in Taiwan since the KMT, the ruling party in Taiwan, used to consider Chinese people in Hong Kong and Macau as politically "their" people. However, none of these passports is equivalent to my

identity – I somehow feel alienated by all of them. In the case of my Portuguese passport, I don't speak Portuguese and until recently I hadn't been to Portugal. I like Portuguese culture but I don't feel I belong to that country. I seldom use my Taiwanese passport, which is far less useful than my Portuguese passport and Macau SAR passport when I travel, due to the diplomatic predicament faced by Taiwan – it is not recognized by the United Nations. I love Taiwan but I never claim to be a Taiwanese. The Macau SAR passport, issued by my hometown where I still live, is my “newest” passport and thus one to which I have not yet built up any emotional attachment. Growing up in a colony, I feel distant from mainland China. According to the law in Macau, my official nationality is Chinese, and my official passport is the Macau SAR one. My other passports are seen only as “travel documents”. However, whilst the law can settle my national status, it cannot resolve my fluid identities. These passports are markers of the geographical and historical contexts which have determined my background, including the colonial invasion and civil war in the modern history of China, and the post-colonial situation of Macau.

Macau is a small city with a population of half a million, which is one of the reasons why its people are often eager to move beyond the city. I have studied in Canada, Taiwan, mainland China and the UK. I also enjoy travelling, and I have been to almost thirty countries in America, Europe and Asia. Sometimes, I am surprised to find several kinds of currencies in my wallet at the same time: usually some Patacas (the Macau currency) and Hong Kong dollars, and sometimes some British pounds and RMBs (currency of mainland China), and occasionally some Taiwanese dollars, US dollars and Thai bahts. These are the places where I live, where I study (and have studied), and where I visit once in a while.

Despite the three passports I own and the places I have lived and travelled to, my case is certainly not an isolated one today. Some of my friends who studied in the US, Canada and New Zealand in the problematic 1990s, in a stream of migration before the handovers of Hong Kong and Macau, simply settled there after graduation. A Taiwanese friend of mine worked in Thailand, met a Spanish man there, and then got married and moved to Spain. Another friend from Beijing, who studied in the UK, met his Japanese girlfriend in Brighton and is now working in Tokyo. It is true that we are all from a generation characterized by mobility, not only because of a particular historical event, the handover,

but also as a result of a global trend today, a trend which was intensified by the handover. In *Tokyo* (dir. Shimoyama Ten, 2005), a short film made as part of a transnational co-produced Asian film *About Love* (dir. Shimoyama Ten, Yee Chin-yen and Zhang Yibai), there is a scene where a young man from Taiwan, a young woman from Shanghai, and a Japanese girl from north Japan, Hokkaido, meet in a small park in Tokyo. On the sandy ground they try to show each other the locations of their hometowns by drawing a map. However, this map on the sand is neither solid nor clear, and is messed up by them very soon. I find this map on the sand symbolic – drawn by the travelling youth, this map can never be finalized nor clarified, just like the physical restlessness and the fluid identities of our generation. Hence for me, a thesis on Wong Kar-wai's films and Hong Kong cinema with its foci on mobility, ambivalence and hybridity is not only the study of an object, something “out-there”. Rather, it is also research about myself and how my identities, my mindset, and my ways of understanding the world are constructed.

By concentrating on the stories about journeys, the travelling characters and the feelings of mobility in Wong's films, which function as a prism for understanding contemporary global culture, this thesis focuses on the ambivalence of identities, hybridity of culture, and creativity of post-colonial self-writing exhibited by cinematic Hong Kong. Borrowing from Wong's film *In the Mood for Love* (2000), I use “In the Mood for Travel” as the title of this thesis. This mood does not only belong to Wong's characters, but also to me, and to many people all over the world today. And “travel” here does not only refer to physical journeys, but also to spiritual restlessness and cultural fluidity in our time. In my examination of Wong's films, my intention is to understand a kind of global culture, which is relevant to my three passports, my travelling experiences and the construction of my identities. Hence, it is more a cultural study than a traditional film study. When analyzing films, this thesis is not exploring the meanings of art, but the phenomena of culture. I will return to the themes and approaches of my thesis later.

Hong Kong Cinema and Chinese Food

“Hong Kong cinema is now as universal as Chinese food,” claims Stephen Teo, author of the first book-length study of Hong Kong cinema (1997: xi). Despite his light tone, there are academic issues behind this parallel: food and cinema. First, under globalization today, international cuisine is one of the most visible symbols of metropolitanism and cosmopolitanism. Taking a walk around Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square in central London, one can easily find restaurants serving the food of various countries in Europe, Asia, America, the Middle-east and even Africa. It is no surprise to see more Chinese or Indian restaurants than British food there. Similarly, one can easily find the DVDs of John Woo or Jacky Chan’s films in a store, and see films starring Jet Li or Michelle Yeoh in a theatre in central London. In addition, the comparison between food and Hong Kong cinema implies one crucial fact: they are more part of our everyday life than something from the galleries or museums of high culture. This comparison alludes to the global accessibility of Hong Kong cinema. Teo’s claim is a good departure point for the discussion of Hong Kong cinema, as well as Wong Kar-wai’s films: when Hong Kong cinema is discussed, we are usually not talking about refined but faraway culture from an aesthetic temple, even though some Hong Kong films could fall into this category. Rather, we are more likely to be talking about something like food – popular, accessible, and close to the people in general.

Interestingly, the transnational reception of Hong Kong cinema resonates with Teo’s claim. Unlike its counterparts from mainland China and Taiwan, Hong Kong cinema was originally welcomed in the West by audiences, not by scholars or film festivals. In Western academia, or more precisely English-language academia, the study of Chinese cinema is relatively new, having only surfaced significantly in the past three decades. Before 1980, there was very little English academic work on Chinese cinema.¹ The situation changed from the mid 1980s when scholars such as Chris Berry (1985), Paul Clark (1987), George Semsel (1987) and Wimal Dissanayake (1988) published their work. Then, in the 1990s, these studies were enriched by scholars like Zhang Yingjing (1996), Ackbar Abbas (1997), Stephen Teo (1997), Stokes and Hoover (1999) and David Bordwell (2000).² Academically,

¹ The only English scholarly book on Hong Kong cinema was Ian C. Jarvis’s *Windows on Hong Kong* (1977). See Fu and Desser (2000).

² For a precise introduction to the academic works on Chinese films in the West, see Zhang Yingjing (2002).

the discovery of Hong Kong cinema was later than that of mainland China and Taiwan. Hong Kong cinema was a marginalized research topic for film scholars in China, and neglected by Western scholars until the late 1990s (Fu and Desser, 2000).³ On the other hand, from the late 1980s, directors from Taiwan and mainland China gained international recognition in leading international film festivals in Cannes, Berlin and Venice,⁴ through which their films became renowned among art-house audiences in the West as well as in Asia. Hong Kong cinema's case, however, differs from those of mainland China and Taiwan. When Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* (1997) won the Palme d'Or (best director) prize in the Cannes Film Festival in 1997, he was the first Hong Kong director to be awarded a major prize in a leading film festival in the West. Even today the extent of recognition for Hong Kong films in these leading festivals lags behind that of films from mainland China and Taiwan. It is true that Hong Kong cinema is commercial and genre-based, without the auteurist value, artistic quality and exotic elements that the international film festivals look for.⁵

Hong Kong cinema, without the attention and credits given by academia and film festivals, found another way to the West, one which is closer to food than to artwork – it earned its reputation by pleasing the mainstream audience. A noteworthy fact is that fandom and fanzines for Hong Kong cinema preceded scholarly attention (Fu and Desser, 2000). In 1973, when the West knew little about Chinese language cinema, a kungfu film *Five Fingers of Death* (dir. Chung Chang-wha, 1972) was widely released in the US and became a commercial success (ibid:3), soon followed by the films of Bruce Lee who made his appearance in the US and became a cult idol after the distribution of his *The Big Boss* (dir. Lo Wei, 1971) and *Fist of Fury* (dir. Lo Wei, 1972), both of which were in fact made before *Five Fingers of Death*. Under this “kungfu craze”, Hollywood soon started to adapt

³ Fu and Desser give a good example here: as an important reader in the early stages, there is not a single chapter on Hong Kong cinema in Chris Berry (ed.)'s *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (1985).

⁴ Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* won the Golden Bear prize (best film) in the Berlin Film Festival in 1987; Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness* won the Golden Lion prize (best film) in the Venice Film Festival in 1989; Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* won the Palme d'Or prize (best film) in the Cannes Film Festival in 1993.

⁵ See Zhang Yingjing (2002) for the discussion of the Orientalist gaze by the international film festivals.

martial art elements for American films (Desser, 2000).⁶ In the early 1990s, Jacky Chan successfully established himself as an action star in the West, before filmmakers John Woo, Tsui Hark and Ronny Yu were contracted to make mainstream films in Hollywood. They were not asked to film anything exotic about the Far East; on the contrary, their main contribution was to renew a Hollywood genre – for example, *Mission: Impossible II* (2000), directed by John Woo, was a financial success. Then, Hollywood borrowed more talents from Hong Kong to innovate its own films, using actors Jacky Chan, Jet Li and Michelle Yeoh, and also action choreographers Yuen Wo-ping and Yuen Cheung-yan. Simultaneously, an alternative group of Hong Kong directors who did not make mainstream action films, such as Ann Hui, Stanley Kwan and Wong Kar-wai, were gradually noticed by Western critics and scholars.

Hong Kong cinema's journey to the West thus distinguishes itself among Chinese language cinemas. First, it is commercial, and is considered to be mass entertainment (Lee, 1996: 182). For the local critic in Hong Kong, it is also seen as superficial, weak in narrative logic, incomplete in structure and even “chaotic” (Sek, 1996). For intellectuals from mainland China, under the “Central Plains syndrome” that discriminates against marginal culture, Hong Kong cinema is condemned as slavish (Fu, 2000). Being highly commercial is seen as the original sin, yet the most valuable quality of Hong Kong cinema. Its popularity in the West proves its transnational accessibility. In the late 1980s, when a new group of Hong Kong films were introduced to the US, they were seen as “unpretentious, unself-conscious, and always easily accessible” by American critics (Yau, 2001: 13). In addition, its creativity as genre cinema has been enthusiastically endorsed, for example, by the film theorist David Bordwell. He notes that at a time when European films fail to keep their own national audience, Hong Kong is able to achieve broad international attention, and create artful films within the framework of modern entertainment (2000: xi). “Since the 1970s it (Hong Kong cinema) has been arguably the world's most energetic, imaginative popular cinema,” writes Bordwell (*ibid*: 1). In addition, Bordwell has emphasized that he regards Hong Kong cinema as an example of superb popular cinema

⁶ See more discussion of the reception and influence of these kungfu films in the 1970s US in Desser's article (2000): for example, how these films appealed to black audiences and coincided with the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam.

rather than as part of Chinese culture (ibid: xi). Hong Kong cinema's universal value is thus highlighted. In the mid 1980s, Hong Kong became "Hollywood of the East" (Fu and Desser, 2000). Hong Kong cinema not only had a "hegemonic practice" in the Southeast Asian film market (Ciecko, 2006), in the 1990s, it was also the first in the world in per capita film production, the second in film exports (next to the US), and the third in number of films produced (next to the US and India) (Stokes and Hoover, 1999). From the 1970s, Hong Kong films have been export-oriented (Fu and Desser, 2000), their transnational quality shown in their ability to maintain an overseas market.

With its mainstream forms, entertaining contents and transnational accessibility, Hong Kong cinema is regarded as a theoretical conundrum which goes beyond the frame of national cinema that works against the Hollywood standard (Crofts, 1993), since it is "a transnational cinema, a cinema of pastiche, a commercial cinema, a genre cinema, a self-conscious, self-reflexive cinema, ungrounded in a nation" (Fu and Desser, 2000: 5). The framework of Third World cinema, which stresses the expression of "national themes" in a "national style" with alternative, independent, militant and anti-imperialist content (Stam, 2000: 100-101) contradicts Hong Kong cinema. Some films from mainland China can be seen as national cinema (such as Zhang Yimou's early films with their references to national culture and distinct national style pitched against Hollywood),⁷ and some films from Taiwan carry certain characteristics of Third World cinema (such as Hou Hsiao-hsien's early films with their alternative style and militant content), but these approaches are useless in the face of Hong Kong cinema. There are no such things as "national themes" or "national style" in Hong Kong cinema, which is usually not alternative or independent, and seldom militant or anti-imperialist. Rather, Hong Kong cinema is commercial in its form and anti-nationalist in its content (Yau, 2001). Thus, the frameworks used to scrutinize Hong Kong films are far from those of national cinema and Third World cinema: Hong Kong cinema has shown the city's own identity and its own way to negotiate its varied form of Chineseness against cultural uniformity (Teo, 1997); the hybridity and marginality of the city's culture are embedded in Hong Kong cinema (Lok, 2002); the idea

⁷ But the tricky fact is, whilst these films are seen as national cinema, they are also accused of self-Orientalizing, as in the case of Zhang Yimou's films. This shows the limitation of the doctrine of expressing "national themes" in "national style".

of an authentic Hong Kong identity is pointless (Marchetti, 2000). These cultural characteristics are well presented by Hong Kong cinema, which is seen as one of the core platforms (together with other forms of popular culture as TV dramas and Cantonese popular music) of Hong Kong culture, identity, and even history (Lok, 2002; Ma, 2007). Hence, it is no surprise to see that the theoretical frameworks often applied to Hong Kong cinema are not those of primitivism or Orientalism, which allude to an essentialist view of culture and self-exoticization. Rather, Hong Kong cinema has been more related to contemporary global issues shared with other countries: globalization as seen by the way Hong Kong talent and films go West (Ciecko, 1997); post-modernism instanced in the cinematic use of pastiche, parody, and the representation of time and gender (Teo, 1997); consumerism as seen by the characters' inseparable relationship with commodities (Marchetti, 2000); capitalism and its crisis highlighted by the dangerous urban spaces in the films (Stokes and Hoover, 1999); and urban identity negotiated by the use of gender, nostalgia and technology (Lok, 1995, 2002). Hong Kong cinema is global and local at the same time (Zhang, 2004; Teo, 1997). It is global in terms of its export orientation and transnational accessibility. It is local due to the city's specific cultural and political problems that the cinema must seek to come to terms with (Lok, 1995; Stokes and Hoover, 1999).

Given its characteristics, how does Hong Kong cinema, as commercial and genre cinema, respond to politics and culture? Bordwell's view offers some hints. Using Hong Kong cinema as an example, he argues that mainstream cinema works with mixed emotions and "aims to chart the highest highs and the lowest lows" in society (2000: 8-9). These emotions, he believes, travel well in all cultures. Despite his disagreement with reading Hong Kong cinema politically in terms of its historical situation (*ibid*: 280), his suggestion of the mixed emotions embodied by Hong Kong cinema makes a linkage to Raymond Williams' notion of "the structure of feeling" (1977), which associates people's feelings – their lived experience and shared values and perceptions – to the cultural, political climate at a particular time and place. Feelings, according to Williams, are not free from politics, but are structurally connected to particular historical moments. This is represented in everyday life as well as in fictions, such as novels. Hence, when Hong Kong cinema embodies certain kinds of mixed emotions and feelings that make contact with local and

global audiences, not only are the city's unusual cultural and political situations, namely the 1997 handover, shown, but also we can see demonstrated "the structure of feeling" of our time on a larger scale. This, I would argue, is the significance of Hong Kong cinema, a quality less found in the films from mainland China and Taiwan. Wong Kar-wai's films seldom address social issues. Rather, as mentioned, the apparent subjects of his films are love stories. However, the "feelings" depicted in his films, as I will explore in this thesis, are related to the global sensibilities of our time.

A Surprise: Encounters with Wong Kar-wai

I saw my first Wong Kar-wai film in 1995 at the Toronto International Film Festival. It was *Fallen Angels*, and I was overwhelmed. Who was this amazing filmmaker with such a brilliant new visual style? I stumbled, still dazed, into the Sutton Place Hotel, the festival's headquarters at the time, and ran into James Quandt, the longtime director of the Ontario Cinémathèque and a man of impeccable cinematic taste. "I've just seen the future of cinema," I said breathlessly. In his usual low-key manner, James replied, "Oh, you're just coming from the Wong Kar-wai film?" (Brunette: 2005: xiii)

The above anecdote from the film scholar Peter Brunette, the author of *Wong Kar-wai* (2005), one of the English book-length studies exclusively about the director,⁸ vividly illustrates the surprise brought by Wong's films to the West in the 1990s. What a Western academic saw in *Fallen Angels* is not an exotic China, but an urban romance in modern Hong Kong, in which he found "the future of cinema". What makes Wong's films so appealing to a Western film scholar, who has supposedly seen a lot of films from various parts of the world? In Brunette's book, his answer is that Wong Kar-wai is a superb auteur (ibid). Following my discussion of Hong Kong cinema's comparability to food as an international phenomenon, however, this does not seem a sufficient answer. Other than his artistic style and "auteurist" qualities, then, what is behind the popularity of Wong's films? My thesis attempts to answer this question.

A look at Wong Kar-wai's biographical background is necessary. Wong was born in Shanghai in 1958. Five years later, he moved to Hong Kong with his family. He grew up in

⁸ See footnote no. 12 for the list of the books about Wong Kar-wai's films.

Hong Kong, and studied graphic design at Hong Kong Polytechnic Institute. He joined the film industry in its prosperous period in the 1980s. In 1981, he took a course for production designers and directors in TVB, the leading TV station in Hong Kong. He soon started working there as a production trainee and began writing scripts for TV dramas and later films (Pun and Lee, 2004: xiv). At that time, many people used television as a springboard to the film industry; Wong was among them. After writing the script for the film *Final Victory* (dir. Patrick Tam, 1987), which was nominated for the best screenplay in the Hong Kong Film Awards, he made his directorial debut, a gangster film, *As Time Goes By* (1988), which was a commercial and critical success for a new director. Afterwards, it took Wong three years to finish *Days of being Wild* (1991), this time a commercial failure but an even bigger critical success which established his cinematic style (Pun, 2004) and won a number of awards in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Developing his style, in 1994 he finished *Chungking Express*, an urban romance, which was shot in a two-month break in his editing of his other film *Ashes of Time* (1994) (Teo, 2005), a modified martial art film that took him another three years to finish, with a “post-modern sensibility” which subverts the genre (ibid: 76). *Chungking Express* was introduced to the US market (distributed by Miramax) with the assistance and endorsement of the American director Quentin Tarantino, who claimed to be Wong’s fan (Ngai, 1995). His next film *Fallen Angels* (1995), a companion piece to *Chungking Express*, was also released in the US. It was Wong’s first international step before he won the best director award at the Cannes Film Festival with his gay film *Happy Together* (1997) in the significant year of Hong Kong’s handover. His next film *In the Mood for Love* (2000), this time a nostalgic love melodrama, considered to be a masterpiece (Brunette, 2005), got even bigger international attention, won the best foreign film awards in more than five countries in the West, and opened a wider art-house film market in the world (Li, 2004). Then, *2046* (2004), a sequel to *In the Mood for Love*, was again a nostalgic melodrama about the 1960s. After this, Wong took a new direction by finishing the short film *The Hand* (2004), part of an international co-operation comprised of three stories directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, Steven Soderbergh and Wong himself under the theme and title of *Eros* (2004), and *My Blueberry Nights* (2007), his first English language film with an American setting. His most recent project *The Grand Masters*, the

story of a kungfu master Ip Man (Yip Man), Bruce Lee's master, is expected to be on screen in the second half of 2012 after a few years of shooting and producing.

There is a close affinity between Hong Kong cinema and Wong Kar-wai, who is seen as "a child of the Hong Kong genre cinema" (Teo, 2005: 2). Wong had been a screenwriter for six years before he made his first film, working with mainstream directors and producing genre films from ghost stories and romances to action films (Pou, 2004: 205-206). He has talked about the production environment in Hong Kong at that time: since the directors and producers always pre-sell their films to get funding, they need to promise to make popular genre films, often action films (Brunette, 2005: 118). For Bordwell, Wong is "deeply indebted to popular tradition", so that "however idiosyncratic Wong's films are, they take popular norms as points of departure" (2000: 270).

However, critics have also suggested that his films go further than their generic frameworks, and even subvert them (Bordwell, 2000). *Days of being Wild*, whose Chinese title *A Fei Zhenzhaung* (meaning "the story of a hooligan") refers to gangster film, is a slow, melancholic and stylish film with limited action scenes; *Chungking Express* is a light romance with some noir elements; *Ashes of Time* is a "post-modern" martial art film; *Fallen Angels* is an urban romance with shooting scenes and underworld characters; *Happy Together* is a gay road movie (Teo, 2005). Wong is close to, and simultaneously distant from, mainstream Hong Kong cinema. His other background is noteworthy: Wong has a linkage to the Hong Kong New Wave, a filmic campaign which modernized Hong Kong cinema (Law, 2001) and addressed urban issues with local perspectives (Rodriguez, 2001) from the late 1970s. Although Wong was not yet in the film industry when the New Wave directors made their debut, this trend changed the picture of Hong Kong cinema and paved the way for Wong, who is recognized as part of the "Second Wave" (Teo, 1997: 193). The relationship between traditional genre and the New Wave directors is ambivalent. The New Wave directors tend to adapt existing genres to their own individual concerns with "originality and seriousness" (ibid: 64). New Wave is not avant-garde. These films are, argues Bordwell, "avant-pop cinema" (2000: 261-281). This context helps to understand Wong Kar-wai's mainstream yet alternative films (ibid).

Other than genre, Brunette finds a linkage between Wong's films and world cinema: the mystification of everyday life in his films is comparable to the films of Krzysztof Kieslowski; the elements about gangsters are related to some Hollywood films of the 1930s (2005). The artistic hybridity in his films is also indicated this way: "where else would someone combine Akira Kurosawa and Alain Resnais to make the equivalent of *The Seven Samurai at Marienbad* ⁹?" One critic describes the bold mixture of different filmic cultures in *Ashes of Time* in the context of Hong Kong cinema's inclusivity and hybridity (Hampton, 1996: 93). Despite his agreement with the suggestion of Wong as the "child of Hong Kong genre cinema", Teo has also explored the connection to world literature of Wong's films. He finds that Wong is influenced by Latin American authors such as Manuel Puig and Julio Cortazar, the Japanese author Haruki Murakami and local Hong Kong authors Liu Yi-chang and Jin Yong (2005). Adding up all the arguments, Wong's films are comprehensively associated to traditional Hong Kong genres, Hong Kong New Wave, mainstream and non-mainstream world cinema, and even local and multinational literatures. However, these arguments are contributory yet restrictive in the studies of Wong's films: they indicate the cultural diversity of his works but simultaneously limit the discussion of them to art creation and auteurism, from which my thesis will depart. My perspective will be clarified later in this section.

The diverse resources and multicultural linkages of Wong's films help to explain the reception of them in the West. Tracing the process of the recognition of Wong's films in the West, the local veteran film critic Li Cheuk-to distinguishes how the Western critics view his films from the reception of those of other Chinese directors (2004). Wong's films are often compared to those of Western auteurs like Godard, Alain Resnais or Fassbinder, whilst his contemporaries, especially the Chinese directors such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, face Orientalist criticism (ibid). It is this cosmopolitanism, or universality, Li argues, that exempts Wong from this criticism. Li remarks that the Western critics appreciate the similarity between Wong's films and the Western world, rather than the disparity between them, such as the exoticism and ancient culture in the East presented in the films of some of the contemporary world famous directors mentioned. In fact, the representation of China

⁹ It means the combination of the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* (1954) and the French director Alain Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961).

and Chinese culture in films is a critical concern. To satisfy the expectations and the taste of the West, Zhang Yingjing argues, Chinese films, especially in the 1990s, have to present themselves with the visual beauty of primitive landscapes, the oppression and eruption of sex, and various kinds of sexual exhibition in rural settings (such as incest and transvestism) (2002: 32). However, the analytic context of Wong's films is modern, urban and contemporary, even though it took a longer time for the West to appreciate them.¹⁰ Eclecticism and heterogeneity are embodied in Wong's films: they are in between the East and the West, the local and global, the popular and high art, and the cinema and literature (Teo, 2005). This kind of in-between-ness, as one of the essential concerns in post-colonialism, is actually part of Hong Kong culture. Wong's films are treated as modern global texts rather than as Chinese national cinema. This global characteristic of Wong's films is a major concern in this thesis.

Indeed, Wong has not only established himself as a leading contemporary director, but also originated a trend with his style: in 1990s Hong Kong, there was a generation of "Wong wannabes" who adopted Wong's cinematic styles, including the use of monologues, camera angles and fragmented storylines (Bordwell, 2000: 266); outside Hong Kong, the Korean director Lee Myung-se (*Nowhere to Hide*, 1999), the Austrian director Tommy Tykwer (*Run, Lola, Run*, 1998) and the Chinese director Lou Ye (*Suzhou River*, 2000) are regarded as deeply influenced by Wong (Teo, 2005: 163).¹¹ How to make sense of this local and global "Wong Kar-wai phenomenon"? It is relevant to the question I raised from Brunette's anecdote: when he discovered "the future of cinema" in Wong's films, what else did he see apart from the artistic quality which "proves" Wong to be an "auteur"? This thesis will examine his films in the contexts of contemporary global cultural politics, and take the discussion beyond the limitations of auteurism.

The "Future of the Cinema"?

¹⁰ *Days of being Wild*, as the first film with Wong's signature style, was shown in the Berlin Film Festival in 1991 but ignored (Li, 2004).

¹¹ Teo argues that these film "copy and imitate" Wong's style, but I think it is more fair to say they are deeply influenced by Wong.

Wong Kar-wai has been one of the most discussed Chinese directors.¹² In general, there have been three major approaches to the analysis of Wong's films. First, some film scholars and critics have paid attention to the artistic styles, aesthetic creativity and originality of his films. For example, Brunette has chosen the approach of European formal aesthetics to examine Wong's works, arguing him to be a great auteur among world class film masters (2005). Teo relates Wong's works to Hong Kong genres as well as world literatures to demonstrate Wong's status as auteur and as best director in Hong Kong, seeing him as having changed both Hong Kong cinema and European art-house cinema (2005). These studies are significant in a number of ways: they offer close textual analysis of Wong's films in terms of style and content; and they effectively make Wong's name equivalent to that of any world class director, which not only deepens the understanding of his films, but also de-stigmatizes the stereotypical image of Hong Kong cinema as "chopsocky" (brought by the kungfu films in the 1970s) and broadens its visibility to Western scholarship, particularly in relation to non-action films. In addition, under the lens of auteurism, the artistic characteristics of these films are examined, leading to the possibility of wider explorations: for example, in arguing for Wong's connection to world cinema, Brunette sees the cultural hybridity in his films, which helps to suggest their wider cultural significance.

The second approach focuses on Wong's attachment to mainstream genres and popular tradition, and is represented by Bordwell's work (2000). In his appreciation of

¹² There are some books that particularly focus on his films, including Stephen Teo's *Wong Kar-wai* (2005), Peter Brunette's *Wong Kar-wai* (2005), Wimal Dissanyake's *Wong Kar-wai's Ashes of Time* (2003) and Jeremy Tambling's *Wong Kar-wai's Happy Together* (2003). A collection of articles about his films titled *Wong Kar-wai* (1997) was published in Paris. Also, there are numerous books with a chapter about Wong Kar-wai, such as Ackbar Abbas' *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), Stokes and Hoover's *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (1999), David Bordwell's *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (2000), Rey Chow's *Sentimental Fabulations: Contemporary Chinese Films* (2007), Vivian Lee's *Hong Kong Cinema since 1997: The Post-Nostalgic Imagination* (2009), and the reader *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (2001) etc. Other than the books particularly on Hong Kong cinema, some books under other themes devote sections to the discussion of Wong's films. For example, the article 'We'll always have Hong Kong: Spaces and Disappearing Memories in the Films of Wong Kar Wai' in Christine Lee (ed.)'s *Violating Time: History, Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (2008), and 'Rethinking Nostalgia: *In the Mood for Love* and *Far From Heaven*' in Pam Cook's *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (2005).

Wong's films, Bordwell see them as "young romance" using innovative forms of narratives and styles. Even though Bordwell's focus is not Wong's auteurism – his conclusion is that Wong's films are "light cinema" (ibid: 289) rather than masterpieces – his emphasis on cinematic style and visual techniques is in some ways similar to the auteurist approach, since both of them don't take much account of the cultural and political contexts of the films. In contrast, the third kind of approach reads Wong's films as reflections of the 1997 handover. For example, for Stokes and Hoover, the martial art film *Ashes of Time* is a 1997 allegory, the theme of reunion in *Happy Together* is a metaphor for the 1997 handover, and even the digital clock showing time moving from 23:59 to 00:00 in the film is seen as "an oblique handover reference" (1999: 277). This perspective, directly linking his films to a specific political event, shares similarities with the approaches of some Hong Kong critics (Li, 2004). This political reading explores the local contexts of Wong's films, helps to understand the socio-political climate in Hong Kong, and provides an alternative avenue for interpretation which does not rely on seeing Wong as an auteur. Despite the disparities in their emphasis, the above three approaches sometimes overlap. For example, Teo's work has paid some attention to the political implications of Wong's films although his major concern is Wong's artistic achievement. Similarly, Stokes and Hoover's political reading of his films is not without some discussion of his artistic style.

The Gap: A Fourth Way to Read Wong's Films

These studies with their varied approaches and emphases significantly contribute to the understanding of Wong's films. However, there are still gaps to fill. Between young romance and political allegory, between masterpiece and popular culture, is there another way to read his films? Both the auteuristic, technical approach and the narrowly political perspective fail to see a wider cultural significance in these films. When his films are seen as auteurist masterpieces, the world outside art disappears from view; when his films are seen as popular culture, the cultural political content in his films is ignored; when his films are seen as direct responses to 1997, the cross-cultural importance of his films is underestimated. In particular, a number of questions are left unanswered. Other than their

innovative style, what makes these films accessible to a global audience? In terms of politics, if Wong's films refer directly to the 1997 handover, how do they touch audiences from Japan to France, who are not necessarily familiar with the political situation in Hong Kong? Is there something political but more far-reaching than the 1997 handover which makes his films resonate with an international audience?

It is this gap in the studies of Wong Kar-wai's films that my research attempts to fill, these questions that I seek to answer. I believe it is a crucial step to compare his films to works by European auteurs, and reading his films within a 1997 context is also necessary. However, it is now worth pointing our studies in another direction: the cultural and political significance of his films within a context that reaches wider than 1997. Rather than offering an aesthetic, technical analysis or a narrow political interpretation, this thesis seeks to bring Wong's films into dialogue with contemporary cultural theories about the nature of space, mobility, gender representation, and the writing of nostalgia in contemporary culture. Since the stylistic details of his films have already been examined, my approach will take equal account of the texts and their contexts, which include the filmic traditions and the local socio-political climate in Hong Kong, related global trends and crucial critical and cultural debates in the West. When interrogating Wong's films, my concerns are not limited to Hong Kong cinema. Rather, I am concerned to reach out to questions of global culture, using Wong's films as my lens. There already exist substantial close textual analyses of Wong's films, but the investigation of the wider contexts of his films is still weak in comparison. This is a void I attempt to fill. My argument is that they are globally significant films precisely because of the paradigmatic nature of the specific Hong Kong culture which they explore, a culture which embodies in heightened form characteristics seen as typifying late twentieth century urban experience. The main question of my thesis is: rather than "the future of cinema", should Wong's films not more properly be seen as offering ways of understanding aspects of "the future of culture"? And in doing this, how can an understanding of Wong's Hong Kong cinema contribute to an understanding of the world today?

My thesis, as a textual and contextual analysis of Wong's films, will treat the texts as the site where different discourses meet and are reworked (Metz, 1974). The related

contexts and discourses of these films are complex, including the director's own experience, other films and literature, film production modes and generic traditions, the socio-political climate in Hong Kong, and the worldwide trends of globalization and nationalism. When these various discourses are reworked, a complicated and changeable picture of Hong Kong surfaces, which not only responds to a changing society and culture, but also actively creates new forms of culture which are presented in Wong's films. The conception of textual contradiction as a working through of social struggle and conflict (Stam, 2000) also sheds light on the understanding of these films. These filmic texts are produced in the ups and downs of the film industry, the economy and the politics of Hong Kong. The cultural and political struggle in Hong Kong is reworked and transformed via the various cinematic devices in these films. In my thesis, the films will not be taken as realist texts that directly reflect or even document social realities. Rather, in the contestation of discourses that they display, these films sometimes reflect "the structure of feeling", sometimes diagnose cultural symptoms, sometimes elaborate political issues via imaginative images, sometimes offer implicit response to a socio-cultural situation, both for Hong Kong and for other urbanized industrialized societies. In addition, to explore the meanings in Wong's films, which are often implicitly embedded in their deployment of genre, I will use the method of "symptomatic reading" suggested by the post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1999). In her reading of post-colonial literature, she explores gaps, omissions and silences between the lines because the capacity for self-articulation of the "natives" is taken away within colonial history. Thus critics, she argues, should read and explore symptoms from these incomplete texts. In a similar way we can argue that Hong Kong's language has been taken by the colonial power. In such circumstances, how does the city speak for itself? As I will point out in my thesis, Wong Kar-wai, as well as Hong Kong cinema, seldom directly addresses political issues and social realities. Without a tradition of political films by Western standards, with its export-orientation, in a commercial market of generic products, Hong Kong cinema often deals with social issues in an indirect way.¹³ These are the circumstances in which symptoms await a reading.

¹³ See Chapter 3 for the discussion of Hong Kong cinema's way of dealing with politics.

Key Themes: Space, Time and Gender

The thesis is structured around three major themes, those of mobility, gender representation and the writing of nostalgia, all of which are both global issues and regionally specific concerns. They are some of the most crucial themes that constantly recur in his films, and which consolidate the director's writing of Hong Kong through the presentation of hybrid culture, fluid identities, and a reflective attitude towards history. His films demonstrate that Hong Kong culture and identities can be best presented by journeys, mobile space, crisis-ridden men, travelling women, and the ambivalent yet reflective writing of the past. Some of these themes have not been critically addressed before in relation to Wong's films, while others have been examined, but not fully. For example, gender issues in his films are seldom addressed critically, and feminism is never used to scrutinize his films; themes like women in mobility in his urban films and androgyny in *Ashes of Time* have not been analyzed in detail. On the other hand, themes like mobility and nostalgia have been discussed. For instance, Sheldon Lu has written about the diaspora in *Happy Together* (2005), and Lok Fung (1995) and Vivien Lee (2009) have examined the nostalgia in his films about the 1960s. However, as with many other studies of Wong's films, they tend to focus on the specific backgrounds in Hong Kong at the expense of the global aspects in these films. In short, Wong's cinematic Hong Kong is not treated as a paradigmatic text in these studies, which is the major difference between my thesis and previous work.

Since one single approach or theory is inadequate for this discussion, my thesis will deploy an interdisciplinary approach in the light of a number of theoretical perspectives: anthropological debates on the meaning of space in modern society; post-colonial theories about hybrid culture and ambivalent identities; the exploration of the subtle relationship between politics and gender representation in cultural studies; feminist perspectives on women in factual and cinematic spaces; and discussion of the complicity and tension between nostalgic texts and official grand narratives of history. Through this merging of approaches I tackle the various cultural symptoms carried by Wong's cinematic Hong Kong, which exemplifies "the (global) structure of feeling" of our time. Despite the diversity of the theories I use, it is still impossible to cover all important currents. Hence, the theoretical choices I make are based on their relevance to the main goal of this thesis. For instance, the

significance of post-colonial theories, gender perspectives and the discussion of space outweigh other possible approaches such as psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and postmodernism in my thesis. These theories are not less important, they are just less helpful to my research, which attempts to explore a Hong Kong culture that has experienced colonialism, diaspora, and is now positioned between globalization and a grand narrative of history and culture from mainland China, whilst struggling to demonstrate its own identities. The analytic frameworks I use are relevant to issues such as national identities, counter-narratives of history and post-colonial culture of an ex-colonial city – the major concerns in this thesis.

That is why my research is more connected to Ackbar Abbas' and Rey Chow's analyses of Hong Kong, and Homi Bhabha's theory of post-colonial culture. Both Abbas and Chow clarify the difficulties of writing and speaking for Hong Kong culture. For Abbas, the problems are the reverse-hallucination, a phenomenon in which people fail to see and value what is there due to Hong Kong's illegitimate position in both Chinese and Western cultures, and the "culture of disappearance", when the city's culture is under threat and things are misrecognized and misrepresented according to some familiar and plausible notions such as "East/West difference" (1997: 6-7). However, Abbas argues that the problem is simultaneously an opportunity for the writing of new culture, which he terms "postculture" (ibid: 145-146), and even culture in its disappearance provides a chance for Hong Kong to establish something new; Wong's films provide one of the best examples of the capturing of this "culture of disappearance" (ibid: 48-62). For Chow, the problem is Hong Kong's struggle to self-write in the tiny gap between colonial and nationalist discourses (1998: 149-158). However, similar to Abbas, she still believes there to be a third space between the cultures dominated by the colonizers and the nationalists, and it is necessary for Hong Kong to be opportunistic in the creation of its own cultures. It is true that there have been some discursive clichés that dominate the images of Hong Kong, namely the focus on economic success, the notion of the "Pearl of the Orient" (the glorification of its prosperity) and that of the "cultural desert" (the condemnation of its lack of high culture) (Yau, 2001: 16). Abbas and Chow have shed light on reading Hong Kong culture in a penetrative way. However, despite their well-referenced insights about Hong Kong culture, Wong Kar-wai's films are not the main focus of their works. In Abbas' study,

Wong's films are only one of his examples, and his discussion only covers his films until 1997. Some of Wong's important films such as *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* have not been addressed by Abbas. The situation in Rey Chow's study is similar, in which Wong is even less a focus in her works than in Abbas'. In my discussion of Wong's films, I will follow but also develop their arguments, and further point out the significance of Hong Kong culture as paradigmatic in our time. In addition, this thesis cannot conclude without Bhabha's influential view on post-colonial culture, including the idea of cultural creativity developed from marginal positions, the "double vision" of the migrants, and the ambivalence of post-colonial culture (1994). Even though he has never written about Hong Kong,¹⁴ Bhabha's theory explores the subtle strategies of cultural articulation of the seemingly marginalized and subordinated groups and communities in post-colonial culture. In my examination of Wong's films, I will explore how Wong Kar-wai finds a voice for Hong Kong under these pressures and difficulties, which contradictorily enable the creativity and activity of Hong Kong culture. This thesis seeks to show how a marginal culture not only survives, but also creates a speaking position for itself through Wong Kar-wai's cinema.

There are three chapters in the thesis. Chapter 1 deals with Hong Kong's absence, the "spatial others" and the spaces of passage in Wong's films. Journeys are stressed and foreign countries are often used in his films to present Hong Kong since it is a city in transition due to its colonial history, migrant population, and its position in today's globalization. Also, Wong's films highlight the spaces of passage, in which people are often homeless. These spaces display a different sense of place, which combines the local and the global, and can be seen as a progressive spatial and cultural phenomenon in our time.

With Wong's constant interest in physical journeys and fluid identity, men and women are presented differently: men are often in crisis, and women are more mobile and homeless than men in his films. Extending my argument about mobility in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 will

¹⁴ Bhabha gave a lecture titled "Global Pathways: Cosmopolitanism and Humanities" in the University of Hong Kong on the 18th of March in 2011. In the lecture, I asked him for his comments on Hong Kong culture since the city is comparable to Bombay he has talked about. In his reply, Bhabha said that he "feels home" in Hong Kong and he thinks it is a city in liminal space which points to the world outside and opens to newness.

examine gender, space and mobility in his films. First, the chapter focuses on the men in crisis. These male characters demonstrate the director's alteration of genres, the changing gender culture in the 1990s, and Hong Kong's anxiety over 1997. Second, the chapter focuses on the mobile women in his films. These female characters freed from the private space explore the "sublime space" and redefine the relationship between gender and space. They break the boundaries of gender and genres, to become the platform of the city's self-articulation and post-colonial culture.

Wong has long been obsessed with the past, especially the 1960s. Chapter 3 will go further from the spatiality of the previous two chapters to the temporal, even though mobility is still a recurrent motif since Wong's writing of the past is often attached to it. This chapter will focus on nostalgia in his films, which is part of a wider cultural phenomenon in Hong Kong cinema, especially before 1997. First, I will trace this cinematic trend of nostalgia and within a number of contexts: nationalism, globalization and post-coloniality. Second, I will focus on the strategies of nostalgia in these films. Spatialized time, nostalgic details, genres as time machines and women in the past are the major themes discussed in relation to Wong's alternative writing of the past. I will argue that Wong's films offer a reflective form of nostalgia, which challenges both official history and the linear concept of time. In my discussion, this cultural symptom of nostalgia is worldwide in our age of globalization and post-coloniality.

There are two points to make about the structure of these chapters. First, the thematic flow of my argument breaks down the order of the director's oeuvre. In other words, these films will not be scrutinized one by one or in linear sequence. Rather, instances from different films will be drawn on in accordance with the themes of the chapters. The "film-by-film" approach, as a classical form for auteurist accounts, which clarifies the progress of the director's creative oeuvre and the characteristics of each film, has been used by Brunette (2005), Teo (2005) and Abbas (1997). However, for my attempt to reach beyond the approaches which characterise their studies, I find the "film-by-film" approach insufficient, since some motifs, especially those that appear recurrently in the films, are easily left out if the analytic structure is film-based. Indeed, it has been argued that Wong has been telling the same story throughout his career, which means the recurrence of

similar characters, moods, and motifs in his films (Ching, 2004). These motifs have to be critically addressed in the analysis of the relevant instances from different films. For example, there are various kinds of travelling women in his films, from a female knight-errant in ancient China in *Ashes of Time* to a prostitute in 1960s Hong Kong in *2046*, and a young traveller from today's New York in *My Blueberry Nights*. Their images and the narratives of their journeys have to be taken as a whole, or at least as a collection, for analytic purposes. Thus, if I follow his filmmaking progress from the first film to the latest film and read these films separately, the auteur Wong Kar-wai will possibly again become an over-whelming figure at the expense of the wider cultural significance of his films. Therefore, my discussion will flow according to its central themes supported by the analysis of related texts.

Second, these chapters share a similar structure in which all the chapters have two layers of discussion: the first layer tends to treat his texts as cultural pathologies which reflect Hong Kong's political predicament, and the second layer will see this pathological representation as a cultural symptom to be found not only in Hong Kong but worldwide in today's post-colonial culture. For example, in my analysis of homelessness in Chapter 1, I will first trace the history of diaspora and the background of mobility in Hong Kong to understand the fluid life of Wong's characters. Then, moving from a specific Hong Kong situation, I will see the culture of mobility, which is now a global trend, as paradigmatic in our time. The cultural phenomena shown in Wong's films have been seen as pathological. For example, in Teo's analysis, many characters in these films carry different kinds of pathology: amnesia, blindness, muteness and lovesickness, which reveal the pathology of the city caused by its politics and history (2005: 88-89). My argument, however, is that this seemingly pathological culture of a post-colonial city sheds considerable light on the present and future of a far more global culture. In other words, these pathologies are not necessarily "abnormal", nor do they only belong to a problematic Hong Kong. Rather, they are paradigmatic, with a global significance.

The Whole World as Post-Colonial

From Wong Kar-wai's case, I thus seek to explore Hong Kong's strategies of cultural articulation: its urban culture, hybrid identities and flexible citizenship (Lu: 2005) function against a normative kind of national identity and homogeneous cultural form. Its popular culture problematizes canonical culture that claims itself to be the standard of culture. Its marginal position empowers it with double vision, which sees the core of today's culture. This re-reading of the stigma it has carried for decades – that of “cultural desert” – not only challenges Chinese culture, but also questions the very concept of “culture” today. Is culture equivalent to “authentic”, “national” culture? Does culture have to be rooted in “tradition”, which is in any case a kind of invention (Hobsbawn, 1983)? The prosperous filmic culture in Hong Kong shows that when flowers grow in a “cultural desert” it is not a miracle but normality, since the marginal position is the soil for culture today. However, I am not using Hong Kong's case to generalize culture, given the fact that different cultures have their own contexts. For example, is any given culture a First World culture? If so, what kind of “First World” is it? Is it the Disneyland culture in the US, the French culture in Canada, or the modern culture of Japan? Is it a Third World culture? If so, which kind of “Third World” is it? Is it the impoverished Bangladesh, or the urbanized Shanghai in China? The case of Hong Kong cinema, without doubt, is not applicable to all. However, in my reading of its self-writing strategies under different cultural and political pressures, I argue it is still paradigmatic and inspiring for all in today's post-colonial situation. In her challenge to European culture as necessarily universal, Spivak calls for minority discourse to speak for our culture today (1999). Despite its international success, Hong Kong culture, being devalued by canonical Chinese culture, being alienated from the grand narratives of the state, being trapped between colonial and nationalist discourses, can be seen as an example of minority discourse. In this thesis, I argue that Hong Kong's post-colonial creation operates against nationalism and globalization, both of which are faced not only by Hong Kong, but also by the whole world (Appadurai, 1996).

The post-colonial situation today is no longer limited to countries that experienced colonialism. Rather, it is seen as the global shift from colonialism, a kind of militant invasion from the eighteenth to the mid twentieth century, to neo-colonialism, a kind of economic, political and cultural dominance from the twentieth century (Spivak, 1999). For Spivak, post-coloniality refers to the changing stage from colonialism to neo-colonialism,

which positions the whole world today as participant in the post-colonial situation. Her understanding of post-coloniality sheds light on the reading of Hong Kong culture; Hong Kong's case is an intensification of today's cultural syndrome – the colonial past, the hybridization of culture, the aggressive trend of globalization, the problematic yet creative construction of new identities and the pressure from nationalism. In other words, Hong Kong's exceptionality is its universality. When Chineseness is seen as an open-ended discourse (Chow, 2007), and the narration of nation is never finished (Berry and Farquhar, 2006), the hybrid, flexible and urban citizenship in Hong Kong makes a positive contribution to this never finished discourse, which is vividly demonstrated in Wong Kar-wai's films. In fact, the representation of the city in film is an important subject in today's film and cultural studies (Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2001; 2003). However, the study of the cinematic city has tended to focus on Western cities such as Paris, London, New York and Los Angeles, which are the reference points and standards of modern cities. In the three groundbreaking academic books on cinematic cities, the readers *The Cinematic City* (ed. Clarke, 1997), *Cinema and the City* (eds. Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2001) and *Screening the City* (eds. Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2003), few articles pay attention to Asian cities (there is only one article about Saigon and another about Manila in *Cinema and the City*), none of them to Hong Kong. In her defense of Hong Kong culture, Rey Chow poses a question: "instead of asking how Hong Kong falls short of other major cities, what does Hong Kong tell us about our assumption about cities in general? What is it about Hong Kong as a city that offers us new insights into the conceptualizations of modern city culture?" (1998: 173) Taking Wong Kar-wai's cinematic Hong Kong as a paradigmatic city, this thesis attempts to shift the emphasis from the West to the East, given the fact that cities such as Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul are global cities with a rich filmic culture, and India and China are rising nations with considerable film production.

Abbas has used "postculture" to describe the indefinable culture of Hong Kong (1997), a novel kind of culture before which all the existing standards of culture are useless. It is a reminder of Appadurai's suggestion of "post-nation", a new form of nation that is not attached to Motherland and without the loyalty to the nation state (1996). They both concern the possibility of an open, diverse and inclusive form and notion of culture and nation. It is the aim of this thesis to explore this kind of "postculture" and "post-nation"

through the re-reading of Wong's films and the re-contextualizing of the cultural phenomena in Hong Kong. For my analytic purposes, there is a tendency in my thesis to treat some cultural symptoms in a positive way. For example, in the light of Bhabha's theory, the cultural hybridity and ambivalence, along with the namelessness and homelessness in Wong's films, are valued as the potential platforms of post-colonial creativity. They are linked to the notions of "postculture" and "post-nation". However, it is imperative to note that my use of these concepts is situated. They are used within the context of a certain cultural climate, such as that provided by globalization and nationalism today. These symptoms or pathologies, such as homelessness, are powerful devices to innovate culture. But just as no cultural theory can be applied to all situations timelessly, the concepts I use and the direction of my analysis cannot be taken out of the cultural contexts in which my thesis is being written. These theories, as well as my analyses, are situated. Thus, the studies of Wong's films and Hong Kong cinema are never finished. Further issues will need to be confronted in the rapidly changing cultural picture of the twenty-first century.

In addition, I am aware of the limitations of my thesis. When textual analysis is my approach, no matter how rigorously I contextualize these texts within their socio-historical situations, I cannot directly address the struggles that Hong Kong people experience in social practice. The theories I reference focus on the cultural politics presented by the texts, not the social movements in the streets. For instance, despite my appreciation of Hong Kong's cultural hybridity according to Bhabha's view (1994), I am aware of the criticism of the post-colonial cultural theories – they are accused of displacing the practice of politics with the politics of symbolic order, ignoring anti-colonialist theories and practices, and disparaging the master narratives of revolution and liberation (Parry, 2002: 67, 77). However, as indicated, using the example of contemporary cinematic Hong Kong, my discussion is within the contexts to which hybridity is more relevant than militancy. To add to this, Wong's films, which are far from realist, seldom address social and political oppression. For example, when gangsters are depicted, factors of social background such as poverty, the education system, or social mobility are absent; when travelling women are portrayed, the realities behind such mobility such as the possible danger of violence are invisible; when multiculturalism is presented, no hint of racism is mentioned. As noted, his

films are genre-oriented and tend to overlook oppression. Transforming genres, deploying highly fictional figures such as assassin and swordsman, Wong's films are intertextual and weak in directly addressing social issues. Rather, with imaginary figures and unrealistic plots, he operates at the symbolic level, an approach which is double-edged – his films lose purchase on some social realities but gain the power of fictionality and allegorization. In relation to this dilemma, however, Abbas argues that realist films can no longer present Hong Kong culture. Rather, he prioritizes the reinvention of genre films such as Wong's films or Stanley Kwan's ghost story (*Rouge*, 1987) ¹⁵ as a better approach for capturing and representing contemporary Hong Kong culture (1997: 21-29). This thesis takes Abbas' argument as its analytic ground, even though it is necessary to note what might be at stake.

In her examination of critical theories, Nancy Frazer quotes from Marx to indicate that a critical text is the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of an age (1989: 2). Our age sees a complex and contradictory cultural picture. With the decline of nation states, the rise of nationalism and its attached exclusivity, the popularity of the internet and an emergent global citizenship, a growing globalization followed by an uneven global development, the intensified racism and fundamentalism and a spreading travel culture, what are our struggles and wishes? This is a question that will take decades – and countless intellectuals – to answer, if such an answer is possible. This thesis has a more modest aim, seeking to use Wong Kar-wai's films and Hong Kong cinema as an instance which might contribute to the clarification of the struggles and wishes of our time. Given the 1997 handover, its colonial history, and its position in globalization, neither Wong's case nor Hong Kong cinema is something "normal" or "common". It is, indeed, rather like my own situation: having three passports is not normal either, but the fluid identities involved subtly allude to the idea of "post-nation". In today's culture, it is exceptionality that best exemplifies the experience shared by many people and the situation seen in many places.

¹⁵ I will discuss this film in Chapter 3 in terms of its writing of Hong Kong's past and culture.

Chapter 1:

A Legless Bird: Physical Mobility and Fluid Identity

In the Italian writer Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*, we are presented with a conversation between Kublai Khan, the emperor, and Marco Polo, the traveller:

KUBLAI: I do not know when you had time to visit all the countries you describe to me. It seems to me you have never moved from this garden.

POLO: Everything I see and do assumes meaning in a mental space where the same calm reigns as here, the same penumbra, the same silence streaked by the rustling of leaves. At the moment when I concentrate and reflect, I find myself again, always, in this garden.... (1974: 103)

This exchange, concerning how far one can go and how close one remains to one's own garden/heart/self, seems to offer a useful way of thinking about Wong Kar-wai's films, which are so much about Hong Kong and yet so often feature a distant space. When Wong's films take us on odysseys out of the current Hong Kong, have we ever left this city, Wong's mental garden? In our journeys, do we "find [our] self again in this garden" when we "concentrate and reflect"?

When the culture of Hong Kong and Wong Kar-wai's films are looked at together, a question that is often missed or ignored is posed: if his films are such key texts in understanding contemporary Hong Kong (Teo, 2005), why is the current Hong Kong sometimes absent from these films? So far, Wong has made ten films, comprising nine feature-length films and one short film, of which only three situate their narratives in the current Hong Kong: *As Tears Go By* (1988), *Chungking Express* (1994) and *Fallen Angels* (1995). The rest of his films are either set in a foreign country, such as Argentina in *Happy Together* (1997), about journeys, such as the trip to the Philippines in *Days of being Wild* (1990) and to Singapore in *In the Mood for Love* (2000), or in the past of Hong Kong, such

as the 1960s in *2046* (2004) and *The Hand* (2004), or even in an imaginary ancient world in which all the characters never settle but travel in *Ashes of Time* (1994).¹⁶ Even when his films are set in modern Hong Kong, their narratives constantly involve physical restlessness: in *As Tears Go By*, Wah tries to get rid of the violent urban space in Hong Kong; in *Chungking Express*, Faye goes to California and then becomes a flight attendant. Travel is such a constant theme in these films; and Wong often takes us out of Hong Kong. His latest work to date, *My Blueberry Nights* (2007), makes the question even more problematic: the whole film, as his first English language film, is located in the US and has nothing to do with Hong Kong, but the film's theme – mobility – and its visual style still highly resemble those of his previous films. The theme of mobility in Wong's films is highlighted by a myth told by the protagonist Yuddy in *Days of Being Wild*: "There is a kind of bird with no legs. It spends its whole life flying. When it is tired, it rests in the wind. It only stops on the day it dies". The symbolic myth of the legless bird represents the mobile life and restless spirits of the characters in his films – life is all about journeys. The details of these journeys and the representation of these places are the foci of this chapter. Whilst Wong Kar-wai makes films about Hong Kong, he is simultaneously telling stories about somewhere else, which I term Hong Kong's *spatial others*.

As a grounding part of my discussion of Wong Kar-wai's films, this chapter will deal with how and why the current Hong Kong is absent, and how the spatial others, journeys, and the mobile space are presented in these films. In my examination of this absence, I attempt to display a bigger picture of Hong Kong culture. First, I argue that spatial others are necessities to present Hong Kong geographically, demographically and metaphorically, given the city's colonial history, migratory background and the trends of diaspora and mobility. Second, when he does capture the urban space in Hong Kong, Wong emphasizes the spaces of passage such as spaces of transportation, hotel rooms, and public spaces like the restaurant and fast food store. In this chapter I will argue that in his urban portrayal of Hong Kong, Wong's use of these spaces of passage creates a new sense of place that displays the hybrid culture of Hong Kong.

¹⁶ Wong's writing of the past will be the theme in Chapter 3.

In order to reveal the implicit cultural meanings of the spatial others and mobile space in these films, I shall draw on Doreen Massey's suggestion of the "global sense of place" (1994), Bhabha's theories of hybridity and ambivalence in post-colonial culture (1994), and Abbas's generalization of Hong Kong culture as a "postculture" characterised by "hyphenation" (1997). In her studies of today's sense of place, Massey indicates that the global factor is part of a local culture, and demolishes the binary opposition between the local and the global. It sheds light on reading the mobile space captured by Wong Kar-wai in a way that does not privilege static place, such as home, over hybrid and mobile space. Bhabha's theories about cultural marginality, which contest ideas of social unity and political totality, are penetrating in exploring the hidden meanings of post-colonial texts. They contribute to understanding the cultural inauthenticity of Hong Kong culture presented in Wong's films. However, both Massey's and Bhabha's theories are rarely deployed to analyze Hong Kong, a paradigmatic post-colonial city. I will make use of their viewpoints to examine the space and culture in Wong's cinematic Hong Kong. In addition, Abbas is one of the few scholars who have successfully positioned Hong Kong culture within a wider context of colonialism, post-colonialism and globalization. I will use Wong's texts to discuss and to develop his conception of Hong Kong culture.

This chapter seeks to make connections between these theoretical works and Wong's texts. The chapter can be divided into two parts. The first will examine the places outside Hong Kong and the spaces of passage inside Hong Kong in Wong's films in relation to Hong Kong's history and characteristics. The second part will go further in seeing the physical mobility and fluid identity in these films as a global phenomenon. In short, this chapter will first see these films as closely related to a Hong Kong condition, and then as the representation of a more paradigmatic global culture.

Part 1:

Spatial Others: Life Is All about Journeys

Space is a major platform that presents the cultural symptoms of Hong Kong; the following detail is exemplary: in *2046*, we see a scene in which a Japanese man asks Jing-wen, a Hong Kong young woman, for directions, and he gets confused over the British names of the roads she mentions, such as Granville Road, Kimberly Road and Salisbury Road. In a colony like Hong Kong, spaces are defined by others. When someone tries to find their way, he or she is dealing with spaces whose names have been given by the colonizer in a foreign language. This detail in the film shows how the urban space in Hong Kong has been named by “others” and remains connected with those “others” in the twin contexts of colonialism in the past and globalization today. This case, connecting Hong Kong to somewhere else, is not isolated in Wong’s films. The Philippines in *Days of being Wild* is where Yuddy’s birth mother is; California in *Chungking Express* is the random destination of a Hong Kong young woman Faye who likes travelling; Argentina in *Happy Together* is a place for self-exile for the Hong Kong gay couple, Lai and Ho; Japan, Singapore, Cambodia and the US in *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* are places with various kinds of relationships with Hong Kong people. The US in *My Blueberry Nights* does not seem to be related to Hong Kong but the mobility shown in the film is still comparable to Wong’s Hong Kong. In Wong’s depiction of Hong Kong, other places are always needed.

In the Mood for Love can be understood as a film “in the mood for travel” with most of its plots about physical mobility. In the prelude of the film, the protagonists So Lai-chen and Chow Mo-wan is looking for a flat separately, and then move into adjacent flats with their spouses. The very first sequence in the film begins with the camera panning and displaying the pictures on the wall, which are the landlady Mrs. Suen’s old pictures taken when she was young. As the pictures are shown, the first line in the film is said by Mrs. Suen in Shanghainese to her tenants, which reveals her background as an immigrant from Shanghai. It then cuts to the medium shot showing So Lai-chen viewing the flat and considering moving there, and the conversation between her and Mrs. Suen. In their conversation, Mrs. Suen switches to Cantonese, which means she has lived in Hong Kong for a while. However, in the next shot, at the end of scene, she switches back to Shanghainese because So happens to be from Shanghai as well. When So leaves, Chow Mo-wan is there looking for a flat. In the next scene, So and Chow move into the neighbouring flats simultaneously. The camera juxtaposes the situations in their flats and

shows the disorder brought by the moving, to create a sense of instability; by mistakes, So's furniture is moved into Chow's room and the shoes of Chow's wife are moved into So's. The sound in the background includes people's speaking and the noise of moving. Soon, some Japanese magazines are found in Chow's room, which belong to So's husband who often travels to Japan on business.

Following this opening about moving, the whole film deals with geographical mobility. So is a secretary in a shipping company from which she can buy cheap ship tickets. Chow works for a transnational newspaper, which offers him the opportunity to work abroad later in the film, and his wife works as a receptionist at a hotel. All of their jobs are related to other places to different extents. As the narration develops, Chow and So find their spouses having an affair and travelling together, and then they are themselves involved in a vague kind of affair. To get rid of the mess, Chow takes an offer to work in Singapore. In Chow's and So's crowded flats, spatial others are often a topic. Mrs. Suen mentions Shanghai and serves her neighbours Shanghainese food; So talks about her husband's business trip to Japan and the new Japanese products that he brings home; and at the end of the film, Mrs. Suen talks about her move to the US. In the last scene of the film, Chow visits the ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, another foreign land. All the characters in the film are in mobility ; they travel, move or emigrate. Just like the opening of the film, its coda is also about moving: Chow goes back to the flat to visit his previous landlord only to realize that he has migrated to the Philippines, and So goes back there to give the ship tickets to Mrs. Suen, who is soon leaving for the US. Indicated clearly in the film, it is 1966 and the disastrous Cultural Revolution has just been launched in mainland China with a strong impact on Hong Kong. "Hong Kong is now in a mess," Mrs. Suen says. In the film, Hong-Kong-ers suddenly find themselves moving or a friend or a family member missing. Hence, what the film mourns is not only the failure of the relationship between So and Chow, but also the loss of the once cheerful neighbourliness due to the city's instability.

On the one hand, *In the Mood for Love* is a film probing into the inner workings of love and emotion between So and Chow. On the other hand, a bigger picture of geographical mobility is drawn and a mood of floating haunts the film. Within specific scenes, we see this motif of mobility registered either explicitly or implicitly. The hotel reception where

Chow's wife works has a background full of postcards, which is connected to travel. Indeed, this woman soon has an affair with So's husband and goes to Japan with him. In both So's and Chow's offices, a globe is seen: an indication of the transnational nature of their companies. The spaces of the main settings in the film are small: the flats are narrow and crowded; So's and Chow's offices are both confined. The camera displays these spaces only in fragments. Instead of having an overview, we often view them from doorframes so that part of the space is obscured. However, these small spaces are always linked to the world outside, such as Shanghai, Japan and the US. This figuration of space can be understood as Hong Kong, which is a small city with dense population and connection to different parts of the world. It is the nature of Hong Kong, a city with a migrant history, a staging post for moving in and out.

In Wong's depiction of all the moves, there is no dramatization of the departures. Rather, the separations, including Chow's departure as the sad ending of his relationship with So, are narrated in a calm way. The film avoids the dramatic moments of sentimental farewell. For example, we cannot see how Chow and So say goodbye to each other. What is shown is only So's shedding of tears silently in her room. Likewise, the suspicious disappearance of So's husband and Chow's wife does not seem to bother the neighbours; the scene of separation between Chow and his wife is also omitted. Noticeably, Mrs. Suen talks about her migration to the US in a casual tone as if it were something ordinary in everyday life. From Shanghai to Hong Kong and then to the US, moving is not new to her. With all the plots about moving and separation, it is hardly any weepy moment throughout the film. Even though moving is the catalyst in the storyline and the film's generic elements are comparable to those of romantic melodrama, Wong does not use the scenes of separation as dramatic climaxes. Rather, he presents all the moves as something usual and normal in a city like Hong Kong without making dramatic scenes. At the same time, the director captures the motion of moving. Scenes showing So and Chow going to the noodle bar in the alley in their neighbourhood are filmed in slow-motion and accompanied by the film's romantic, melancholic and nostalgic theme music by the Japanese composer Shigeru Umebayashi. The beauty of mobility is presented by the tempo, movement and atmosphere created by the director, especially when we follow So as she walks in and out of the alley

elegantly in her stunning Cheongsams¹⁷. I will later analyze the physical movement and the space of passage in Wong's other films.

Following the storyline in *In the Mood for Love*, the film *2046* commences with the protagonist Chow Mo-wan planning to go back to Hong Kong from Singapore in 1966. Due to the social upheaval in Hong Kong, he rents a hotel room instead of the kind of permanent residence that is seldom seen in Wong Kar-wai's films. This hotel also accommodates Bailing, Jin-wen and Mimi/Lulu, temporarily. Then, Chow leaves for Singapore again later in the film. Similar to *In the Mood for Love* but more emphatically, in *2046* the demographic history of Hong Kong is illustrated by its ever-moving protagonists going to Hong Kong from mainland China (Bailing) and Japan (the Japanese young man), or leaving Hong Kong for Singapore (Bailing) and Japan (Jie-wen), and by its multilingual enthnoscape with Japanese, Cantonese and Mandarin speaking characters communicating with each other. In *Fallen Angels*, one of Wong's films set in 1990s Hong Kong, one scene finds its closest linkage to *2046*'s multicultural enthnoscape. Policeman 223 approaches a mysterious woman, who is in fact a drug dealer, in a bar. He is not good at flirting but his multilingual skills help: he speaks several dialects and languages as diverse as English, Japanese, Cantonese and Mandarin. In the beginning, the drug dealer does not bother to reply, but his Mandarin impresses her, since she is also fluent in Mandarin – even though we still do not know where she is from. Set in a Hong Kong deeply affected by global capitalism at the end of the last century, these stories, behind the multi-languages, are about moving, travelling and migration.

In the discussion of the spatial others in Wong's films, the director's own history is pertinent. His life epitomizes the fluidity of the city. During the troubled times in mainland China in the 1960s, he moved to Hong Kong from Shanghai in a stream of migration. His life is worth referring to as it exemplifies the diasporic experience of many Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong: he needed to learn a new dialect since Cantonese was not his first language; he was exposed to a more liberal environment, such as watching all kinds of films that were not shown in mainland China (Brunette: 2005: 133). Having a sailor father, Wong's background is further connected to travel and places outside Hong Kong (Teo,

¹⁷ There will be more discussion of the Cheongsams in the film in Chapter 3.

2005). A few years ago, he made the film *My Blueberry Nights* in the US, in a journey that echoed that of thousands of Chinese people who seek their fortune in the West. After making a single English language film, he declared that he would not make any more films in the West since Hong Kong is still his base (*Oriental Daily*, 3 April, 2008). Once again, his decision echoes similar returns to Hong Kong and China in recent years, when the country's economy suggests a promising future (Huang, 2005). Just like his characters, he finds himself in a fluid condition between leaving home and going home. To argue this is not to assert a reductive autobiographical origin for the films. Rather, it is to say that claiming a cultural significance for the films in relation to Hong Kong also involves seeing Wong's own experience as part of this cultural phenomenon.

The spatial otherness in Wong's films can be traced back to Hong Kong's history, which has seen a series of emigrations and immigrations. From the mid nineteenth century when Hong Kong became a British colony, the city has been a city of migrants as the population increased quickly, and then decreased equally fast due to the political instabilities in mainland China. There were several streams of migration from mainland China to Hong Kong: during the Japanese invasion and Civil War from the late 1930s to 1940s, after the birth of communist China in 1949, and during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 (Huang, 2005). Facing the 1997 handover, from the late 1980s to the 1990s, especially after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, there was a wave of emigration with more than 400,000 Hong Kong citizens moving to foreign countries (*ibid*). In 1990 alone, 62,000 Hong Kong emigrants were documented (Welsh, 1993: 527-528). Apart from its relationship with mainland China, Hong Kong has also had a complex connection with the West from the colonial nineteenth century to today's global capitalism. After the Opium Wars, Hong Kong became one of the earliest ports for international trade in China. Today, it is one of the major financial centres in Asia. Hong Kong has always been a place for moving into (from mainland China and Western countries) and moving out from (to other Asian and Western countries), either for the long term or in the short term. As Lok Fung argues, as a trading port, a commercial city for investment, an international metropolis and a touristic city, mobility in Hong Kong has become its cultural style, which has fostered a great deal of diasporic literature as well as films (2002: 159). The culture in south China, well represented by Hong Kong, is regarded as "ocean civilization", whose openness and

external tendency contradict the closed and conservative “yellow earth civilization” in mainland China (Leung, 2011). The essentialist tone of this division is arguable, but the cultural characteristics of Hong Kong are correctly stressed.

Stories about Somewhere Else

Studying Hong Kong cinema, Ackbar Abbas suggests that “stories about Hong Kong always turned into stories about somewhere else, as if Hong Kong culture were not a subject” (1997: 25). Wong, then, is not alone in exploring the concept of Hong Kong through other places. In his analysis of Ann Hui’s *Song of the Exile* (1990), Abbas points out that the film tries to seek Hong Kong’s identity by tracing the city’s relation with London, Macau, Japan, Manchuria and China. With her childhood in Macau, her college life in London, her parents’ encounter in Manchuria, her grandparents’ attachment to mainland China, and her trip to her mother’s hometown in Japan, the protagonist cannot find a sense of belonging in Hong Kong until she reflects on her personal background and her familial history related to these places that tell the history of Hong Kong. The film suggests that a concept of Hong Kong can be better clarified by its spatial others. Likewise, Stokes and Hoover argues that in the film “Hui suggests cultural politics through this personal story” (1999: 145), which shows the problematic identities for Hong Kong Chinese and hybrid cultures in the city. Stokes and Hoover’s idea of cultural politics and personal story, as I shall show, is applicable to Wong’s films: while all his films appear to be love stories and urban romances, they are not without Hong Kong’s cultural politics. Apart from *Song of the Exile*, Ann Hui has made a “Vietnam Trilogy” in the 1980s, using Vietnam’s traumatic experience under the communist government as a metaphor for Hong Kong, as Hong Kong would soon be under a communist power. For instance, in *Boat People* (1982), the backdrop of North Vietnam under the communists implies a fear and criticism of communism from a modern Hong Kong perspective (Chiao, 1987). Factually and metaphorically, Hong Kong seems to need spatial others to present itself. Naming these places, I will clarify their significance one by one.

A number of places have particular significance in Wong's films: Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Singapore and Cambodia in *Days of being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, other countries like Argentina in *Happy Together* and the US in *My Blueberry Nights*, and the Chinese city of Shanghai in *In the Mood for Love*, which never appears on-screen but somehow exists as pervasive shadows. None of these places is presented in Wong's films without a meaning or a history. Tambling notices that many of these countries share a similar colonial experience to that of Hong Kong (2003: 24). The Philippines was a Spanish colony; Singapore was a British colony; Cambodia used to be under French governance. In *In the Mood for Love*, Wong even explicitly visualizes the colonial power in Cambodia with a scene of the French ex-Prime Minister De Gaulle visiting Cambodia. "De Gaulle is part of the colonial history that's about to fade away," Wong has said (Rayns, 2000: 16). All these countries are not only part of colonial history, but also part of a bigger whole of instability and hybrid culture. Similarly, Tambling indicates that Buenos Aires in *Happy Together* is an ex-colony and an immigrant society in a marginal position, which is comparable to Hong Kong (2003: 24-25).

The Southeast Asian countries that appear frequently in Wong Kar-wai's films also have a close migratory relationship with China's past. In the past 500 to 600 years,¹⁸ tens of thousands of people moved to Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia in different eras for various reasons from mainland China. There are currently over two million Chinese living in Singapore, and over one million Chinese living in Vietnam today.¹⁹ Looking at the film industry, Mak Long states that there are intricate networks between Hong Kong cinema and Southeast Asia due to the migrant history (2006). The Chinese in these countries used to be the overseas investors in the Hong Kong film industry, whilst the Chinese population there was a market for Hong Kong films for decades from the mid twentieth century. Hong Kong films which tell the stories of Chinese diasporic lives in these countries have been appearing since the 1950s, since this decade saw the production of the earliest transnational Cantonese films (ibid: 102-110). Migrant Chinese from Southeast Asia established the biggest film company in Hong Kong, Shaw Brothers, in the

¹⁸ Chinese emigrants to South Asian countries can be traced back to the fifteenth century from the Ming Dynasty (Wang, 2005).

¹⁹ Figures from the Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission in Taiwan in 2005.

1960s. Today, this part of the filmic history of Hong Kong and the historical relationship of Hong Kong to Southeast Asia are seldom mentioned. However, Wong is interested in this period of fluidity in the 1960s. In his films, these countries can represent the source of kinship of Hong Kong people (The Philippines for Yuddy in *Days of being Wild*), an alternative working place (Singapore for Chow Mo-wan in *In the Mood of Love*), a destination for those who want to leave China (Singapore for Bailing in *2046*), and a historical site to visit (Cambodia for Chow Mo-wan in *In the Mood of Love*). In these films, it does not seem difficult for the characters to leave Hong Kong for these Southeast Asian countries. Hong Kong's long-term connection with Southeast Asia makes the travel between these countries frequent. In his recent studies, the Hong Kong critic Leung Man-tao uses the example of *In the Mood for Love* to demonstrate Hong Kong's close relationship with Southeast Asia before these countries declared independence: Chow Mo-wan in the film goes to work in Singapore easily when he wishes, as if Singapore were one of the islands in Hong Kong (2011). Leung also indicates that the newspapers *Sing Tao Daily* in Hong Kong, *Lian-he Zao Bao* in Singapore and *Sin Chew Daily* in Malaysia were all owned by the Chinese Hu brothers in Burma, establishing a media network, which explains why Chow can move to Singapore so easily. In other words, due to the transnational economy, it is relatively easy for people in Hong Kong to travel and work overseas. At a moment when Hong Kong is encountering a new stream of diaspora before and after the 1997 handover, Wong stresses this forgotten history of mobility.²⁰

As another crucial spatial other, Shanghai is a haunting shadow in Wong's films. Even though the real Shanghai is never seen in his films, Wong is still believed to be the contemporary Hong Kong director with the most explicit "Shanghai complex" (Lit, 2006: 90). Wong's obsession with Shanghai is displayed subtly in his films about the 1960s, the period when Wong himself moved to Hong Kong. In *Days of being Wild*, a Shanghainese speaking foster mother has a Cantonese-speaking son. In *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*,

²⁰ Differing from Wong's depiction of the diasporic 1960s, other Hong Kong directors such as Clara Law and Mabel Cheung have made films about Hong Kong Chinese migration in the 1980s and 1990s. Clara Law has made a series of films about it, such as *Farewell China* (1990), *Autumn Moon* (1992) and *Floating Life* (1996). Mabel Cheung made a "Migration Trilogy" in the 1980s, comprising *Illegal Immigration* (1985), *An Autumn's Tale* (1987) and *Eight Tails of Gold* (1989).

Hong Kong in the 1960s bears a close resemblance to Shanghai with its dialect (Shanghainese), costume (Shanghai styled Cheongsam), music (the famous Shanghai singer Zhou Xuan's song) and interior design (the colors and setting of Shanghai style). The relationship and comparability between Shanghai and Hong Kong is noteworthy. Shanghai was once the most prosperous and multicultural city in China, before this position transferred to Hong Kong after the Communist Party took power in 1949. During the 1950s and the 1960s, a large number of people moved to Hong Kong from Shanghai. The decline of Shanghai offered Hong Kong several remarkable legacies: population, wealth and talent. Immigrants from Shanghai stimulated the development of Hong Kong in many respects, including film making (Lent, 1990: 95). In addition, Shanghai's culture and position are comparable to those of Hong Kong. As one of the earliest Chinese cities that was opened to and partly occupied by the West as trading port in the nineteenth century, Shanghai's growth relied hugely on foreign investment and its prominence was due to the co-existence between local and foreign culture in the city (Chow, 1991). Culturally and ideologically, Shanghai, as a metropolis with a transnational atmosphere, was seen as a strange land since the city was quite incompatible with "authentic" Chinese culture (ibid). Given its international position and metropolitan culture, Hong Kong's distance from "authentic" Chinese culture is no less than Shanghai's. Due to the relationship and interchangeability between the two cities, Shanghai is always a significant presence and has been calculated to be the second most often seen city, only next to Hong Kong itself, in Hong Kong films (Lit, 2006). As the only city in mainland China that Wong refers to prominently, the cultural hybridity and internationalism of Shanghai are stressed. In other words, when Wong tries to make a cultural connection between Hong Kong and mainland China, what he chooses is not a city with "authentic" Chinese tradition, but one with cosmopolitan culture.

Hence, Wong Kar-wai's films can be seen as maps. In order to locate Hong Kong, he draws a bigger picture, which shows the diasporic history of the past decades in Hong Kong and mainland China. Hong Kong cannot be clearly seen until its linkages with Shanghai and Southeast Asia are revealed. In this sense, the absence of the current Hong Kong in Wong's films is in fact a haunting presence, which is hidden everywhere. It is a mental garden that Wong's films never leave. Via these spatial others, Hong Kong's culture and identities are probed. The case in *Happy Together* seems to be the most explanatory of all:

two men flee to Argentina without a date of return. While the whole story takes place in Buenos Aires, a very short scene of Hong Kong is shown. In the film, Lai Yiu-fai, unlike his partner Ho Bo-wing, works hard to save up to go back to Hong Kong. In the second half of the film, his will to go back is strengthened. He takes a night-shift job, which he thinks can adjust him to Hong Kong time. One day, it comes to his mind that Hong Kong is exactly on the opposite side of the earth to Argentina. He wonders what an upside down Hong Kong would look like. Then, for seconds, the only and brief appearance of Hong Kong is shown in the film. We see upside down images of the mundane cityscape of cars, flyovers and dense buildings in Hong Kong, accompanied by the sound of a Cantonese news report and programme on the radio (Figure 1). From the opposite side of the world, what Lai misses is something ordinary in Hong Kong. Here, Lai can be seen to stand in for the filmmaker himself, who keeps Hong Kong in mind when he is telling stories about somewhere else.

Figure 1: *Happy Together*. The upside down image of Hong Kong's cityscape.



With this spatial otherness, Wong Kar-wai brings a modern version of exile to his films, in which the restless characters live in mobility or long for travel. The theme of exile

in Western films can be read in two contexts. First, Barber points out that the description of exile appears in European cinema in the post-WWII era when urban inhabitants become nomads (2002: 62-64). The mood of exile usually comes with a ruined cityscape and traumatic memory, showing a need to run away from the pain brought by the war. Second, if road movies are taken into account, another kind of exile shows the discontent of urban inhabitants who want to get away from the cities. Crang relates road movies to the “beat generation” in the 1950s, stating that a car on the highway means the ability to escape from the unbearable bourgeois urban and suburban life, and to find their egos (1998: 87). The themes of exile in American and European films are not the same, but a spatial other is always needed when there is a discontent with the present world or the urban life. In the history of Hong Kong, in the more than fifty years in Wong Kar-wai’s life, and in the more than twenty years of his filming career, Hong Kong has been constantly in political instability and cultural fluidity, and we can see this embodied in the mood of exile in his films. To travel or to be in exile, Wong’s characters sometimes visit the sublime landscapes, which present another kind of spatial otherness.

Encounter with the Sublime Landscape

Apart from its representation through other countries and cities, the absence of Hong Kong in Wong Kar-wai’s films is also stressed by another group of spaces – those embodying “the sublime landscape”. Whilst his films are recognized to be representative urban texts (Wong, 1998), the notion of a sublime landscape is also central in his works. In his first film, *As Tears Go by*, the natural Lantau Island is a contrast to the urbanized Hong Kong. Whenever there is a problem in the city, the protagonist Wah, as a gangster, goes to Lantau Island. We are presented with a spatial binarism: the city is full of danger and violence, but the rural Lantau Island contains love and harmony. Wong contrasts the green colour in Lantau Island with the dark blue in the city, connoting the island as an exit or even redemption for Wah, a gangster who wants to quit.

The sublime landscape is a motif in Western literature and painting from the nineteenth century when the West experienced industrialization. For the past two hundred

years, there has been a lot of discussion of the sublime space in philosophies, religions and aesthetics (Melbye, 2010). For Kant, the sublime inspires fear and awe brought by the nature, which connects the processes of the human mind to the outer natural world (ibid). As a philosophical concept, the sublime, whose beauty is often used to suggest an aesthetic form that can alleviate troubled souls as a form of therapy, is about the challenge to the self. These paintings and writings about the sublime were followed by a trend of moving to the rural due to the unpleasant industrialization and urbanization in the cities in the second half of the nineteenth century (de Botton, 2003). The sublime landscape, often the magnificent natural world poetically acclaimed by writers such as William Wordsworth, offers the transcendental feeling that cannot be obtained in the cities, and plays the role of therapy for the urban inhabitants. The experience of urbanization in some Asian cities such as Hong Kong and Taipei is even more unpleasant and painful, given the problems of pollution, crime and over-population brought by the rapid development in the past decades. On top of the living environment, what makes Hong Kong's urban space more uninhabitable is the 1997 handover that caused a stream of emigration. In a dense city with all kinds of troubles, the sublime spaces in Wong Kar-wai's films are alternative spaces, in their dreamlike images, apart from the problematic urban Hong Kong.

Following the redemptive power of the green Lantau Island in *As Tears Go By*, the sublime landscapes in *Days of being Wild*, *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love* require more discussion. In *Days of being Wild*, the landscape of the rainforest haunts the whole of the film. This sublime space serves the film in different ways. First, it is an illusory space for Yuddy, who longs to find his biological parent who is in the Philippines. Second, it is also a symbolic space related to Yuddy's favorite fable about the legless bird. The landscape of the rainforest is presented by the camera from a flying bird's point of view. Again, in the film, this sublime space of green stands in sharp contrast to the shabby and dark urban space, as an exit and even source of identity for the protagonist. Similar to the rainforest, the picturesque Iguazu waterfall in *Happy Together* is also a dreamlike space, which the gay couple Lai Yiu-fai and Ho Bo-wing long to visit but get lost on the way. They quarrel over this, and they throw the map away. In Wong's films, mobility can never be led by a map, and the journeys of his characters are often unplanned and unexpected – a map means nothing. And love, in his films, is as unexpected as mobility. After their failure,

Ho sometimes looks at the lamp with the picture of the waterfall, seeming preoccupied. At the end of the film, Lai decides to go back to Hong Kong alone. Before his departure, he pays a visit to the waterfall on his own, saying in sorrow that “it should be two of us watching this waterfall”. It is a ritual of ending a relationship. When they are both tortured by their problematic relationship in the city of Buenos Aires, the waterfall – sublime and powerful – functions as an ultimate destination of love which they are never able to reach. In addition, at the end of the film, the Taiwanese Chang, whose reason for travelling around is unrevealed, visits “the end of the world”, a lighthouse in Ushuaia in Argentina, the alleged southernmost spot in the world. It seems that he needs to go to the furthestmost space from home to face his own unclarified “unhappiness”. In *In the Mood for Love*, the sublime space is a historical site, the ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Chow Mo-wan has heard a myth about how people deal with their secrets: they go up to the hill to confess to a hole on an old tree, and the secret will be concealed for good. Instead of a tree, he talks to a hole on the ruins of Angkor Wat, ending his story with the married woman, So Lai-chen.

It is noteworthy that none of the sublime spaces in Wong Kar-wai's films is located in mainland China. They are all foreign spaces a world away from China, such as the rainforest, the waterfall and Angkor Wat. When the natural spaces such as great rivers, high mountains and idyllic countryside are often nationalized for the promotion of nationalism (Bhabha, 1990b; Tomlinson, 1999), Wong never takes his characters back to spaces with the slightest hint of national identity or cultural roots. Rather, these spaces are foreign, mysterious, beyond politics and history. If all the journeys in his films are to different extents related to the search for a Hong Kong identity, the national spaces are dysfunctional and non-existent for Wong, because they are never compatible with the flexible identities and hybrid culture in Hong Kong as in many other places today. Thus, it is no surprise to see how these sublime spaces are perfectly blended with multicultural music: in *Days of being Wild*, *Always in My Heart*, the music by the Brazilian guitar duo Los Indios Tabajaras, accompanies the slowly moving shot of the rainforest; in *Happy Together*, the Mexican song *Cucurrucucu Paloma* sung by Caetano Veloso, sounds harmonious together with the image of the Iguazu waterfall; in *In the Mood for Love*, the Japanese composer Shigeru Umebayashi's melancholic melody is seamlessly combined with the ruins of Angkor Wat.

In sharp contrast to another Hong Kong film *Homecoming* (dir. Yan Hao) made in 1984 when the 1997 handover was settled, in which a Hong Kong woman gets emotional healing and feels at home in the idyllic countryside in mainland China, Wong Kar-wai's sublime spaces are never associated with any national imaginary. On the contrary, they serve to question it through his homeless characters and their often fruitless search for identity. In *Days of being Wild*, Yuddy's failure to meet his birth mother in the Philippines, along with his encounter with the rainforest, proves the impossibility of roots. In *Happy Together*, Lai Yiu-fai's visit to the Iguazu waterfall, as a ritual of letting go a relationship, only proves that reunion, and being "happy together" (with Ho Bo-wing) is impossible. In *In the Mood for Love*, Chow Mo-wan's confession in Angkor Wat, as the burial of his secret, also proves that it is impossible to go back to the past. In addition, after reaching the sublime, the characters' whereabouts are as open as always. Yuddy dies in a running train in the Philippines; Lai goes back to Hong Kong amidst continuing uncertainty; Chow returns to Hong Kong and lives an unstable life in a hotel in 2046 after his confession in Angkor Wat in *In the Mood for Love*. In other words, unlike the nationalized landscapes, the sublime spaces fail to offer any psychic, cultural or political destination or home.²¹ Rather, they only prove that life is all about instability. As travellers, these characters have no destinations, no promised land to settle down in, no roots to go back to, and no bright future to head for. They are travelling, from one city to another, from one ruin to another. However, it does not mean that they are necessarily pitiful. Instead, there are some alternative kinds of belonging they find in the mobile space. In addition, by going elsewhere and via Hong Kong's absence, they demonstrate Hong Kong as a global city, which will be the focus of the following section.

Mobility as Part of Place

Having considered the necessity for Hong Kong's absence when the city is portrayed, I now turn to the way Wong Kar-wai presents the current Hong Kong. In *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*, the only two films that show the current Hong Kong by Wong, the spaces of passage are captured. *Fallen Angels* shows virtually all kinds of transportation in

²¹ More discussion of the tension between Wong's films and nationalism in terms of nostalgia is in Chapter 3.

the city: the assassin and his dispatcher walk through the metro station; the dispatcher takes the train across the city; the assassin takes a minibus after a mission; the mute drives an ice cream truck and rides a motorcycle at night; an airplane flies over the dense buildings in Hong Kong. These scenes of transportation give the film a restless character and fluid outlook. This city never stops. In addition, public spaces such as McDonald's, Chungking Mansion, bars and a Japanese restaurant are all displayed, becoming the locales in the storyline: Chungking Mansion is where the mute and his father live; and McDonald's is the place where the assassin and the blonde girl meet. These spaces are mobile, temporary and global, with a sense of instability and insecurity. If in Wong's films Hong Kong must be defined by travel, migration, exile and spatial others, the Hong Kong of the 1990s, faced with another huge change in the form of the handover and another surge of emigration, is full of mobile and temporary spaces.

Marc Augé, the French anthropologist, defines these modern mobile spaces as non-places, in which people only stay temporarily, without history, identity and relation (1995). Unlike the places of anthropology, a non-place fails to provide either cultural memory or identity, both central to making people feel that they belong to a local history. For Augé, non-places such as rail and motorway routes, airports and hotel chains and retail outlets, without organic social relationships, represent a kind of "supermodernity" created by contemporary capitalism, which alienates people from society. The space of travellers is a typical non-space. Augé's concept of non-place echoes an earlier theory by humanist geographer Relph, who claims that a sense of placelessness is spreading in the modern world (1976). Developing Heidegger's concept of place as the locale of the truth of being and his emphasis on dwelling, Relph deploys a keyword "authenticity" to refer to the attitude of sincerity and the sense of belonging of people living in an authentic place (ibid: 78-80). Moreover, modern media, argues Relph, have encouraged the sense of placelessness and undermine "place-identity" (ibid: 90). Placelessness, which alienates people from a real sense of place and a local identity, never allows us to be the insiders of place. The tourism business, alongside Disneyfication and museumization of place, contributes to this kind of placelessness. In addition, mobility is closely related to the rise of placelessness and the demise of home (ibid).

The emergence of non-place and placelessness is a by-product of globalization and mobility about which both Augé and Relph are not optimistic. Their argument offers a critical tool to probe Wong Kar-wai's cinematic spaces: in the unstable urban space, is there any local identity, any sense of belonging and authenticity? In all these non-places, are the characters "non-humans" or "inauthentic humans", living without history and memory? Theoretically, Augé and Relph's ideas have been challenged. Disagreeing with the concept of authenticity, Lippard argues that all "local places" are in fact constructed by the hybrid, which produces a new sense of place in a society of mobility (1997: 4-6). In contrast to the binary opposition of place and mobility, she indicates that these two seemingly opposite ideas go hand in hand in the age of hybrid culture. Likewise, in his analysis of the architecture of Hong Kong, Abbas adopts the idea of placelessness differently and positively (1997). For him, the placelessness of the international and parasitic architecture in 1990s Hong Kong is not void of identity. On the contrary, it addresses Hong Kong's own new cultural identity, having its version of the "floating world" instead of a stable identity (ibid: 76). Even though Wong Kar-wai's urban space is full of non-places and placelessness, the films do not seem to mourn "the death of place" or "the lack of authenticity" in Hong Kong. Instead, some of his mobile cinematic spaces bring a sense of joy and a rhythm of pleasure to the characters as well as to the audience. In other words, many of the characters in Wong's films do not feel miserable, nor do they look pitiful in the "non-places" of the films. Rather, the mobile space is exactly where they find a sense of belonging.

For example, the urban mobility and the spaces of passage in *Fallen Angels* are not unpleasant. With Wong Kar-wai's cinematic techniques, including jump cuts, wide angles, slow motion, freeze frames and the daring use of bold colors and multicultural music, the mobility in these films is actually energetic and rhythmic and their people feel at ease. These spaces are unstable, but not hostile or depressing. The assassin and his dispatcher walk through these urban spaces, such as the metro with its bright colours and the old-style Mahjong parlour, in energetic rhythm, such as in the sequence accompanied by the song *Because I am Cool* of the British trip hop duo Massive Attack. They seem to appreciate these cityscapes in Hong Kong as they walk past them to conduct their missions. They do not belong to these spaces, in which they only execute the duty of killing, but there is still a

vague sense of belonging – or at least a feeling of ease – when they freely walk through these places. Their body motion, with Massive Attack’s music alongside the camera movement, produces a rhythmic sense of visual and audio pleasure. We get a similar sense of pleasure offered by the space of passage in the running ice cream truck. One night the mute Ho Chi-moo, who has a weird hobby of breaking into other people’s properties after midnight to do his “business”, steals an ice cream truck. He runs into a man who is constantly unlucky enough to meet him, and forces him to buy his ice cream. The man’s wife brings their family to the truck to see him, and they all involuntarily become the mute’s “customers”. Just when the scenario becomes highly absurd, we see a heart-warming family picture: sitting in the running truck, eating ice cream, watching the night scenes of the city, the family spends a wonderful night together. The scenario looks unreal when a long shot captures the family laughing and chatting in the ice cream truck on the road at midnight, which is absolutely not an ordinary activity in Hong Kong. In this “accident”, in this mobile space, to which they will probably never go back, they have some good experience and memories. In another sequence towards the end of the film, in early winter, the mute meets the killer dispatcher. They are neighbours in Chungking Mansion, but their relationship is not developed until the very end of the film. Now they are both lovelorn, and they ride on the mute’s motorcycle. The motorcycle runs through the tunnel at full speed, and its sound breaks the silence of the city. “At this moment, I feel warm,” says the dispatcher, putting her head on his shoulder when it is almost dawn. In mobility, they share some moments of tenderness. None of the spaces of passage mentioned above is void of memory and identity. Rather, they are where the characters experience their life and their city. If there is a sense of belonging, it is a temporary one happening in mobility, thus posing questions for the theoretical formations of Augé and Relph. Besides, these spaces, such as the boldly colorful metro and the old-style Mahjong parlour in the film, are full of the distinguishing characteristics of Hong Kong; they are not a form of Disneyfication without any social context.

The dreamy girl Faye is one who feels good in non-places, such as the escalators she often uses, and the take-away fast food store Midnight Express she works in. Midnight Express, selling hotdogs, fish and chips, and salad, is located in Central, the heart of Hong

Kong city, which is busy and multicultural.²² Its owner is a Hong Kong Chinese, while some workers there are also Chinese and others seem to be from India or Pakistan. Midnight Express, without a door, is part of the street, the public space. In one scene, the store's proximity to the rhythm of the city is highlighted. When policeman 633 is drinking coffee by the counter in the store, Faye seems to be in a daze on the other side of the counter. This non-narrative scene is the subtle depiction of the slowly developing feeling between the two. However, the two characters are not the only focus of the shot. The camera puts them in a wider environment: Midnight Express and its surroundings, from which we see an energetically mobile urban space where the stream of people comes and goes. In this space of mobility, policeman 633 and Faye find a vague sense of belonging.

In Midnight Express, Faye often turns on the music, usually the brightening Western oldie *California Dreaming*, and moves her body to it freely when she works. In addition, she seems to feel at home in a space that is obviously not hers – policeman 633's flat.²³ She secretly breaks into his private space to explore and to change his life. In a place originally empty of her memories and identity, she adds some objects of her choice into the flat. As a “space invader”, she makes the space her own, adding her history and emotional attachments. One day, policeman 633 realizes that she has already changed his life and became part of his space, and then he happily accepts the spatial change, as well as her love. In the mood for dating, he discovers a red shirt, which has been put in his closet by Faye, and wears it to see her. This case exemplifies the idea that place and mobility are dialectically shaping each other, and outsiders can change a place for the better. On the one hand, place, along with the identity, culture and memory attached to it, is not fixed and still. On the other hand, mobility contributes to the making of place, and adds new meaning to a place, without turning it into a non-place or a space of placelessness. After the changes by Faye, the policeman's flat is a new one with new meanings and new memories, bringing him hope for love and a positive opportunity for life. Then he quits his job as a policeman and becomes the owner of Midnight Express, a space that has some meanings for him – he used to buy food for his ex-girlfriend from there and he knew Faye there. In fact, whilst he

²² The name of the fast food store coincides with the film *Midnight Express* (dir. Alan Parker, 1978). This film, about an imprisoned American student in Turkey who tries to escape, is coincidentally about foreign place and the desire for mobility.

²³ The relationship between women and space will be examined in Chapter 2.

is usually lonely in his private place, *Midnight Express* is homely for him: the owner of it treats him as a friend, and cares about his love life; when the staff there know that his girlfriend has dumped him, they all look sad. *Midnight Express* is a representative space in a city like Hong Kong, which is a transitional place for many but one in which a sense of belonging and even attachment is found between the place and the people. His flat, as well as *Midnight Express*, is unstable and changeable, but redolent of possibility, just like Hong Kong – people coming and going change the city. In contrast to Augé's argument about how the sense of place is endangered by mobility, Wong's films seem to demonstrate the opposite: mobility is a positive part of the making of place. In his films, there is no binary opposition between place and non-place. To push the point even further, these mobile and insecure spaces seem to establish another kind of identity, which is open rather than fixed, and another form of sense of belonging, which is ambivalent and complicated rather than transparent and simple. Hence, as presented by Wong, the non-spaces in Hong Kong offer a new condition of existence, in which long dwelling and fixed identity are no longer dominant. Arguably, Hong Kong identities can only be found in this kind of non-space.

The hotel is another urban space that Wong Kar-wai has constantly presented in his films. The Oriental Hotel is the main backdrop in *2046*, embodying the high mobility and multicultural population of the 1960s in Hong Kong. Chungking Mansion in *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels* is a large building crowded with residents of a variety of nationalities. It is half residence and half guesthouse. In *In the Mood for Love*, Chow Mo-wan rents a hotel room for writing, whose number 2046 becomes the title of Wong's next film. The space of the hotel has been discussed by Siegfried Kracauer (1997). In his discussion of transcendental homelessness, which he sees as a key characteristic of modernity, he focuses on the hotel lobby. In the space of the hotel lobby "that encompasses them (the travellers and customers) and has no function other than to encompass them", people's togetherness there has no meaning (ibid: 53). It only references the "strange mysteries" (ibid: 58) and "pseudo-life" (ibid: 59) of a modernity in which people only "encounter with the nothing" (Kracauer's phrase) (ibid: 57). This view of the space of the hotel is reminiscent of criticisms of "non-place" and "placelessness". Of course, the holiday hotels in Kracauer's discussion are not exactly the same as the hotels as the semi-residence in Wong's films. However, despite his original insight, Kracauer's view still loses sight of

another side of this space of passage. In Wong's films, lives in the hotels are not pseudo nor do the tenants encounter nothing. The Oriental Hotel is fictional, and Chungking Mansion is factual, but both of them contain a similar sense of mobile and hybrid culture.

The Oriental Hotel, owned by a migrant from north China, accommodates people from different places such as Japan, mainland China and Hong Kong itself. In the 1960s, rather than a place for vacation or business trips, the hotel is a temporary shelter for migrants (the mainlander Bailing), short-term workers (the young Japanese man), members of marginal social groups (the hall dancer Mimi/Lulu), and locals who have not yet settled due to the social instability (Chow Mo-wan). The Oriental Hotel is inscribed with a period of Hong Kong history. It is noteworthy that Chow's choice of the room 2046 in the Oriental Hotel is because of the memories produced by another hotel, the one in which he has spent good times with So Lai-chen in *In The Mood for Love*. Wong never treats a hotel as something void of meanings and memories. Rather, his characters meet, befriend each other, and become lovers in the hotel as in *2046*. Chungking Mansion is located in the commercial centre in Hong Kong but is populated by its social and economic minorities such as working-class Indians and Arabs, gangsters and low budget travellers. In Hong Kong, it is somewhere people are advised to keep away from because of the possible danger of crime. Wong presents its darkness, mess, danger and multiculturalism and makes it a bold symbol of Hong Kong. The mysterious woman in *Chungking Express* is in the building all day long to perform illegal drug dealing. Her walking and running movement combined with the messy and shabby environment produces a sense of turbulence, in a visually and audibly energetic way: through the hand-held camera movement within the crowd in the small space alongside the high-speed cutting and Indian music, a lively atmosphere is displayed. In *Fallen Angels*, Chungking Mansion is again a place of mess and crimes where the killer dispatcher and the jobless mute live. Wong himself has said, "This overpopulated and hyperactive place is a good metaphor for the city itself" (Ciment, 1995: 45). As an emphasized urban space, this building shows the instability in Hong Kong, which is sometimes problematically dangerous and sometimes energetically exciting. To call the life in a hotel "pseudo" with zero encounter with anything finds a curious resonance with those voices which would devalue Hong Kong culture as trivial and philistine by the canonical standard of Chinese legitimate culture and Western high culture. Given the fluidity of Hong

Kong, the hotel becomes a typical space that challenges the traditional definition of place and culture, which generates a new form of life and culture that I will explore later in this chapter.

In his writing on post-colonialism, Bhabha has used the notion of the stairwell, a border area and a liminal space, to explain the ambivalence of post-colonial identity (1994). The stairwell is a transitional space in which people do not stop or dwell. People need it but seldom contemplate their relationship with it. It is an area of physical mobility, unfixed identifications and cultural ambivalence. The different types of space of passage discussed above demonstrate Wong Kar-wai's interest in and attitude towards spaces similar to the stairwell. In the American geographer Allan Pred's discussion of place, he expresses his discontent with the assumption of place as fixed, visible and measurable. For him, place is a historically contingent process, which is never finished and always in the process of becoming (1984). His stress on the necessity for change and process in place is useful in reading Wong's films, in which there is no binary opposition of place and non-place, no meaningless space of placelessness, and mobility is part of place as place is part of mobility. More importantly, identity and memory are possible in the space of mobility and instability. This conception echoes the work of the feminist geographer Doreen Massey, who has developed the idea of "a global sense of place" (1994), which is crucial to the second part of this chapter.

Part 2:

Global Mobility: In between Travel and Home, Global and Local

"[I]t is not possible to understand the 'inner city' ..., by only looking at the inner city." (Massey, 1994: 155)

In the previous section, I discussed the absence of the current Hong Kong and the urban spaces of passage in Wong Kar-wai's films from a relatively pathological perspective:²⁴ as a fishing port, a colonial city and an immigrant land, Hong Kong can only be shown by using its spatial others. In other words, the reason why Wong often needs a distant place to present Hong Kong and why his characters always live in mobility is that Hong Kong is an extraordinary city with an extraordinary history over the past 170 years of colonization and globalization. There is no doubt that a small city like Hong Kong, governed by the British colonizers, invaded by the Japanese imperialists, handed-over to communist China, and now in the middle of globalization, presents an extraordinary phenomenon. However, there are limitations to seeing Hong Kong as an "extraordinary" city and treating its experience as an exceptional case. The first problem concerns the text and its reception: as discussed in the Introduction, if Wong's Hong Kong is just an exclusive one, why do the critics and audiences in the West find it resonant, relevant and accessible? The second problem is theoretical: if this cinematic Hong Kong is just a coincidental case, what is its position in the context of globalization and the post-colonial condition, which are parts of a global trend rather than products of a regional specificity? Using Wong's texts, this section will treat Hong Kong culture as not only exceptional but also exemplary in today's cultural condition. Beyond understanding Wong's Hong Kong as a specific case, which is still a necessary critical move, my argument in the following section is that the culture of mobility and hybridity in this cinematic Hong Kong is common and paradigmatic in the age of globalization. More radically, I argue that Hong Kong's culture, often seen as a marginal one, can instead be viewed as at the centre of contemporary cultural experience. This uncanny culture of hybridity, marginality and mobility is a possible source of resistant power against nationalism or fundamentalism, a conservative trend that has appeared with globalization. The symptoms and exceptionality Hong Kong carries are the intensification of today's global culture.

Travel and Food in New York

²⁴ See the Introduction for my discussion of the pathologies in Wong's films as well as in Hong Kong culture.

In terms of mobility and global culture, *My Blueberry Nights*, Wong's latest film shot in the US, is a key text in exploring the new culture of our time. On the surface, the film is totally located in a spatial other for the Hong Kong director; it has nothing to do with Hong Kong. The film is about the encounter of a British man and an American woman in a restaurant in New York City. Unlike in *Happy Together*, there is neither any mention of Hong Kong nor any appearance of the Hong Kong cityscape. However, this does not mean that it has no connection to Hong Kong. In the first place, the story of *My Blueberry Nights* is not a newly invented one. Wong has admitted that it was originally a project for the Hong Kong stars Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung, one that he had kept in mind for years since he made *In the Mood for Love* (*Beijing Daily News*, 22 Nov. 2007). Originally, the film was about Hong Kong. Moreover, his crew is still mostly from Hong Kong, so he does not claim *My Blueberry Nights* to be a Hollywood film. "My conclusion is," he says, "this kind of story about human emotion works everywhere." (ibid) It is true that *My Blueberry Nights* looks like another film by Wong despite its New York City setting. A Hong Kong critic has called the film a Hollywood version of *Chungking Express* (Yau, 2008). In Hong Kong, *My Blueberry Nights* aroused debate because the critics were disappointed by Wong's "self-repetition" (Lam, 2008). However, I argue that what is important about the film is just that repetition: how an urban romance in Wong's style, a Hong Kong story filmed as an American one, is still able to remain quite unchanged. Comparatively, one can hardly imagine how Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) or Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) could be changed to a modern American setting. The most significant common feature between Wong Kar-wai's Hong Kong and New York is possibly the key characteristic of urban culture today – mobility.

First of all, the film is multicultural, with a British actor, Jude Law, an Indian American singer/actress, Norah Jones, an Israeli-American actress, Natalie Portman, and a cosmopolitan setting in New York City. Similar to *In the Mood for Love*, the narrative in *My Blueberry Nights* is pervasively about travelling: Jude Law as Jeremy is a man from Manchester, Britain, who tries to run all the marathons in the US until he falls in love with a Russian girl, Katya; Norah Jones as Elizabeth is a young woman living in New York City who later decides to travel around the country after her boyfriend's betrayal. They meet in a restaurant run by Jeremy, which is beside the overhead railway. Just like the assassin's flat

in *Fallen Angels*, the sound from the speeding trains gives the scene a sense of restlessness and fluidity. On her journey, Elizabeth saves up money for a car, and she keeps on sending postcards to Jeremy. Here, car and postcards mean mobility to different extents: the former is a key figure for mobility in the US, and the latter signals journeys and long distance communication.²⁵ At the end of the film, having acquired her own car, Elizabeth, who seems to learn a lot from her journeys, and with her wounds healed, goes back to the restaurant in New York City and meets Jeremy, who is waiting for her with blueberry pies and hospitality.

My Blueberry Nights echoes the very core of Wong Kar-wai's films: life is about fluidity. Just as in his other films, there is seldom a scene of home. Jeremy is always in the restaurant, and Elizabeth is always in the bar, the restaurant or the casino that she works in. The public space, Jeremy's restaurant, plays the role of a physical and emotional home. It is what the critic in Hong Kong finds so familiar: the scenario of two separated lovers meeting each other at the end in a fast food store in which they used to hang out in *Chungking Express*. This restaurant as the film's major location not only again typifies the public space for travellers, but also emphasizes something recurrent and crucial in Wong's construction of space – eating. The blueberry pies served by Jeremy become the source of a sense of belonging found in the restaurant. Before her journey, Elizabeth has eaten a blueberry pie there, which is an unpopular kind of desert in Jeremy's restaurant (Figure 2). Looking at the untouched and unwanted pie, she, just betrayed by her boyfriend, seems to feel sympathetic. After her journey, she goes back there, has another blueberry pie, and her relationship with Jeremy is promising. Using the close-ups of the cream and the berries as the opening image of the film, Wong uses food as a motif, a crucial part of Elizabeth's feeling for the restaurant and Jeremy. Hence eating, a sensual and mundane activity, is a necessity for the sense of belonging attached to a mobile space. Before *My Blueberry Nights*, Wong has deployed scenes of eating to establish the sense of place: in *Chungking Express*, Midnight Express offers food, drinks, as well as the sense of belonging for the characters; in *Happy Together*, the sweetest time between Lai Yiu-fai and Ho Bo-wing is when the former cooks for and feeds the latter, who is hurt, in their temporary flat in Argentina.

²⁵ The significance of the car in the film will be examined in Chapter 2.

Figure 2: *My Blueberry Nights*. One of the eating scenes in the film: Elizabeth enjoys the blueberry pie in Jeremy's restaurant.



In *In the Mood for Love*, there are even more depictions of eating in relation to the growth of love and the construction of space. Whilst it is suspicious to So and Chow that their spouses are having an affair, the feelings between them also seem to germinate secretly when they go to the alley to buy noodles and brush against each other. Filmed in slow-motion, the scene captures the atmosphere in the noodle bar by vividly showing the lights, the smoke and the crowd there. The lights shown are the typical ones used by the street vendors in Hong Kong in the past; the smoke from the food brings warmth and sensual elements to the scene; the moving and eating customers give the location a sense of liveliness. The first time that So is shown going to buy noodles, the camera first displays the lower part of her body with a pot, and then the sight of her back appears like a paper cut-out silhouette. Then, it cuts to her upper body and shows her waiting in the noodle bar. Her solitary figure and the melancholic look on her face hint at her loneliness. After she leaves, Chow goes to the alley. This time, they miss each other. In a parallel set of shots, after disclosing his wife's lie, Chow is shown going to eat noodle on his own. In the second scene in the noodle bar, they run into each other in the alley. In their first brief meeting

outside their crowded flats it is revealed that they buy noodles because their spouses are not in Hong Kong and they do not bother to cook. As a highlighted locale which appears recurrently in the film accompanied by the gloomy theme music, the dark and narrow alley functions as a space for mobility as well as intimacy, in which people usually do not stop but feelings between So and Chow are silently developed.

The actress Maggie Cheung and actor Tony Leung's subtle acting presents their loneliness and confined desire for love. The action of buying and eating noodles is ordinary, but their acting gives the everyday scenes a dramatic layer about the undisclosed secret (the affair between their spouses) and the unspeakable feelings between them. Leung's unreadable expression makes Chow's eating scene full of the hints of suspicion and contemplation. After they brush against each other in the alley, So looks back to Chow with a vague expression of doubt. She seems to be wondering: why is he alone? Is his wife gone just like her husband? Is there anything happening between her husband and his wife? Is this handsome man a good man? Cheung's performance makes these complicated feelings convincing. Their costumes – Chow's neat suits and So's tight Cheongsams – confine their bodies as well as desire to overcautiousness. Thus, eating becomes a way of expressing one's desire and will. Buying and eating noodles in the film are romanticized and serve to chart the development of So and Chow's ambivalent relationship. When Chow is sick, So knows from his friend that he wants to eat dessert and she makes some for him. When they are trapped in Chow's room (So does not want her neighbours to know she goes to his room), Chow goes out and buys her breakfast and they eat together. In the restaurant, So wants to know more about Chow's wife while ordering her favourite food: beef steak with mustard. In the film, eating together and preparing food for each other are the representation of love. The food gives these mobile spaces, from the alley to the restaurant, a tangible and sensual layer, which makes it impossible for them to be void of memories.

My Blueberry Nights is another film about food, love, mobility and the space of passage. However, despite its familiarities with Wong Kar-wai's previous films, the film has elaborated the theme of mobility from a regional one about Hong Kong to a global one – in our time, everyone is travelling. Today, people all over the world are mobile; there are more than a billion people crossing the borders of different countries at any given moment

(Lewis, 2002: 337). In her discussion of the international “Wong Kar-wai phenomenon” in the 1990s, Wong Ain-ling argues that there is hardly any cultural barrier preventing the young audience in Japan or Korea from being engaged with Wong’s films since these films present the urban culture of our time, which resonates among global audiences (1998: 97). She does not specify what this universal urban culture is, and I take mobility as a possible answer. Of course, Wong’s stories cannot universalize the various forms of mobility in today’s globalization, but the mood for travel, the mobile culture and living condition still resonate with the global audience. This also explains why his films can be exempted from the criticism of Orientalism, unlike those of some mainland Chinese directors of his generation (Li, 2004). What Wong has been exploring for years is a modern motif rather than a historic one, a global issue rather than a national one. However, very few critics have critically addressed the global sensibility of mobility depicted in Wong’s films.

The Alternative Form of Home

Whilst mobility is a constant motif in Wong’s films, there is another recurrent theme about space – home. The concept of home is problematic for Hong Kong people. The population there was around 300,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century, but this figure expanded over twenty times in eighty years to over five million in the 1980s (Huang, 2004). For the immigrants, Hong Kong was just a temporary shelter, not a long-term home, although most of them lived in Hong Kong for longer than they expected because of the long-lasting turbulence in mainland China. This group of people became the majority of the population in the city. To make things more problematic, it was difficult for the colonial Hong Kong to be treated as a homely place by the Chinese migrants since it was governed by the British. All these complicated historical and political factors make Hong-Kong-ers feel homeless and rootless.

In Wong’s films, many of his characters are “homeless”, or even though they have homes, the spaces are temporary, unstable and fluid. In addition, his characters usually live alone and their homes are just shelters without warmth. In *Days of Being Wild*, Yuddy is the only character whose home is shown. He lives alone in a big and dark flat where two of

his girl friends have lived with him, but they eventually leave like passing visitors. Having a well-off foster mother, he lives in a relatively comfortable flat. There are no family members living with him, nor does he show any sense of belonging in his flat. Rather, he leaves his flat without hesitation when he discovers the whereabouts of his birth mother. He goes all the way to the Philippines, only to be disappointed by her refusal to see him. He abandons his flat in Hong Kong, but he is rejected at the mansion where his birth mother lives in the Philippines. He floats between these spaces and these cities, but ends up belonging to none of them. In the Philippines, he stays in a more mobile space, a shabby hotel in Chinatown, a diasporic community. Then, he risks his life to get a fake US passport and is finally shot. He dies very quickly on the train, which is running in the night in a foreign land. Accompanied by the sound of the horn, in the trembling carriage, his death is not a peaceful one. Throughout his life, despite his urge to find his roots, Yuddy does not have a home. This theme of homelessness is indispensable in Wong's films, which always show that mobility is a common form of life. In his subtle depiction of the ages of exile in Hong Kong, Wong's films are full of "homeless" people and floating lives that echo the political crises. Yuddy in *Days of Being Wild*, who compares himself to a legless bird, is always lost in what he wants in his life. He is always in search of something, but nothing seems to make him feel complete. He does not work. He goes after women but never commits to them. His obsession is a desperate – but ultimately failed – search for his origin, which is his reason, or his excuse, for his playful use of life.

The settings of *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels* are both Hong Kong in the 1990s. The form of home in these films is abnormal. The killer dispatcher in *Fallen Angels* lives in a small room in a guesthouse in the Chungking Mansion. The killer's apartment is an open one on the roof and surrounded with broken windows. His key is usually left inside his room by the broken window. When he gets home, he just puts his hand inside the broken window to get the key. This habit enables the killer dispatcher to enter his flat anytime. His flat is beside the overhead railway, whose sound and light are the city's rhythm of mobility. In *Chungking Express*, the public elevator is just outside policeman 633's flat, which makes his private space easily observed, with a sense of insecurity. The drug dealer walks and runs in and out of Chungking Mansion and she does not seem to have a home. It is either the bar or the hotel where she takes a rest. None of these characters

has a secure place to live in. However, given these circumstances, these films do not present the insecure domestic space as negative or hell-like. They are simply commonplace in Wong's depiction of urban space.

There is an alternative form of home in *Happy Together*. Chang, a young man from Taiwan who undertakes a long-term journey because of his unspecified unhappiness, seems to enjoy travelling. However, at the end of the film, when he eventually reaches "the end of the world", he starts to miss home. As dawn breaks in Buenos Aires, he guesses it is night-time in Taipei. "I wonder whether the night market in Liao-ning Street is opened now," he says. Then the camera shows the night market in Taipei. On his way to Hong Kong, Lai Yiu-fai stops over in Taiwan and he visits the food stall of Chang's parents in the night market. In the sequence, jump cut and camera movement are used to stress the ever-flowing energy in the night market. Walking in the market, Lai makes his way in the noisy crowd, avoiding the passengers and the motorcycles around. When he finds Chang's parents' stall, he stops and sits down. A middle-aged couple greets and serves him warmly. There are two men quarrelling about something, but the customers in the stall do not care, as if it were the most common scene in the market. It is the energetic, lively scene of the grass roots in Taipei City (Figure 3). In the market, Lai envies Chang his home. He then realizes that Chang can travel around with a free heart just because he has a warm home behind him. It might be the warmest "home" ever presented in Wong's films. Unlike some acclaimed Taiwanese directors, such as Hou Hsiao-hsien who often presents the static countryside as the physical and mental home as in *Dust in the Wind* (1987), Wong chooses the urban mobile space of the night market to construct an alternative form of home. Feeling the homeliness in the night market, Lai again contemplates his return to Hong Kong. Such feeling, followed by the scene of him taking the overhead train, alongside the spirited melody of the song *Happy Together*, going forwards among the neon lights in the city, forms the ending of the film. Throughout the film, his home in Hong Kong has never been shown, and the result of his return is in doubt. Still, going home does not guarantee being "happy together". Therefore, despite the desire for home at the end of the film – Chang is going back home to Taiwan, Lai is going back home to Hong Kong, and Ho Po-wing returns to Lai's flat, in which they have spent some good times – the form of home is still not fixed and the result of home-coming is still uncertain. This kind of "going home

complex” is pervasive in *Happy Together*, echoing the end of the colonial age when Hong Kong was returning to mainland China. For Wong, the return is desirable, but the notions of home are diverse; the homes in his films are open to change or found in a mobile environment. Running away from home, missing home, and simultaneously enjoying travelling are all emotionally mixed in the characters in the film. These emotions are not exclusive to Hong Kong people. In modern times, people either feel sick at home or feel homesick away from home (Boym, 2002). It is a cultural symptom in our age of mobility.

Figure 3: *Happy Together*. An alternative form of home in public space: the energetic night market in Taipei.



The characters in Wong’s films are fluid and in between spaces, but they are relatively comfortable. We see this in the declaration of Chang in *Happy Together* – “the place that you’ve never been to is usually interesting.” This statement shows a type of travel that is much more voluntary than that of the diasporic 1960s in Wong’s films. Chang belongs to the new generation of travellers in developed regions like Hong Kong and Taiwan. Unlike the earlier generation whose travel was compulsory and helpless – getting rid of a political

problem, or moving just to survive – Chang’s generation takes the trip as they like and enjoy it. Moreover, importantly, they can go back home if needed and wanted. Their journeys are not fatal. Likewise, in *My Blueberry Nights*, even with a broken heart Elizabeth’s journey is a fruitful one bringing the understanding of love and the recovery from sorrows.

Tim Cresswell’s idea of “out-of-place” is helpful in understanding the progressive meaning of the homelessness and mobility in Wong Kar-wai’s films. Cresswell argues that the people judged to be “out-of-place”, not belonging to a specific culture and normative behaviour of a place, have a power of transgression that goes beyond the social and cultural sideline (1996). Being out-of-place, they disrupt the division of space, which leads to a new form of culture. Cresswell traces the history of homeless people in the West and finds that being homeless is often a rupture with a certain form of life (2004). For instance, in the age of Elizabeth I in England, the tramps that in the emergence from feudalism were called “masterless men” who brought panic to the people (ibid: 111). In their mobility, the tramps bring the traces of other places, annoy those who live more stationary lives, and contribute to the making of a different culture. In modern times, homelessness is no less a threat than in the Elizabethan age. In the face of this threat, the anti-loitering law in modern cities is made to keep the homeless away from public space (ibid: 112). Homelessness is not only socially dangerous, but also prohibited by law. This context helps us to read Wong’s films in a more progressive way: when he romanticizes wandering and travel, he is also legitimizing homelessness and mobility, a resisting power against the fixity of place and its culture, especially when the stress on locality and the sense of place is so often reactionary and exclusive today (Massey, 1994). Being homeless or in these abnormal forms of home, Wong’s characters redefine the concept of home.

Today, on the rapidly changing global stage, the desperate dream of going back home and the sense of a fixed home is fading. For the Chinese, who are supposed to be strongly attached to their homeland and culture, the situation is changing too. It has been suggested that today’s overseas Chinese no longer see themselves as sojourners or orphans, nor do they see China as the ultimate resting place (Wang, 1998). The idea of motherland that sees the overseas Chinese communities as its extensions or colonies, Wang argues, is

chauvinistic and ignorant of the diversity of the overseas Chinese. “Fortunately,” he writes, “the inevitability of return to China has been on the decline in our fast changing world” (ibid: x). After dealing with the diaspora of Hong Kong Chinese for years, in *My Blueberry Nights* Wong sets a new stage of fluidity whose meanings have been changed. He changes his focus from the Hong Kong Chinese diaspora to global mobility. In this sense, New York City in *My Blueberry Nights* simply represents another absent Hong Kong, a city of mobility. This time, Hong Kong is absent because its cultural significance is replaceable with other cities like New York City. Both of the cities are paradigmatic in the global culture of fluidity; they are both the “restaurants as home” in the film. Hong Kong and its spatial otherness in Wong Kar-wai’s films embody this yet-to-be-defined new culture.

Travelling in Jianghu

When Wong Kar-wai’s films and the urban issue in Hong Kong are taken into account, there remains one curious yet difficult problem to solve: how should *Ashes of Time*, a costume drama with certain elements of the martial art genre, be located in the context of the director’s creation of urban scenes? Is it possible to find Hong Kong in the film? Or, just because *Ashes of Time* references nothing about Hong Kong, can it potentially be even more symbolic, applicable and general about contemporary culture? In fact, the film is read this way: “Although it is a kung fu movie set in an unnamed historical period, the mood and ethos inscribed in the work are undeniably modern, displaying the uncertain grammar of modernity.” (Dissanayake, 2003: 120)

One of the reasons why Wong Kar-wai decides to make his own Wuxia (Chinese martial art and chivalry) film is a starting point for this discussion: “One thing that is never mentioned in most movies of this genre is travel. To travel from one location to another, one has to pass through many desolate places.” (ibid: 151) Travel, as a key word in this statement as well as in my discussion of his films, bridges the gap between a spatially and temporally distant costume drama and urban culture in Hong Kong – people are all in mobility. In the imaginary realm of Chinese chivalry, the characters are even more in fluid and homeless situations than in his other films about Hong Kong. Different from the

majority of knights in medieval Europe, who belonged to a respected social class and Christian religion, and whose responsibility was often to protect a piece of land for the feudal king or landlord,²⁶ it is argued that the swordsmen in the Chinese tradition were more rebellious figures, who were alienated from the system of social norms, and were disruptive to society (Liu, 1967; Luo, 1990). Today, the knight remains an officially noble class in the British aristocratic ranks, while his Chinese counterpart has never been recognized by the political authorities and is admired only in novels and cinema. Knights in Chinese tradition are the outsiders in the society's class system, often being nameless or having a sobriquet, and always travelling around to help the needy, take revenge and fight injustice. In Chinese agricultural feudalism, which is highly based on the ownership of farm and land, the figure of the mobile swordsmen is exclusively that of an alien, bearing the resistance to the social norm: they do not farm; many of them neither get married nor live with their families. Therefore, Wong Kar-wai's choice of the Wuxia genre can be seen as a subversive one, in the light of Cresswell's theory about homelessness which I have referenced.

There is an essential concept of *Jianghu* in the tradition of the martial art genre. "Jiang-hu", literally meaning "river" (Jiang) and "lake" (hu), is a vague idea of physical space where the swordsmen travel, fight and practise righteousness. It includes towns, forests, mountains and deserts; it is always away from the normal, peaceful life of a rural village. Jianghu is a world "out there" as the opposite of home (Dissanayake, 2003: 95). In addition, Jianghu also indicates a special kind of lifestyle; "walking (wandering) in the Jianghu" (xingzao Jianghu) usually means abandoning a stable life and living a travelling life of excitement and conflict. In King Hu's *Dragon Gate Inn* (1967), a martial art classic, the vague idea of Jianghu is embodied by an inn located in the wilderness, presenting a world of travellers and strangers, including the exiled family of a beheaded general and different kinds of male and female martial artists. "River and lake", the literal meaning of Jianghu, has its social implication: in ancient times, travelling on a ship or boat was the most "radical" form of instability, carrying great danger. Jianghu is not the place to dwell, but the place to travel, as Wong has pointed out. Its related mobility is symbolically

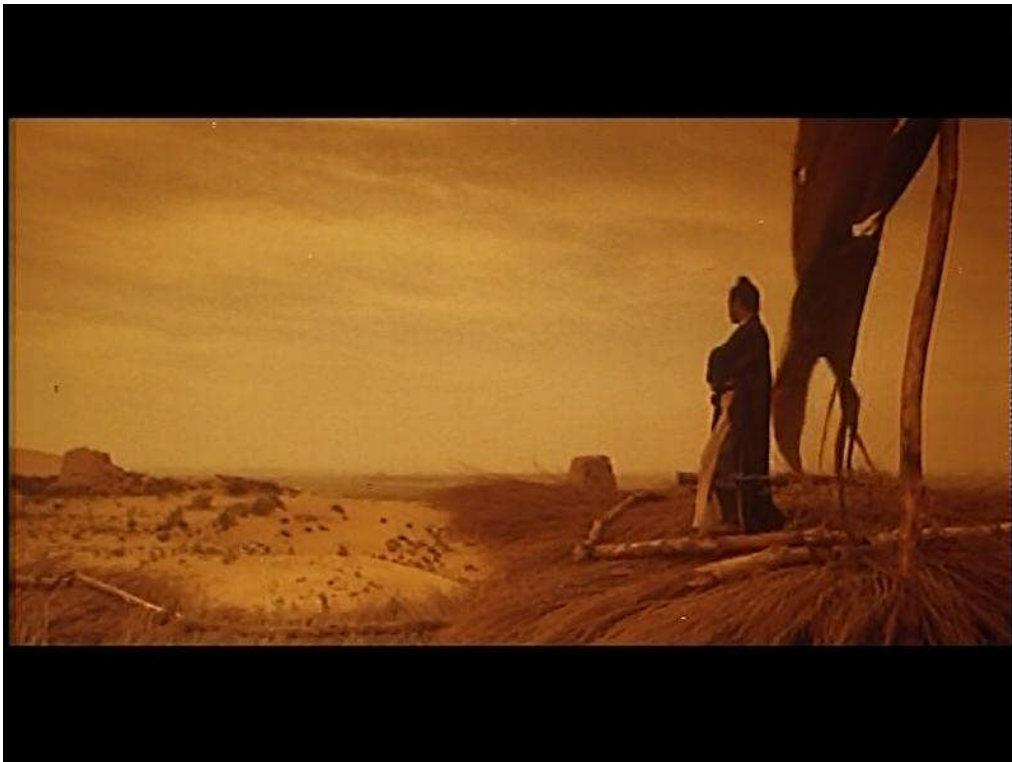
²⁶ There is also a subgroup of knights-errant that travelled around and looked for adventure in medieval Europe. Here, I am referring to a more general group of knights.

comparable to today's global culture. On the other hand, Jianghu also curiously resembles a modern city. In contrast to the lifestyle in a village, there are mixed populations, heterogeneous cultures, mobility, anonymity, opportunities, danger and competition in Jianghu, where people from different places fight for fame, money, justice or revenge. These characteristics bear striking resemblances to those of a modern city. Moreover, the representative space of the inn parallels the hotel today. If Jianghu, the imaginary realm of the martial art genre, is like a modern city, is the wilderness in *Ashes of Time* a possible metaphor for the global city with mobility like Hong Kong or even New York?

Just like mobility in contemporary global culture, the swordsmen's travelling is a social symbol. With its specific elements of the genre, *Ashes of Time* represents a life of homelessness. In the film's intricate networks of relationships and affairs, most of the characters are in fluidity: Huang Yaoshi is travelling and delivering messages for his beloved lady, Ouyang Feng's lover and sister in law; the schizophrenic Murong Yin, the princess from the neighbouring country Yin, is travelling alone in male disguise as a prince; the blind swordsman is travelling away from home because his wife is in love with his best friend, Huang; Hong Qi is travelling with the hope of becoming a famous swordsman; the peasant girl is travelling alone in the desert to find a killer to avenge the death of her brother. In the Jianghu of *Ashes of Time*, as in other Wuxia novels and films, travel is just normal. The major character Ouyang dwells in a ruined cottage in the wilderness, which also seems to be a way station. This cottage is completely different from the traditional cottage on the farm where the peasants live peacefully: there is no family in the cottage; nor are there farms or poultry by the cottage. Instead, there are strangers from different places visiting this cottage. Because of Ouyang's status as a killer's agent, various characters such as Murong Yin, Hong Qi, the blind swordsman and the peasant girl visit the cottage to seek their fortunes as killers, or to get someone killed. This cottage, comparable to the inn in *Dragon Gate Inn*, is an open space in the wilderness, half private and half public, which the characters from various backgrounds go in and out of temporarily, and by which people fight and travel. There are several scenes capturing Ouyang's overview of the desert outside his cottage (Figure 4). Sometimes there is only the boundless desert with no sight of any human beings. Sometimes there are groups of people fighting. Just like a restaurant in the heart of a modern city, from which people can see how the city moves, or a hotel lobby,

from which people see travellers from different places, this cottage is a platform for strangers in the desert. Thus, this cottage reminds us of the recurring space in Wong's films – a hotel or a mansion building where a mixed crowd gathers.

Figure 4: *Ashes of Time*. Ouyang's overview of the desolate space for travellers outside his cottage.



At the end of *Ashes of Time*, Ouyang burns the cottage and goes west to the White Camel Mountain, and later becomes the Malicious West. This cottage in the middle of the wilderness is metaphorical – or even more metaphorical than Chungking Mansion. If the latter's geographical specificity is an inspiration, as well as restriction, for us to link it with Hong Kong, the geographical ambiguity of the cottage in *Ashes of Time* encourages a more global reading; an open space with mobility like that can be found everywhere nowadays. In terms of cinematic style, despite its Chinese traditional background, *Ashes of Time*

actually avoids giving the look and feel of a Chinese film. According to the film's music composer Frankie Chan, Wong Kar-wai did not want the film to carry an excessive Chineseness, so the music was produced through an orchestration of Chinese and Western instruments (*City Entertainment Biweekly*, issue 402, September 1994). In addition, the costumes in the film were designed with a strong sense of simplicity, without referring to a specific historical time. Behind the scenes, the film was intentionally shot to be culturally ambiguous one rather than a historic one with a specifically Chinese quality. That is why it can be taken as a fable; it displays the culture of mobility as shown in *My Blueberry Nights*. Similar to the characters travelling in Jianghu in the film, people in our time are also living in the mobility of the modern city in globalization.

The Culture of Travel and the Global Sense of Place

In developing the interpretation of Wong Kar-wai's films from that of a regionally specific text to a global one, travel as the crucial part of culture must be considered. In the context of globalization, travel is becoming more and more convenient and important in today's culture, unlike the physical and psychic pain involved in the journeys in pre-modern times. Under globalization, Lash and Urry believe that modern society is an ever-changing one. It is impossible to understand it without the new cultural meanings formed by long distance transportation and travel (1994: 252-278). For Lash and Urry, "[m]odern society is a society on the move." (ibid: 252) The anthropologist Clifford argues that anthropological research has ignored the significance of movement, and challenges the traditional concept of ethnography that fixes causality in the relationship between culture and a fixed place: "the field" (1997: 21-24). He argues that the meaning of culture is produced by constantly moving people, and is an outcome of the mobile relation between different cultures. For Clifford, travel is the crucial part of culture (ibid: 17-46). These critical views of culture help us to read Wong's films as global as well as regionally specific. The homelessness and fluidity, as characteristics of Hong Kong people, are at the same time felt and experienced by people worldwide.

There are a number of cases that can be cited to justify this assumption. Tijuana is a migrant city located in the border between the US and Mexico, a geographical and cultural margin. In his research on the city, Canclini notes that the urban identity in Tijuana is a product of a complicated local experience, which is defined by its relation with other places such as Mexico, north America and even somewhere further away, showing a “delocalized locality” (1995: 239). Despite its extrovert characteristics, Tijuana has developed a strong local identity. This case is helpful in tackling the “conflict” between the global and local – the assumption that the homogenizing power of the former endangers the uniqueness of the latter, and the division between the outsiders and insiders of a place – by demonstrating how locality and globalization co-exist. Canclini indicates that the culture in Tijuana is prosperous even though its position in globalization is subordinate and its people live in poverty. This case concludes with the argument that the marginal region is the centre of global culture, and “all cultures are border cultures” today (ibid: 261). Hence, it is reasonable to infer that Hong Kong’s marginality makes it the most central and global of all. Wong Kar-wai’s Hong Kong, no matter whether it is absent or present, no matter whether it is replaced by New York City or Buenos Aires, exemplifies this modern global culture in its ever-lasting mobility and ever-changing hybridity.

Tijuana is comparable to Hong Kong, and so is the Parsee, an ethnic minority in India. In an interview, Homi Bhabha has used the Parsee, a religious group in India, as an example of a mobile and hybrid community (Thompson, 1994). The Indian Parsee is the descendant of the Parsee who fled to India from Persia after exclusion by the Muslims, and is now living in the cities of India, Canada, the US, the UK and Australia. They are cosmopolitans, who are used to travelling, without a strong cultural heritage or a strict doctrine, blending Persian and Indian cultures. In India, they were the earliest to adopt Western capitalism, becoming the capitalist class, and taking advantage of the convenience offered by the British, without feeling embarrassed or self-condemned. Bhabha uses the term “Bombay Mix” to depict their hybridity and freedom (ibid: 185). However, their political position is not equivalent to their economic status due to the impurity they bear – they are never treated as “real” Indians. Their status is superior and inferior simultaneously. Other than the Parsee, Bhabha also shows personal and academic favour to Bombay, where he finds a compatible environment, a co-existence between different cultures, and a blend

of colonial and post-colonial modernity (ibid: 187-188). Today, when there is sometimes a hostile and exclusive attitude towards the immigrants in some great Western cities, the post-colonial Bombay, which is like a marketplace, is the real container of cosmopolitanism for Bhabha.

The cases of Tijuana, the Parsee and Bombay are comparable to Hong Kong. Just like Tijuana, Hong Kong's relations with mainland China, the UK, Japan, Southeast Asia and the global network of capitalism define its characteristics; Hong Kong's culture is produced by travel, migration and an attitude of inclusiveness. Just like the Parsee, Hong Kong's status in Chinese culture is an ambivalent one with its economic importance, political marginality and cultural periphery. It is often seen as a "cultural desert", a place without culture (Yau, 2001: 16). Just like Bombay, Hong Kong is also similar to a marketplace and a hotchpotch. The case of Hong Kong is neither a single nor an isolated one. On the contrary, it is possibly the major part of our culture. Wong Kar-wai's films make clear both this specificity and this global quality.

The above discussion tries to resolve the problem between global and local. Is it a contradiction to take Wong Kar-wai's cinematic Hong Kong as a global case as well as a local one with a specific history? How to deal with the emotion of homesickness and the desire for travel? Massey's essay about "a global sense of place" (1994) forcefully strikes home in this discussion. Under rapid globalization and its alleged powers of homogeneity, the sense of a local place and its particularity are taken as a resistance. However, locality sometimes develops into nationalism, "sanitized heritage", and antagonism to newcomers and "outsiders"; then the sense of place becomes something reactionary (ibid: 147). Confronting this hostile relationship between the global and local, Massey gives place and its identity a different definition. She takes Kilburn, her local shopping centre in the north-west of central London, as an example. It is an ordinary place in which she finds Irish newspapers for sale, Indian Saris on display, a Muslim man keeping a newsagent's shop, and the overhead airplanes in the sky that are close enough to show the names of their airlines. All these details exhibit Kilburn's linkages with the world outside (ibid: 152-153). With a vivid character of its own, its culture is very international, and there "is absolutely not a seamless, coherent identity, a single sense of place which everyone shares" in Kilburn

(ibid: 153). For Massey, Kilburn, as an integration of the global and local, demonstrates a sense of place that is extrovertly constructed by a world outside. “[P]laces are process” is her conclusion, which defines the sense of place as a global and progressive one with multiple identities and linkages to the wider world (ibid: 155). In other words, globalization does not necessarily eliminate heterogeneity since every place is a unique mixture produced by different social relations.

This idea of a “global sense of place” rescues us from the dilemma of a choice between the global and the local in reading Wong Kai-wai’s Hong Kong, which seems to be an even more hybrid place than Massey’s Kilburn. It penetrates into the cinematic texts in which the city can *only* be presented by spatial others and mobility, explaining and clarifying the co-existence of the global and the local, the homesickness and the desire for travel. Two of Wong’s urban films *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels* have illustrated this kind of urban culture and lifestyle: McDonald’s is where romance happens, the old style Shanghai barber shop and the Chinese teahouse are where people visit, and Japanese restaurant, fish and chips, Cantonese barbecued pork are all part of the characters’ everyday life.

The case of Hong Kong is helpful in coming to terms with the concept of identity, especially in today’s post-colonial context. Identity is constructed via difference and the relation to its Other(s), to what it is not and what it lacks (Hall, 1996b: 4). Identification is often a process of exclusion, and the marking of outsiders and even enemies. However, in the light of Massey’s theory, we can now define the spatial others in Wong Kar-wai’s films more specifically: these other places, such as Shanghai, the Philippines, Singapore and New York, are not the capitalized “Others” in an opposing position. These others, with cultural and historic linkages, are part of the construction of Hong Kong. Spivak forcefully states that all identities are irreducibly hybrid (1999: 155). Also, in his discussion of the anti-nationalist, ambivalent nation-space as “the crossroads to a new transnational culture”, Bhabha also states that the “other” is not outside or beyond us (1990a: 4). Wong’s films show how these spatial “others” are culturally not outside Hong Kong. Therefore, the spatial others in these films are never presented as exotic. There is no visual contrast between Hong Kong, as home, and these places as others, in his films. The darkness in the

Philippines in *Days of being Wild* is just an extension of Hong Kong; for example, the dim color and shabby condition of the hotel in the Philippines are much like Yuddy's own flat in Hong Kong. The worn-out spaces in Singapore and Hong Kong look alike in *In the Mood for Love*; for example, the noodle stall in the street there resembles the one in Hong Kong, which indicates the similar life style between these places. The ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia are naturally blended in with Hong Kong with its atmosphere of decay. And even those foreign metropolises, New York and Buenos Aires, do not look so very different from urban Hong Kong to Wong's camera. No matter whether the place is in Asia or in America, mobility and travel are so common that the film does not stress the disparities between these places. The global is part of the local. The sensitivity to the mobility and hybridity of modern culture makes his films accessible to a global audience and critics.

Hyphenation: Locating Hong Kong Culture

Hyphenation has very different implications. It points precisely to the city's attempts to go beyond such historical de-terminations by developing a tendency towards timelessness (achronicity) and placelessness (the inter-national, the para-sitic), a tendency to live its own version of the "floating world" (Abbas, 1997: 143)

Concluding his analysis of the films, architecture and literatures of Hong Kong, Abbas uses the term "hyphenation" to locate Hong Kong's culture. A hyphen is the mark used to connect two words to make a new one. Hyphenation is the act and process of mixing and joining. As a metaphor, it is an ambiguous position and indefinable concept of culture. To culturally locate Hong Kong, Abbas questions the feasibility of the current available models of culture, and calls for an unstable kind of "postculture". "[T]here is no chance of cultural survival unless we radicalize our understanding of culture itself" (ibid: 146). In his book, Abbas does not develop the notion of "hyphenation" and "postculture" at length. In addition, when the current available models of cultures are no longer applicable, the question about what kind of standard is appropriate today remains unanswered. Abbas might not want to conclude in haste, which would possibly be counter-productive. However, it is still worth giving more thought to Abbas' exciting yet unclear suggestion. In the face of this problem, I shall try to find a way out in the light of Bhabha's theory.

As a migrant himself, Bhabha believes that “the truest eye may now belong to the migrant’s ‘double vision’” (1994: 5). Migrants, being in between cultures and without fixed identity, can penetratingly see the core of the global hybrid culture nowadays. Wong Kar-wai is a migrant with a great interest in mobility, whose films disclose an ambiguous kind of Hong-Kong-ness with the depiction of Hong Kong’s relation with the wider world from the 1960s to today. In this chapter, I have argued that Wong usually sees Hong Kong more clearly when he keeps his eyes outside Hong Kong. His eyesight operates with a double vision that dissolves Hong Kong with the Philippines, Buenos Aires or New York. In the dissolved images, his films show the very core of Hong Kong’s culture clearly. This double vision helps him to develop a case of Hong Kong to a case in New York – he sees the linkage between the cities and reveals their hidden similarity.

With Bhabha’s idea that today’s culture does not totalize experience, concepts of cultural displacement and disjunction become necessary when a contemporary culture is being minoritized (1994), which means the culture of the marginal groups becomes more and more normal and influential. The cases of the Parsee and Bombay suggested by Bhabha exemplify this kind of culture. And Hong Kong should also be included. Focusing on marginality and minority, Bhabha believes that minoritization is a possibly radical way to present cultural difference in our world full of cross-national culture and the power of the migrants. In this theoretical context, we can understand the characters and their journeys in Wong’s films in a positive way. In terms of the idea of minoritization, the director is constantly interested in social minorities: the gangsters in *As Tears Go By*, the hall dancer Mimi/Lulu in *Days of being Wild*, the drug dealer in *Chungking Express*, the assassin and his dispatcher in *Fallen Angels*, the wandering swordsmen in *Ashes of Time*, the homosexual men in *Happy Together* and the prostitutes in *2046* and *The Hand*. The assassin and drug dealer are living in secret and danger; these gangsters and the hall dancer have an abnormal lifestyle and an unusual working schedule; these homosexuals are supposed to be deviants. They are all excluded from the majority of the society, and are alienated from the established social institutions, with a resulting anxiety of identity. These minorities on one hand display the perspectives of the periphery, which is relevant to Hong Kong’s cultural position. They can be understood as the personification of the hybrid city like Bombay and Hong Kong. In their peripheral positions, they present culture in a new

way. On the other hand, their jobs and status are related to different kinds of mobility: the gangsters Wah and Fly often do their job in the street, the drug dealer walks around the world of the lowlife in Chungking Mansion, the assassin visits various public places to conduct his mission, the swordsmen travel and fight in the desert. With these characters, Wong normalizes mobility and marginal space.

Again, it is the embodiment of Hong Kong culture. Geographically, Hong Kong is located in the southeast end of mainland China, while Beijing – the capital city that represents canonical Chinese culture and legitimate Chinese authority – is far away in the north. Historically, its colonial history makes the city an object of the “shame” brought by colonialism in Chinese history. Culturally, over one and a half centuries of colonization have given it a hybrid culture that is far from the Chinese matrix. When Wong Kar-wai portrays Hong Kong, he always uses the figures of social minorities who often live a mobile life. However, I have suggested that the above perspective is necessary and yet alternative. Bhabha’s notion leads us to a global interpretation of his films. In our time, not only is travel an essence of culture, but also minority. This is not only the case in Hong Kong. Therefore, it is no surprise to see that there are a lot more members of social minorities than “normal” people in Wong’s films.

The problem of identity is crucial in understanding these characters. Indeed, the loss of identity is a consistent issue in Hong Kong’s colonial culture. The most significant figure in Wong’s films is Yuddy in *Days of Being Wild*, who fails to meet his birth mother and find his roots. His story exemplifies Abbas’ notion of hyphenation since he ends up belonging to neither Hong Kong nor the Philippines. At the same time, the identity of the hall dancer in the film is not miserable but split. She sometimes calls herself Mimi, and sometimes Lulu. This kind of split identity can also be seen in *Ashes of Time*, in which the schizophrenic Murong Yin/Yang is at times a man, a woman, a lover, or a killer. When she travels in Jianghu, she is in male disguise as a prince. At the same time, she is a woman who loves Huang Yaoshi. In addition, there are many characters in Wong’s films that are nameless: the policeman 633 and the drug dealer in *Chungking Express*, and the assassin and his dispatcher in *Fallen Angels*. There are different reasons for their multi-names and namelessness: Mimi and Lulu seem to be the pseudonyms of the hall dancer, whose

indecent job makes her real name unspoken; the policeman 633 belongs to an armed force that defies individualism; the drug dealer from the underworld hides her real identity. Their namelessness implies an incomplete self. Their fluid identity and changeable gender identity is part of the post-colonial culture in Hong Kong. Being called the mass or the crowd, people living in modern cities are usually nameless, but the people living in colonial cities are even more nameless and faceless. However, just as the cultural sense of homelessness is not always negative, namelessness conceals flexibility and the strategies of identities, whose void and elusiveness enable resistance to any fixed form of culture and politics.

In his observation of the black British migrants, Hall points out that the marginalized, dispersed young black people, who seem to claim the territory in London, are somehow centered in place (1996a). They carry new identities that are distant from the “absolute, integral self” and against any “fully closed narrative of the self” (ibid: 118). Likewise, using the mobile and nameless characters, Wong’s films have put the marginalized Hong Kong in the centre of today’s post-colonial culture. As Lok Fung states, Wong’s films show the unique emotion of Hong Kong people, who are forgotten by history, exiled from time (1995: 59). Having been handed over several times politically, people in Hong Kong are quite unsure about their political identity. In the 1990s they could not claim themselves to be British even though their nationality was British on their passports, but they did not feel really comfortable being considered as Chinese due to the cultural and political gap between mainland China and Hong Kong. Today, nearly fifteen years after the handover, more than 44% of Hong Kong residents claim themselves to be Hong-Kong-ers rather than Chinese, the highest percentage since the survey launched in 1997. And the first three identities they choose are respectively “Hong-Kong-ers”, “Asians” and “part of the Chinese nation”.²⁷ Being Chinese is not the priority for Hong-Kong-ers. In post-colonial culture, the subjectivity of individuals is changeable and their identity is fluid. The nameless and multi-named characters in Wong’s films embody these characteristics.

²⁷ A survey conducted by the Public Opinion Programme (POP) in the University of Hong Kong in June 2011. One of POP’s long-term surveys is to track the changes of Hong Kong citizens’ identities from 1997. (Website: <http://hkupop.hku.hk/>)

As Linda McDowell states, identity is always a mixing process of place and memory (1999). For her, anxiety about identity can also possibly activate the agency of history. In other words, the void of identity, similar to namelessness, can create a different history by absorbing diverse perspectives, which is relevant to Bhabha's idea of "double vision". The identity crisis in Wong's films means that culture is the stage of changing. This agency of history might be found in the namelessness in Wong's films, which can be contrasted with another kind of namelessness, a nationalist one. In the film *Ip Man* (dir. Wilson Yip, 2008), the factual kungfu master Ip Man in south China, Bruce Lee's master, becomes well known in the disastrous 1930s with his nationalism and martial art skills conducted against Japanese imperialism. In one scene, a Japanese asks Ip's name, and his answer is "I am just a Chinese". This nationalist declaration is followed by a severe fight with the Japanese. When representing China, Ip simultaneously gives up his individual identity.²⁸ In this case, namelessness, alluding to national collectivism, is reactionary. However, being nameless in Wong's films is, in contrast, to resist social and national totality. These characters as social minorities are alienated from the "economic miracle" propagated by the government and media in 1980s Hong Kong, without becoming middle-class with a "decent" lifestyle. With immorality and deviant behavior such as smuggling and murder in the underworld of modern Hong Kong, they have even less contact with the traditional mainland Chinese culture.

Such nameless characters resonate with other representative minority figures such as the *flâneurs* and scavengers in Baudelaire's poems as noted by Walter Benjamin (1983). In his study, Benjamin indicates that there is no presence of social minorities such as hooligans before Baudelaire in French literature. These figures surface at the time of the emergence of modernity and high capitalism, the turning point and changing stage of history. In the iconic figures of *flâneurs*, who are not included in the mass control network after the French Revolution, Benjamin finds a resisting power to high capitalism: these *flâneurs* are not part of the system nor do they contribute to it. They are just bystanders in the margins of the system. Benjamin notes that Baudelaire himself lived a homeless life,

²⁸ Wong Kar-wai's latest film *The Grand Masters*, which is expected to be released in the second half of 2012, is about the same kungfu master Ip Man. Whilst Wilson Yip's *Ip Man* promotes nationalism, it is interesting to see how Wong deals with this character.

running away from his creditors and moving to different places. From 1842 to 1858, Baudelaire had fourteen addresses. In his literary world, there are more minorities such as scavengers, hooligans and prostitutes than “normal” people. It is more or less a kind of “minoritization” of culture as suggested by Bhabha. In a similar way, Wong makes his cinematic world full of social minorities, which are treated as normality. From Baudelaire to Benjamin to Bhabha, for more than a hundred years, social minorities and their fluid lives have been created and analyzed to seek an alternative form of culture for the future. In this context, the notions of “hyphenation” and “postculture” by Abbas again surface: with a minority and fluid identity, it is the indefinable and in-between culture which is against social totality and national unity, which is the possible container of new and progressive culture, which is a mixture of locality and globalization, and which is even the centre of culture in our time. With hybridity, ambiguity and anxiety about identity, this “postculture” is not simply countering Chinese nationalism in particular, but is also opposing two major global trends today – the power of homogeneity in globalization and the exclusive and nativist nationalism in the alleged age when different civilizations clash (Huntington, 1997). Just as Hong Kong’s absence can be a kind of presence, Wong’s “apolitical” texts can be political, in a way that is about more than a response to 1997. In addition, as with the *flâneurs* in French literature, his nameless and homeless characters also emerge in the era of post-coloniality and globalization, another stage of rapid changes in history.

To indicate Hong Kong culture’s global significance, another statement by Abbas is important: “[T]here is no question of waiting for ‘liberation’ before we can see the genuine development of a Hong Kong culture” (1997: 145). The liberation here is not a product of political campaigns or radical revolution, but a kind of social practice happening in urban life, in popular culture, in everyday resistance. For Abbas, this liberating power can be generated by the “hyphenation” of culture in Hong Kong, and Wong Kar-wai’s films are part of this political movement. Therefore, living in a colony, being deprived of its cultural tradition does not equal cultural disability. On the contrary, it is fertile soil for the new culture. Wong’s films demonstrate how another culture and another language are possible in this “predicament”, with progressive political power. In his discussion of Walter Benjamin’s works, Bhabha suggests a new way of reading: “I hope it (Benjamin’s line) will now be read from the nation’s edge, through the sense of the city, from the periphery of the

people, in culture's transnational dissemination." (1994: 170) This approach is applicable in reading Wong's films, which are made from the nation's edge, through the sense of Hong Kong as a paradigmatic global city, from the periphery of Hong Kong people, in culture's transnational dissemination through the films' international popularity. In light of Bhabha's words, Hong Kong's position at the centre of today's culture generating novelty and new forms of culture as presented in Wong's films is clear.

Chapter 2:

Men in Crisis and Women in Mobility: Gender and Space

Thelma: My God. It's beautiful.

Louise: It truly is.

Thelma: I always wanted to travel. I just never got the opportunity.

Louise: You got it now.

Deep in the night, deep in the desert, two women are amazed by the sublime landscape they experience during their flight. When Thelma and Louise talk about travel and the landscape in the desert, they are already fugitives, as Louise herself declares (*Thelma and Louise*, dir. Ridley Scott, 1991). Having left husband and boyfriend behind, they kill, they rob, and they are running away to Mexico. However, even as fugitives, in desperate circumstances, they enjoy a moment of travel as well as appreciation of the sublime space. At the same time, the men, including Thelma's husband and a group of policemen, are confined in a domestic space, waiting for them, and wanting to keep track of them.

Whilst the road movie is recognized as a "masculine" genre (Roberts, 1997), *Thelma and Louise* sets a milestone for the "female road movie" with the depiction of women's own travel. If the domestic space is an "ideological prison" (Rose, 1993) in which women are the victims of patriarchal oppression, travel and mobility produce possibilities of resistance, and provoke discussion on gender, space and cinema. Starting from the 1990s, road movies have opened some space to other social groups besides white macho men. Women now experience the road trip, as in *Thelma and Louise* and *Boys on the Side* (dir. Herbert Ross, 1995), and in addition space on the road begins to be "queered", as with the

gay and transgendered protagonists in *My Own Private Idaho* (dir. Gus Van Sant, 1991) and *The Adventure of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (dir. Stephan Elliott, 1994). These films challenge the tradition of road movies, redefine the relationship between gender and mobility, and reconstruct the cinematic space of the road – these are the stories from the West. So, what has happened in Asia? Do women there find their way out of domestic space? What does it mean to be a mobile woman in cinematic Hong Kong? On the other hand, how are the men presented in Hong Kong cinema that is famous for its action films? What kind of space do they belong to?

Faye: I am saving up.

Policeman 633: To study?

Faye: Never thought of that. I just want to have fun.

Policeman 633: Where?

Faye: Anywhere. Maybe California.

Policeman 633: California? Why?

Faye: I said maybe. I can move on if it's no fun.

Policeman: You like to travel?

Faye: Don't you?

Policeman 633: I am happy with where I am.

In *Chungking Express* (1994), Faye confesses her desire for travel, and she really does go to California later on. On the contrary, policeman 633 remains close to domestic space. As I have argued in Chapter 1, the characters in Wong Kar-wai's films are often homeless, which is a cultural symptom of Hong Kong. In terms of gender, women are shown to be more mobile and more homeless than men in Wong's films. Thus in *Chungking Express*, the homes of the male protagonists, two policemen, are shown but the ones for the females are not. These men have lost their authoritative masculine power as policemen, and they are shown staying home pitifully after being dumped by their girlfriends. Policeman 633, who experiences a kind of masculinity crisis, has an attachment to his flat, which embodies his

memories of his ex-girlfriend and his devastated, lovelorn emotion. In contrast, the female characters are mobile. The drug dealer is always running and walking in and out of the hyperactive Chungking Mansion. When she needs a rest, she goes to a bar or a hotel room. In addition, Faye, whose home is also invisible in the film, is saving up to travel. Later in the film, she becomes an intruder in the flat of policeman 633 she adores, but she flies to California without leaving a word after winning his heart. At the end of the film, policeman 633, who becomes an owner of the fast food shop Midnight Express she used to work for, is right there waiting for her. There, the mobile woman meets the immobile man. It is a cultural symptom shown in Wong's films; via the crisis-ridden men and the mobile woman, the director enables a post-colonial writing for Hong Kong, which will be diagnosed in this chapter.

In recent years, when Hong Kong cinema has become the object of an increasing academic concern, gender issues in these films have begun to be addressed.²⁹ However, there are still some crucial questions left underdeveloped, such as the perspectives of the contemporary female directors in Hong Kong³⁰ and the gender representation in Wong Kar-wai's films. In the discussion of Wong's works, gender is often overlooked. For example, the cultural significance of the impotent policemen, the lovelorn swordsmen, and the mobile women in his films has not yet been explored, especially when seen in the light of wider cultural contexts. To work on this field, this chapter will look closely at how men and women are depicted by Wong in terms of their relationship to different spaces, such as domestic space, the space of passage and the sublime space. The content in this chapter thus extends the discussion in the previous chapter about mobility and spatial others.

The chapter includes two parts, in which I will both examine the relationships between gender, space and mobility in Wong Kar-wai's films, and contextualize these impotent or feminine men and highly mobile women in terms of cinematic tradition, political

²⁹ The reader *Masculinity and Hong Kong Cinema* (ed. Pang, Lai-kwan, 2005) as the first book-length study of gender in Hong Kong language cinema is a significant step.

³⁰ There are some influential female directors in Hong Kong since the 1980s, including Ann Hui, Clara Law and Mable Cheung. Their works have comprised a substantial part in Hong Kong cinema.

background and cultural significance. The masculinity crisis in Wong's films, which gives way to the agency of the female characters, will be the focus of Part 1. In comparison to the masculinity crisis in Western culture, and more specifically the cultural politics of Hollywood films, I argue that the crisis represented in Hong Kong cinema has its own cultural contexts. It is exemplified by the alternative male images in Hong Kong cinema, in which Hong Kong's transnational, hybrid culture is shown. These male characters will be critically compared to the "remasculinization" of films, as well as the nation, in the Reagan era of the 1980s (Jeffords, 1994). In her studies of the relationship between masculinity in the cinema and in politics in the 1980s, Jeffords argues that the emergence of macho men in the cinema was related to the changing politics in the US when heroes were needed by both the government and the people. Despite the specificity of Hong Kong's case, these cross-cultural comparisons of men, which are rarely made in the studies of Hong Kong cinema, are helpful in examining the cultural politics of the creation of heroes and anti-heroes in Hong Kong cinema.

In Part 2, in order to understand the cultural politics behind the mobile women in Wong's films, I will first discuss in general women's relationship to space – they are confined by domestic space and excluded by public space (Rose, 1993). Then I will analyze the figures of the mobile women, including drug dealer, killer dispatcher, courtesan and woman warrior, in Wong's films. In addition, to focus on another highlighted space – the sublime landscape – I will analyze the difference between men's and women's relationships with the sublime in Wong's films, which discloses an understanding about mobile women and space. In Wong's films, while the sublime space is an object for the men to dream of and to achieve, the women seem to have a more intimate relationship with it. Female solidarity is consolidated in a sublime space that is more real and even mundane for the women. In this part dealing with women and space, I will draw attention to some feminist ideas which have not so far been used to understand Wong's films, such as Bih Heng-da's studies of gender and space in Taiwan (2004), Barbara Creed's notion of "neo-myth" as women's journey (2007), and Nancy Miller's analysis of "female landscapes" in some feminist writings (1988). My discussion will move between everyday life, global trends and

filmic texts. Bih Heng-da's studies help to understand women's relationship to spaces in today's Chinese society, in which women struggle to have their own space. Creed's analysis of women's journeys in fictions sheds light on the understanding of women's travelling experiences in Wong's films, and Miller's discussion, which shows the possibility of the use of women's space as resistance in feminist writings, is applicable to Wong's films. Connected to my argument in Chapter 1, this chapter will define the culture of Hong Kong, represented by the crisis-ridden men and mobile women in Wong's films, as paradigmatic in our age of hybridity and mobility.

Part 1:

“I Hate to Pull a Bullet out of My Body”: Men in Crisis

“[M]asculinity is an effect of culture – a construction, a performance, a masquerade – rather than a universal and unchanging essence.” (Cohan and Hark, 1993: 7)

Whilst gangsters and killers are heroic figures in mainstream Hong Kong cinema, in Wong Kar-wai's *Fallen Angels* (1995), a vulnerable assassin is found. Far from a fearless hero, he is fed up with getting hurt: “I hate the feeling when I pull a bullet out of my body. I feel tired,” he says. Here, “getting hurt” refers to both physical pain and emotional injury since he is not courageous enough to pursue love in the film. This is only one of the numerous men in Wong's films who are vulnerable and even impotent. The questions I wish to raise from this figure are: how are the male characters represented in Wong's films? How do they differ from their counterparts in Hong Kong cinema? As crisis-ridden men as I will

examine, how are these men related to Hong Kong, a city facing 1997 and a post-colonial situation?

The masculinization of Hong Kong Cinema

With its worldwide fame for making action films, Hong Kong cinema has been defined as masculine (Desser, 2005). Action film, including the costumed martial art film and the modern gang-and-cop film, has been a major genre in the history of Hong Kong cinema from the 1960s on (ibid). It is also what has brought Hong Kong cinema to the global stage in past decades. From kungfu master to super cop, from Bruce Lee to Jacky Chan, from swords to guns, Hong Kong cinema is pervasively occupied by masculinity. In his analysis of the origin of the masculine trend, Desser considers the 1960s as a critical period when Zhang Che's martial art films became so overwhelmingly popular that they rendered Hong Kong films masculine. Zhang Che initiates a Yang-gang (masculinity) genre with motifs such as the death and replacement of a father figure, master-and-disciple relationship, male bonding, and the absence of women (ibid: 30). The narrative and semiotic structure of Zhang's films then become a prototype of the subsequent action films in Hong Kong cinema. John Woo, alongside Ringo Lam, is influenced by Zhang Che (ibid: 20). In the 1980s, John Woo's box-office record breaker *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) exemplified most of the key motifs from Zhang's legacy: the protagonists are betrayed by a "brother" in the gang; one of the heroes is injured and disabled; there is a romantic bonding between males; and women are absent. The heroes in John Woo's films might sometimes be tragic, but they are still tough and heroic in the face of fate and adversity. In the 1980s and the 1990s, there are several typical heroes in Hong Kong cinema: Jacky Chan as a policeman in the *Police Story* series (1985, 1988, and 1992), Chow Yun-fat as a gangster in the *A Better Tomorrow* series (1986, 1987, and 1989), Jet Li as a martial art master in the *Once Upon a Time in China* series (1991, 1992 and 1993). As the Western genre stands for the essential masculine standard as well as national pride in America, the action film embodies something about what it means to be a man and a Hong-Kong-er in Hong Kong.

If the emergence of a popular genre often attempts to “solve” some particular cultural problems, especially those relating to gender (Williams, 1991), what does the popularity of Yang-gang films indicate about Hong Kong society? For this question, Hollywood offers some hints. In her study of the muscled heroes with “hard bodies” in 1980s Hollywood cinema, Jeffords associates cinematic image with political crisis and national identity (1994). In the aftermath of the Vietnam War in the late 1970s, Jeffords argues, when President Carter is characterized as being too feminine and “not man enough” to lead a superpower nation, Reagan, as a tough cowboy, appears to be a “physical king” and powerful father who can solve all problems and regain national pride for America. With his familiarity with Hollywood cinema, Reagan, a former actor, makes use of cinematic discourse and his own macho image to portray himself as a tough leader and America as a superpower (1994: 1-23). His tall, athletic body and his tough, manly cowboy image are effectively deployed in political propaganda and widely welcomed in the 1980s, to comfort and “rescue” the American psyche from the 1970s political trauma. In Reagan’s heyday, super heroes with hard bodies emerge or become popular in Hollywood films, such as Bruce Willis in the *Die Hard* series (1988, 1990, 1995, and 2007), Arnold Schwarzenegger in the *Terminator* series (1984, 1991, 2003, and 2009) and Sylvester Stallone in the *Rocky* series (1976, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1990, and 2006). These hard bodies and heroism, argues Jeffords, are highly political and are used to link the individual to the nation:

In order to revise the relationship between people and nation, the Reagan presidency, in conjunction with the New Right, nationalized *bodies* (Jeffords’ emphasis) by equating individual actions with national actions in such a way that individual failings were to be seen as causes for national downfall (precisely its critique of Jimmy Carter and the ‘cultural elite’, but equally its justification for attacking single mothers, substance users, homosexuals, and welfare recipients). (1994: 14)

Jeffords states clearly the relationship between politics and the representation of bodies, especially in films. Masculine bodies as the embodiment of the nation call for people’s identification. In a sense, these male images are propagandist and compensatory, responding to the political need of a Republican government seeking to strengthen its power, and the emotional need of a people with a shaken national identity. This perspective

is helpful in interpreting masculinity and its crisis in Hong Kong cinema, which tends to be more symptomatic and compensatory than propagandist. In the 1960s, the Cultural Revolution, a disastrous nationwide political movement against the liberal bourgeoisie in mainland China, had a big impact on Hong Kong (Lui, 1997). Along with this movement, a riot opposing the British colonial government by pro- Communist-China citizens in 1967 caused social upheavals. Dessler believes there is a linkage between this political turmoil and the emergence of a masculine cinema in Hong Kong, even though it is not a simplistic cause-and-effect relationship (2005: 23-24). The fighting in the films is parallel to the violence on the street. The masculine genre, alongside Bruce Lee's muscle and kungfu in the 1970s, supports nationalism against colonialism, and represents the feelings shared by a group of Hong Kong people at that time.

In the 1980s, the two sides of masculinity in Hollywood films are comparable again. Apart from the "hard-bodies" genre mentioned above, the physically and mentally injured and troubled heroes in *Apocalypse Now* (dir. Francis Coppola, 1979), *Full Metal Jacket* (dir. Stanley, 1987) and *Born on the 4th of July*³¹ (dir. Oliver Stone, 1989) surface (Jeffords, 1989). Alongside the tough guys for the politically challenged country, these contemplative films disclose the wounds of American men, reveal the scars and weaknesses of the country, and present crises of masculinity. In addition, the women's movement from the 1970s gives rise to an upward social mobility for women, which becomes a threat to men's vested interests. The example of America demonstrates how the image of males is used to solve or to state a political problem. Due to the city's political predicament, Hong Kong cinema has been called "crisis cinema" with the inclusion of Wong Kar-wai's films in this category (Stokes and Hoover, 1999). As in America, the political crisis of Hong Kong is tackled by macho men in the cinema. In their writings, Stokes and Hoover have given some examples of these masculine genres, as in John Woo and Ringo Lam's films, in which the heroes are often faced with great danger and anxiety, to show how cinematic Hong Kong is like a

³¹ In *Born on the 4th of July*, the casting of Tom Cruise, whose previously successful role was a strong and romantic Naval aviator in *Top Gun* (dir. Tony Scott, 1986), as an severely injured soldier from Vietnam War, gives the film another layer of contemplating the representation of masculinity.

“city on fire”³² (ibid). Hong Kong cinema is filled with macho heroes such as courageous policemen, fearless gangsters and invincible swordsmen on the one hand, but full of their crises on the other hand.

Romance: Another Kind of Crisis

However, there is another kind of film which shows a crisis of masculinity in a different way. In these films, the crisis is presented and tackled not via danger and bleeding, and women are neither invisible nor destructive. Rather, men’s crisis is pondered via romance, which takes us back to Wong Kar-wai’s films. In his modification of genres,³³ Wong has recreated a few key typical male characters in Hong Kong cinema: cops, gangsters and martial art professionals. An obvious example is the two policemen who totally lose their masculine and authoritative power in *Chungking Express*. Policeman 223 is dumped by his girlfriend May. In his desperate loneliness, he compares himself to an expired can of pineapple, which is May’s favourite food. Feeling sympathetic to the cans, he looks for some soon-to-be-expired cans in a convenience store, but fails to find any. He is told by the staff that these cans are replaced, and he angrily blames the staff for “not being concerned about the feelings of the abandoned cans”. On the 1st of May, his birthday and the “expiry date” of his relationship with May set by him, he has eaten thirty cans of pineapple. In parallel narratives, the first twenty minutes of the film show the distinct lives of policeman 223 and the female drug dealer: the former is obsessed by his loss of love, while the latter, involved in crime, is busy with matters regarding drug trafficking. Their situations contrast sharply with the conventional division of gender characters in mainstream cop-and-criminal films, in which men are in battle and women are trivial. There are two scenes capturing policeman 223’s helpless sadness and loneliness: in his hope of reaching May, using the pay phone in the fast food store Midnight Express, he calls her family, talking non-sense to them. After the “expiry date” of their relationship, in the same place at midnight (even the

³² It is taken from the title of a Hong Kong film *City on Fire* (dir. Ringo Lam, 1987).

³³ See the Introduction for the discussion of Wong’s relationship with Hong Kong genres.

Midnight Express is closing), he simply calls anyone, including a friend that he has not met for five years and a classmate from primary school who does not even remember him.

In the same film, the case of another policeman, number 633, whose girlfriend is also gone, is not any better. “In every flight, there is always a flight attendant that you want to seduce,” he says, recounting his success of winning his girlfriend’s heart in the beginning of the story. While this statement sounds macho – a “hunting” attitude towards women, his masculinity is ridiculed because he is soon abandoned by her. There are some striking scenes depicting his despair and loneliness, in which he talks to various domestic objects, just like a girl talking to her dolls. “Why do you become so skinny?” he asks a half-used soap. “Stop crying. Be strong,” he encourages the water-dripping towel. “Why are you so wrinkled? Let me give you some warmth,” he says to a shirt before he irons it. “Everyone might get confused sometimes. Give her a chance,” he says to his puffy doll (Figure 1). For him, these objects are as sad as he is. In *Chungking Express*, as Brunette observes, the men suffer more than the women in a romance (2005: 46). These policemen’s vulnerability is seen not only from their failed relationships, but also from their jobs. As policemen, they are dysfunctional and impotent in fulfilling their duties to maintain public safety. With little narrative of pursuing or capturing criminals (there is only one scene that shows policeman 223 catching a criminal, which is his first time in six months, while there is no hint of policeman 633 practicing the power of the police throughout the film), or investigation of crimes, policeman 223 falls in love with a mysterious woman without knowing she is in fact a drug dealer that he should arrest, and policeman 633’s own flat is broken into by a woman. On top of it, they never use a gun as policemen. In this kind of masculinity crisis via romance, there are no macho men, and no woman is victimized.

Figure 1: *Chungking Express*. Being dumped by his girlfriend, policeman 633 talks to a big puffy doll.



There are several issues to note regarding these policemen in crisis. In general, the police symbolize social order and masculine power, and the police force in Hong Kong also carries colonial implications: when it was first established in the nineteenth century, it was not a civil police force, but a semi-militarized force of the colonial government (Ho and Chu, 2011: 19). Being called the “Royal Hong Kong Police” in the colonial age and wearing a British style uniform in public, the policemen embodied the authority of the colonial government and a kind of political identity. Hence, facing 1997, in the last days of the colonial age, the broken images of policemen can be seen as a figuration of Hong Kong’s social-cultural anxiety; there must be a problem with the society if even the policemen cannot keep a place safe.

Hence, the impotent police figure in *Chungking Express* can be seen as a barometer that indicates the decline of the colonial government prior to the 1997 handover. The masculinity crisis in *Chungking Express* is a cultural-political symptom. Following this approach, the other male characters in Wong’s films can be read similarly. Under cultural-political anxiety, what happens to the males in the films is about what happens to Hong Kong people. In *Fallen Angels*, as mentioned, a vulnerable assassin who is tired of getting hurt is found. He honestly admits his weakness: “I am a lazy guy. I want my job to be

arranged by someone.” In fact, his tasks are always directed by the female killer dispatcher, which leads to his death. With his confession of being tired of getting hurt, he attempts to quit his job, and to run a restaurant. In the film, the life of an assassin is boring and tiring rather than exciting or heroic. In a cozy Japanese restaurant, he enquires about the budget of running a similar restaurant, and has a pleasant chat with the chef, who promises to help him in the future. His affection for the restaurant, however, is disrupted by a song being played there, the one named *Forget Him* that he dedicates to his dispatcher as a refusal of her love. He never goes to the restaurant again. Behind his cool appearance, he is sensitive and emotional. In addition, he also lacks courage in love. He seems to like the killer dispatcher but he thinks that “there should not be love between partners”, and he wants to avoid making things complicated. Instead, he seeks casual sex without commitment. At the end of the film, he is set up by the disappointed and angry dispatcher, and dies when he conducts a task. Such an inglorious anti-heroic death of an assassin is seldom found in Hong Kong cinema. He originally plans to quit after this final task, but a woman changes his fate. He is shot suddenly, without knowing why. In the moment of his death, a shot of the sky above the city is inserted, alongside his voice-over expressing his wish to make some changes in life. However, ironically, his fate has just been controlled against his will. The assassins and gangsters, often tragic heroes in Hong Kong films, usually die gloriously for revenge or brotherhood, as in John Woo’s *A Better Tomorrow*. However, when an assassin is set up and killed by a woman who turns her love to hatred, heroism is eliminated.

Wong Kar-wai, with his interest in playing with genre, puts his heroic men into crises – various unheroic, pitiful situations. In *Fallen Angels*, certain elements of the gangster film are altered to show a less macho male figure. The assassin tells us that when business is bad, he sometimes collects money for creditors instead of killing. Compared to killing, an action highly glorified and aestheticized in John Woo’s films, collecting money is obviously less macho and heroic. It is only a job, for survival. In one scenario, after conducting a task, the assassin gets into a mini-bus and runs into a classmate from elementary school. The classmate, now an insurance agent, talks to him endlessly in the bus about insurance, marriage and their childhood. He asks the assassin whether he has married,

and the latter shows him a picture of his wife and child. From the assassin's voice-over, we know that he has never married and it is a fake picture, prepared in order to deal with situations exactly like this. Before he leaves, the classmate invites him to his wedding with an invitation card, which is tossed away immediately by the assassin. "Sometimes I would like to attend a wedding, but I am sure this kind of occasion is not for me," he says. The absurdity here is not only of a killer living in danger meeting an insurance agent, but also about how an assassin, usually a highly embellished and unreal character in Hong Kong cinema, is brought back to a mundane reality, where his heroism is questioned. The setting in the mini-bus is interesting since it shows that even an assassin has his mundane life: after conducting a task, he takes public transportation like everyone else; he has friends doing ordinary jobs; his marital status is an issue. This side of an assassin is seldom displayed, or is intentionally ignored by the mainstream gangster films.

For Abbas, Wong uses the gangster genre as critique of the "masculinist ethos" (1997: 49). In addition, his films are regarded as "feminized" by Julien Carbon (see Brunette, 2005: 4). Tracing the development of the gangster genre in Hong Kong, if the heroic gangsters in John Woo's films are already faced with crisis in Hong Kong's 1997 syndrome, the anti-heroic assassin in *Fallen Angels* is even more significant in its undercutting of heroism as well as the genre. When John Woo makes use of macho heroes to tackle a political anxiety, at the expense of women's subjectivity, Wong's response to the anxious 1990s is to reveal the fragile part of heroes, without putting women in marginal positions. In fact, after 1997, Hong Kong people's anxiety continues, which is also mediated by the films. In her critique of the masculine films after 1997, best presented by Johnnie To's films, Pang Lai-kwan argues that these films, with their effort to find new directions for the masculine genre, have limitations in their discriminative gender frameworks, which are inherited from the traditional action films in Hong Kong (2010: 68). In this sense, Wong goes further than John Woo not only in his depiction of gender, but also in his breakthrough in renewing genre, which gives Hong Kong cinema, as well as Hong Kong culture, a different representation, whilst the city is undergoing a huge transition in its anxious yet creative post-colonial situation.

Infantilized Men and Hong Kong Identities

Instead of using “crisis” to describe the men’s situation in Wong Kar-wai’s films, Bordwell sees a tendency to “infantalization” of them (2000). For men, it seems that being in love and experiencing romance must come with acting or thinking like a child in these films. As indicated, in *Chungking Express*, the lovelorn policeman 633 talks to and comforts his “sorrowful” domestic objects. In the same film, policeman 223 is another child-like man, who shares a hotel room and spends a sexless night with the woman he admires, the drug-dealer. When the woman is sleeping, he eats and watches TV in the room, without access to sex. Looking at the sleeping woman, he thinks of his mother’s saying – it is not good for women to wear high heels overnight – and he takes off her shoes. In addition, policeman 223 confesses to his method of preventing himself from crying when he feels sad: he goes jogging and makes the water content in his body evaporate. If “men don’t cry” is the doctrine in the masculine genres, policeman 223 is frank enough to admit his delicacy. At the end of this section of the film, it is his birthday but his ex-girlfriend May never calls; he goes jogging again. The image of him running in the rain is immersed in the film’s melancholic blue colour tone, alongside his usual lonely monologue. It is very early in the morning and he is the only one in the sports ground. In the film, no matter whether he is in the crowded Tsim Sha Tsui or in the empty sports ground, he is lonely. At that moment, his whole body is wet, and his world is full of water, in spite of his effort to get rid of it. Right after he has left his pager on the sports ground in his belief that nobody will call him on his birthday, the pager rings and it is a happy birthday message from the drug dealer. On his face we see the hint of a child-like expression of joy. Bordwell has not elaborated how Wong re-thinks the image of men in Hong Kong cinema by infantilizing them. However, if the way that masculinity presents itself often symptomises particular cultural-political issues, the infantilization of the men, especially those usually seen as macho male figures, implies the loss of masculine power in a colonial city. The implication seems to be: stop acting, we are far from big men. One of the interpretations is that it is the embodiment of Hong Kong’s political predicament: if the British government and Communist China are both paternalistic fathers, there is not much option left for Hong Kong but to play the role of a child or an adolescent, passively. However, another more positive reading would

suggest that Hong Kong's active voice is carried by these adolescents, which is my next point about men's crises in Wong's films.

When men are infantilized, the father-and-son relationship cannot be overlooked. Indeed, the portrayal of fathers, along with the important tradition of filial duty in the Chinese context, is core in the narration of nation. Given the political complication between mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, the father figure is something that some Chinese directors have to confront and tackle, as seen in the films of Ang Lee and Jacky Chan (Berry and Farquhar, 2006: 143). Berry and Farquhar have stated that "[t]he concepts relating to father and son and to ruler and subject – filiality and loyalty – were vertical power relationships that applied to family and state, respectively" (ibid: 141). For example, Jacky Chan's roles as "kungfu kid" in his early films often rescue his authoritative father. It is a love-hate relationship between father and son, which can also be seen as Hong Kong's struggle in earning and asserting its own identity and autonomy (ibid: 144-150). Chan's masculinity is seen as "not feminine but adolescent" (ibid: 145). Hence, being a kid or a youth carries positive meaning against paternalistic nationalism: "Chan's adolescent persona reflects Hong Kong's vitality, creativity, and wondrous derring-do as well as its subnational status" (ibid: 147). In Wong's films, not many father figures are found, and members of the young generation usually live their own lives homelessly.

A prominent father figure is found in *Fallen Angels*, where we see the father-and-son relationship that Wong seldom touches. Inspired by his boss who uses the camera to communicate with his families in Japan, the mute starts to film his father, who is in charge of a guest house in Chungking Mansion. From the lens of his amateur camera, we see the mundane life of his father, who is annoyed by the filming. Soon in the film his father dies and the mute watches the video clips alone, with his voice-over saying that he now feels like a grown-up even though he does not want to be. Even though many of Wong's characters refuse to live as grown-ups, it is the first time such a statement is clearly made. After his father's death, he moves out from the guest house. There are some noteworthy points in the depiction of this father-and-son relationship. First, the father is not presented as authoritative or paternal. Rather, he is a comical figure – one scene shows him farting

and rushing to the toilet in his suffering from diarrhea, and he is locked in the toilet by the mute as a practical joke. Different from the fathers in Jacky Chan's early films as mentioned, the mute's father is not at all an oppressive figure that a son has to confront. Second, the death of the mute's father echoes the death of Deng Xiaopeng, the top political leader in China at that time, at the end of *Happy Together* (1997). Watching the TV news in Taipei, Lai Yiu-fai is alert to Deng's death. Despite the difference in their narrative functions in these films, Deng's face on TV is a reminder of the mute's father's images on screen, both of which are gone, leaving behind their sons – one blood son and one political son. Their existence is now only via visual images. After the death of these father figures, Lai heads for an unknown future in Hong Kong, and the mute continues his life roaming in the city.

However, this is not the whole picture. There is also an invisible father figure in *Happy Together*, Lai's father. Before Lai leaves Hong Kong, he has taken some money from the company of his father's friend. Throughout the film, his father does not appear, but his shadow is haunting. The closer to Lai's return to Hong Kong, the more the father is mentioned as an absent presence. Lai tells us his hope for his father's forgiveness, and he has even written a long letter to him. "I hope he can treat me like a friend," he says as he reveals some of the content in the letter. This implies that his father is authoritative – not treating his son as equal. This father figure, created before 1997 via his invisibility, reveals a pressure unusual in Wong Kar-wai's films, which do not usually see the father figure as overwhelming. Most of Wong's characters are homeless, but a father figure still exists. This contradictory picture in his narratives presents the complexity of Hong Kong's situations and identities. One single kind of father-and-son relationship is insufficient to clarify this complexity. Hence, apart from the travelling, fatherless young characters, and the unauthoritative father figure, we are reminded that sometimes the absence/presence of the father is haunting. Under the governance of the British authority, in front of the political power from Beijing, despite Hong Kong's self-assertiveness about its cultural identity and difference as shown in Jacky Chan's early films, Hong Kong's involuntariness in politics is still seen through the persistence of father figures in various forms. This also explains, from another perspective, the infantilization of the men in Wong's films – Hong Kong people

are not “adults”, nor do they want to be “adults”, as mentioned. This refusal of growing up, in a sense, is Wong’s awareness of the danger of paternalistic politics, either colonialism or nationalism. In addition, the invisibility of the father in *Happy Together* carries a certain level of vagueness, just as Lai’s return to Hong Kong is left unknown in the film. As Lim indicates, by ending the film in Taipei instead of Hong Kong, Wong provides Lai with a different destination called home, not China, and rejects reconciliation with national patriarchy (2006: 125). Given the homeliness Lai feels in Taipei, another “home” is still possible for him. The only known fact, according to most of the leading characters in Wong’s films, is that travel is the necessity in life, which is Wong’s ambiguous yet powerful resisting gesture towards paternalism. Therefore, the masculinity crisis presented by either the infantilization of men or the absence of the father figure in his films is on one hand the reflection of Hong Kong’s anxiety over the 1997 handover. But on the other hand, it is potentially the site of Hong Kong’s active cultural articulation.

“When a Flat Cries.....”: Men in Domestic Space

With their infantilization, men’s distance from domestic space, or a fixed space, is sometimes reduced. Before examining the domestic men in Wong’s films, it is worth looking at the spatial elements along with the masculinity crisis in mainstream gangster films. Stokes and Hoover have observed the spatial elements in these films, such as the use of “mean streets” (1999). The high-rise buildings, makeshift stalls, and the heavy-traffic streets, in which crimes and danger could happen at any minute, are highlighted in Ringo Lam’s *City on Fire* (1987). The “dangerous, tumultuous, intense” streets in Hong Kong “serve not simply as a backdrop but as the emotional terrain of the movie” (ibid: 68). In another popular gangster film *Young and Dangerous* (dir. Andrew Lau, 1996), the street scenes, which groups of youths are moving through and on, present the instability and rootlessness of the new generation facing 1997 (ibid: 82). The domestic space is not for the macho heroes in these films. Hong Kong people’s mentality is embodied by these public

spaces of crisis and instability. In all these spaces of danger, the men struggle to survive. They are heroic yet tragic. And Hong Kong, just like these spaces, is hostile to its people.

However, the space for men in Wong's films is different. First, the public space depicted by Wong is mobile but not brutal. Rather, the men can find some romance there: in *Chungking Express*, policeman 633 meets Faye in Midnight Express in Central, the city centre in Hong Kong; in *Tsim Sha Tsui*, the busy commercial district, the drug dealer bumps her shoulder against that of policeman 223, who has some feeling for her later in the film. Second, whilst most of the characters in Wong's films live mobile lives as analyzed in Chapter 1, there is still an alternative group of men who are a lot closer to domestic (or quasi-domestic) space than the female characters and their counterparts in mainstream gangster films. Policeman 633's flat is a main setting in the film where he eats, sleeps, irons clothes, talks to the objects, and waits for his ex-girlfriend. One day, his girlfriend, in her flight attendant's uniform, leaves his flat for work and waves to him from the public escalator outside it, and she never comes back. In his despair, he often goes back home in the middle of his work to check whether she is suddenly there to give him a surprise, but she is not. Her job is to fly, and she only uses his flat as a stopover. She leaves him with those "sad" objects that need comfort and his "sorrowful" flat that has once "cried" in his eyes – the fact is he forgets to turn off the tap. "If a person cries, you just give him or her some tissues, but when a flat cries, you have a lot more work to do," he says in his voice-over when he cleans the floor. Throughout the film, the domestic space embodies the policeman's emotional ups and downs: it is the scene of him and his ex-girlfriend kissing and cuddling; there are the scenes of him "comforting" the domestic objects; and finally he realizes that Faye has come to his flat and changed everything, and he finds a chance of love and a hope for new life.

While space for women is often restricted to home in the "woman's films" of the 1940s (Doane, 1987), in *Chungking Express*, the flat is almost policeman 633's heart, which carries all his feelings. In *My Blueberry Nights* (2007), Jeremy, abandoned by his lover, is also in a passive position waiting for her in his restaurant where they used to hang

out. His reason for staying in the restaurant is also infantile: when he was a child, his mother always told him to stay where he was when he got lost; that is why he is waiting in the same restaurant after his lover leaves. Even though it is not a domestic space, his cooking, serving and waiting there make his figure comparable to that of a family man, or even a “traditional” housewife. The restaurant is the only place that he appears, while every woman in the film travels. The proximity between the men and the domestic or quasi-domestic space shows an alternative kind of masculinity, challenging the definition of masculine space and male image in Hong Kong cinema.

Lovelorn Swordsmen and Homosexual Travellers

Wong Kar-wai has not only recreated the images of macho policemen and gangsters in Hong Kong cinema, but also altered the prototype of masculinity in Chinese culture – often represented by the image of a swordsman. In *Ashes of Time* (1994), no heroism is performed by the swordsmen. Like the policemen and gangsters in his other films, the swordsmen are heart-broken. Using some key characters from Jin Yong’s famous novel *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (1957), the film does not display any Chinese chivalry, adventure or patriotism as the novel does. Rather, as before, what interests Wong is only the swordsmen’s obsessive love stories. Therefore, he does not adapt the novel, which is only the inspiration for his recreation of the Wuxia (Chinese martial art and chivalry) world. The Chinese title of the film “Dongxie Xidu”, meaning “Sinister East, Malicious West”, refers to two major characters from the novel. Ouyang Feng is the “Sinister East”, a cold-hearted death broker, whose lover decided to marry his brother. He has stopped fighting and put aside his sword – a signification of castration (Dissanayake, 2003: 36). Huang Yaoshi is the “Malicious West”, a swordsman who falls in love secretly with Ouyang’s sister-in-law; he hardly fights in the film either. In their despair, the former only chases after money, while the latter hunts for women. Using today’s words, one is a businessman and another is a playboy. The opening scene of the film shows Ouyang’s “business talk” – as an assassin’s agent, he tries to convince a potential client to hire his assassin. This image

of a businessman alludes to Hong Kong, which is often seen as a highly commercial and even mammonist city. Wong recreates these martial art masters from the angle of modern Hong Kong.

The film describes how they suffer from their broken love stories and regretful feelings. They are swordsmen without swords; it is comparable to the policemen who never fire a gun in *Chungking Express*. According to Dissanayake's analysis, they can be read as men without the phallus – the power of masculinity (2003). Hence, it is not a coincidence that many male characters quit, or plan to quit, their jobs that are masculine, such as policeman 633 in *Chungking Express*, the assassin in *Fallen Angels*, and Ouyang who stops fighting. Quitting these jobs is to say goodbye to a kind of masculinity that is usually celebrated in Hong Kong mainstream genres. On the other hand, it is also a search for new identity – these endangered macho heroes are Wong's choice for the representation of Hong Kong's predicament. Instead of John Woo and Ringo Lam's approach of using violence and danger, Wong's alteration of masculine genres and their attached masculinity demonstrate an alternative kind of cultural articulation of Hong Kong, which is more ambiguous, and more progressive. During the restless 1990s, Hong Kong faces an uncertain future as well as establishing its cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism. With his subverted versions of mainstream genres, Wong contemplates and recreates tradition and gender roles in his films. In this Wuxia world, love and money are desired but no national identity is wanted – which is a Hong Kong perspective.

The alternative male images in Wong Kar-wai's films have also a global context. With the focus on the "new man" in 1990s America, Malin analyzes the popularity of President Clinton and the emergence of "metrosexual man", "SNAGs" – Sensitive New Age Guys (2005). This kind of man, compared to the popular macular men in the 1980s presented by stars such as Bruce Willis, tends to be tender, gentle and fashionable. For Malin, this gender issue is closely related to changes in the capitalist marketplace: the popular culture of muscle guys opens up a sales market for movies, automobiles and stereos, and the new image of metrosexuality promotes products such as male cosmetics and shaving accessories

(ibid: 5). This new form of acceptable masculinity, Malin points out, is also friendly to homosexual men. In Hong Kong cinema, the 1990s also sees the emergence of explicit homosexuality. Apart from losing a gun, putting aside a sword or being infantilized, another kind of masculinity crisis is represented through homosexuality – a taboo in Hong Kong cinema at that time (Kong, 2005) – as showcased in Wong's *Happy Together*. In the 1990s, two groups of Hong Kong films deal with homosexuality: one is the drama which takes homosexuality as a serious issue such as Stanley Kwan's *Hold You Tight* (1997); another is the fantasy costume film which displays the transgendered as martial art professionals, such as Ching Siu-tung's *Swordsman II* (1992). It is noticeable that the closer 1997 draws, the more films about homosexuality appear in Hong Kong. This fact echoes the argument that the representation of gender in films is always connected to a political issue (Jeffords, 1994).

Happy Together, as a box-office success starring two big stars, Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung, is regarded as the first serious gay film in Hong Kong, because it shows homosexuality without stereotypes (Lim, 2006). If the men in *Chungking Express* are vulnerable as lovers and powerless as policemen, the situation of the gay men in *Happy Together* is even worse. Suffering from their tortured relationship, they are aliens in a foreign country living the life of the working class and sometimes even that of the prostitute, but still without enough money to go back to Hong Kong. Lai Yiu-fai works as a doorman in a bar, and then as a labourer in a butchering factory. Unlike *The Queer Story* (dir. Shu Kei, 1996), a film with a relatively realistic touch that makes reference to the everyday life of a gay couple in Hong Kong, *Happy Together* hardly addresses gay men's difficulties in a society. Rather, focusing on their innermost psyches, Wong demonstrates a vague feeling of alienation. Their crisis, as gay men or as exiled Hong-Kong-ers in Argentina, is displayed through alienation from social norms: heterosexual relationships, respectable social class, and homeland. The very first shots of the film show the gay couple's British passports being stamped by immigration officials, showing "1995". The film puts several elements together: exile, homosexuality, the crisis of men and identity ambiguity. Again, this crisis has its cultural-political implication in 1997's Hong Kong. Via

this social minority, a general predicament in Hong Kong is probed – the mixed feelings towards 1997 and the struggle to find and negotiate an identity. These men, who are marked by the film's opening as representative of the position of Hong-Kong-ers, are also gendered. Their gendered images are used to present a difficult and ambivalent Hong Kong identity.

The late Leslie Cheung, a veteran male actor in Wong's films who was open about his own homosexuality, often played characters with ambiguous gender attributes. His character in *Happy Together*, Ho Bo-wing, is a promiscuous and capricious gay man. In the foreign land of Argentina, while his partner Lai Yiu-fai is working and trying hard to save money, he only cares about having fun, changing partners, stealing, and occasionally getting himself into trouble. In the film, unlike with Lai and Chang, there is no mention of his family. Whilst Lai has a domestic space, he does not. He has stayed in Lai's flat for a while when he was hurt, but soon after his recovery he is gone. However, despite his sometimes vulnerable situation (he has been beaten up for stealing), he is not a pitiful figure. Rather, he seems to live a life of ease. His body language of dancing or sitting in the tango bar is relaxed, seductive and self-appreciative. And he is also the one who teaches his partner the tango, which gives the film some beautiful and passionate moments. The film captures his hair-combing postures before the mirror, narcissistically. Wong even shot some scenes of him in drag which are cut from the final version but shown in a "making of" documentary *Buenos Aires Zero Degree* (dir. Kwan Pung-leung, 1999).

In fact, before playing this gay role, Cheung's image in *Days of being Wild* was already prominent. In the film, although Yuddy is a womanizer who always conquers women, his narcissism and delicacy distinguish him from most of the males in Hong Kong cinema. The film not only captures his posture of combing his hair in front of the mirror multiple times, but also shows how he dances to the music alone at home in a cotton vest and short pants. Similar to Ho Bo-wing, he is a male dancer. In one scene, the jobless Yuddy is at home. He turns on the music, looks into the mirror, and starts to dance. It is his narcissistic moment: he shows his body movement, he watches himself, and he declares his

high self-esteem – he is like a kind of legless bird,³⁴ permanently in flight, a unique figure. For twenty seconds the camera follows his movement from the inner part to the outer part of his room, a semi-balcony. Then he is shown from the doorframe. In a full shot, we are invited to appreciate his movement and his indulgence in self-admiration, as if we watched him from another room, as a hidden voyeur (Figure 2). This scene is remarkable because Hong Kong films seldom present a male in such a way, particularly in masculine genres. Heroes are admired by the camera in John Woo's films, but usually when heroic actions are taken, not in such leisure time dancing. He gazes at himself as the camera gazes at him; this type of gaze is rarely seen in Hong Kong cinema.

Figure 2: *Days of being Wild*. Yuddy's narcissistic moment: he shows his body movement and he declares his high self-esteem.



These cinematic images reflect Cheung's other role as a popular singer who was famous for his handsomeness and androgyny in Hong Kong, as well as his homosexuality (Lok, 2008). In his concerts, he has worn red high heels to dance, and he has had feminine long hair. The popularity of Cheung echoes the cross-sexual characters in classic Chinese

³⁴ See Chapter 1 for the significance of the myth of the legless bird.

literature; in the “beauty-scholar” romance, the male protagonists are often “just like beautiful women” (McMahon, 1994: 234). Men’s feminine beauty has a long history in Chinese art. Wong Kar-wai makes use of Cheung’s image to create his male characters with a feminine temperament, which reflect the changing cinematic culture, society and politics in 1990s Hong Kong. It can be seen in part as a response to the trend of SNAG (Sensitive New Age Guy) from the West (Malin, 2005), though one which draws on a specifically Chinese representational tradition, and also as a representation of Hong Kong’s cultural image. The gender ambiguity, homelessness and alternative life styles of Cheung’s characters in Wong’s films problematize social norms and patriarchal politics, and negotiate the complicated and elusive Hong Kong identities. In other words, Hong Kong speaks for itself in the position of gender ambiguous figures.

Homosexuality in Hong Kong cinema can also be seen as the city’s self-representation in cultural and political terms. In other words, Hong Kong’s image and culture can be understood via gendered images (Shen, 2005: 120), especially in its post-colonial ambiguous situation. Hence, homosexuality in Hong Kong cinema carries resistance to patriarchy as well as to “pure” national identity, which is often idealized in the authoritative paternal figure. Hong Kong’s transnational identification, Pang Lai-kwan reminds us, is constructed around gender to question masculine national ideologies (2005: 10). When homosexual love is “normalized” in the 1990s (Kong, 2005: 79), not only is the liberation of queer seen, but also a new political identity is explored. These gay or queer characters, transgressing social norms and threatening gender traditions, raise challenges to a fixed identity imposed by patriarchal nationalism and seek a new Hong Kong identity. Despite their difference, we can draw parallels between the rise of the Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar after the fall of the dictator Franco and the gender ambiguity in Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s. In a changing Spain, cinema projects a “liberal, postmodern, and ‘post-Franco’ image abroad” (Pavlović, 2009: 153). And Almodóvar, with his controversial, homosexual, bi-sexual, transgendered films, which showcase a new Spanish culture and identity and capture the radical changes in the era, appears on the national and international stage (ibid: 160). A new Spain is presented in gendered term cinematically by Almodóvar.

Even though the political shift in Hong Kong is of a very different kind, both cases demonstrate how gendered images respond to a changing external world and negotiate a new identity.

To conclude, the masculinity crisis in Wong Kar-wai's films demonstrates cinematic change under pressure from a particular political situation and from the global trend of a revision of notions of masculinity. First, Wong changes the genre by re-thinking its gender roles – such as the swordsmen, the gangster and the policeman. His male characters display a man's delicacy, fragility and femininity rather than the usual manifestations of masculinity. Second, his films reflect a changing gender culture in the 1990s when the economy for men, both in the film industry and the society as a whole, had altered its direction. While cinema is still full of relatively macho heroes such as those of Jet Li and Chow Yun-fat, society becomes more open to alternative images of men such as the melancholic Tony Leung in *Ashes of Time*, the narcissistic Leslie Cheung in *Days of being Wild* and the child-like Takeshi Kaneshiro in *Chungking Express*, all of whom become popular after acting in Wong's films. Third, this change also contains a political agenda which concerns the feeling of being impotent in the face of the upcoming political changes of the time. However, these images do not only present Hong Kong's cultural pathologies. Simultaneously, when the definition of men in the cinema is changed, a Hong Kong identity is under negotiation. Pang Lai-kwan has stated that "the gender complexities of Hong Kong cinema once again prove that the word 'masculinity' can no longer be rendered singular in our complex world." (2005: 14) Here, "our" world, I argue, does not only refer to Hong Kong, but has a far broader reference in today's post-colonial age, and Pang's argument is well demonstrated in Wong's films. These films display how a post-colony in its marginal and unrecognized position makes use of various cultural resources, such as local genre traditions and Western trends of gender representation, to articulate itself in the post-colonial situation. The hybridity and ambivalence here is not limited to Hong Kong, but extends to a much wider post-colonial world. At the level of cinematic representation, these blurred images of men also create some space for different female images, such as those of mobile women.

Part 2:

“Take the Longest Way to Cross the Street”: Women in Mobility

Arnie: How come you're working so hard, Lizzie?

Lizzie: I am trying to save up for a car.

Arnie: Where are you going?

Lizzie: Well, I don't have any specific destination in mind, but I'm just gonna go till I run out of places to go.

Arnie: I wish I could do that.

Doesn't it sound familiar? In *My Blueberry Nights*, to the policeman Arnie, Lizzie (Elizabeth) declares her dream of travelling around the world at a point when she has already travelled alone to Memphis from New York. This dialogue shares a similarity with the conversation between Faye and policeman 633 in *Chungking Express*: a lovelorn policeman, who is less mobile, listening to the dreams of travel articulated by Faye, who goes to California alone and becomes a flight attendant later in the film. In Wong Kar-wai's films, women are often mobile and homeless; some of them have dreams of travel just like Lizzie and Faye. Following my discussion of men in crisis in the previous section, I will now focus on the images of mobile women in Wong's films by answering the following questions: how are women in general confined by domestic space and excluded by public space? Why is mobility important for women? How do women travel in Wong Kar-war's films? What are the contexts for and significance of these female images?

Before discussing gender and mobility, I want first to turn briefly to the linkage between women, private space and mobility in a modern context.³⁵ Home, the domestic

³⁵ My discussion in this chapter is within the context of modernity, which is inseparable from the construction of space. Modernity, Derrida argues, depends on “the harsh law of spacing” (see Clarke, 1997). It means the law and logic of modernity rely on the spatial order it creates, which is often presented by the cities. This kind of spatiality is found in the West as well as the regions that experienced modernization in the East, such as Hong Kong and Taipei.

space, has long been seen as a major site of oppression for women within a capitalist patriarchy. In her discussion of Kate Millett's feminist view on the public/private distinction, Gillian Rose indicates that the private space is a form of "ideological prison" (1993: 18). While humanistic geographers celebrate home and the sense of belonging to it, feminist cultural critics have argued that such celebrations support a gendered division between a feminized private sphere and a masculine public sphere, in which "home" becomes a site of isolation and constraint for women (Oakley 1974, Hobson 1978, Rose 1993). The domestic space comes with a set of propositions, such as that females should be protected from the danger outside, that women are essentially good at housework, and that children should be raised solely by the mother. One of the main functions of the ideology of domestic space is to keep women away from economic independence, social networks, and societal activities (Abbott and Wallace, 1990: 80-86). Thus, the valuing of home and family in a patriarchal society imposes the roles of mother and housewife on women, so that it is considered a "problem" if women are not satisfied with their roles and lives within the family (ibid: 81-82). In the circumstances constructed by these myths, women's capacity for agency and individuality is severely constrained.

Even in critical theory, women's positioning within the family is often not probed. In her criticism of the acclaimed "communicative action" theory of Habermas, Nancy Fraser argues that his dual notion of "lifeworld" (family and public sphere) vs. the "system" (official economy and the state), which endorses the former and condemns the latter, has ignored the fact that women are subordinated to men in both realms (1989: 119-120). The lifeworld and the system, she suggests, cannot be separated due to their equal interrelationship with patriarchy. For example, the system relies on the gender roles in the family (lifeworld) to sustain itself, using women in the exchange of service, labour, cash and sex.

"Ideological Prison" and Footbinding

In Chinese culture, private space can be said to have been even more of an "ideological prison" than it is for the women in the West. The Taiwanese scholar Bih Heng-da has

traced the origin of sexual oppression through Chinese characters (2004). The character “女” (Nü, female) is a pictograph showing a woman with her hands crossed and her knees down as a slave. The character “婦” (Fu, women) is a combination of a female and a broom: the cleaning woman (ibid: 12). Women’s very early image in China is that of a slave who offers service and does housework at home. However, the most brutal way to remove women’s mobility in Chinese history is the tradition of footbinding, which can be dated back to the Han Dynasty (206BC-24AD) and became fashionable in the tenth century (Hong, 1997: 22). In service of the idea that the smaller women’s feet are the prettier they are, girls’ feet were bound with bandages to keep them from growing, starting when they were five to eight years old. For centuries in China, with their very tiny feet, women had difficulty walking.³⁶ It was a form of social control which kept women from leaving their quarters, made them the objects of ownership, and eroticized their bodies as fetish objects. Most importantly, such practices confined women within the domestic space in the ownership of men (ibid: 124). As the “ultimate tool to deny women the physical expression of freedom” (ibid: 196), it was a form of oppression that operated through brutally removing women’s mobility. Wong Kar-wai’s reference to the feet and legs of the mobile women in his films will be discussed later in this chapter. In his research on gender and space, Bih also examines the hostile nature of domestic space for the wife in modern Taiwan. In Taiwan’s domestic spaces, even though both husband and wife have a job, when there is an additional room in a flat it is usually used as the husband’s study, no matter whether he really reads, or as the husband’s parents’ room, no matter how seldom they come to visit (2004: 117). Even though wives usually spend more time at home than their husbands, the domestic space is still prioritized for men. “I feel at home only when my husband is not home,” confesses an interviewee in Bih’s research (ibid: 90).

Not only does private space oppress women, public space is not friendly to them either. Given these widespread cultural assumptions about home as the ultimate space for women, then, women’s being outside of domestic space is problematic. Echoing Fraser’s view, Rose argues for the implicit masculinity of public space, which excludes women from it not only literally but also politically, since citizenship, the participation in public space and

³⁶ Footbinding is also a class issue since it was originally the privilege of monarchy and aristocracy, then spread throughout the whole population (Hong, 1997: 45).

political life, is seen to require rationality, individualism and self-control, qualities which are deemed to be masculine (1993: 35). In addition, contemporary urban public space is masculinized when the notion of the dangerous nature of cities is centred on their hostility towards women. Using the example of the Take Back the Night marches, Rose describes women's contestation of such assumptions. For her, a new claim on public space means a call for a new social form (ibid: 34-36). She stresses the dilemma for women: if the private space is a prison, and public spaces are hostile, where should women go? Given such a (patriarchal) binarism of public space as masculine and domestic space as feminine, clearly women's homelessness and mobility can become a source of disturbance to this space division. When they are without a home, it is less possible for women to be stereotyped as housewives. They become more difficult to define and control, to keep within the "ideological prison".

Turning, then, to contemporary Chinese societies, how might women achieve spatial breakthrough there? Bih Heng-da's research resonates with Western feminist thought. The interviewees in Bih's research give two kinds of answers about their relationship with public space (2004: 114-117). A runaway wife says that she has nowhere to go at night because all the "decent places" for women are closed before midnight. Another runaway wife has the same feeling that she is denied access to public space because of the alleged threat of sexual violence. However, another group of women finds the non-domestic space more friendly than hostile. A wife tells the story of a trip she took with her daughter many years after she was married. In a hotel room, when she and her daughter lay on a double bed to chat at night, she felt at home. It was the first time since she was married that she did not need to deal with dirty clothes, unfold bedding and wash used dishes. Another married woman expresses how she enjoys spending an hour in a small café in her neighbourhood every day. The hotel room and the café constitute the kinds of mobile space I discussed in Chapter 1. This kind of space, a space of "placelessness", can perhaps carry a sense of identity and belonging which offers certain possibilities for women.

The experience of these Taiwanese women suggests that even though some public space is hostile towards women, there is still potential space to be claimed there, especially when the domestic space is fixed and the public one is relatively more diverse in its

possibilities. Hence, mobility becomes crucial: it is no less important for women than the ability to claim specific spaces. The women in Wong Kar-wai's films constantly play out this gender issue. The spaces of hotel and café, which offer pleasure and freedom to the women in Bih's research, are exactly the spaces in which Wong's films are consistently interested. The Chungking Mansion and Midnight Express in *Chungking Express*, the Oriental Hotel in *2046* (2004) and the restaurant in *My Blueberry Nights* are highlighted as key urban spaces for mobility. Women's relationship with these spaces frees them from stereotyped gender roles as well as fixed space.

Everyone Is Homeless, But Women Are More Homeless

In Wong Kar-wai's first film *As Tears Go By* (1988), the female protagonist is already shown as mobile. The story follows the formula of the mainstream gangster genre of the time, in which male bonding is romanticized and there is a spatial division between the masculine violent world and the feminine peaceful space. However, the female protagonist Ngor still differs from the others of her time. She is more than a woman who screams and waits for the male's rescue in a gangsters' world. The way this first woman, Ngor, appears on the scene in Wong's first ever film is captured by her ferrying to Hong Kong from Lantau Island. She is travelling from a peaceful and rural island to the problematic city centre – Mongkok. Twice in the film, she talks about her desire to leave the island: she wants to work in Kowloon, and she will never go back to the island if she leaves. In her boredom on the island, she flies a paper airplane. Ngor is not a highly mobile figure, but in her dream of mobility she typifies the key characteristics of women in Wong's later films.

If a subtitle were to be added to *2046*, it would possibly be “a story about travelling women”. In the film, the female figures are all mobile, and the whole story is about how women move in and out of the Oriental Hotel, the film's main location, and in and out of Hong Kong. The two daughters of the hotel's owner leave home one after another: the younger sister Jie-wen runs away from home; the elder sister, Jin-wen, goes to Japan to get married. The prostitute from mainland China, Bailing, has an aspiration to go to Singapore and she makes sure that happens. For these women, there is always an urge to travel,

sometimes with a reason, and sometimes without. A number of parallel scenes bring out this theme of longing for travel: different female characters, including Jie-wen, Jin-wen and Bailing, stand on the roof of the Oriental Hotel, looking up to the sky, seemingly wanting to fly (Figure 3). These non-narrative scenes are not directly related to the storyline of the film, but later in the film, these women all leave the hotel for different places. In Chapter 1, I analyzed this mobility in the contexts of Hong Kong's background and global trends. However, how women are more mobile than men in Wong's films is yet to be examined.

Figure 3: *2046*. A scene captures Jin-wen on the roof of the hotel before she leaves.



In examining women's journeys in Wong's films, it is worth discussing the subtle relationship between the women and the men's space in Wong's films. In these films, it is a convention that the male's living space is shown far more often than the female's, despite the fact that most of these men still live in mobility as discussed in Chapter 1. For example, in *Days of being Wild*, the most often shown domestic space is Yuddy's home, while the two leading female protagonists' homes are never seen. In *Chungking Express*, we only see the flats of policemen 633 and 223. It is obvious that women claim less living space than men do in his films. Rather, women claim more mobility: whereas the private space is

mostly for the men, women travel. A stable, warm home is something impossible and non-existent in Wong's films. Both genders find their way out, while the women often go further.

When women cannot claim the space, they travel, or they break into the male's space. As mentioned, to know more about the policeman 633 she loves, Faye in *Chungking Express* breaks into his flat secretly and changes the space gradually. For example, she replaces a white bear doll with a Garfield cat, and puts a shirt she buys for him in his closet. To the song *Dream Man*, a Cantonese cover-version of the Irish band Cranberries' *Dreams*, which matches Faye's favourite song *California Dreaming* that she plays loudly in Midnight Express, there is a sequence showing her dancing, putting goldfish into his jar, replacing the domestic objects with something red in colour, and obviously having fun in his flat. After she intrudes into his flat, she not only changes the space, but also changes or even controls his life. When the song is played, we see a montage sequence of parallel cutting shots showing how she makes him sleep: in one shot, we see her adding two sleeping pills into his bottle of water, and then a flash-forward shot of her counting to three in Midnight Express; and then, back to his flat, we see him drinking the water and falling asleep exactly when she finishes counting. Without his knowledge, his space and life have been changed by a woman. When he discovers this and tries to date her, she flies to California. One day, she shows up as a flight attendant. According to her, California is just "so-so". It seems that she has not found an ideal place, or that travel itself is rather a goal than a tool for her – she is not looking for a specific place, she just wants to travel. She tells 633 that she has an early flight to take the next day³⁷ and she offers him a hand-written boarding pass. "Where you wanna go?" She asks. "Wherever you go, I go," 633 replies. In spite of her vague "promise", she is still highly elusive for the man, who can either wait for her or follow her.

Another intruder is found in *Fallen Angels*, in which the killer dispatcher slips into the assassin's flat to clean and to understand his daily life. She feels so at ease there that she even masturbates on his bed. This sex scene will be examined later in this chapter. What I

³⁷ A similar scene is found in *My Blueberry Nights*. Jeremy's ex-girlfriend Katya goes back to the restaurant to visit him, but she has not stayed long because she has an early flight to take the next day. Jeremy can only see her come and go. My discussion will come back to this film later in the chapter.

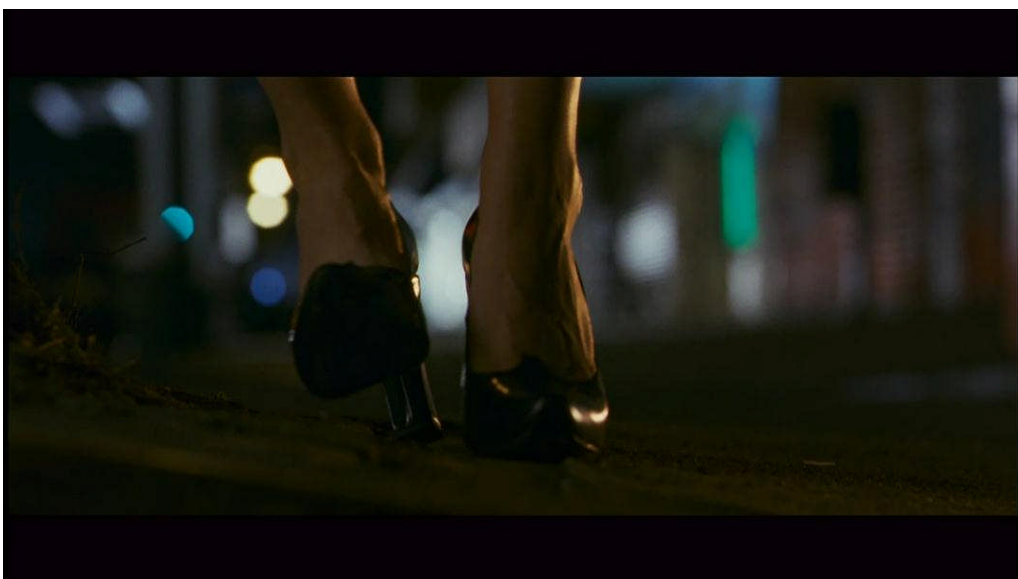
want to focus on here are the owners of these spaces: one is a policeman and the other an assassin; both of them are traditionally macho figures in Hong Kong cinema. Whilst women are mostly absent from the masculine space of the cop-and-criminal genre, in Wong's films some of them break spatial boundaries and invade the male's space. With these figures of homeless women and men's vulnerable private space, Wong defines the relationship between gender and space in a different way, breaking new ground for a discussion of the masculinity crisis and the rise of mobile female figures. These women do not belong to the private space, nor do they attempt to own it. Rather, they break into it and change it actively.

Women as space invaders in Wong's films can be contrasted to those women in Hollywood films of the 1940s who live in masculine-owned haunted houses and become victims of the space, as in *Rebecca* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) and *Gaslight* (dir. George Cukor, 1944). These women, who are often married to an unreadable man, suffer psychologically and even physically after moving into the man's house (Krutnik, 1997). Women's situation in masculine space in mainstream Hong Kong cinema is no better. In some gangster films such as John Woo's *The Killer* (1989), in which a female singer is hurt in a shooting battle in a night club and loses her eyesight, and *Bullet in the Head* (1990), in which another female singer is trapped and abused by the gangs in another night club in Vietnam, women are victims in men's space. Wong Kar-wai's films change how a woman might feel in a policeman's and an assassin's spaces. They are not victims of these spaces. Rather, they exert their agency and sexuality there: the killer dispatcher masturbates and climaxes with bitter enjoyment; Faye rearranges policeman 633's space with pleasure. They transgress the spatial division of gender in genre, and redefine these spaces. Wong does not seem to care much about giving specific spaces to women. Instead, he makes the women travel and break into men's space. Again, mobility, as spatial transgression, is more important than fixed space for women in his films.

With his interest in women's mobility, Wong often shows us women's legs. Scenes with close-ups of women's feet, legs and high heels appear frequently in his films. In *Chungking Express*, both of the female protagonists' legs are displayed. After walking for days, the drug dealer takes a rest in a hotel room with her high heels on. Looking at the

sleeping exhausted woman, policeman 223 tenderly takes off her shoes and carefully cleans them with his tie. “She must have walked a long way,” he says sympathetically, ignorant about what this woman has been doing. Policeman 633 catches Faye breaking into his flat, but he does not blame her. Knowing that Faye has a muscle spasm in her leg, he gently massages her legs. He tells her that he used to do it for his ex-girlfriend who is a flight attendant. These scenarios show men’s attitude towards women’s mobility in a subtle way: they feel sympathetic to them, but they do not intend (and they are not able) to stop them from travelling. And in *Fallen Angels* and *2046*, Wong films women’s legs and feet when they are lying in bed, having sex, walking in the street, or pacing at home. The shot capturing Jin-wen’s feet pacing in her room, practicing Japanese, seems to foreshadow her flying to Japan against her father’s will. In *My Blueberry Nights*, when the betrayed, heartbroken Elizabeth makes up her mind to leave New York, her lower legs are shown (Figure 4). These shots of women’s legs represent women’s agency and mobility. Wong captures how women move, have sex, masturbate and rest by showing their legs and feet. As stated, in the context of the brutal history of footbinding, Wong’s emphasis on feet implicitly reassigns agency and mobility to the Chinese women.

Figure 4: *My Blueberry Nights*. When Elizabeth decides to “take the longest way to cross the street”, the camera shows her legs.



“Good Girls Go to Heaven, Bad Girls Go Everywhere”

Women’s mobility in Wong’s films can be read in a historical context. Feminist geographers have argued that the concept of travel has long been constructed as the privilege of the middle-class white man, thus the history of women’s travelling experience is ignored by mainstream geography (McDowell, 1999). In recent decades, however, there has been research into this hidden history of women’s travel (Enloe, 1989). From this perspective, Wong’s trilogy about the 1960s, *Days of being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, not only reveals Hong Kong’s migrant history, but also the travel history of women in Hong Kong. For example, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* tell stories about how different kinds of women travel before Hong Kong becomes a metropolis in Asia. From the 1960s, some of the women begin to have opportunities to get in touch with the world outside: in *2046*, Jin-wen goes to Japan because she is in love with a Japanese man who works in Hong Kong. Some women work in the travel business and become close to the possibility of mobility: in *In the Mood for Love*, So Lai-chen is a secretary in a shipping company, so she can buy cheap tickets easily. Some women are freed from the family because they choose certain jobs, such as those of sex workers: in *2046*, Bailing is a prostitute from mainland China and heads to Singapore to work in a night club later in the film. Some women escape from paternal control in a changing culture: in *2046*, Jie-wen is a rebellious adolescent girl who runs away from home. Some women’s reason for travel is not even illustrated: in *2046*, another So Lai-chen, also named as Black Spider, is a gambler in Singapore who speaks Chinese but her nationality is unknown. This mysterious woman implies the diasporic history of China and Hong Kong, in which women play a crucial part. With their appearance of obsessive love stories, Wong’s films appear to be far from ethnographies. However, they do show something about social facts, such as the experiences of women’s mobility in the past decades in Hong Kong.

Regarding women’s mobility in our time, the bumper sticker on a car noticed by Cynthia Enloe is suggestive: “Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere.” (see

Cresswell and Uteng, 2008: 5)³⁸ Of course, this is not to say that mobile women are “bad”, but it is to note how women who do not conform to the traditional roles of housewives and mothers carry possibilities of “going anywhere” and resist patriarchal social norms. Yet the history of women’s mobility in Hong Kong is part of a bigger and complex global picture. There are a number of – often contradictory – trends in women’s travel today. In addition to the increase in middle-class women who work, study or travel in a foreign country, feminist cultural critics have also pointed to the rise of women from the developing countries who work abroad in various positions from waitresses to domestic assistants. Being called the “feminization of global migration” (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, 2005), women’s mobility is a key characteristic of today’s rapid globalization. As a global city in the East, Hong Kong exemplifies this trend, with large numbers of women studying and working abroad, thousands of Filipino women working there as domestic assistants, and countless women from different parts of the world, such as mainland China, Thailand and Russia, working as sex workers. This global trend displayed in Wong Kar-wai’s depiction of Hong Kong, in contrast to the Chinese tradition that confines women to the domestic space, is now changing the gender culture with mobility in our time.

Wong Kar-wai’s films capture this spatial turn with women’s crucial role in it. If Wong’s films may be accused of ignoring social realities³⁹ such as the dark side of women’s mobility, they can equally be argued to be a powerful form of intertextual mythmaking, reworking their archetypal characters and plots in order to provide a more challenging representation of contemporary Hong Kong than realist modes of filmmaking (Abbas, 1997). Since Wong’s works are highly intertextual, it is necessary to examine those genres in Hong Kong cinema and Chinese literature which Wong has used and modified. In the Chinese literary tradition, the figure of the Nü-xia (female knight-errant) is significant for its cultural and gender specificity. This kind of woman, who fights, travels, or practises justice, originates from the fictions of Chinese chivalry (known as the “legends”) in the Tang Dynasty (Luo, 1990).⁴⁰ This literary tradition was followed by the writers of the Ming

³⁸ This is in fact the title of a song performed by the group Pandora's Box in 1989.

³⁹ See the Introduction for the discussion of the lack of social realities in Wong’s films.

⁴⁰ The emergence of the literary figures of female knights -errant is related to the liberal cultural and political climate in the Tang Dynasty from the seventh to tenth century (Liu, 2006).

and the Qing Dynasty, whose literature saw more female knights-errant. These images in the context of the Wuxia world have influenced novel writers for centuries until today. In the twentieth century, various images of female knights-errant were found in the writer Jin Yong (Louis Cha)'s novels such as *The Legends of the Condor Heroes* (1957) and *The Return of the Condor Heroes* (1959) (ibid).⁴¹ It is argued that compared to their Western counterparts such as Joan of Arc, Chinese women warriors have more deeply penetrated the popular imagination (Edwards, 2010). This tradition has had remarkable impact on Wuxia films and also on modern action films, in which the female fighters are a transformation of the female knights-errant. In their guide to Hong Kong cinema, before introducing numerous Hong Kong films with prominent female fighters, Hammond and Wilkins indicate that "Hong Kong [cinema] may be the only place in the world where men and women fight as equals" (1996: 49-50). Despite its representativeness as the first comprehensive English book about contemporary Hong Kong cinema, this guidebook is not an academic work and the above statements are not well examined.⁴² However, these claims still reflect how the figures of women warriors in Hong Kong cinema surprise some film critics in the West.

Fighting women leave footprints on almost every decade in the history of Hong Kong cinema. In the 1920s, the first image of a female knight-errant emerges from Hong Kong cinema (Lo, 2006). In the 1940s and 1950s, Yu Su-qiu famously plays numerous roles of women warriors in black and white Cantonese films. In the 1960s, King Hu created many female knights-errant in his works such as *Come Drink with Me* (1966) and *A Touch of Zen* (1971), which achieved international fame for the female figures (Desser, 2005). In the 1980s and 1990s, transgendered and homosexual female knights-errant appear in Tsui Hark's bold reinvention of Wuxia films. This tradition of the female knight-errant has long presented women with "masculine" characteristics. In the past decade, women-centered action films in Hong Kong have provided models for the female characters in modern Hollywood films such as *X-men* (dir. Bryan Singer, 2000) and the *Charlie's Angels* films

⁴¹ In Jin Yong's novels, even though these female knights-errant tend to concern more with their love life than the male characters, their bold images and adventurous characteristics are still highly credited in terms of gender representation (Luo, 1990).

⁴² In their book, they have introduced numerous Hong Kong films with bold female warriors without comparing Hong Kong's case to the films elsewhere.

(dir. McG, 2000, 2003) (Lo, 2006). The director Tsui Hark, who has created numerous assertive female characters in his films, argues that women, no matter how strong they are, inevitably fall into conservative romance in Hollywood narratives, while the case in Hong Kong cinema is very different (Stokes and Hoover, 1999: 28). His comment reminds us that most of the female knights-errant do not need to return to domestic roles in contemporary Hong Kong cinema. As I have argued in Chapter 1, being in Jianghu means the most radical travelling life in ancient times. Women as knights-errant live a life of instability and mobility in the same way that men do, which can provide the opportunity for resistance to patriarchy, fixed national identity, and traditional sexuality.

The gender characteristics of the women in Wuxia films are helpful in understanding women's mobility in Hong Kong cinema. Women in the genre have a complex mix of gender characteristics. Observing *Swordsman II* and *Swordsman III: The East is Red* (dir. Ching Siu-tung and Raymond Lee, 1993), Giukin finds that "the strong masculinization of the heroine often creates a break with the classical representation of feminine passivity in cinema, a transformation that affects her body representation to a degree that questions the received notion of gender" (2001: 55). Women's fluidity in gender, space and sexuality in these films is significant. In his analysis of the female action stars from the 1970s in Hollywood, especially those on motorcycles, Gateward indicates that this "new" image of women in the West is not anything new in Chinese culture and Hong Kong cinema in which women have been fighting from the 1930s (2001: 201).

The late Anita Mui is an iconic star in Hong Kong cinema. As a singer as well as an actress, she is named as "hundred faces" (Baibian) due to her diverse and changeable images on stage. She sometimes dresses up in suits like a man, and sometimes performs femininity in an excessive way. As a bankable actress who has been the highest paid in Hong Kong (*City Entertainment Biweekly*, issue 377, Sep. 1993), her images on screen are as diverse as her images on stage. One of her distinctive roles is that of the woman warrior in Tsui Hark's *A Better Tomorrow III* (1989). As a veteran leader of a gang in Vietnam, in this film she is also the mentor of two men from Hong Kong, including Chow Yun-fat's role Mark. As I have stated, Chow is an icon of masculinity in Hong Kong cinema. This masculine figure is supervised and rescued by a smart and experienced woman in the film.

A Better Tomorrow III portrays Chinese migrants and fugitives in the crisis-ridden underworld of Saigon City in Vietnam; in their mobility, the woman is more experienced, intelligent and courageous than the men. Even though it is a masculine genre, the woman knows the space in Vietnam better than the men. Unlike mainstream American road movies which usually do not provide nor allow a space for women (Roberts, 1997), many Wuxia and action films value women's presence as a convention and a developed trend.

Woman as Drug Dealer and Killer Dispatcher

In Wong's quasi-gangster films, different images of women are presented. There are stereotyped female characters in Hong Kong's gangster films, usually beautiful but clumsy and useless, always waiting to be rescued, sometimes being hurt or raped in the battle between men, as in many John Woo's films such as *The Killer* (1989) and *Bullet in the Head* (1990). This is comparable to the women in the Western who are "nonexistent or peripheral" as "helpless, parasitic embellishment to a masculine genre" (Roberts, 1997: 62). But there are actually two main groups of costume action films in Hong Kong from the 1960s: one is the male-dominant kind initiated by Zhang Che, whilst another kind is identified with King Hu with prominent female knights-errant (Teo, 2009: 115). The mainstream gangster films tend to belong to the first group, in which women are passive and helpless. Wong Kar-wai's films do not fit into this category. The drug dealer in *Chungking Express* always acts independently without seeking company. After she is betrayed and framed, she is faced with a crisis: she needs to kill someone before a certain time. She gets her task completed with little hint of vulnerability shown. She is the only one in the film who shoots a gun, whilst the men don't. If the policemen without guns can be read as castrated, the woman who shoots implies an action of taking over power (Mizejewski, 2004). The drug dealer's relationship with the male and the space is not traditional. Policeman 223 is neither someone she avoids nor someone she co-operates with. They meet in a bar. Because of her fatigue, she says she needs to find somewhere to rest and they go to a hotel. She does not seem to have a home to rest in. Policeman 633 expects sex – it is assumed that local people don't need a hotel room just to rest. But, to his surprise,

“when she said she needs to rest, she really means it.” As a result, she sleeps while he watches TV and eats.

In addition, she is also the one who knows the space better than the police. The main location Chungking Mansion, a crowded place mingling good and evil inhabited mostly by men, is her space. It looks like a maze but she knows it well. Her walking and its tempo are captured by various fast cutting shots, accompanied by the rhythm of music. Inside, she deals drugs, then she is set up, and finally she gets herself out of the trap. If Chungking Mansion is a metaphor for Hong Kong, it seems to belong to women rather than to men. Her image, far from that of a sex object in the film, blends assertiveness and femininity, and integrates itself into the dangerous space of the lowlife. This kind of proximity between a woman and a lawless underworld is rare in gangster films. In the space for the social and ethnic minorities in the city, a gender “minority” finds a sense of belonging. In addition, the film shows no condemnation of her transgression of space and gender role.

The killer dispatcher in *Fallen Angels* is a tough woman who arranges everything on her own and kills the assassin in her anger. Every time before the mission, she examines the locales by walking through them, then she draws a plan of the route for the assassin to follow. Just like the drug dealer in *Chungking Express*, she uses these spaces as hers, in which no paternal power functions. Thus, if an action taken is the understanding or exploration of space (Cresswell, 1996), it is not the man but the woman who first experiences these spaces, which are masculine battlefields in mainstream gangster films. In her accommodation, Chungking Mansion, she once runs into some policemen, who are after the mute who breaks the law, but she shows neither fear nor anxiety as a criminal herself. As dysfunctional as they are in *Chungking Express*, the policemen do not cause her any troubles. Despite the male-dominant crowd there, Chungking Mansion is never a space of masculine power. Not only in the mansion, her body language in other spaces is noteworthy in that she always feels at ease and acts assertively. When she is taking the train, she lies on the seat in her fatigue; when she is waiting for the assassin in the street, she throws away a soft drink can in her boredom. With her transgressive and even offensive behaviour in the public space, she feels at home there, as if the whole city of Hong Kong is her space. In addition, her familiarity with these spaces enables her to frame and kill the

assassin who turns down her love and terminates their co-operation. This time, a woman is not the victim of the masculine space as with those in John Woo's films, but a resourceful user of it. On the contrary, a man becomes the victim. After getting rid of the assassin, she continues her dispatching job only with short-term partners. She might be a loser in love but she survives by adjusting her working style. It might be tempting to link her "vengeance" to the *femmes fatales* in film noir. However, in the story's overall tone of romantic drama, her action is rather the result of a failed relationship than a devilish, crafty plot. She, just like the killed assassin, is a loser in love in the film's atmosphere. More importantly, she is not punished for her action. Rather, the film depicts how she survives, not as a criminal, but as a lovelorn woman and wanderer in the city.

In terms of sexuality, there are very unconventional sex scenes in *Fallen Angels*: the killer dispatcher masturbates twice on the assassin's bed. From a low and wide angle, the camera focuses on her lower legs rather than other parts of her body during her masturbation, keeping the scenes erotic whilst exposing only limited parts of her body. In the first masturbation scene, she climaxes, and then smokes a cigarette and relaxes her body, with a hint of a smile on her face. After being rejected by the assassin, she masturbates on his bed again, a scene which ends with her sobbing. In a pleasant way or not, she is at ease with her expressive emotions in the man's space. Her sexual desire for him is clearly stated in the film. In contrast to the women in mainstream gangster films who are sex objects and sometimes sexually abused in the strife between men, she has her own sexual desire to fulfil, even though it is a bitter one. In addition, she does not do it in her place, but the man's flat. Here, the traditional attachment between sex, domestic space and gender roles collapses: home is not the place for sex, and a woman has her own sexual desire to fulfil, which can be done without a man, even in the realm of gangsters. These scenes of masturbation might be visually pleasant to a male spectator, given the actress Michelle Lee's beauty and the photographer Christopher Doyle's composition which emphasizes the actress's legs. However, the killer dispatcher is still more a subject, who fulfils *her* desire, than an object in the film's context. Taking the policeman 223 and the drug dealer's sexless night in *Chungking Express* in the hotel into account, Wong Kar-wai redefines women's sexuality in a quasi-gangster film: rather than having sex (with the good guys) or being raped (by the bad guys), one woman has sex on her own and another woman prefers no sex.

In the film, these public and mobile spaces are closer to women than to men. These female characters subvert the gangster genre and recreate the masculine space.

In *Ashes of Time*, Wong explores the physical mobility and sexual fluidity of women. Murong Yin, the princess of the adjacent country Yan, dresses as a man, meets Huang Yaoshi and falls in love with him. In a flirtatious way, Huang tenderly touches her face and tells her that he would marry “his” sister if s/he had one.⁴³ However, Huang is not serious about his words, and he does not show up for their appointment. In deep agony, Murong becomes schizophrenic and also the most powerful martial art master who travels around, with her image often shown in the desert. Just like the killer dispatcher in *Fallen Angels*, her sexual desire is stressed. In one scene, when Ouyang is asleep, he is surprised to be fondled by Murong. He knows that it is Huang that she wants, but he does not stop her but imagines it to be his lover’s hand. Again, women’s desire is recognized, in a way rarely seen in Wuxia films – a woman slips into a swordsman’s room to touches his body for her own pleasure. Compared to the masturbation scene in *Fallen Angels*, this scene, which shows Murong’s hand and Ouyang’s body, does not rely on the female body at all (Figure 5). There is no objectification of women. Apart from sex, the power of her martial art is presented as magnificent while other male characters’ kungfu skill is not privileged to be shown this way. In the scene of her practising martial art by a pool, the water erupts violently when she points to it with her waving sword. This action, with special effects, is shown several times. It is the most spectacular scene in the film, presenting her status as the invincible martial art master, named Dugu Qiubai, meaning “the loner who seeks defeat”. This film shows the possibilities of a woman in Jianghu in terms of her appearance, gender characteristics, physical skill and spatial experience. Away from her own country Yan, she is the only one who crosses the national border in the film. She, alone, visits the desert in China, and goes further to unknown places in Jianghu. In the film, whilst the whereabouts of the main male characters are indicated (Ouyang goes to White Camel Mountain; Huang settles in the Island of Cheery Blossom; Hong Qi goes north), her tracks are left unknown

⁴³ However, it is unclear in the film that whether Huang knows she is actually a woman when he says that he wants to marry “his” sister. This ambiguity leaves room for homosexuality – the theme in *The Swordsman II*, which is the source of inspiration of the androgynous character in *Ashes of Time*.

and her story becomes mysterious. The literary imagination of the martial art world enables her to “go everywhere”.

Figure 5: *Ashes of Time*. Murong Yin slips into Ouyang’s room to touch his body for her own pleasure.



This female character Murong is significant in Hong Kong cinema. Both her blurred gender identity and her mobility contribute to a post-colonial writing of Hong Kong. As discussed, in the 1970s, Bruce Lee’s masculinity was welcomed as a national identity; in the 1980s, Jacky Chan’s image of a “kungfu kid” was recognized as a new Hong Kong identity. From the 1990s, the city’s more complicated post-colonial identity has to be represented by more sexually ambiguous figures, and here we find the gay men in *Happy Together* and the androgynous fighting woman in *Ashes of Time*. On the one hand, as argued, since gender is bound up with the construction (or deconstruction) of national

identity, blurred gender image shows Hong Kong's ambivalent culture in the face of the homogenizing nationalism from mainland China (Leung, 2009), which is often seen as masculine. On the other hand, this unbeatable female martial art master Murong from another country who travels in the unknown desolate space far from political authority is also a figure problematizing patriarchal nationalism – she is far from her family and country. This figure functions as a tool of gender politics to claim a difficult Hong Kong identity, which can potentially be presented via the multiplication of mobility and sexual ambivalence. Given the motif of travel in Wuxia genre, an androgynous woman reaching the desert is even more significant, because she is outside patriarchal feudalism as well as masculine nationalism. The genre's fictional character offers Wong Kar-wai the possibilities to explore gender transgression. Whilst the gender representation in his films reflects the cultural construction of Hong Kong, the intertextual references of the women's images illustrate Hong Kong's identity as transnational. The tough image of the drug dealer in *Chungking Express* resembles Gena Rowlands' role of a female mobster in the American film *Gloria* (dir. John Cassavetes, 1980) (Stokes and Hoover, 1999: 197). The boyish image of Faye in the same film has been seen as a homage to the actress Jean Seberg's refreshing short-hair image in *Breathless* (dir. Jean-Luc Godard, 1960) (Brunette, 2005: 51). Using the same actress Brigitte Lin and her popular androgynous image, Murong Yin's role in *Ashes of Time* is more directly taken from a popular Hong Kong film *The Swordsmen II*.⁴⁴ From American, French to Hong Kong film, the references of the women in Wong's films are highly multicultural, a characteristic not only of Hong Kong cinema but also of the city as a whole. Just as its spatial others are needed to define Hong Kong as suggested in Chapter 1, these multicultural references of female images are also crucial to present Hong Kong in gendered terms.

Women cannot travel in such an extreme way either in reality or in films which make claims to realism, especially in Chinese society, where historically women had bound feet, but they can do so in fantasy fictions. In her studies of footbinding in Chinese history, Hong argues that Chinese novels written by writers critical of the oppression of women

⁴⁴ The film *The Swordsman II* is a big commercial success. Lin's transgender role "The Invincible in the East" in the film becomes so popular that she has played similar roles in five to six other films.

could respond to society: in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some novelists used bold female figures to criticize patriarchal feudalism, including Cao Xueqin, who created symbols of female rebellion in his classical *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (mid eighteenth century), and Li Ruzhen, who let women play men's roles in *Flower in the Mirror* (1827) (1997). In this argument the fictionality of novels allows room for a critical agency and subjectivity of women. In a similar way the representational fluidity between Yin (femininity) and Yang (masculinity) in Chinese culture can be used to portray talented and capable women in fictions which comment on the sexual oppression characteristic of the society of the time. In the cinema, fiction can be no less a potential realm for alternative voices. Agents of a kind of cultural politics, these fictional women can provide a kind of discursive resistance. Considered in this way, the empowered travelling women in Wong Kar-wai's films are not in conflict with the oppressed, immobile women of Chinese tradition. Rather, these mobile women on one hand mediate contemporary female mobility, and on the other hand respond to the confined women in traditional Chinese society. Using these female images, Wong's films speak for Hong Kong: both face the same patriarchal power at different levels. Via the writing of these women in spatial, temporal and gendered terms, an open, resistant, transnational, and post-colonial Hong Kong identity is brought into potential being. Including the film *My Blueberry Nights* set in the US, which has no reference to Hong Kong and Chinese culture but still displays physical mobility and identity fluidity, Wong's films make claims to a global identity in our time, not only for Hong Kong but also for the contemporary post-colonial age.

She is Elizabeth, Lizzie and Beth

In recent years, when Hong Kong genres are in decline, Wong Kar-wai's Chinese-language films have also moved forwards from their reliance on genre. Fewer and fewer traces of generic structures are found in his films in the past decade. However, his English-language film *My Blueberry Nights* shows his interest in another genre – the Hollywood road movie. *My Blueberry Nights* is a film distinct from other works by Wong. It is not only his first English language film, but also the first time a female protagonist has narrated the whole story, with a dominant voice-over. In Wong's previous films, even though the female

characters are important and distinctive, it is still the men who usually narrate the story as in *Days of being Wild*, *Ashes of Time* and *2046*. In this film about travelling, self-healing and self-exploration, the woman is the traveller while the man is a family type. Since travelling is a recurrent theme in Wong's films, the figure of a lone female traveller is significant. Elizabeth discovers the betrayal of her boyfriend from the restaurant owner Jeremy. From the opposite side of the building in which her boyfriend lives, she witnesses his physical intimacy with another woman, then she decides to "take the longest way to cross the street" in her agony – to travel alone across the US. In this scene, she is shown standing under the traffic light on the traffic island, a place from which people must move on. From that moment, the audience is invited to listen to her feelings via her voice-over throughout her journeys.

On her journeys, she has different names in different places. In Memphis, she is called Lizzie; in a small town in Nevada, she is called Beth, both abbreviations of her original name, Elizabeth.⁴⁵ It is not the first time for a woman to have different names in Wong's films. In *Days of being Wild*, there is a hall dancer who calls herself Mimi and Lulu. In Chapter 1, I have discussed how this is relevant to the fluid identities in Hong Kong's post-colonial culture. While a name refers to a certain identity, Elizabeth seems to deliberately explore herself and seek new identities when she decides to go on a long journey. The question of name is now not a Hong Kong issue, but a global one. It highlights the intricate relationship between mobility and identities in the film. On her journeys, Elizabeth meets other women, who are also travelling or ready for travel: Leslie is a lone traveller and gambler; Sue leaves a small town after her husband's death. Far from the roles of housewife and mother, they do not fit into the dominant gender tradition. There is an interesting similarity between these women: their journeys are all related to getting rid of a male figure. Elizabeth travels because her boyfriend cheats on her; Sue travels because she is freed by the death of her obsessive husband; on Leslie's journey, she experiences her father's death. They all gain greater mobility after losing an important male figure.

Generalizing women's journeys as "neomyth" in Western film history, Barbara Creed indicates that the idea of the threshold is crucial in women's paths to self-discovery (2007).

⁴⁵ To avoid confusion, I will use her original name Elizabeth in my following discussion.

To cross the threshold, she argues, women have to confront the paternal symbolic order, such as an authoritative male figure, or the religious or legal institution which represents patriarchal values. In their struggle, they defy their gender role, or reject marriage and even heterosexuality, sometimes sacrificing themselves rather than submitting to the patriarchal system (ibid: 22). Hence, the male figure, which is a cheating boyfriend for Elizabeth, an obsessive husband for Sue, and a father with whom Leslie has a love-hate relationship, represents the paternal symbolic order as threshold for the heroines in *My Blueberry Nights*. Having crossed this threshold, all of them are given the opportunity of mobility in life: Elizabeth heals herself, makes new friends and finally gains a car; Sue finally leaves the small town and starts a new life as desired; Leslie is finally freed from the love-hate relationship with her father. As in other Wong films, the travellers' destination is often unclear; it is left untold where Sue and Leslie are heading, whilst Elizabeth goes back to her point of departure, New York City. However, just as the forms of home in other Wong films are not traditional or fixed, what Elizabeth returns to is not a real "home". Rather, it is the restaurant where she meets Jeremy – arguably a vague form of home which provides a sense of belonging but has nothing to do with family, certain roles or obligation. Thus, after leaving behind a male figure, having more experience and gaining greater mobility from their journeys, the future of these women remains ambiguous in a positive way. In other words, getting rid of a male figure sets them free and leaves them with more possibilities in life, possibilities which are often signified in spatial terms in Wong's female travelogues.

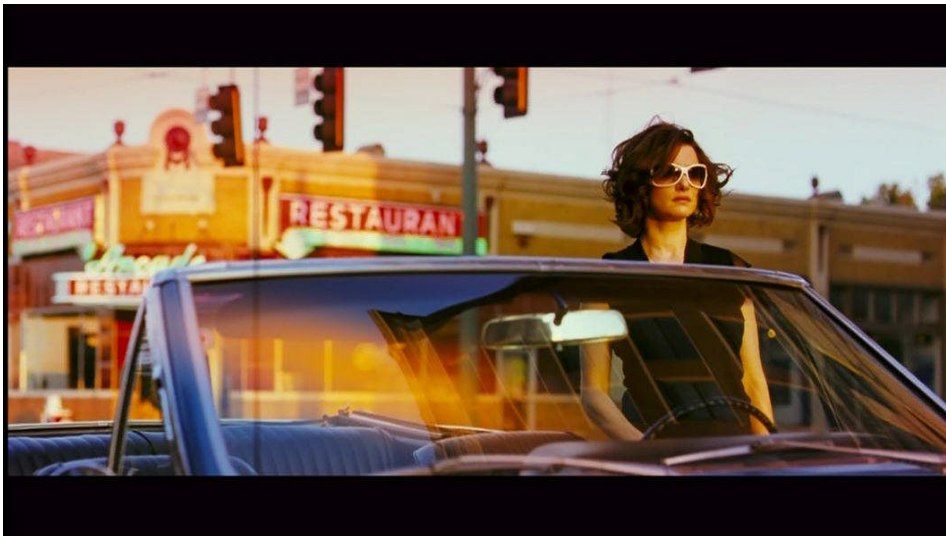
In this story about women's mobility, the car is a symbolic and thematic object. After she leaves her boyfriend, the first thing Elizabeth wants in life is a car, for which she works day and night in different places. Eventually, she gets a car with the help of another woman, Leslie. The encounter between them is significant. In the casino where Elizabeth works as a waitress, Leslie is gambling when she teases a man for not tipping Elizabeth and then she tips her in a generous manner. The women exchange smiles in a homosocial way, which develops into friendship soon. Leslie loses all her money on the table and she tries to borrow some cash from Elizabeth by promising to give her her car if she loses again. After a while, she comes back to Elizabeth only to tell her that she has lost. Before giving her the car, she wants Elizabeth to give her a ride to Las Vegas to see someone who can provide her with money, and then they go on a journey. On the journey, they sleep on the same bed,

and they talk and share feelings. Later in the film, it turns out that Leslie did not lose in the casino. She tells a lie because she wants Elizabeth's company on her way to Las Vegas. Finally, Elizabeth buys a car with the money that Leslie returns to her with part of her winnings. Leslie has her own story about her car, a new Jag, which is stolen from her father. However, when Leslie and Elizabeth arrive in Las Vegas, her father has just died, and Leslie decides to keep the car. In the coda of the film, both of the women drive their own cars on the highway, heading in different directions and waving their hands to each other.

In the recent history of people's mobility, the car plays an important role. In the twentieth century, the car became the dominant mobility system in Northern America and Western Europe by creating a wide range of accessible spaces beyond the railways, and enabling the drivers to determine their own schedules of social life (Urry, 2007: 112). Comparable to the birth of railway in the nineteenth century, the car, as embodiment of "utopian notions of progress" (ibid: 114), brings a new way of life (ibid: 132). Unlike walking in the cities, a crucial experience of modernity in the nineteenth century (Gleber, 1998), the car takes people out of the urban space. But, the similarity between walking and driving is that they are both something that women have had to fight for. Walking women in urban space were stigmatized as prostitutes in the nineteenth century's European cities (Thornham, 2000). Likewise, women have been to different extents alienated from cars: the space in the cars was originally designed for the average male body; the distribution of company cars often prioritizes men; and in some countries women are restricted from driving (it is still illegal in Saudi Arabia) (Urry, 2007: 133). Hence, women's right to drive and their ownership of cars are crucial steps to gender equality. In Hollywood road movies, the meaning of a car is equivalent to that of a horse in the Western, while the road is like the frontier (Roberts, 1997: 66). To attain an American and masculine identity on the road (ibid), or to escape from urban life and social norms in the cities (Crang, 1998), getting a horse or a car is necessary for men in the Western and road movie respectively. The mobility that a car implies is that of a masculine power, no matter whether it is used to support or challenge greater masculine power – nationalism. Hence, women's gaining and driving a car in road movies are significant. In *Thelma and Louise* the women use the car, which means freedom and individuality, to experience the journey on the road, a site of liberation from their oppressed lives (Sturken, 2000). In addition, the car can take women

to the natural landscape, which makes greater spatial transgression. In *My Blueberry Nights*, the importance of the car is highlighted not only by Elizabeth's desire for it and Leslie's complicated relationship with it, but also by the camera shots displaying its glamour: when Elizabeth is thinking over Leslie's proposition, she looks at the car, and the splendour of the different parts of the Jag is shown by several shots showcasing its streamlined shape, bright colour and perfect lustre. Even on the gambling table, the car is a topic. When Leslie is winning, a man teases her, "You got that fancy Jag. You are working on a Rolls Royce now?" In addition, all the driving scenes featuring the female characters signify more than mundane activities: when Leslie drives, she talks about her father and her problematic relationship with him is implicit; when Sue drives, she finally gets rid of her imprisoning marriage (Figure 6); when Elizabeth drives, her dream of freedom eventually comes true.

Figure 6: *My Blueberry Nights*. Sue is ready to drive her car and get rid of the small town.

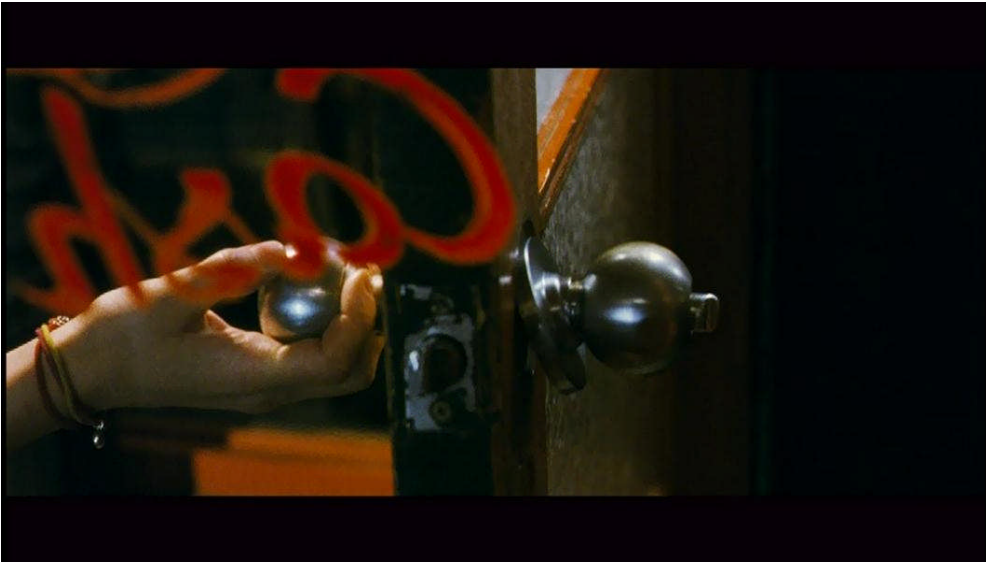


Doors to Open and Keys to Give Up

These women in *My Blueberry Nights* demonstrate their desire for mobility, which has usually belonged to men and means independence, self-esteem and exploration in life. Emphasising the theme of women's journeys, the film subtly captures several scenes of the

women's opening or closing of doors, and their walking out. Before her journey, Elizabeth goes to Jeremy's restaurant again, in which she is overwhelmed by her boyfriend's betrayal, but she hesitates when opening the door and decides to leave. "I almost walked in but I knew that if I did, I would just be the same old Elizabeth. I didn't want to be that person anymore," she tells Jeremy after her journey. In a flashback shot, her hand is shown opening and holding the door for a second, before she lets go, and starts her journey (Figure 7). A similar shot captures the departure of Jeremy's ex-girlfriend Katya years before, in which she opens the door, hesitates, and then leaves. In another scenario, in a bar Sue meets her husband again, who threatens to kill her if she walks away. "I wanna restart my life," she says aloud, and she turns back and walks out of the bar, in a shot showing her opening the door and leaving. These doors, which signify contained space, are the thresholds for these women. Throughout the film, the emphasis on doors and keys gives prominence to the theme of mobility. Keeping the keys that customers leave in the restaurant, Jeremy says that he won't throw them away because the doors will be closed forever without the keys. However, in his ex-girlfriend's short visit, they talk about this in a different way: even if you have the keys, the door might not be opened; even if the door is opened, the one you look for might not be there, and people might need other keys for other doors. This conversation foreshadows Jeremy's disposing of all the keys he keeps, including his own key as a symbol of his past relationship with Katya. When Elizabeth comes back, she discovers the disappearance of the keys, including hers to her ex-boyfriend's flat, and she claims that she doesn't need them anymore, which implies the new life ahead after her journeys. All these details about doors and keys underscore the theme of mobility, especially women's, in the film.

Figure 7: *My Blueberry Nights*. Elizabeth holds the door for a second before she lets go and starts her journey.



With their desire for mobility, the women in the film never fight for a fixed space. Elizabeth's relationship with the spaces is ownership-free. Her boyfriend's flat, which she only looks up to but never occupies in the film, is not her space. Soon after her boyfriend's betrayal is revealed, she leaves the keys in the restaurant and tells Jeremy to give them back to her boyfriend. Thus, before she decides to travel alone, she has given up a private space by disposing of the keys. When she begins to travel, she works in a bar, a restaurant and a casino. These public spaces are not hostile to her nor does she own these spaces. Rather, they appear to be temporary lounges in which she tries to forget the past, saves up money, and makes new friends who inspire her understanding of love and life, and finally enable her mobility. Her pain is relieved by these spaces, as for example with the confined space in the casino which makes her lose track of time and solves her sleeping problems. However, she never means to own them or dominate them. Her relationship with these public spaces is a loose one; there is neither obligation nor settlement.

On the other hand, Elizabeth's private space is deliberately omitted in the film. Her home in New York is not shown. The film leaves questions about it: does she have her own place in New York? Or does she share a place with her boyfriend? What we know is only that she gives up her boyfriend's place, and also her own place if she has one. On her journey, her living place is only displayed once: in a long shot for a few seconds, we see

her opening the door and sitting down on a chair in a dark room. That's all. Little hint of her living environment is shown. The film cares more about her experience in public space than in private space. As suggested, to gain mobility, rather than fixed space, is often crucial in Wong's films. In patriarchy, while the private space always imposes certain obligations and responsibilities upon women, the public spaces in *My Blueberry Nights* are more friendly to them. This is the difference between *My Blueberry Nights* and, for example, *Thelma and Louise*, in which the travelling women find the road hostile, dangerous, abusive and male-dominant. As I have stated, if public space is a complex site which contains both hostility and positive possibilities for women, Wong, with his interest in women's mobility, selects the relatively bright sides of public space. In comparison to the suicidal ending in *Thelma and Louise*, the women, Elizabeth and Leslie, head for their own futures with a smile. Just as he playfully subverts the space of the masculine genre in Hong Kong, he does not take women's relationship with the road as a problematic one with his touch of seeming romance, in which women's travelling is not dangerous and mobile women are not demonized. He naturalizes not only mobility, but also women's journeys.

Gaining her own car, which means a greater mobility, Elizabeth goes back to the restaurant run by Jeremy. He is still there, waiting for her, serving her some blueberry pies. Just like the ending in *Chungking Express*, a woman travels and a man waits. When Elizabeth is away, she keeps sending postcards to Jeremy without giving her addresses in different places. All that Jeremy can do is just waiting and making random phone calls to restaurants with the same names, hoping to reach her. This situation is interestingly opposite to some ancient folk novels in China (also some Western narratives), in which husbands leave home to take the imperial exam in the capital city or to serve the army, and their wives wait desperately and passively at home for messages from them.⁴⁶ Here, Wong Kar-wai has reversed the roles of the genders in his modern travelogue. At the end of the film, Elizabeth goes back to Jeremy's restaurant. "I know you serve the best coffee and pie in town," she says. "How do you know?" Jeremy asks. "I get around," she replies with a confident smile. After the journey, she has changed from a pitiful, abandoned woman to an

⁴⁶ Here is one well-known example: in the novel *Xue Rengui's Campaign to the East* (Anonymous, Qing Dynasty), the General Xue Rengui leaves home to fight for the country, whilst his wife, Liu Jinhua, has waited for him for eighteen years in the hometown.

assertive woman. What is left unclear is: where is Elizabeth going to stay in New York? This question is no longer important. Indeed, after her journey, homelessness has already become her home, and home has a very different meaning for her, since she now takes the restaurant as a homely place. There, in the mobile space of the restaurant, which is run by a British man in multicultural New York City, a global identity is promised via the sense of non-pathological homelessness felt by a woman.

Gender in front of Sublime Landscape

In Chapter 1, the sublime landscapes were analyzed in terms of their function as a way out of the problematic city for Wong's characters. These spaces conceal the hybrid identities in Hong Kong rather than national quality or cultural roots. Now, expanding my discussion of women's mobility, I will focus on another aspect of the sublime space in his films. In terms of gender, it is usually the men who look for a sublime space in his films. From *Days of being Wild*, *Happy Together* to *In the Mood for Love*, this kind of space is always for the men to pursue. However, the picture changes in *My Blueberry Nights*, in which two women encounter a sublime space of the desert on their journey. Feminist geographers argue that "nature" is an idea in Western culture referring to a physical world, which is an opposite realm to the cultured world of the human (Rose, Kinnaird, Morris, Nash, 1997: 156-160). This nature is sometimes called "Mother Earth", which is waiting for the discovery and conquest of science, a masculine power. Under the male's discourse, nature is nurturing and plentiful on one hand, but mysterious and uncontrollable on the other hand (ibid: 172). These two faces of nature are parallel to the binarism of women as Madonna and whore. Therefore, landscape, as a positive part of nature, is framed by the male viewers from a distance and with a scientific, appreciative gaze. The landscape is an Other, an object to be looked at, for the dominant male. Just like women, landscape is for visual pleasure and even physical conquest. This serves to explain why the sublime landscapes in Wong Kar-wai's films are so picturesque and accompanied with harmonious music, and why it is usually the men who need the space of the sublime.

However, what is discernible between Wong's sublime space and the "Mother Nature" gazed at and exploited by the males is that his male characters never occupy nor conquer these spaces. Unlike in the Western, in which the frontier is waiting for civilization and exploitation by men, the men in Wong's films pursue these spaces but they never attempt to own them. Whilst mobility is the eternal motif, it is never occupation of space in his films. These spaces, originally imagined and desired by them as a kind of psychic destination, later only become part of their often fruitless searches for love and identities. This can be seen in *Happy Together*, in which the waterfall is somewhere Lai Yiu-fai needs to pass by, physically and psychologically, just to continue his next journey to Hong Kong. And in *Days of being Wild*, the rainforest in the Philippines proves not to be Yuddy's destination in his search for identity. Hence, whilst the sublime space in mainstream masculine texts is equivalent to women for men to control and conquer, the case in Wong's films is different since it is impossible for men, as for women, to occupy. In short, men in his films can neither conquer space (and women) nor do they want to do so. This is the core of Wong's post-colonial writing of ambivalence – homelessness is home itself. These sublime spaces function as transcendental experience in the characters' journeys, which only proves there is no land to conquer and no destination to reach. Thus, there is no hint of viewing the space as a signifier for women since all his male and female characters will travel and experience the sublime space with or without a lover. This characteristic of the sublime, in which it exists in order that the men can experience mobility but not declare occupation, in turn makes space for the female characters.

In her analysis of the "female landscape" in Western women's literature, Nancy Miller notes that space used by women functions as a "revision of story" outside the masculinist convention of narratives (1988). For example, in the French writer Colette's *Vagabond* (1910), the protagonist Renee's space in a garden allows her resistance to the male gaze and enables her own vision. Similarly George Sand brings her heroines to an island which embodies "a scene of escape from the demands and violence of heterosexual plotting" (ibid: 254). In these novels, the spatial exploration of the female protagonists often opens to transgressive moments against traditional male narratives. For Miller, the landscape and secure space, with which women have a close relationship, is a potential tool for feminist writing. As indicated, women claim more mobility than tangible space in Wong's films.

When these women travel, they are out of home, out of the city, and some of them reach the sublime space. In Wong's films, the sublime spaces are non-national as I have argued, and they are also non-narrative. For example, if the waterfall and rainforest scenes were cut from the films, the storylines would not be much affected. Thus this space differs from the frontier in the Westerns, which is the main locale in which crucial dramatic elements occur, such as defending a piece of land or overcoming the hardship encountered in nature. Masculine plotting is often about the fight for space – territory, and masculine nationalism often uses the sublime space to seduce us into national identification. Wong's sublime space is resistant against masculine plotting and masculine nationalism. Therefore, the sublime space for women in *My Blueberry Nights* deserves some analysis. At the end of their journey, as with their male counterparts in Wong's films, the women reach a sublime space on their journey.

Despite their similarity in terms of searching, mobile life and opened-up identity, there are still some differences between men's and women's sublime space in Wong Kar-wai's films. In *My Blueberry Nights*, for the first time we see a solidarity between people happening in the sublime space. In *Days of being Wild*, Yuddy goes to the Philippines on his own, leaving behind his lover and good friend in Hong Kong; in *Happy Together*, Lai Yiu-fai's journey to the waterfall is also lone; in *In the Mood for Love*, Chow Mo-wan visits Angkor Wat alone just to bury his secret. These journeys are sad and lonely. However, the desert in *My Blueberry Nights* is where Elizabeth finally gets a car and her friendship with Leslie is solidified. The space empowers her. The hint here is that the sublime can be closer to women than to men, which is relevant to my next point. The second disparity between the men's sublime space and the women's is that this space for the men is apparently more foreign and visually pleasant. The rainforest, the Iguazu waterfall and Angkor Wat are all captured and framed magnificently in scenery shots which last a number of seconds, as landscapes on postcards, orchestrated with music. They are all foreign lands for the men who desire them. Wong has used a bird's eye view to show the magnificence of the forest and the waterfall. And in the Angkor Wat scene, the dolly camera is employed to display the spectacle. In addition, when the forest and waterfall are first shown in these films, they are just imaginary for the protagonists because they have not yet reached them. Before reaching these places, the men have mentioned them as well

as their desire for them. Throughout the films, these spaces are the dreams or mystic destinations for men. There is a clear distance between the men and these spaces, which are amazingly beautiful and difficult to reach.

However, the desert in *My Blueberry Nights* is not presented in scenery shots and with exotic music. In Wong's cinematic style, the desert might still look appealing to some extent, given that the director seems to capture the beauty of almost everything, even the slum-like Chungking Mansion. However, the desert is never as amazing and illusory as other sublime spaces in his films. Apart from a few shots showing the desert, there are not many complex cinematic techniques used in the filming. There is no bird's eye view, no dolly tracking of camera, no long take. In addition, in the storyline, the desert does not function as a destination or a desired place; it is an unexpected place that they happen to go through. Elizabeth would not even have gone to the desert if she had not met Leslie. In the desert, Elizabeth tries to buy a second-hand car and bargains with the dealer. In this scene, Leslie urges her to walk away in order to make the dealer lower the price, but she refuses because she thinks it is the car she wants. This mundane activity of buying and bargaining makes the space less unreal and dreamlike. Also, given the American context in the film, the desert is very possibly not anything strange for them, especially for Leslie, who might have seen the desert before as a lone traveller in western America. It is nothing exotic and foreign. In comparison to the above sublime space for men, the desert is something more solid, not so picturesque, and its relationship with the protagonists is closer. In other words, the men's sublime space is more for the gaze and imagination, but the female's is not.

The director establishes women's relationship with the sublime space as different from the men's. It implies another kind of relationship between nature and human beings: feminists argue that women's use of nature is not one of exploitation (Rose, 1993: 111). In other words, if the male's way of seeing then using nature often leads to exploitation, women's way seems to suggest an alternative relationship between human beings and nature, and *My Blueberry Nights* contributes to this relationship in an implicit way. Moreover, following my previous argument, while mobility is such a key state to achieve for today's women, the sublime space is crucial, if not ultimate, in their journeys. There are two layers in its significance: first, the sublime is the furthestmost space from the

“ideological prison” – home; second, at the same time, it is also the most distant from another home – the nation-state – in Wong’s texts. Here, these two layers are indeed inseparable, since patriarchy functions from the micro-level of home to the macro-level of the state. Thus, these seemingly trivial and romantic narratives of females travelling are positioned ideologically against patriarchy at different levels. There will be more discussion of gender and nationalism in the next chapter about nostalgia.

Elizabeth’s whole journey resonates with the model of the female “neomyth” that Barbara Creed suggests (2007: 15-37). Differentiated from the model of masculine heroic journeys, women’s journeys, Creed argues, have not yet been generalized as a formal narrative structure. Compared to the male’s journeys as myths, which can be summarized as being in three parts: departure, initiation and return, women’s neomyth, for Creed, consists of three stages: journey, threshold and self-discovery. The threshold, as mentioned, is often the paternal symbolic order, and self-discovery is the consciousness of women’s self and their position in society. Creed’s model is original and suggestive, and paves the way for studies on distinctive female forms of narratives. However, whilst the notion of the journey is such a key concept of the neomyth, there is not much attention paid to the spatial elements in Creed’s argument. Hence, in my discussion, Elizabeth’s journey in *My Blueberry Nights*, which is neither about initiation of something great nor a return with glory, demonstrates the neomyth, whose significance is stressed through her spatial experience in terms of the public space, sublime space and the object of the car in the film.

“[T]here is no third-world politics without women” (Young, 2003: 115) is a statement which stresses women’s crucial role in post-colonial politics. Being political leaders and the leaders of social movements in some third-world countries, women’s role is not a subordinate one, and the issue of women is not a sub-topic in post-colonial situations (ibid). Social movements and political campaigns are not the subjects of this thesis, and Wong Kar-wai seldom directly addresses these issues in his films. However, this does not mean that his texts lack the layer of post-colonial politics. In my analysis of his texts in Chapter 1, I argue that Hong Kong’s culture, in its post-coloniality, is paradigmatic today, in terms of the mobility, cultural hybridity and ambivalence it bears. In addition, using his mobile women to negotiate an ambiguous identity, Wong’s films show that women form a major

part, rather than a sub-topic, in this new culture. In the ambiguous space of post-colonial culture, women are sometimes doubly colonized by the local men and the colonizers. However, the women in Wong's films seem to be doubly empowered – being peripheral in the domestic and national space, they are set free to travel, and to produce space not only for women but also for all in our time. In their mobility, women are the most subversive group, displaying multiple possibilities and potential productivity for the building of countercultures against patriarchy and its complicit power of nationalism today.

Chapter 3:

The Past in a Hotel: Nostalgia and Alternative History Writing

At this point Kublai Khan interrupted him (Marco Polo) or imagined interrupting him, or Marco Polo imagined himself interrupted, with a question such as: “You advance always with your head turned back?” or “Is what you see always behind you?” Or rather, “Does your journey take place only in the past?” (Calvino, 1974: 28)

Listening to Marco Polo’s description of his journeys, Kublai Khan wonders why he is always talking about the past. In Italo Calvino’s novel *Invisible Cities*, one of the major parts is “City and Memory”, which raises the issue of what has been seen to be a cultural symptom of our time – nostalgia. In this novel, the past depicted, as well as the cities visited by Marco Polo, is imaginary, and is used to address contemporary urban issues. In Chapter 1, I analyzed Hong Kong’s “spatial others” in relation to the absence of a contemporary Hong Kong in Wong Kar-wai’s films. Here I want to discuss another crucial element of his films: the temporal. Wong always turns his head back to the past. He is particularly obsessed with the Hong Kong of the 1960s. His films *Days of Being Wild* (1990), *In the Mood for Love* (2000), *2046* (2004) and *The Hand* (2004) are all set in 1960s Hong Kong, full of nostalgic atmosphere with the music, colour, costume and decoration from that era. It is the whole of the 1960s that Wong deliberately addresses: *Days of Being Wild* starts in 1960; the story in *In the Mood for Love* happens from 1962 to 1966; *2046* takes place between 1966 and 1970. This set of films almost constitutes a chronicle of the whole decade in Hong Kong. In addition, Wong’s interest in the past extends beyond the 1960s. With his only costume film *Ashes of Times* (1994), he brings to the audience an unidentified period of time in ancient China.

Wong Kar-wai's films are always about journeys, which is also the theme of *Invisible Cities*. In this sense, Kublai Khan's questions for Marco Polo are also applicable to Wong: Why do his journeys often take place in the past? Why does he write Hong Kong's stories with his head turned back? Why is what he sees often behind him? What has this to say about the present? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine the trend towards nostalgia in Hong Kong cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, because rather than being an isolated case, nostalgia in Wong's films is part of a wider symptomatic cultural phenomenon in Hong Kong. This nostalgic trend is taken advantage of and intensified by Wong's films to show an alternative narration of past and history in Hong Kong. By presenting the past in a reflective way in various genres, his films take the trend further to a critical and even radical plane. They exemplify how Hong Kong cinema, with its highly commercial surface and entertaining quality, can carry political and cultural resistance.

Cultural studies take cinema as a crucial tool of representation, including the narration of nation, time and history. We might still want to ask, however, about the relationship between cinema and history. A look at theories on time and narrative seems helpful here. Paul Ricoeur has written influentially about the relation between time and narrative (1983, 1984, and 1985). He writes that our lives only become intelligible when a structure of narrative gives meaning to them. Similarly, history only becomes meaningful when it is incorporated into a narrative discourse which organizes separate events as plots in a story. For Ricoeur, fiction and history share so many similarities that they are sometimes indistinguishable. Moreover, people comprehend fiction and history in the same way, with expectations that obstacles will be overcome and predicaments resolved (Kaplan, 2003). Hence, even though fiction and history differ in crucial respects, history is still narrativized as "quasi-fiction" and fiction is historicized as "quasi-historical". Ricoeur's theory is powerful in terms of its insight into the nature of history and fiction, and it sheds light on the practice of historicizing, especially in our time with its dual trends of globalization and nationalism. Since history is a form of narrative, he argues that history is not singular, but is capable of telling stories of the powerless as well as of the privileged classes. Beneath the narrative of official history, an alternative writing is always possible. This theory is helpful in examining nostalgic cinema in two ways. First, it indicates the quasi-fictional character of history and confirms the historicizing power of fiction; second, it insists on the space for

counter-history in fiction writing. Therefore, despite its seemingly unofficial status, cinema is important in historicizing, especially given the fact that visual media have been seen as a legitimate field of historicizing (Rosenstone, 1994) and as the “chief carrier of historical messages in our culture” (ibid: 3).

“The rewriting of history itself is never without an agenda”. (Lee, 2008: 8) Behind the urge or interest in telling stories of the past, there is always a current reason hidden. Historical narratives are always driven by the interests that exist in the present. For instance, a new political power might want the history re-written to support its legitimacy, and a revolution might reveal the history of oppression to justify itself. Whilst writing of the past can be seen as an articulation of the present, what is Wong Kar-wai’s agenda behind his nostalgia? Before examining his texts, it is necessary to discuss the concept of nostalgia. Nostalgia, as a modern symptom, has its own history. From the nineteenth century, nostalgia, yearning for the golden age and escaping from the present, has been a concept responding to the trend of modernity (Boym, 2002). While today’s nostalgia concerns time, its original meaning is about space. Nostalgia as a disease, according to seventeenth century Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer, is a kind of ill feeling and sad mood that a group of soldiers have when they miss home away from their country (ibid: 2-3). The term “nostalgia” has the roots of “nostos” and “algia” in Greek, which means “returning home” and “longing”. In the pain of homesickness, home is longed for and then idealized – “Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s fantasy” (ibid: xiii). The concept of nostalgia in its modern context has changed from space (a home) to time (the past); home now becomes a temporal site, a certain period in the past, to which people aspire to return, with the belief and fantasy that this was a time of happiness and spiritual home. Despite its stress on time, space still plays a crucial role in today’s nostalgia. The fear or lament over lost place is part of the cause of nostalgia, and the creation of a fantasized past often involves spatial elements. Just as the idealized homeland in the Swiss soldiers’ hearts is imaginary, the past that nostalgia longs for is created upon fantasy.

As a cultural symptom today, nostalgia is critically contested. The conservative side of it has been emphasized. It is seen as “necessarily static and unchanging in its attempt to retrieve a lost utopian space” (Huffer, 1998: 19). With its refusal to change, Huffer argues,

nostalgia is at its core conservative. It is also accused of a lack of authenticity and of the production of a degraded version of the “real” event, which obscures our understanding of politics and society (see Cook, 2005: 2). Jameson describes nostalgic films as an “indictment of consumer capitalism” which reflects the symptom of “a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history”. (1998: 10). However, its critical quality has also been asserted. For example, Pam Cook argues that nostalgia can inspire viewers to rethink and to reflect on the past (2005: 2). In this debate, Svetlana Boym has clarified two kinds of nostalgia: restorative and reflective (2002). Believing that it is about truth, not nostalgic emotions, the aim of the former is to construct an “origin” and a “conspiracy”. In this case, the past is selected to emphasize the continuity between the present and the past, and the origin is shown as a kind of exclusive imagined community and nation, with the conspiracy used to scapegoat a mythical enemy. However, reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild home; rather, its aim is to relocate the relationship between past, present and future. It can be ironic, humorous and distant, offering reflection on rather than restoration of the past. It defamiliarizes and retells the relationship between past, present, and future, without serving nationalist agendas. Boym’s discussion of nostalgia is not the only important one in cultural studies – Jameson’s analysis of postmodern nostalgia (1998) and Huffer’s (1998) and Radstone’s (2007) feminist criticisms of nostalgia are all inspiring in different ways. However, since the focus of my discussion is how Wong Kar-wai’s nostalgic films respond to the narratives regarding colonialism and nationalism, Boym’s theory, which analyzes both the constructive and conservative sides of nostalgia and the arguments for and against institutionalized history writing, which concerns the construction and deconstruction of “collective home” and “national symbols”, and which tackles the writing of the past within different political contexts and for various political agendas, seems more useful in shedding light on Wong’s obsession with the past. Wong’s nostalgia is an effort to seek a new identity; when he reconstructs the 1960s, it is never with any cultural purity or origin to revisit. Wong’s attitude towards the concepts of ethnicity and cultural roots differs from that of restorative nostalgia. If the time-journeys are constructed in order to answer the question of how Hong Kong becomes Hong Kong, Wong’s stories show the impossibilities of root, origin and cultural purity in a city like Hong Kong.

In this chapter, using Wong Kar-wai's films as major texts, I will trace the nostalgic trend in Hong Kong cinema and examine its cultural importance. Nostalgia and the writing of history will be read in a number of contexts. First, their presence attests to an urge to tell Hong Kong's own stories before it dissolves into mainland China in 1997; second, it represents a will to keep something unchanged in the rapid changes brought by globalization; third, it is an attempt to search for a Hong Kong identity in the post-colonial situation. These contexts, both local and global, are helpful to understand Hong Kong cinema and culture in a new way. Rather than viewing the nostalgia in Hong Kong cinema as a special political case about a city with colonial history, I will argue that this kind of cultural phenomenon of obsession with the past is indeed worldwide in our age of globalization. It opens up a space of ambivalent history and film culture, which resists the hegemony of the institutionalized history created by colonial discourse and national narration. As I have argued in Chapter 1, while mobility and the sense of homelessness can be culturally progressive, nostalgia in Wong's films also displays a third way between the hegemony of nationalism, which explicitly pursues cultural authenticity and purity, and the homogenization of globalization, which allegedly endangers cultural differences. I argue it is reflective nostalgia, which can be seen as a tool of cultural and political resistance in our time.

Since nostalgia is a trend in 1980s and 1990s Hong Kong cinema, this chapter will not only deal with Wong's texts, but also the various contexts of this trend and texts by other directors. In Part 1, I will first focus on the contexts, including the difficulties of history writing in Hong Kong, the origin of the phenomenon, the cultural and political backgrounds behind it, and the motives and reasons for Wong's rewriting of the past, such as his distinct choice to revisit the 1960s. The focus in Part 2 will be the analysis of Wong's nostalgic texts, which explore the strategies of nostalgia in Hong Kong cinema. His films will be examined in terms of the spatialized time, the nostalgic details presented, the genres recreated and the women characters portrayed. Using nostalgia as a theme and Wong's films as major texts, this chapter will draw on other directors' films and the wider background as well as various theories which help to construct a critical perspective on the cinematic past in Hong Kong. Adding to my discussion of space in Chapter 1 and gender in

Chapter 2, this section will explore the temporal aspect in Wong's texts, and further examine how his films activate the city's own voices.

Part 1:

Looking for History in a City without History: The Contexts of Nostalgia

"Hong Kong is a city without history." (Wong, 2000: 7)

"Chinese history is dead in Hong Kong cinema." (Ng, 1996: 205)

In the film *Rouge* (dir. Stanley Kwan, 1987), we see a self-mocking scene about Hong Kong people's poor knowledge of history. Fleur is a ghost, who dies in the 1930s and appears in the 1980s to look for her long lost lover. She encounters Un Weng-teng, a journalist in modern Hong Kong, and talks with him about her time, a forgotten part of local history, which reveals her status and frightens him. In his panic, he refuses to listen to her past and says, "I failed history in the public exam." This confession implies Hong Kong people's relation with history: in a modern and commercial city like Hong Kong, the knowledge of history is unimportant and ignored. This scene, concerning the loss of history and memory, is not an isolated example in Hong Kong cinema in the 1980s and 1990s. Another film *Ordinary Heroes* (dir. Ann Hui, 1999) begins with the amnesia of the female protagonist So. As she is trying to regain her memory, the history of the social movements in Hong Kong from the 1980s to the 1990s, which is seldom mentioned today, is simultaneously narrated throughout the film. Under the overwhelming grand narrative of Hong Kong's handover to mainland China as "home-coming" – the reunion of a separated nation, the local history in Hong Kong is overlooked. Again, the motif of forgotten history is stressed in this film. Most of Wong Kar-wai's films are similarly obsessed with the motif of remembering, forgetting and the suffering brought by both.

It has been recognized that the 1980s and 1990s see a nostalgic stream in Hong Kong cinema (Li, 1993; Chan, 2000). Starting from the late 1980s, nostalgic films of different genres, including comedy, melodrama and biography, surfaced in the market in Hong Kong. Some of these films tended to be market-oriented, such as the box-office hit comedies *92 Legendary La Rose Noire* (dir. Jeff Lau, 1992) and *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Father* (dir. Peter Chan, 1993). Some were made by acclaimed directors and become prize winners in film festivals, such as Stanley Kwan's *Rouge*, Wong Kar-wai's *Days of being Wild* and Ann Hui's *Song of Exile* (1990). In this period, almost every genre had its nostalgic version, and every director had their favourite past to return to. It is important to understand how a city like Hong Kong, as a British colony with little education about history (Wong, 2000), and a modern metropolis whose history was hardly seen from the cityscape (Abbas, 1997), suddenly saw an urge to narrate the past.

The nostalgic trend emerged at the time of rapid urban change in Hong Kong, when “we have seen how high-investment buildings in Hong Kong are threatened by demolition, how what looks very permanent is in fact very temporary.” (Abbas 1997: 75) On top of that, the 1997 handover was believed to be bringing more massive changes to Hong Kong. It forcefully justifies the trend of nostalgia in Hong Kong cinema, which questions modernization and contemplates the expected radical changes brought by the handover. Facing such a de-historicized present and uncertain future, the past suddenly became a popular temporal site. Many of the Hong Kong directors in the 1990s had their own favorite pasts: Stanley Kwan chose the 1930s; Wong Kar-wai chose the 1960s; and other directors such as Tsui Hark went further back to the turbulent days at the beginning of the twentieth century with his *Once Upon a Time in China* series (1991, 1992, 1993), which did not take place in Hong Kong but were narrated from a Hong Kong perspective (Lok, 1995). Their constructions of Hong Kong's past reflect not only an intention to tell Hong Kong history, but also an action to tackle anxieties over the looming changes and to question as well as establish the problematic identity of Hong Kong people.

A Subaltern Plight: The Difficulties in History Writing

Before discussing how Hong Kong cinema seeks and writes its history, a look at the difficulties in history writing faced by Hong Kong people is necessary. In the 1980s and 1990s, Hong Kong encountered a triple predicament when it tried to trace its own past and identity. First, Hong Kong's history was very much erased and replaced by the dominant discourse of the "status-quo" by the British, namely economic prosperity and social stability (Chu, 2004: 331), which shifted the focus from imperialism to current economic achievement. As a colonial government, the British administration sought to avoid the history of its imperialist invasion of China in the nineteenth century. In Hong Kong, the curriculum in schools does not include local history; media seldom address history either (Wong, 2000).⁴⁷ The popular propagandist idea of "the miracle of Hong Kong's economic achievement" celebrates development, ignoring the past and history. Under this discourse, what Hong Kong people care about and what Hong Kong culture is concerned with is the present, shown by the ever-changing modern cityscape, which is seen by Abbas as a representative cultural space in Hong Kong (1997). When the city is transforming itself into a financial centre and world city in Asia, the resulting rapid globalization accelerates the renewal of the city and the disappearance of the evidence of history (ibid). Advancement, progress and joining the global market become the city's doctrine; thus history gives way to globalization.

Second, instead of the neutral term "handover", often used by the English media, the nature of the city's political change in 1997 was early determined as "home-coming" or "return" (Huigui) by mainland China. Before the handover, mainland China introduced a writing of Hong Kong history, which integrates into the narration of nation in China, along with an anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism focus (Wong, 2000). For example, CCTV (China Central Television), the influential state-owned TV station, produced two big budget serials *A Hundred Years in Hong Kong* (Xianggang Bainian) (1997) and *A Hundred Years of Big Changes* (Bainian Cangsang) (1997) about Hong Kong history. These programmes both lay emphasis on the ties of blood between Hong Kong and China, the national humiliation brought by the British colonizers, the dark side of the colonial

⁴⁷ Wong also writes about the study of Hong Kong history in academia (2000). He indicates that until the 1980s, Hong Kong history was only written in English from colonial perspectives. On the other hand, in mainland China, Hong Kong history was not a research subject until the mid-1990s. These studies by the mainlanders use Hong Kong history to demonstrate the legitimacy of handover.

governance, and the glory of Hong Kong's return to China (ibid). The absent part in this narration is the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, the decades when Hong Kong experienced economic development, political reforms and the rise of local identity. The reason for the absence, Wong Wang-chi argues, is that these programmes cannot manage to link Hong Kong's development in those decades to China (ibid). A successful colonial Hong Kong does not fit into the narration of historical disgrace. In fact, for the historians in mainland China, Hong Kong history has long been treated as only the history of a region or a border area of China (Chau, 2010). Hong Kong only plays a subordinate role in Chinese history. All these factors, to which my discussion will return in this chapter, seem to make a local version of Hong Kong history impossible.

This situation is indeed a subaltern plight. The subaltern, in Gramsci's terms, is a subordinate and inferior group whose representation is determined by the ruling class in the society (1971). The subaltern is not able to write their own history. In 1982, the Subaltern Studies group was formed and a journal was launched by Ranajit Guha and other scholars in South Asia to investigate the history, sociology as well as religion and values of the subaltern groups of different classes and genders (Ludden, 2002). The Subaltern Studies group, for example, examines Indian history and finds its discourse controlled by colonialist elitism and national elitism; both are the by-products of colonialism (ibid). The history told by the local ordinary Indians is absent, and so the concept of a modern India is still determined by the colonial discourse even after its independence. This is not only a matter of history writing, but also a post-colonial aftermath faced by the subaltern that struggles to have a say in their stories and culture. Hence, the mission of the study group is to evoke the subaltern history as resistance to the official and dominant historiography. In comparison to the situation in India, the writing of history is even more problematic in Hong Kong because what the city needs to tackle is more than one dominant discourse. It is trapped between the different rhetorics of the British, the mainland Chinese and globalization, all of which have certain ways of historicizing. Facing such domination, how can Hong Kong cinema write its own past? As with Un Weng-Teng in *Rouge*, who fails in the history exam, if Hong Kong directors have little knowledge about history, then the reasons why they engage in telling historical stories and how they present the past deserve attention. Why does Hong Kong cinema carry such a difficult mission? Is this mission

really doomed, or does it create something positive and constructive? Despite the difficulty in writing local history, it is noteworthy that while history is not found in textbooks, popular culture can be seen as a place where Hong Kong history is inscribed (Lok: 1995).

In a city with a modern outlook, as the city itself is crossing a historical threshold, the directors trace the past and explore a kind of Hong-Kong-ness. The question of Hong Kong's past and its identity started haunting Hong Kong significantly from the second half of 1984, the year when the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed and the city's future was determined. In 1984, nostalgic films and TV programmes emerged in large numbers (Cheong, 1987). With a sense of nostalgia, these films deal with Hong Kong's identity, the future of the colony, and the anxiety over 1997. Cheong takes the TV programme *Days in Hong Kong* (Xiangjiang Suiyue, 1984) as an example of attempts that intentionally write the history as an official record in the name of "Hong Kong" by the locals (ibid:195).

Local film scholar Ng Ho has used the term "historical dementia" to refer to some popular costume films with historic settings in the 1990s – films such as *Once Upon a Time in China* (dir. Tsui Hark, 1991) (1996). Instead of providing historical facts, these films often casually change history to make them more entertaining, a process which is seen as a reflection of the colonial culture in Hong Kong: history is erased by the colonizer.⁴⁸ For Ng, history in these films is presented in an inaccurate and mistaken way, and these films' attitude towards history is irresponsible, which leads to the collapse of historic consciousness and the death of the cultural identity of Chinese people. "Chinese history is dead in Hong Kong cinema" (ibid: 198), he accuses in respect of these films. "Save our cultural memory!" (ibid: 205) he laments. It is undeniable that nostalgic films in Hong Kong make many factual mistakes, but Ng's criticism, which condemns these films as totally valueless according to standards of historical authenticity and accuracy, is still questionable. Without dealing with authentic history, for example, Wong Kar-wai's films are never valueless in their reflection on the past. Rather than minimising the significance of these films, I argue that despite Hong Kong cinema's "historical dementia", the effort of many Hong Kong directors, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, to construct their own

⁴⁸ He also indicates that in the 1980s, the worst result that Hong Kong students got in public examinations was in history (1996), which echoes the scene in *Rouge* as mentioned.

versions of the past is neither fruitless nor meaningless, even though in recent years in aiming at the market in mainland China some films made by Hong Kong directors tend to be politically conservative.⁴⁹ My discussion will include these films in comparison to Wong's films. I argue that the ways in which these films play with the history and retell their own stories establish a discursive field of new identity, which is culturally flexible and politically resistant in the post-colonial age. Fictionality, rather than authenticity, is the platform for history writing in Hong Kong cinema. Wong Kar-wai's films are exemplary here.

The Past Told by a Ghost

Wong Kar-wai has been acclaimed as a "poet of time" for his artistic and philosophical portrait of time (Rayns, 1995). His films have a constant motif about time, memory and the loss of memory, which is shown by his suffering characters besieged in the limbo between remembering and forgetting. In *Days of being Wild*, So Lai-chen suffers from the memory of that one minute she spends with Yuddy, showing that one single minute can become inerasable memory. In *Ashes of Time*, the wine literally named "live to drink and die in dreams" (Zuisheng Mengsi), or translated as "happy-go-lucky" in the DVD version, allegedly with the magical power to make people forget, does not erase Ouyang Feng's painful memory but only intensifies it. In *Fallen Angels* (1995), the mute meets the formerly beloved young woman again only to discover that he has been forgotten by her. In the same film, the assassin meets a blonde girl who claims to be his ex-girlfriend, but he cannot remember anything about her. No matter whether these characters are trapped in their memory or lost in their amnesia, Wong's films demonstrate a deep concern about memory and the past. His nostalgia for the 1960s has an apparently personal reason since Wong migrated to Hong Kong from Shanghai in the 1960s. He has talked about how he cherishes the memories from the 1960s (Ngai, 1995: 27). At that time, he started watching films, learning Cantonese, and effecting the transition from mainlander to Hong-Kong-er.

⁴⁹ In the past a few years, the major market of many films made by Hong Kong directors is mainland China. To pass the censorship and to satisfy the audience there, some of these films no longer carry the characteristics and distinctiveness of Hong Kong cinema (Pang, 2010).

However, the director's nostalgia seems more than a trace back to his own childhood. Especially when we consider that his nostalgia surfaced along with a nostalgic stream in Hong Kong cinema, we can conclude that this approach is more than a personal preference. An alternative way of expressing that is to say that for Wong, the personal is also political.

Before viewing Wong's past, a look at the origin of nostalgic films in Hong Kong in the 1980s is necessary. *Rouge*, a film much discussed by local and international critics, sets the contemporary nostalgic trend in Hong Kong cinema (Li, 1993: 3). Directed by the "second New Wave" director Stanley Kwan,⁵⁰ the film juxtaposes Hong Kong's 1930s and 1980s through the visit of a ghost, Fleur. In search of her lover, she is shocked by and alienated from the dramatic urban changes – the city in the mid-1980s is unrecognizable to her, and her old lover is lost. In her discussion of *Rouge*, Rey Chow argues that Fleur's shock is due to the disruption of the secure sense of space under the business of real estate in Hong Kong as in other rapidly developing countries (1998). Fleur's failure to find the evidence of her past implies that the global space of a colonial city does not display any sense of history. However, the de-historicized urban space in Hong Kong is paradoxically haunted by history, which is embodied by the ghost. Lok Fung argues that the purpose of the ghost's personal time-journey is to arouse memory and history in Hong Kong (2002: 49). Fleur's shock has a colonial background. After WWII, the British officials cared more about the city's competitiveness in the capitalist world, which indicates the extent of globalization today, than for the traces of Empire and Britishness it retains (Welsh, 1993).⁵¹ Wang Ban has argued for the duality of the expansion of globalization and the persistence of memory in our time (2006: 1-10). The more closely we follow globalization and connect to the new myth of economic development, the more we linger with memory and the images from certain periods in the past, as a resistance to globalization. Globalization speeds everything up and endangers memory, but it simultaneously evokes the persistence of memory and the desire for it. The ghost in *Rouge* is the embodiment of this kind of desire. As a cornerstone of the nostalgic trend, *Rouge* sets some fundamental characteristics which are followed by the subsequent nostalgic films in Hong Kong: first, the past is used

⁵⁰ He has so far made four nostalgic films about the 1930s, namely *Rouge*, *Centre Stage* (1991), *Red Rose*, *White Rose* (1994) and *Everlasting Regret* (2005).

⁵¹ Welsh indicates that the colonial styled buildings carrying imperial symbols were not maintained by the British government, which shows the city's full-scale commercialism after WWII (1993).

to tackle contemporary anxieties; second, the aim of nostalgia is usually to construct a forgotten, yet imagined, local history; third, the common interest in the past has political and economic meanings related to the handover and the threat of globalization.

Using the idea of “the culture of disappearance”, Abbas discusses how a sense of place and history is lost in a highly globalized city like Hong Kong, especially when it is caught between two “colonizers”, the British and the mainland Chinese (1997: 69). He states that “there is a desperate attempt to clutch at images of identity, however alien or clichéd these images” are, since “a sense of place is being threatened with erasure by a more and more insistently globalizing space” (ibid). For Abbas, Wong Kar-wai’s films are the “most wide-ranging exploration of Hong Kong’s problematic space” (ibid: 49). In his inspiring discussion of the factual spaces (in architecture) and fictional spaces (in films) in Hong Kong, Abbas explores the city’s striking culture. I would argue further that the space explored has a temporal significance as the representation of the past and memories – the elements which have not been given attention in Abbas’s writings. In other words, the investigation of Hong Kong culture has to take account of both the spatial and temporal elements. When it is not easy to find a solid sense of place, Abbas’ analysis helps to explain why these Hong Kong directors suddenly go back to the past as temporal site. Hence, the spatial anxiety under globalization subtly becomes nostalgia for a lost time, in which certain places, such as a brothel in *Rouge* or a hotel room in *2046*, are crucially needed.

In addition, there is also a more particular political agenda behind the ghost’s appearance and her search for an old lover after fifty years: according to the Sino-British Joint Declaration, Hong Kong will remain unchanged as a capitalist city and a SAR (Special Administrative Region) with a certain degree of autonomy for fifty years after 1997. Unfortunately, in the film, the city changes, and so does the promise between the lovers. Stanley Kwan is not optimistic about the promise of keeping anything unchanged. However, what is worse than loss and change is that people do not even find any evidence of the loss and the change. Lok Fung argues that the ghost’s failure to find the past is a representation of Hong Kong people’s mentality before 1997: their search for history is destined to be in vain in such a colonial city (2002: 51). However, Rey Chow finds the possibility of resistance here: whilst the directors in mainland China often present history in

a canonical way with stories about kings, queens and eunuchs (such as those found in Tian Zhuangzhuang's and Li Hanxiang's films), and others about villagers living in poverty (such as those in Xie Jin's and Zhang Yimou's films), *Rouge* chooses the brothel as historical space and a prostitute as the witness of history, which produces a different version of history – seemingly trivial and worthless yet very Hong Kong (1998: 142). A brothel, far away from politics, historic events and mainstream culture, is a seemingly unimportant and disgraceful space whose marginality parallels that of Hong Kong as a colonial city with its “shameful” history. Writing the past from the brothel's angle brings an alternative narration of history. In Wong Kar-wai's films, the hotels function in a similar way to the brothel.

The 1960s: How Did Hong Kong Become Hong Kong?

Wong Kar-wai's obsession with the past, therefore, expresses a generational need and cultural necessity rather than a personal preference. He has talked about how he consciously preserves the past with his films: “[t]he lifestyle of Hong Kong in certain periods, maybe the sixties or seventies or eighties... I'm trying to preserve it.” (Brunette, 2005: 118) In *Fallen Angels*, he shoots in a Cantonese teahouse, a Shanghainese barbershop and a Mahjong parlour. They are all old styled locations which he thinks might possibly disappear in one or two years. In his trilogy about the 1960s, *Days of being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, and his short film *The Hand*, he deliberately re-constructs the old Hong Kong with details of clothes, properties, architecture and music. Even when he makes a film about the current Hong Kong, he tends to show the old part of the city, such as an old residential area rather than the financial district in Central in *Chungking Express* (1994), or the places in *Fallen Angels* mentioned. Preserving can be understood as a reaction to the fear of loss. Wong Kar-wai himself believed that Hong Kong's uniqueness will be gone after 1997 and “it will be just another city in China” (ibid: 121). His films can be seen as an intentional preservation of the city's uniqueness, which is about to disappear in its merging into mainland China, in response to the de-historicized and globalized Hong Kong. The film *In the Mood for Love* ends with such a line on screen: “that age has gone, and so has

anything about that age”. However, rather than preservation, I argue that his films are recreation of the past given their reflective and critical quality.

In the prologue of *Days of being Wild*, the first film in his nostalgic trilogy, Wong deliberately locates the film’s temporal position: “Today is the 16th of April in 1960. Before three o’clock in the afternoon, we have been friends for one minute”, Yuddy says to So Lai-chen. In the film, it is a womanizer’s tactic to approach a woman: he asks her to look at his watch for one minute and claims it is a fact that they are friends. From this opening scene, Wong goes on a temporal journey, from the very beginning of the 1960s. At the end of the film, that very minute is mentioned again. Yuddy, who travels to find his birth mother, meets Chiu, who travels around as a sailor, in the Philippines. Since Chiu has known the story between Yuddy and So, he asks Yuddy whether he remembers what he did on the 16th of April in 1960. He answers, “what’s to be remembered, I’ll remember.” However, he does not want So to know he still remembers it since it is better for her to forget. Yuddy is not the only character in Wong’s films who does not forget. Remembering is often painful, but his characters still remember. It is parallel to the director’s attitude towards history: regardless of the pain it brings, memory cannot be erased.

A crucial question about Wong’s nostalgia is: why is the 1960s his obsession? Historically, 1967 is the year recognized as a turning point in Hong Kong’s contemporary history and culture, followed by the emergence of a local consciousness and sense of self identity in the 1970s (Lui, 1997). Influenced by the disastrous Cultural Revolution in mainland China, a group of nationalists launches a protest against the colonial government, which ends with riots and deaths. Instead of making Hong Kong people hostile to the colonial government, this campaign pulls them even further away from mainland China (ibid). When mainland China becomes an impossible land to live in, the former immigrants start treating Hong Kong as their homeland rather than a place for stopover. In addition, after this “1967 Riot”, the government changes its style of management and introduces a series of conciliation policies such as public housing and free education. It focuses more on the needs of Hong Kong people, which makes them feel at home (ibid), and later initiates big plans for the city’s infrastructure which later on make Hong Kong one of the major modern cities in the East. In the 1960s, Hong Kong is just a temporary residence. One of

the most famous film lines at that time is: “I can just go back to my hometown if something bad happens in Hong Kong” (Lam, 2009: 154). Especially for the elderly, the mainland is still seen as the roots they can return to. However, from the 1970s, given the ongoing social instability and poverty in mainland China, it is no longer a hometown to go back to, and Hong Kong as home becomes the subject of the local films (Chan and Chu, 2008: 193).

Along with the conciliation policies, the 1970s sees the rise of a new Cantonese popular culture, including TV, films and music, which replaces the once dominant Mandarin culture and offers a sphere for the imagination of a Hong Kong identity (Chu, 2005). Coincidentally in the same year of the 1967 Riot, Television Broadcasts Limited, known as TVB, commences broadcasting and soon becomes an influential media source in Hong Kong. Its total use of Cantonese makes the dialect more powerful in terms of communication and cultural creativity in the city. The programmes it produces are about local events and culture in Hong Kong, leading to an emphasis on localism. From the end of the 1960s, these films, music and TV programmes are catalysts for the surfacing of a Cantonese popular culture and then a Hong Kong identity. This new-born identity is hybrid and local. In this period, old things vanish quickly, while new things change the city dramatically. It makes the 1960s important yet ambiguous – a transitional stage in which a Hong Kong identity is initiated at the expense of something old. This complicated sense of loss mixed with a new-born culture lies beneath the surface of Wong Kar-wai’s nostalgia. On the other hand, internationally, the 1960s in the West are a time of liberation and students’ movements – the reference point for Yuddy’s rebellion in *Days of being Wild*. Teo has also linked *Rebel without a Cause* (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1955) to *Days of being Wild*, whose Chinese title (A Fei Zhengchuan) is the same as the former’s (2005), and Yuddy resembles James Dean’s character Jim. Wong uses the film as homage to that aura and time. It is when a kind of locality is established with its relationship with the world outside, not inside China. This might be the crucial reason why Wong chooses the 1960s, when everything is in its becoming.

The example of the 1930s is a good reference point to see why the 1960s is important for Wong. Taiwanese critic Chiao Hsiung-ping argues that the trend of nostalgia in Hong Kong cinema from the 1980s uses the past to parallel the present since the turbulence in the

1930s to 1940s in China is comparable to the situation in Hong Kong before 1997 (1987: 192). Her interpretation suggests that the reason a certain period in the past is chosen is because of its hidden relevance to the current time. Hong Kong films in the 1990s are much interested in “Luanshi” (the era of turmoil) in Chinese history. The last days of the last dynasty Qing when it is invaded by numerous Western countries, the early period of the Republic of China when various powers compete, and the years of the Japanese invasion in the 1930s to 1940s are all periods to which Hong Kong films pay much attention. The more turbulent the era is, the more Hong Kong films show their interest. If a bygone era is stressed because of its linkage to the present, Wong Kar-wai’s long obsession with the past can be related to the parallel between the 1960s and 1990s, both of which mark the end of one era and the opening of another, when culture and identity in Hong Kong are both changing. However, despite the period’s transitional character, the films in the 1950s and 1960s, usually made by directors from mainland China, are in fact about root-searching and homesickness (Chan and Chu, 2008: 66). In comparison to Wong’s 1960s, the 1960s in these earlier films are still full of fixed national identity and the belief in roots. Wong chooses this decade through which to rewrite the past and define history in a different way, a Hong Kong local perspective with its hindsight from the 1990s, which makes a critical reading of the 1960s possible. For instance, at the end of *In the Mood for Love*, when Mrs. Suen, a Shanghainese speaking woman, leaves Hong Kong for the US in 1966 due to the impact brought by the Cultural Revolution in mainland China, she says, “I hate to leave Hong Kong” – a sense of attachment between her and the city surfaces, which foreshadows the subsequent Hong Kong local identity in the 1970s. Besides, in the 1960s, the Mandarin films made by the big companies like Shaw Brothers and Cathay were more successful than Cantonese films. Targeting a bigger market in different Chinese speaking regions, these companies produced big-budget historical dramas and martial arts films, and distinguished themselves by lavish production values (Fu, 2000a: 79). These Mandarin films seldom address local culture and lifestyle in Hong Kong. The 1960s is important, but not yet clearly tackled cinematically, especially by Wong’s generation which has grown up in Hong Kong. With his hindsight, Wong’s films complicate the 1960s by probing questions about identities and Hong-Kong-ness.

This ambivalent stage of becoming is implied in *Days of being Wild*. In this film, “What time is it?” is a recurrent question: when Yuddy flirts with So Lai-chen in the kiosk she works in, they look at the watch and it is 3 pm; when Mimi/Lulu is staying in Yuddy’s flat for the first time, she asks about the time and it is 3 am; when Yuddy and Chiu meet in the Philippines and share one hotel room, he asks about the time and it is again 3 am. Leung Ping-kwan has observed the ambivalence of time in the film, pointing out that both 3 am and 3 pm are ambiguous and transitional because they cannot be clearly categorized; 3 am is midway between midnight and dawn; 3 pm is midway between noon and evening (see Lok, 1995). This temporal ambivalence, I further argue, hints at the political ambivalence in the 1990s as well as the 1960s, when the city is in a state of change. This ambiguous time refers to the stage of becoming and in-between-ness. In Chapter 1, I used Bhabha’s notion of the ambivalent space of the stairwell (1994) to explain the mobile space in Wong Kar-war’s post-colonial Hong Kong. Wong is also interested in the temporal aspects of the stairwell. The 3am and 3pm in *Days of being Wild* function as the temporal version of Bhabha’s stairwell, to suggest Hong Kong’s coming into being under conditions of uncertainty, especially in the 1960s.

Being Wild and Being an Orphan: The Departure

Compared to the trend of emigration before 1997, Wong’s 1960s provide a historical background of Hong Kong as a city for immigrants and emigrants, putting an emphasis on the city’s diasporic history. At the end of *Days of being Wild*, Yuddy dies in a train in the Philippines. He lives and dies in fluidity. His life seems to be all about searching: he hunts for love and sex as well as his identity. However, as with his unsuccessful relationships, his desperate attempt to search for his roots is doomed since his birth mother refuses to see him. Officially rejected, Yuddy’s status as an “orphan”, just like Hong Kong’s status as “political orphan”, is confirmed. Instead of a coincidence, I argue that it is a declaration of rupture with roots and origin, and Wong uses a long take to stress this rupture. Walking away from his birth mother’s grand mansion, which I regard as a symbol of enviable status and grand narratives, Yuddy knows that she is watching him from the window, but he intentionally keeps going without looking back – “I just want to see her. She didn’t give me

the chance, neither do I”, he says. This full shot shows his back walking into the woods, shifting from normal speed to slow motion, for about one minute. The audience, like his birth mother, cannot see his face. The sight of Yuddy’s back shows his determination to create a point of rupture. At the point when Hong Kong people struggle to find an identity, Wong depicts an orphan figure that does not belong to here (Hong Kong) or to there (The Philippines). He is destined to travel. Despite Yuddy’s fruitless search and tragic death, an ambiguous Hong Kong identity and mentality surface, which are rootless and mobile. Christine Lee has correctly pointed out that the nostalgia in Wong’s films is not only a reaction to the 1997 handover, but also a self-narrativizing amid colonization and globalization (2008). On top of that, I would add that it is a reaction to the nationalist discourse from mainland China.

It is noteworthy that after his failure to see his birth mother, Yuddy stays in the Philippines and tries to get a fake US passport from the gangster, which causes his death. It is not mentioned why Yuddy wants a fake passport so desperately, nor does the film make it clear where he plans to go with that passport – he asks Chiu whether he has been to the US, but it is not necessarily his destination. After being rejected by his mother, instead of going back to Hong Kong, which does not seem homely for him, his desires are for a passport and another journey, for which he risks his life. At a time when 1997 is fast approaching, and the identities conferred by legitimate Chinese and Hong Kong passports are promised, Wong’s character desires a foreign passport and travel in the 1960s. Yuddy’s desperate action in leaving Hong Kong and obtaining a fake passport in the Philippines suggests the ambivalence and conflict of Hong Kong identity: an identity is important yet disposable in certain circumstances. Hence, if Hong Kong’s situation is comparable to that of an orphan, the scenario of the passport indicates the political reality that when one’s roots are impossible to find, it is pragmatic to get a foreign passport, even a fake one. Wong’s films are preoccupied with the political facts in Hong Kong: people are dying to gain a passport in the 1960s as they will be in the 1990s. By reconstructing the 1960s, *Days of being Wild* traces the history of high mobility and fluid identity in Hong Kong. Instead of constructing the past as a safe and warm haven, Wong stresses that fluidity and changeability have been unavoidable in Hong Kong’s history for decades. In fact, after Yuddy’s failure to reunify with his family, the characters in Wong’s subsequent films are

even more mobile physically, and their identities even more fluid. I argue that this is Wong's view of Hong Kong history. These films remind us that the past is never a safe and unchanged temporal site. There is no political unity and cultural purity to go back to (in the past) and go forwards to (in the future). This kind of nostalgia resists any form of nationalism, and is reflective, not restorative. I will now analyze the strategies of Wong's reflective nostalgia.

Part 2:

“Heading for a Drowsy Future”: The Strategies of Nostalgia

The previous section clarified the difficulties in writing a local history for Hong Kong. Trapped by the powerful discourses of colonialism, nationalism and globalization, what space is left for Hong Kong locals to speak of their own version of history? How does Wong Kar-wai write the city's past? Here, I will examine Wong's nostalgic texts to reveal the possibilities for a post-colonial city's self-writing. His cinematic past will be examined via four themes. First is the spatialization of time. The accentuated spaces in his films, such as hotel rooms and transportation, not only present the physical mobility and cultural ambivalence of the city, but also imply an alternative way of historicizing against the rigidity of grand narrative. Second are the details in the depictions of the past. Whilst grand narratives rely on symbols, “little narratives” focus on details. In his films, the seemingly trivial descriptions of the private life of Hong Kong people in the past subtly contain room for a counter-history. Third are genres as time machines. When Wong visits the past, it is often via specific film genres, whose fictionality and imagination empower the films with a critical distance from official historical narrative. Fourth is the position of women in the past. When women are subordinated by both patriarchy and nationalism, how they are textualized in history is important. There are women in Wong's films, such as prostitute and gambler, who live an “indecent” kind of life and activate alternative memories.

Recognized as the first film with Wong Kar-wai's own cinematic style (Pun, 2004), *Days of being Wild*, also the director's first nostalgic film, is significant in two ways: first, it sets the nostalgic tone for many of his subsequent films; second, it clearly initiates the recurrent theme of the impossibilities of fixed dwelling and the necessities of journeys in his films. In Chapter 1, I discussed how the characters in Wong's films live highly mobile lives. Now, taking mobility and the past into consideration, when space and time meet, it becomes clear that Wong has been telling stories about how Hong Kong people travelled in the past. It is a past full of journeys. Against the pressure of a dominant national narrative, in which Hong Kong's return to China seems to be a one-way journey back to its "home" and an undoubtedly linear historical progression – colonialism in China is officially ended and the country will head for a bright future – the mobile past offers an alternative way of contemplating the complexity of history. If nostalgia is about searching for home, home itself for Wong's characters is often homelessness. It is what makes his nostalgia reflective and even critical. Before introducing the reflective quality of Wong's films, a look at the restorative nostalgia found in some other films is necessary.

In recent years, to target the huge market in mainland China some Hong Kong directors serve nationalism in an explicit way. The film *Ip Man* (dir. Wilson Yip, 2008) is a film of restorative nostalgia according to Boym's definition (2002). Narrating the kungfu master Ip Man's resistance to the Japanese army in the 1930s, the film deliberately promotes nationalism. To make him a hero possessing cultural purity, the film presents his life selectively: the historical Ip's education in a British high school in Hong Kong is not mentioned; his attempt to study in Japan is deleted; his status as a member of the Nationalist Party (KMT, the enemy party for the Communists) is erased (Lei, 2009). As a result, an idealized hero representing cultural purity and political unity is constructed and the past is restored yet imagined as a goal for the present to achieve. And without question, all the Japanese characters in the film represent the public enemy to fight with. The agenda behind the depiction of Ip Man is the rise of nationalism in China in recent years (ibid), which has been intensified by the promoted pride of holding the Olympic Games in 2008 and World Expo in 2010. It is continuity between the present and an imagined past that a restorative nostalgic film like *Ip Man* creates. After the commercial success of *Ip Man*, the sequel *Ip Man 2* (dir. Wilson Yip, 2010), this time about Ip fighting the British in Hong

Kong, follows the same formula. These films show how the past is shaped and tampered with to produce restorative nostalgia; its rewritten narrative arouses collective national emotion against the “enemy” and implies that if our hero performed such feats in the past, we should be able to emulate them today.

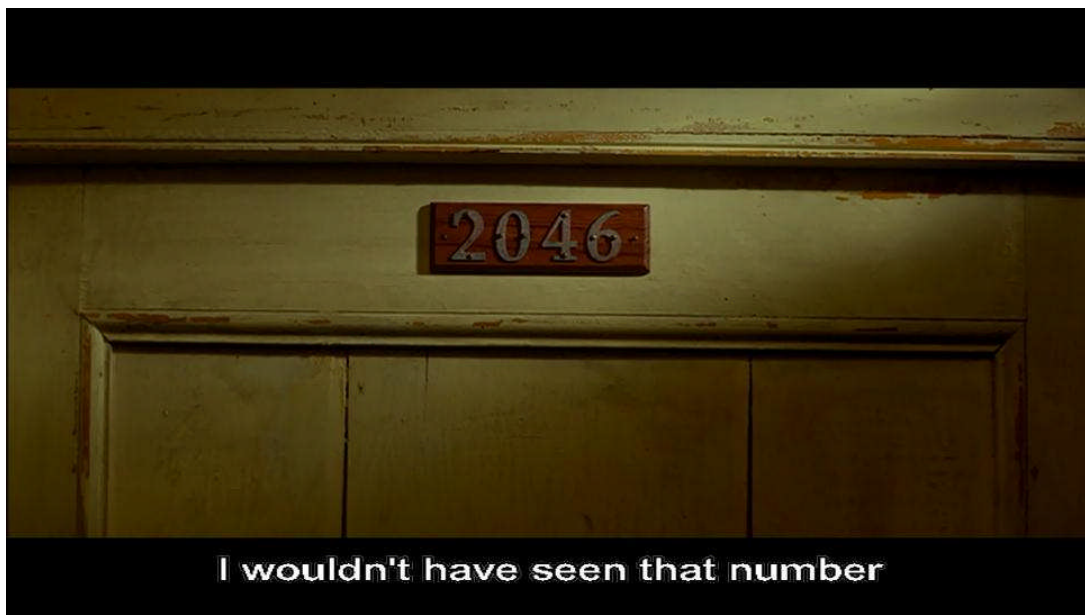
Spatialized Time: Is 2046 a Year, or a Room?

2046 is an interesting case in which the meanings of time and space are reversed in order to view the past from a different angle. Whilst the title “2046” seemingly indicates the year, fifty years after 1997, when the political promise of Hong Kong’s unchanged status will finish according to the Sino-British Joint Declaration, what Wong shows in the film is not the year 2046, but a hotel room numbered 2046 (Figure 1). Time is spatialized.⁵² Hence, whilst the film does not seem to address politics, it is indeed challenging the linear concept of history in an ambiguous way. Following my discussion of spaces of passage in Chapter 1, a hotel room is a space for highly mobile people. In the film, the characters come in and go from that room in the Oriental Hotel. This hotel is very different from the holiday hotels today, since the residents (usually not tourists) live there on a comparatively long-term basis. Returning to Hong Kong from Singapore in 1966, Chow Mo-wan decides to live in a hotel due to the social upheaval against the colonial government. And his neighbour Bailing, a prostitute, also chooses the hotel as her temporary shelter. Therefore, it is hard to define the Oriental Hotel, which is a place for neither a few nights’ stay nor long dwelling. Similar to Chungking Mansion in *Chungking Express*, the Oriental Hotel is another miniature of Hong Kong. After the main location in *In the Mood for Love*, the crowded flats from which most of the characters move out at the end, Wong chooses the even more mobile space of a hotel in *2046*. If common hotels are in mobility, this Oriental hotel bears Hong Kong’s version of instability in a more symbolic way and with more ambivalence. Comparable to the brothel in *Rouge*, the space of the hotel is another marginal and ambiguous space which defies spatial division. It is private, but not domestic. For the residents, the hotel room is their space but still not their own space. Wong’s bold use of the hotel as a key space of

⁵² In his discussion of *Ashes of Time*, Wimal Dissanayake also mentions that the past is spatialized by Wong (2003). However, he hasn’t elaborated his arguments with relevant textual analysis.

Hong Kong stands in for the city's social upheavals in the 1960s and its migratory history over the past one hundred years. As shown by Wong, if space and time are interchangeable concepts, time is spatialized as highly mobile space to refer to the changeable, contingent and ambivalent characteristics of history. In reality, the spatialization of time is not something new. Calendars have long been the spatial form of time, making sense of abstract time through clearly displayed and divided squares on papers. They impose on people a working schedule as well as a national history and culture, through their marking out of national holidays with historical significance. Anderson writes that calendrical time gives the nation a sociological solidarity (1983). Public spaces like squares, gardens and bridges are often named after important historical figures and events to offer a certain way of reading the past and identifying with the country. Sitting in a square under a statue of a national hero leads people to understand the history from a given perspective.

Figure 1: *2046*. In the film, 2046 is not a year, but the number of a hotel room.



In her writing about nostalgic films in Hong Kong, Chan Sui-hung points out how their spatial experiences show the fragmentation of historicity (2002). The film *He Ain't*

Heavy, He's my Father depicts the time journey of a man from the 1990s to 1950s Hong Kong. In the past, he makes friends with his father, who is still a young man. The time journey makes the protagonist overcome the generation gap between him and his father in his understanding of Hong Kong's past. Discontinuous time is presented by fragmented spatial experiences between modern time and a vividly reconstructed past. In its imaginary form, the film shows that "[h]istory does not exist in a diachronic form, but instead, it presents itself in spatial difference" (ibid: 262). Jameson's account of postmodern culture gives space a core position (1991). According to him, the spatial turn is the watershed between the modern and the postmodern. He uses conceptual art as an example to demonstrate how the spatialization of signs shows the transformation of social relations in postmodern culture (ibid: 157-180). The "displacement of time" and "the spatialization of the temporal", he argues, "often register[s] its novelties by way of a sense of loss" (ibid: 156). In postmodernism, this kind of spatialization occurs together with historicism with its secession from a genuine history. The point of this cultural form "is to search out radical historical difference, and not to take sides or hand out historical certificates of value" (ibid: 175). In *2046*, the spatialization of time is deployed to produce a new sense of time and a new form of past. Hence, while time is spatialized as highly mobile and changeable, *2046*, with its explicit political title, shows its way of viewing the past: Hong Kong's handover is far less than "the end of (colonial) history" or the propagandist idea of "home-coming" to its motherland. The handover is just another ambivalent point in history's contingency and changeability. In her analysis of *In the Mood for Love*, Pam Cook suggests that Wong has a critical attitude towards history, one which shows no interest in progress (2005). This view is shared by Berry and Farquhar (2006). In his films, if there is a belief about history, it is the necessity of history's recurrence and contingency, not progress, just like the unstable space in a hotel room.

With their focus on *In the Mood for Love*, Berry and Farquhar indicate that present, past and future collapse into each other in Wong's films (2006: 41). This temporal blurring, I argue, is further exemplified by the use of space in *2046*. There are layered temporal meanings about *2046*. First, the film takes place in the 1960s, and the 1967 Riot is mentioned as a historical trauma. Second, when Wong made this film after the 1997 handover, the unstable space and mobile characters from the 1960s had their implications

for the current Hong Kong situation – the haunting anxiety brought by 1997. Third, via the room 2046, this kind of anxiety is brought forwards to the year 2046, meaning that there is no happy promised land in the future. In other words, chaotic history recurs. Therefore, using the space as metaphor for time, the film blurs the past (1967), the present (after 1997), and the future (2046) within the dark hotel room 2046, which is both critical reflection on Hong Kong's past and present, and skeptical about Hong Kong's future. More importantly, it interrogates the idea of linear history of the nation-state.⁵³ This blurring of the past, present and future is again spatialized by the train named 2046. In the film, "2046" is a novel, written by the protagonist Chow Mo-wan, about characters taking the train 2046 to look for their lost memory. With its futuristic style and its name's implication in politics, the train implies an unknown future. However, the train's destination is memory and the novel is indeed a reflection of Chow's own experiences: all the characters are embodiments of the people encountered by Chow in his current life. Hence, the point where the past, present and future overlap is a running train, again a highly mobile space. Wong not only puts all his characters in a running train, but also symbolizes time with the mobile space of a train. When history is in a train, there is no stable place to settle down. In addition, the train is not taking the passengers to any geographical destination or bright future. Therefore, in the face of the political promise of fifty unchanged years, the film implicitly questions the notion of unchanged time by a running train. At the end of the film, the future is literally referred to. After rejecting Bailing's invitation to "go back to the way we were before", Chow is wearily alone in a taxi, and the film ends with the lines from the Hong Kong writer Liu Yi-chang's novel *Drinker* (1963): "It was as if he'd boarded a very long train, heading for a drowsy⁵⁴ future." It might be the most political moment in the film: under the title 2046, it ends with an unsure future. Whilst the film does not seem to address 2046, the year when Hong Kong will no longer be a SAR, implicitly it does.

This conception of history, via the spatialization of time, focusing on its casualness and contingency, is exactly what nationalist restoration denies. In his influential research on

⁵³ In their analysis of *In the Mood for Love*, Berry and Farquhar also present the argument that Wong's films resist incorporation into the linear time of the nation-state (2006).

⁵⁴ The word "朦朧" (meng long) is translated as "drowsy" in the DVD version, but it can also be translated as "hazy" or "unclear".

the nation-state and nationalism, Anderson states that the myth of a nation-state relies on the concepts of an immemorial past and a limitless future (1983). This past, in the case of China, argue Berry and Farquhar, is related to the “national wound” in historiography, such as the Opium War presented by different Chinese films (2006).⁵⁵ The dark and even shameful past arouses affection and a sense of unity among the people in the country, and the bright future offers a promised land for them to look forward to. Thus, the nation-state is what moves the society forwards and national unity is needed for this progress. Both the past and the future which are thus created make the people share the same feelings and hatreds, and fight against a common enemy when necessary. The “enemy” here is what restorative nostalgia is good at creating by its sense of conspiracy (Boym, 2002). Once an enemy is produced, people will take sides and a unity is promised. Wong Kar-wai’s form of nostalgia is of a kind which opposes this nationalist and restorative nostalgia.

The open endings in many of Wong’s films underline this reflective attitude towards time and history. *Days of being Wild* is a good example whose ending is the introduction of a new character who is supposed to be the protagonist in its sequel, but there has never been a sequel due to the film’s commercial failure. Therefore, strangely, the opening of a new chapter becomes the actual ending. This case coincidentally shows how the making of films is as contingent as history. Many of Wong’s films finish in a similar way: *Ashes of Time* ends with Ouyang Feng burning his cottage and travelling to the west; *Happy Together* ends with Lai’s uncertain and uneasy journey back to Hong Kong; *The Hand* ends with uncertainty about whether the courtesan Hua is dead or gone. These so-called “endings” do not offer traditional dramatic resolution, often leaving the audience with doubts and questions. They challenge the linearity of story-telling and history, which makes Wong’s films distant from the discourse of capitalism, modernity and nationalism, whose core is all about advancement, progress and sometimes pride.

Grand narrative, a term which in Lyotard’s use (1989) is related to and in contrast to the postmodern condition, is a totalizing form of discourse which legitimates certain forms of ultimate explanation of truth and reality. According to Lyotard, grand narrative often

⁵⁵ See Berry and Farquhar (2006)’s discussion of the four films about the Opium War produced in different times for various political agendas.

arouses devoted passion and involves identification with great names and contemporary historical heroes. However, it does not concern people's actual lives. Lyotard argues that the idea of the grand narrative has collapsed and given way to the postmodern language of games since the former fails to encompass heterogeneity, creation and incommensurability. Capitalism, which promises economic achievement, nationalism, which guarantees a bright future for the nation, and modernity, which emphasizes progress and advancement, can all be understood as grand narratives with their focus on the idea of progress and the linearity of history. However, both the past and the future are ambivalent, unknown and far from constituting a grand narrative in Wong Kar-wai's films. At the end of *In the Mood for Love*, Chow hides the secret past, his unspeakable affair with So Lai-chen, in the ruins of Angkor Wat, the mysterious site in a foreign land, Cambodia. Since the content of his confession is not shown in the film, there are doubts left: What is his secret? His regret about not keeping So with him? His guilt about cheating So as revenge for her husband's affair with his wife? These questions will never be answered by the film. It is "history as a secret hidden in the ruins" (Berry and Farquhar, 2006: 17). No one will ever know it. What people know, document and remember, as shown in the film along with Chow's hiding of his secret, is the official visit of the French president Charles de Gaulle to Cambodia in the 1960s. The news clip in the film displays an official colonial history of Cambodia, whilst Chow's secret, the story of ordinary people, will remain unknown and silent, in the desolation of the ruins. Indeed, the ruins in the film indicate a pre-colonial and even pre-historical time,⁵⁶ which is ambiguous and mysterious, without the existence of modern nation-states.

This is not the first time in Wong's films that the characters seek another space: the Lantau Island in *As Time Goes by* (1988), the rainforest in *Days of being Wild*, the waterfall and the lighthouse in *Happy Together* (1997), the ruins of Angkor Wat in *In the Mood for Love*, and the desert in *My Blueberry Nights* (2007). In terms of the narration of time and history, these spaces function as alternative temporal sites. Whilst the narration of nation relies on nationalized public spaces such as squares, monuments and museums, which offer certain ways of reading history and the nation, these accentuated spaces do not refer to any imagination of modern nation-states. Rather, they appear to be mystic and pre-historical.

⁵⁶ Likewise, Pam Cook argues that the ancient tradition that Chow mentions about confessing one's secret to a tree connects him to a pre-historic era (2005).

For example, the rainforest and waterfall first appear in the films as foreign, unreachable and dreamlike spaces for the protagonists. They don't seem to belong to any period of history. They are beyond history, and thus beyond the grand narrative of the nation. The only way to get close to them, in these films, is via the characters' innermost feelings and psyche, just like Chow's confession to the ruins in *In the Mood for Love*. This personal approach stands in contrast to grand narrative. Concerning with personal experience and individual memory is not grand narrative's job. Rather, grand narrative tends to suppress the alternative narratives which might possibly question the former's legitimacy and problematize its purity.

Details in the Past: What to Wear is a Political Issue

With their reflective quality, Wong Kar-wai's films are devoted to details. According to Boym, the details are what reflective nostalgia is interested in (2002: xviii). Rather than symbols such as national flags and anthems, which usually call for identification and unity, details create the space for alternative reflection. Likewise, in her studies of modern Chinese literature, Rey Chow discusses how the details are used to question the plan of collective patriotism in the days of revolution in China (1991). The details in Wong's films display a cultural hybridity which defies origin and purity. *In the Mood for Love* vividly presents Hong Kong's mid-1960s through details. For instance the costume, namely the actress Maggie Cheung's numerous stunning Cheongsams, a mixture of Western and Eastern styles, subtly shows the multiculturalism of Hong Kong (Figure 2). In the film, Cheung wears more than twenty different Cheongsams in different circumstances. After the Communist Party came to power, Chinese women had no choice but to wear one kind of unisex plain clothes which indicated their status as proletarians. The Cheongsam, with its Western style and elegant design, disappeared in China after the Communist Party came to power. As a form of clothing showing women's body shape clearly, identified with bourgeois ideology, the Cheongsam is culturally complicated, encapsulating "opposing forces of tradition and modernity" (Cook, 2005: 10).

Figure 2: *In the Mood for Love*: The actress Maggie Cheung in one of her stunning Cheongsams in the film.



Once popular in Shanghai, then the most cosmopolitan city in China, the Cheongsam became a fashion in Hong Kong associated with immigrants from Shanghai. Not only does the Cheongsam differentiate Hong Kong from mainland China, but a similar differentiation is also constructed by the male characters' suits and ties. Chow, who works in a newspaper office, and So's boss, who is a supervisor in a shipping company, wear Western suits throughout the film. Similar to the Cheongsam, the trend of suits in China first surfaced in Shanghai as a new cultural trend at the end of the nineteenth century (Chang, 2007). It reflects a new social class and life style in China under the influence of the West. After the Communist party came to power, the suits were seen as the symbol of the bourgeoisie and banned, especially during the proletarian Cultural Revolution from the mid-1960s. However, the Cheongsams and suits worn in *In the Mood for Love* are essential parts of Hong Kong people's daily life. Also, So's husband and Chow's wife buy their spouses handbags and ties from Japan. These details indicate the life style in the 1960s Hong Kong as a city in progress towards capitalism and modernization, which is shown by its relationship with the world outside.

In her discussion of costumes in film, Stella Bruzzi argues that the use of costumes can result in spectacular intervention, delivering radical narrative interjections and discursive strategies (1997). Examining some films with significant costumes, she explores the possibilities of costume as the field of women's subjectivity, idealized masculinity and identity of blackness in various films. In this sense, the stunning Cheongsams and neat suits in *In the Mood for Love*, along with Chow and So's finely set hair styles, function as more than spectacles of the past. These details are markers of a Hong Kong culture and an identity which emerges in the 1960s as unique. Apart from the costume, the living environment in the film reflects the changes in the society. At the beginning of the film, two couples move into adjacent flats, which are crowded with residents. The situation of many families sharing one small flat shows the wave of immigration from mainland China at that time. These details subtly give the film social and political dimensions.

In the film, the life style is also multicultural. First, Shanghainese culture is crucial. This is not only because Wong himself is from Shanghai, but also due to the comparability between Hong Kong and Shanghai – they are both cosmopolitan cities with a hybrid culture.⁵⁷ People from Shanghai brought their multiculturalism to Hong Kong in the stream of migration. Hence, the Shanghainese details in the film, including the dialect, the clothing, the interior decoration and the music, are all highlighted as a major component of Hong Kong culture. The film presents a cultural picture of Hong Kong: Western culture is influential, and the city also absorbs a Chinese culture which, rather than being “authentic”, is the hybrid one from Shanghai. The details in the film are used to show the city's hybridity. Chinese noodles in the street and beef steak in the Western restaurant are both parts of the characters' daily life. More noticeably, the music in the film, including traditional Chinese opera Jingju, Latin music by Nat King Cole, oldies from 1930s Shanghai and newly composed music by the modern Japanese musician Shigeru Umebayashi, blend together into the film's atmosphere without awkwardness, demonstrating the hybridity of Hong Kong culture. When the film is recognized as a celebration of Hong Kong's hybrid and cosmopolitan culture in the past (Cook, 2005: 9), I argue that it is the precision of its details that give life to it. Another detail in Wong's films which shows this kind of flexibility can be seen in the languages used. Especially in *In the*

⁵⁷ See Chapter 1 for the discussion of the similarity between Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Mood for Love and *2046*, multiple-languages are the norm. Not only do people speaking Shanghainese, Cantonese and Mandarin communicate with each other, but also a relationship between a Hong Kong woman Jin-wen and a Japanese is established despite the language barrier. These people with different backgrounds and languages mix naturally in the films as if Hong Kong is a hotel that accommodates all kinds of people. Neither strangeness nor enmity is produced via difference. The only scenario with dramatic conflict occurs when the hotel owner objects to Jin-wen seeing the Japanese man, but he changes his mind later in the film.

There are also details about Hong Kong's special relation with Japan which reflect an open attitude in politics. From the very beginning of *In the Mood for Love*, Japan seems to play a certain role in daily life. A Japanese magazine is found; a Japanese electronic cooker amazes people; the ties and handbags from Japan are appreciated; So's husband often goes to Japan on business and always comes back with Japanese products as popular gifts. Even though it is less than twenty years after the Japanese invasion in WWII, the film shows no hostile emotion towards Japanese culture. Instead, products from Japan symbolize a sense of advance which people in Hong Kong admire. In *2046*, in his attempt to help Jin-wen to keep in touch with her Japanese boyfriend, Chow receives his letters from Japan for her. He pretends that he has a girlfriend in Japan. "The Japanese girls are obsessive," he says to the staff member in the hotel who distributes the letters. It seems that having a Japanese girlfriend is not uncommon in Hong Kong at that time. This openness is in marked contrast to the anti-Japan nationalism in mainland China until today. In recent years, numerous films have been made with the theme of "fighting the national enemy" in China. Undoubtedly, Japan is one of the major enemies. For instance, the mainland Chinese production *The Message* (dir. Chen Guofu and Gao Qunshu, 2009), a commercial hit in China, is a propagandist film depicting how spies from the Communist party worked in the Japanese government during WWII and risked their lives to get confidential information to save the country. Throughout the film, the brutality of the Japanese is shown in a disturbing way. To find the spy, they use many kinds of torture, which are demonstrated one by one in the film. Creating a national enemy is part of restorative nostalgia. Today, the cinematic apparatus works effectively with nationalism by presenting the past and the enemy.

This cultural hybridity presented in *In the Mood for Love* not only speaks for Hong Kong, but also alters the way people in mainland China view their culture. It has been argued that the ambiguous cultural space in *In the Mood for Love*, in-between Hong Kong and Shanghai, the East and the West, has an alienated relationship with mainland China and provides another possibility of history for the mainlanders (Sun, 2007). For the audience in mainland China, this filmic past embodies a Chinese community with cosmopolitanism, which stands in sharp contrast to the history of class antagonism in 1960s China. Hence, this past intervenes in the official Chinese history by offering alternatives. The nostalgic films in Hong Kong, including Wong Kar-wai's works, show the ambivalence of history in the post-colonial context (Chu, 2004). Chu argues that there is no "pre-colonial" identity to set against the colonizer in Hong Kong (ibid: 332). Thus, there is never the binarism of "colonizer vs. colonized" or "colonial vs. native". Since there is no pre-colonial past and native culture to return to, Hong Kong's identity is rootless and modernized, and even nostalgia does not evoke an "original" or "pure" history of Hong Kong (ibid: 333-334). In fact, the history of Hong Kong started with the British since it was just a small fishing village before their arrival (Chau, 2010). This ambivalence is shown in the films. In her discussion of *Rouge*, Rey Chow observes that the object of nostalgia is ambiguous, but only the sense of loss is clear (1998). It explains why from Tsui Hark's war time in China, Stanley Kwan's 1930s to Wong's 1960s, the past in these films is never presented in a realistic way. This ambivalence resonates with Abbas's comment that filmic realism is not capable of capturing the modern Hong Kong culture, and his endorsement of the ambiguous reflection of the city found in the films of Wong Kar-wai and Stanley Kwan (1997). In contrast to the "home-coming" discourse about 1997, Wong's films indicate that home has very open, diverse and even problematic definitions in Hong Kong. If the destination of a journey usually means a goal, a home or an ending point in politics and culture, the journeys in his films show a history of endless search rather than settlement.

Genres as Time Machines

Due to the commercialism of Hong Kong cinema, when serious topics about current events in the society are unwelcome, genres become the sphere of nostalgia where political

messages are to be found. With their nature as entertainment, these films nevertheless carry certain attitudes towards history and identity. Chan and Chu state that there has never been a tradition of political films in the Western mode in Hong Kong. Very few films have directly addressed political issues (2008: 216). Between the colonizer and the national culture, in a highly commercial film market, there is only a very narrow space for Hong Kong cinema to deliver its political messages. However, this does not mean that there is no political consciousness in Hong Kong cinema. The political messages are often hidden in genres in an obscure way (ibid: 220-221). Chan and Chu find that responding to the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, genres of action and horror are deployed for critical political messages (ibid: 107-133). For example, *A Better Tomorrow III* (dir. Tsui Hark, 1989) uses Vietnam under the Communist occupation to carry implications for Hong Kong's future.

Genre has its own discursive power in writing history and defining culture. In Andrew Higson's analysis of British costume films from the 1980s, best represented by Merchant and Ivory's adaption of canonical English literature, he on one hand sees the construction of British history and Englishness, but on the other hand argues that there is still room for the perspectives of the marginalized groups of women, homosexuals and lower classes in some films (2002: 6, 26-28). The case of British cinema demonstrates the relationship between genre, history writing and national culture, and sheds light on the analysis of nostalgia in Hong Kong cinema. Genre, with its fictional quality, has the power to ignore the "facts" – the so-called authentic history. Good at making genre films, Hong Kong cinema often overlooks the historical "facts" produced by the British and Chinese authorities. Following my previous discussion about Hong Kong cinema's "historical dementia", ignorance has the potential for an alternative writing of history. A Cantonese slang expression urges, "as an audience, don't challenge a story",⁵⁸ meaning that narration is self-explanatory with its own logic and law, no matter whether it is factual, convincing or not. In his deployment of genres, Wong has explored the possibilities of their fictionality to write the past.

⁵⁸ It is "聽古唔好駁古" in Cantonese, literally "do not challenge a story when listening to it".

Within generic forms of narrative, meanings are packaged via certain rules and conventions of creation (Thornham and Purvis, 2005, 44-5). And “[t]exts are not simply texts but come in bundles and groups; and these groups are laden with meanings and functions.” (ibid: 45) Science fiction, romantic comedy and police drama are some of the genres with packaged meanings and conventions. As an important cultural form, genre always comes with a series of ideologies which define and explain our lives. Hence, in a changing society, genres change and complicate themselves with different packages of meanings. This nature of genre makes it sometimes ambivalent and even resistant as mentioned, despite its strong commercial attachment. Genre is contradictory. In her studies of genre and nostalgic films, Vera Dika discusses strategies of resistance within the genre system (2003). For instance, in the 1970s some genres return to tackle the political predicament in the US. *Badlands* (dir. Terrence Malick, 1973) reuses elements from *Rebel without a Cause*, including the rebellious protagonists and their sociopathic behaviour and doomed life, to refer to the US of the 1970s in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal and Vietnam War (ibid: 56-65). Genre has its sensitivity to history. Sometimes, old genres are reused to tackle new issues; sometimes, new genres are created to revisit the past. Certain genres become a way to historicize.

When the genres used in Wong Kar-wai's films are viewed, the situation seems even more complicated since Hong Kong cinema itself is already a hybrid creation, mixing elements from Chinese tradition, Western genres, Japanese films and local creation in Hong Kong. Wong is a director who has long worked within the genre system.⁵⁹ In his time-journeys to the past, I argue, genres are his time machine. His debut *As Time Goes By* shows his interest in gangster films. It has been argued that the lawless world and rebellious life in the gangster genre defy official authority. In John Woo's films, which glorify underworld heroes and beautify violence, there is “no invocation of a higher authority, an ultimate and legitimate lawgiver” (Berry and Farquhar, 2006: 158). This underworld, embodied in a bundle of extremely popular gangster films in the 1980s and 1990s Hong Kong, is understood as symptomatic of the political anxiety before 1997 (Lo, 2007a). *Days of being Wild*, whose Chinese title *A Fei Zhenzhaung* means “the story of a hooligan”, emerges in the trend of gangster films. The recklessness and selfishness of the protagonist

⁵⁹ See the Introduction for the relationship between Wong and Hong Kong genres.

Yuddy ignore social norms and responsibility. No grand narrative of politics and nation is relevant to this jobless womanizer, who is rebellious without a cause. As mentioned, this kind of figure, whose prototype is James Dean's famous role, Jim, in *Rebel without a Cause*, is a representation of moral decay and social disorder, carrying discontent and resistance to society and authority. The rebellion in *Days of being Wild* is against social norms and political authority, given the fact that the British government was still ignorant about the living conditions of Hong Kong Chinese and mainland China was still in the disastrous political campaigns of the 1960s. If brotherhood, loyalty and justice (executed by the underworld) are still glorified in John Woo's lawless Hong Kong, nothing deserves such status in Yuddy's gloomy love, failed relationships and fruitless search. Hence, Wong takes the genre even further to a more critical position. When so-called "authentic history" is good at "imposing narrative order on chaotic reality" (Cook, 2005: 2), the darkness, violence and chaos in the film construct an alternative history.

Similar to gangster films, the Wuxia genre is even more significant in terms of chaos and lawlessness. The world of Jianghu, where the swordsmen fight and wander, is a land often without law and nation. Using the example of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (dir. Ang Lee, 2000), Chang Hsiao-hung states that the fantasy of the ancient cultural space Jianghu in Wuxia films subverts nationalism and cultural legitimism, showing the multiple, hybrid and fluid identity of the contemporary Chinese diasporic community, and posing questions to Chineseness (2007: 37, 86). In this sense, the modern Wuxia genre is more a Hong Kong legacy than a mainland Chinese one. It is only the diasporic community which is capable of constructing such an ambivalent cultural space. Jianghu is a lawless space far from political authority, in which martial art is the major force to execute righteousness. In addition, as stated in Chapter 1, people in Jianghu are highly mobile, always travelling, sometimes nameless or using a fake identity; some of them do not seem to belong to any country. In fact, Wuxia films were prohibited by the Nationalist government (KMT) in the 1930s due to their "reactionary glorifications of feudal ways of life" (Dissanayake, 2003: 6), and Wuxia novels were despised as valueless popular literature inferior to the classical literature and banned by the Communist government after 1949 (Fan and Tang, 1998: 271). Chang also indicates that the Wuxia genre has long been one of the most hybrid genres in Chinese cinema, with its traces of Japanese Samurai films, American Westerns, Italian

armed-escort films, Hollywood musicals, science fiction, comic books and even computer games (2007: 39). For the Wuxia genre, there is no such thing as authentic culture because it is imaginary and hybrid in the first place. The Hong Kong directors' Wuxia films such as Tsui Hark's futuristic *The Butterfly Murders* (1979) and *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983) exemplify how Chinese chivalry can be mixed with elements of science fiction and Japanese comics, in which little reference to governmental authority is found. This anarchism and internationalism empower Wuxia genres with cultural ambivalence. This genre sometimes creates a past which does not exist in history; its creativity and imagination embody the most radical form of nostalgia: the past is just an unreal fantasy dependent on today's agenda. Lok Fung has argued that the time of turmoil depicted in Tsui Hark's Wuxia films, which juxtapose people, ghosts and demons and offer an ambiguous space, reflects a Hong Kong historic perspective that problematizes official Chinese history and traditional morals (1995: 16). Not only were Wuxia films banned in China in the 1930s, but also the private martial art training centers were prohibited by the Communist government after 1955 for their potential threat to the government and the stability of society (Hsieh, 2009). For the political authorities, martial art may be dangerous in terms of both its cultural meanings and physical force.

Ashes of Time is so far the only costume film that Wong Kar-wai has made. The film borrows some elements from Jin Yong's novel *The Legends of the Condor Heroes* (1957) set in the Song Dynasty. However, the film not only avoids reference to any dynasty, but also refuses to present Chineseness.⁶⁰ On the contrary, the visual and musical styles of the film have been compared to MTV and the Western respectively (Dissanyake, 2003). Hence, the past created is in fact not an indication of history. This rupture between past and history radically subverts the idea that the past is the way we were and where we are from. The past, being detached from history, only refers to an ambivalent point in the contingency of time, where no politics functions. As with Wong's other films, *Ashes of Time* portrays its characters as lovelorn travelling swordsmen and swordswoman, rather than heroes and heroines who execute justice. They wander in the desert, looking for love or being devastated by love. In the desert of time and love, identity is void. When the anarchism of the conventional Wuxia genre meets the recurrent themes of love and pain in Wong's films,

⁶⁰ See Chapter 1 for the use of music and clothes in the film.

the past in *Ashes of Time* seems the most ambiguous of all. In the desert, the only thing related to political power is Princess Murong from the neighbouring country Yan. However, her appearance in the film has nothing to do with national issues or conflict. Rather, as an exiled figure in the film, leaving her country and becoming the number one martial artist in Jianghu, she is only involved in obsessive love (Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Ashes of Time*. Murong is an exiled figure that does not indicate to history or national culture.



In the film, the only reference to time is to neither political event nor historic incident, but to the almanac (lunar calendar) for the ancient peasants in China, which shows the circular time of the changing seasons every year, not a linear progress in history. Almost every character's life seems to be controlled, or at least predicted, by the almanac. For example, before Hong Qi gets hurt and loses a finger in a severe fight, Ouyang Feng reads

the almanac: “Day 15. Rainy. The King of Earth makes troubles. The Star of Talent presides. Good for baths, but bad for outdoor activities. Malignancy in the north.” The lines seem to foresee Hong’s injury. Also, after saying goodbye to Hong, who has decided to go with his wife to the north and make a fortune in Jianghu, Ouyang again quotes the almanac, “The Chamber Star presides. Extremely favourable for the north.” At this point, the subtitles on the screen pre-tell Hong’s future: he will become the Head of Clan and is named “the Beggar of the North”. The almanac depends on a schedule of the natural, mystic world, not a political power. Grand narratives of history cannot find a place in such a depiction of time.

Stressing the multiplicity of genre, David Bordwell states the difficulty in defining genre, which is neither a mode, a cycle, nor a formula (1989). Genres “function as open-ended and corrigible schemata” (ibid: 148), and they are able to contain multiple themes. Wong’s films demonstrate how contradictory genres can be. He uses different existing genres, and then alters them to produce new meanings as responses to the changing politics in Hong Kong. Genres, sometimes seen as highly commercial and overly market-orientated, are opportunities for invention that he takes advantage of. In *2046* we see a meta-narrative about genre. In his struggle to make a living, Chow writes different kinds of serial novels for newspapers, such as Wuxia and erotica. With the objective of entertaining his readers, instead of feeling restricted, Chow is happy to follow his inclinations in his writing, in which he dramatizes his real life. This can be paralleled with Wong’s attitude towards genres – one can feel free to present the world by making genre films. Rey Chow has talked about the need for people in Hong Kong to be opportunists in order to negotiate their cultural identity since “opportunity is molded in danger and danger is a form of opportunity” (1993: 25). In her writing, these opportunities can be nostalgic films, popular music and modern poems in Hong Kong, which are created in a diasporic situation. Wong’s texts show that genre is a crucial opportunity for Hong Kong’s post-colonial self-writing. Using these genres to revisit the past, he writes his version of history which is never official or canonical. It is this fictionality of the past via genres which articulates a voice for Hong Kong. The authenticity of history is hegemony, and the cinema, a form of popular culture, shows the energetic power of alternative writing.

What Kind of Women Live in the Past?

In Chapter 2, the relationship between gender and space was analyzed. Here I will discuss the tension between women and official history. If Wong Kar-wai has used genres to portray his version of the past, how are the women and their stories presented in these genres? In his quasi-Wuxia film *Ashes of Time*, a lovelorn woman fights and travels in the timeless desert. In his quasi-Wenyi (Chinese melodrama) films *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, women, whose romance is as doomed as men's, travel alone. As mentioned, in the 1980s and 1990s, female figures were significantly highlighted as a means of revisiting the past in Hong Kong films such as *Rouge*. If Wong's nostalgia works against nationalism, what is the function of the nostalgic female figures in Wong's films?

The writings of national histories, including the portrayal of official history in films, are not neutral in terms of gender. History is most often *his story* in films. In the mainland Chinese films *The Founding of a Republic* (dir. Han Sanping and Huang Jianxin, 2009), a depiction of the birth of the People's Republic of China as an official celebration of its 60th anniversary, and *Beginning of the Great Revival* (dir. Han Sanping and Huang Jianxin, 2011), a narration of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party as an ode to its 90th anniversary, the past is orchestrated to serve as propaganda for the nation and the party. Unsurprisingly, very few women are important players in the political grand narratives of these films. As in many other historic films with a "legitimate" narration such as *The Birth of a Nation* (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915), the past of a nation, which often involves battle, bleeding and pride, is constructed as a masculine one in which women are given little credit.

In the narration of the past and nationalism, gender plays a key part. First of all, the ideology of nationalism is often idealized in the image of perfect womanhood, despite the fact that patriarchal nationalism actually oppresses women (Young, 2003: 63-64). In addition, it has been suggested that the "theorizing of national duties explains how women can be seen as essential beings while men are perceived as free to make choices" (Pickering and Kehde, 1997: 6). In other words, while men produce change for the nation, women represent its unchanged essence. Steinwand goes further, seeing such a construction as a crucial product of (restorative) nostalgia: "she is nostalgically produced: she preserves the lost wholeness; she can save modernity precisely by being excluded from society and

history” (1997: 13). We can see this in the women’s clothing in the independence movements of some Asian colonies at the end of the nineteenth century: whilst men wore suits to symbolize European modernity, women wore traditional clothes or a modified version of them to embody the persistence of tradition (Chang, 2007: 159). In the process of history, men are seen as changing and women as remaining unchanged, for the good of the nation. Hence, when women step out from their essentialised roles, or become sexual beings, this logic of nationalism is threatened. Contemporary Taiwanese female novelist Ping Lu states that the consciousness of women’s sexuality and desire is the greatest subversive power against patriarchy and the “Father’s Law” (see Wang, 2008: 15). For example, after the dismantling of martial law in 1987 in Taiwan, a group of female writers, such as Ping Lu, employed sex and desire in their novels to release the subversive agency of women’s bodies, which defied the oppressive national power (ibid: 28-34).

The nostalgic texts in Hong Kong cinema exemplify how gendered memories interfere with nationalism. As mentioned, *Rouge* uses the figure of a prostitute, the ghost from the 1930s, to narrate the past and to interrogate progress and modernization in Hong Kong. Her story, a private one which happens in the ignored and marginal space of a brothel, displays an unknown and forgotten part of local Hong Kong history with its unique beauty, in sharp contrast to the colony’s official histories written by the British and mainland China. The film reveals the potential of “her-story” as “little narrative”. Numerous female characters in Wong Kar-wai’s nostalgic films have similar characteristics and significance. In his cinematic past, women are often out of the mainstream social norm, including a dancer in a night club (Lulu/Mimi in *Days of being Wild*), a woman engaged in an affair (So Lai-chen in *In the Mood for Love*), a courtesan (Miss Hua in *The Hand*), a prostitute (Bailing in *2046*), an adolescent girl who runs away from home (Jie-wen in *2046*), a gambler (Black Spider in *2046*) and a young woman who marries a Japanese in the aftermath of WWII (Jin-wen in *2046*). It is noticeable that few so-called “decent women” – dutiful wives and loving mothers – are found in his films. These characters show different kinds of lives which are far from the ideal of wholeness, harmony and peace. They can no longer stand for a safe space and stable time for the nation’s history and modern progress. Rather, their stories are about people’s “indecent” life styles and personal affairs which often lead to divorce, “moral decay”, physical and psychic exile, not a warm and solid home – sometimes the

symbol of a nation. In addition, the way the women dress often reveals their changing status. The Cheongsam again is significant. Other than the cosmopolitanism it brings, it reveals the sexual politics of the 1960s. These women in stunning Cheongsams, which show their body shapes clearly, are beautiful and seductive. As seen in *2046* and *The Hand*, their charm offers more possibilities in life for them: travelling, making money and having the men they choose. All of this takes the women away from the roles of housewives and “Mother of Nation”.

The women in Wong’s nostalgic films are roughly from three regions according to the dialects they use in these films: local Hong Kong, Shanghai, and other parts of China. They are all in the process of becoming and travelling. The background of the first group, from hall dancer to secretary, is diverse, showing the changing status of Hong Kong women at that time. The second group, the Shanghainese, represented by the Shanghainese singer Rebecca Pan who acts in *Days of being Wild* and *In the Mood for Love*, brings cosmopolitanism to the film. Her roles in both films are those of mobile women: they go to Hong Kong from Shanghai, and then leave Hong Kong for the US. The third group is the women who speak Mandarin, who stand in sharp contrast to the proletarian women seen in images of mainland China at that time. Acted by famous Chinese actresses such as Gong Li, who symbolizes China in some internationally well known Chinese films such as *Judou* (dir. Zhang Yimou, 1990) (Berry and Farquhar, 2006: 128), these women characters are de-Chinese-ized and recreated by Wong as cosmopolitan figures in terms of how they look, behave and travel in the films. These women’s elusiveness and mobility, and the ideologies they hint at, parallel the women in some romance novels at the beginning of the twentieth century observed by Rey Chow (1991). For her, this feminine genre not only documents the changes between the nineteenth and the twentieth century in China, but also comments on these changes in an indirect way, with women characters who bear the marks of a contradictory history.

If gendered memories can be seen as the politics of details, female bodies can be the point of departure. Women’s bodies have been the victims of power. In Chinese ancient tradition under feudalism, women were expected to smile without exposing their teeth, to live in a house without going out, and to have their feet bound in the name of “beauty” (Ge

and Song, 2005: 66). However, if bodies are the core realm of the practice of power, they are also the starting point for subversion. The liberation of bodies is often by sex. It is one of the reasons why sex is dangerous in patriarchy. In Chinese modern literature, the danger of sex is particularly over-stated in the days of proletarian revolution because personal motives and love relationships are possible obstacles to revolution (ibid: 135). Women's bodies and sex are powerful counterforces against some revolutionary theories. This sheds light on the depiction of some "indecent" women in the 1960s in Wong Kar-wai's films: at the time of the Cultural Revolution, when women's bodies, in the unisex proletarian clothes, were seen as only serving politics in mainland China, women in Hong Kong were already exploring love and sex. Regardless of their distinct social classes and occupations, they all fall into forbidden love or inglorious sex. The curtain of *Days of being Wild* is raised by the scene of Yuddy and So Lai-chen's encounter, which is followed by the scene of them in bed. The film's plot develops quickly to the sex between Yuddy and another woman, Lulu/Mimi, on the first night of their encounter. Another So Lai-chen in *In the Mood for Love* finds herself in an affair with a neighbour. In *2046*, most of the women, from the refined Jin-wen to the coquettish prostitute Bailing, are involved in "deviant" love and sex. Compared to their counterparts in mainland China, whose sexuality is exploited in the name of the glorious revolution and liberation, the women in these films live totally different lives outside conventional moral standards, ones never recognized by the nation. Within a grand narrative, there are always some left-behind stories, particularly of women's experiences, which are collected by Wong Kar-wai.

The image of the prostitute is significant for Hong Kong. In her acclaimed novels "Hong Kong Trilogy", the female novelist Shi Su-ching famously uses the figure of a prostitute Hudie (butterfly) to contemplate Hong Kong's modern history over the past one hundred years, showing the resistance against colonial history through women's consciousness (Wang, 2008: 33). The prostitute here is not the embodiment of colonial feminization and fetishization. Rather, her figure, her dramatic life and her perspective are the resource for an alternative viewing of the history, just like the ghost Fleur created by Stanley Kwan's *Rouge*. Looking at its history, Hong Kong used to be a place for many kinds of marginal groups: in the 1840s, the immigrants were mostly labourers, hawkers, pirates and opium dealers; in the 1870s, there were 16,000 to 20,000 Chinese prostitutes

there, out of the whole population of around 120,000 to 130,000 (Chau, 2010: 61, 68), a fact which is possibly the inspiration for Shi Su-ching's creation. The figure of the prostitute functions symbolically and factually in Hong Kong history.

In *2046*, the prostitute Bailing, whose background is unknown, is a woman from mainland China. In the chaotic time of the Cultural Revolution, she lives alone in a hotel in Hong Kong, carrying out her business, and dreaming of going to a further place, Singapore. Going to Singapore used to be a dream she shared with her lover, but it later becomes her own dream, and she ends up going there alone to work for a night club. At a time when going and living abroad is far from easy in 1960s mainland China, because of her status Bailing gains the mobility, independence, and life choices which are a luxury for the majority of Chinese women at that time. With her economic independence, in her unsatisfactory relationship with Chow Mo-wan, she says, "This time I pay you as my prostitute". As a sex worker, she lives her life on her own, often assertively. She makes money from men but she does not depend on them. The stunning Cheongsams she wears and the life she lives serve her desire, not any national agenda (Figure 4). In *The Hand*, the courtesan Miss Hua is an even stronger woman who lives in a big, comfortable apartment. Chang is a young tailor who makes dresses for her and falls in love with her. A striking sex scene in the film demonstrates her assertiveness and delivers the film's theme. Before their first meeting, Chang waits for her in her living room and becomes aroused by the sound of love-making from her room. When they meet, she notices his physical reaction and tells him to take off his pants. In a manner almost equivalent to rape, he is forced into being given a "handjob" by her. "Remember this feeling, and you will make some beautiful clothes for me," she tells him. No matter whether it is for her sexual pleasure or her future clothes, it is a sex scene that is totally conducted by a woman. In this highly erotic scene, she is well-dressed, and the camera only shows her face. As a courtesan, her body is for sale, but the film focuses more on how she uses it as an expression of her agency. These women in the 1960s enable a different way of viewing the past that is distant from the patriarchal history that eliminates women's sexuality.

Figure 4: *2046*. The prostitute Bailing lives her life independently in 1960s' Hong Kong.



In Wong's films, the stories of the women often offer open discourse, which is typified in a conversation in *2046*: When Chow Mo-wan meets the gambler Black Spider in Singapore and asks her to go with him to Hong Kong, she rejects him by saying, "You don't know my past". When a man tries to "take a woman away with him" – a usual patriarchal narrative – the woman, a mysterious gambler, rejects him and reminds the man that her life is beyond his knowledge as well as his control. In fact, Chow knows nothing about her, including her past and her future plans. This kind of elusiveness and unpredictability make women's history impossible to be absorbed into the official history. As indicated, patriarchy and nationalism often put women in a fixed and easy-to-control space (home) and role (mother of the family and the nation). However, whilst Wong's films often end up with open endings, his female protagonists' future is even more untold. Black Spider's whereabouts at the end of the film are left unknown. In his attempt to meet her again, Chow goes to Singapore only to find that she has disappeared. Some say she has gone to Cambodia and someone says she has died. Compared to the nationalist discourse, whose meanings are sealed by certain political agendas and gender roles in its writing of the past, the women's stories in the 1960s in Wong's films open up unpredicted, dangerous possibilities for history. Whilst women are spatially fixed to serve the history of patriarchy

and nationalism, they are elusive in these films, physically and ideologically. I argue that it is necessary for these women to live in such uncertainties, since most of the available narratives about women are embedded in patriarchal discourses. The mysteries of these women's futures in Wong's writing of the past, including Murong in *Ashes of Time*, Mimi/Lulu in *Days of being Wild*, Bailing, Jie-wen and Jin-wen in *2046*, reject both the optimistic happy ending and the pessimistic fatal destiny for women, leaving the narratives about women an open discourse.

Following my earlier discussion of gender and space, women's loss of space has its progressive meanings in the face of the patriarchal writing of nationalism. Jin-wen's case in *2046* is possibly a more transgressive one since the national enemy, a Japanese, is involved. Jin-wen's spatial experience is out-of-place as a woman. Having a father who is a hotel owner, she lives in a hotel which makes it easy for her to know different kinds of men, such as the Japanese, who becomes her boyfriend, and the writer Chow, who helps her to get in touch with her boyfriend. Later, with her wish to live independently, she gets a job as a cloakroom attendant in a night club, another "indecent" space. Finally, she goes to Japan to marry the Japanese man. It is no surprise to see Wong's female characters travelling, but this time she ends up in the national enemy's country, which makes her journey, from a hotel to a night club and finally to a foreign land, difficult to absorb into the patriarchal nationalist narration of history. Nationalism, as well as its history regarding a national enemy, is betrayed by the personal desire of a woman. In the film's melodramatic plot, she is not blamed for going to Japan. Rather, she is envied by Chow, who fails to be with the woman he loves.

However, there are two necessary questions left about the past and women in Wong's films. First, given all the mobile women outside the duties expected by patriarchy, are the films nostalgic for a lost mother? Second, with the numerous prominent female characters, is his representation of the past a feminization of the city for imperial eyes? It is noticeable that *Days of Being Wild* is about the fruitless search for a mother figure. Without a warm family, Yuddy has a tortured relationship with his foster mother. For money, she has taken on the responsibility of raising him. Yuddy wants to get information about his birth mother but is rejected by her. "I'll torture you until you tell me the truth," he says. In her middle

age, she has a young boyfriend that she pays for, who is beaten up by Yuddy because he thinks he is cheating her of money. She is not a typical good mother. On the other side, his birth mother not only gives up her child, but also refuses to see him when Yuddy visits the Philippines and appears at the entrance of her house. None of the mothers in the film are good in a traditional sense. Hence, it is tempting to see the feminist criticism of nostalgia as applicable: with the concept of mother as spatial, symbolized by confined or constricted spaces such as cave, womb or island, nostalgia is a gendered idea that relies on a “lost origin”, usually a feminine object desired (Huffer, 1998: 28). The heart of nostalgia is believed to be the “cutting off any possibility for uncertainty, difference, or fundamental change” (ibid: 19). Female spaces as closed and confined become the core of the origin. And a past with a loving, giving mother is crucial for the rhetoric of patriarchy’s law and order, as an unchanged and immobile figure which resonates with the notion of “Mother of the Nation” mentioned earlier. This kind of nostalgia, in Boym’s classification, is restorative, in contrast to the reflective nostalgia which I argue is shown in Wong Kar-wai’s films.

I would argue that it is doubtful whether the absence of good mother figures simply equals the hunger for a lost mother. As examined earlier, none of Wong Kar-wai’s films emphasize roots and origin, and he never hints in any sense that a comfortable past is possible. The past in his films is for us to contemplate, not to go back to. In Abbas’ analysis of *Days of Being Wild*, the past is given a labile structure, which can parallel the 1990s or any earlier stage (1997: 53-54). He finds in the film “a history of the sixties that, like the experience of disappearance itself, is also there and not there at the same time” (ibid: 53). Wong’s films show the ungraspability of time, in which there is neither safe origin nor fixed root. Rather, these films always point out that national purity and cultural authenticity are impossible. Therefore, instead of seeing the absence of mother as patriarchal nostalgia, it makes more sense to argue instead that it is a declaration of a unique yet ambiguous Hong Kong identity and culture – a political mother is no longer needed. In addition, as indicated, after *Days of being Wild*, there are no more searches for mother and origin, and women’s travel and “deviant” behaviour become more and more “normal”. The characters tend to search for something more indistinct, intangible and indefinite. It is a process of up-rooting, not root-searching. The object of nostalgia for Wong is fluid and ambiguous, not a

loving mother. In his nostalgic texts Wong comments on nostalgia, especially the kind of restorative nostalgia that longs for an origin in the past. He not only expresses the nostalgic emotion shared by Hong Kong people, but also implicitly questions it.

Turning to the issue of colonial feminization, in her study of the representation of the colonized Pacific islands in the West, O'Brien finds exotic primitivism and femininity represented in the timeless and unchanging stereotypes of the island girls as having a natural and exotic existence (2006). These feminized images are made for the West's conquest, colonization, salvation, consumption and visual pleasure. If the colonized objects are often feminized, does Wong internalize this process in his films? In his films, the city and the past look feminine, in terms of the melodramatic plots, the melancholic atmosphere, the prominent female characters and the feminized men discussed in Chapter 2, especially in comparison to the mainstream masculine Hong Kong films. It is also the case that the women are sometimes presented as objects of visual pleasure in these films. Especially in *2046* and *The Hand*, women in stunning, tight Cheongsams display their body shapes and tempting femininity. However, what they represent is not a purified and simplified notion of primitivism or femininity. Rather, they embody the hybridity and ambivalence of Hong Kong, which are so ungraspable that they can only be shown by travelling women with fluid identities. They are far from the timeless and unchanging images of the island girls in the Pacific islands in imperial eyes, nor do they represent any imagined national culture for political propaganda. Just like the city, they are always in a state of change and mobility. Even though the women are seductive and sexy, they do not imply the colonial feminization of the city. Instead, via these women, Wong on one hand refers to the ignored history of women's mobility, and on the other hand resists any fixed ideologies of patriarchy and nationalism. These women, as well as the men, with ambiguous gender attributes in his films, are created to demonstrate Hong Kong's active response to its political anxiety and even to claim the city's subjectivity.

However, it would be difficult to argue that these films are feminist since there is never an obvious gender self-consciousness found in his female characters. In addition, Wong seldom explicitly criticizes patriarchy or directly addresses gender inequality in his films. For example, the paternal power of Jin-wen's father against her love for the Japanese

is not questioned, and Jin-wen's final decision to go to Japan is not presented with feminist consciousness. Whilst not arguing that his films are feminist, however, I would argue that these figures are not merely symbols either, especially in light of Boym's discussion of symbols, whose meanings are fixed and whose function is to call for political identification in restorative nostalgia. These female figures are complex. They bear the trace of women's changing status and travelling history in Hong Kong and even in a global context; their active sexuality is demonstrated; they are not realist figures but fictional characters in the contexts of genres as discussed in Chapter 2. Just like the ambivalent culture presented in Wong's films, these unconventional female figures cannot be easily defined. They are, however, crucial figures in the representation of Hong Kong, which makes the openness of post-colonial hybrid culture visible, and which creates a potential space for emancipation for women especially when viewed against the doctrinal complicity between nationalism and patriarchy.

Implosion of Time

Without idealization of the past, Wong's nostalgia stands in contrast to grand narratives. Before and after 1997, when an overwhelming discourse of national pride was promoted, and when the colonial discourse was equivalent to globalization without history, Wong focused on diasporic experience, cultural hybridity, ambiguous identity and local memories in his depictions of the past. His films enable the multiple narratives of history and demonstrate the necessity of creating Hong Kong's own past. Whilst his films can be seen as pessimistic in showing the characteristics of Hong Kong – long dwelling, concrete identity, stable space and singular history are all impossible – they also positively produce space for cultural multiplicity. No matter how it is defined, no matter under what kind of discourse, Hong Kong is still ungraspable. The past is created by today's perspective. Wong's films show the creativity of Hong Kong cinema, at a time when the city was experiencing and still experiences high anxiety. By constructing the past, Wong has been producing Hong Kong culture, whose uniqueness is resistant to any political propaganda. His films show that the past can be used to portray a post-colonial, cosmopolitan and hybrid culture. However, as stated in the Introduction, since Wong Kar-wai seldom directly

addresses political issues and social realities, his nostalgic texts lack explicit criticism of the dominant narratives, such as the colonial government's erasure of history and mainland China's nationalist history. Similarly, facing globalization in 1980s and 1990s Hong Kong, Wong did not criticize the tendency to high capitalism in his depiction of the 1960s. His way of dealing with the past is through cultural ambivalence rather than political antagonism. In his nostalgic films, for example, social injustice in the colonial age is rarely mentioned. His nostalgia, one might argue, does not go far enough in terms of political militancy. Yet here, again, I agree with Abbas's (1997) argument that Wong's approach of ambivalence is more powerful than any realist style in presenting Hong Kong, whose urban culture is ambiguous.

With his version of history, Wong Kar-wai rejects the colonial discourse of the British which resembles globalization and erases history, as well as mainland Chinese's political discourse, which is nationalist. Between these narratives, Wong constructs a history by Hong Kong locals, at the same time produces a Hong Kong identity. Today, both globalization and nationalism are powerful trends in the world. Wong's strategy of resistance is not only a response to 1997, but also to globalization and nationalism. His films show the creativity and activity of post-colonial culture in Hong Kong, whose significance is global. For example, in today's China, in which narratives of nationalism, capitalism, modernization and globalization are dominant, filmic nostalgia has been argued to embody an uninstitutionalized, alternative imagination of history against canonical, classical history, causing an implosion of time in the homogenized history (Wang, 2006). Wong Kar-wai's films have shown the reflective quality of nostalgia that brings this kind of implosion, which is significant in Hong Kong as well as in mainland China.

In fact, the rewriting of history in cinema as counterculture is far from restricted to Hong Kong and China. Rosenstone sees a trend of rewriting history in contemporary contexts: Latin American directors in the 1960s told the story of colonialism; African directors in the 1970s re-thought colonial history; German directors sought to view WWII through alternative perspectives also in the 1970s (1994: 5). He notes that it is the post-colonial nations and countries, which experienced upheavals, dictatorship or war, tend to contemplate history in their cinema. If we think of the twentieth century as one full of wars

and upheavals, and at its end facing globalization, it is even arguable that most of the countries in the world see a necessity to revisit the past. Today, the whole world is in a post-colonial situation (Spivak, 1999) and nostalgia is a global phenomenon, and the case in Hong Kong is both special, in terms of its politics, and paradigmatic, in terms of the post-colonial culture it embodies. In our time, the pluralist writing of histories is demanded in order to produce the possibility of a pluralist identity, as a resistance to a homogenizing globalization on the one hand, and an exclusive nationalism on the other, which together produce hatred and war. Wong Kar-wai's films demonstrate that the writing of the past can be a culturally productive strategy against the twin forces of globalization and nationalism.

Conclusion:

The Two Sides of a Journey

A couple years ago, I visited Portugal. Holding a Portuguese passport for more than thirty years, it was my first visit to the country. Having grown up in Macau, I have always realized that Portuguese culture is a necessary component of the ex-colonial city's culture – something deep inside me but which I seldom make any efforts to analyze. Hence, before my trip, I thought it was going to be a search for a “root”. However, Portugal, as the pioneer of navigators, surprised me by its hybrid culture: the beautifully painted ceramic tiles – Azulejo – are the legacy of the Moors; the heart-breaking Fado was influenced by the African-Brazilian music of the colonial age; the magnificent Manueline architecture established in the heyday of Portugal's history of navigation is a mixture of European and Eastern (Muslim) styles. In Portugal, it is not easy to find “pure” Portuguese culture, since Portugal has absorbed cultural elements from Asia, Africa and other European countries. Thus, the culture that Portugal brought to Macau was not pure, but diverse. My intention to find a static cultural “root” in Portugal was proved to be naïve. Those “roots” are fluid and hybrid, which link me, and Macau culture, to somewhere beyond Portugal. My trip to Portugal was, after all, about the understanding of how cultures travel and mix, not about how roots are fixed.

When I visited Portugal, I was in the initial stage of writing the major part of my thesis. This journey, which has nothing to do with Wong Kar-wai's films, is interestingly like a “fieldwork” for my examination of Hong Kong films and culture – it is impossible to seek cultural purity in either Portugal or Hong Kong. Clarifying the complication of Hong Kong's political background, Rey Chow argues that as a city in southern China, colonized by the British, occupied by the Japanese, later modernized and Westernized, and handed-over to mainland China, Hong Kong's pursuit of a pure Chinese identity is doomed to fail

(1993). Hence, what Hong Kong is able to establish is urbanism with karaoke, fast-food culture and pop music, just like the cases of Tokyo, Taipei and Singapore. Given the city's history, the impossibility of roots seems to be a specific situation in Hong Kong. However, it is a worldwide phenomenon in today's culture of mobility and hybridity. It has been argued that rather than "roots", our culture today should come to terms with our "routes" (Gilroy, 1994; Clifford, 1997). Today, when mobility and communication are necessities and different cultures always exist in their mixing and dynamic interactions, it is more crucial to trace the routes – how something becomes something and how cultures travel and mix, than to seek the root – the origin and essence of culture. In my examination of Wong Kar-wai's films, I have explored the importance of "routes" – presented through journeys, the space of passage, travelling women, and the mobile past – in Hong Kong culture, which can be seen as paradigmatic in our time.

Rey Chow has referenced Western scholar Stephen Owen who mourns the demise of Chinese tradition because Chinese literature has become "supremely translatable" to the West at the expense of its tradition (1993: 1-4). For Owen, the Chinese have become Westernized, hybrid and too accessible to the West. Their tradition is lost and these writers can no longer be seen as representatives of their ethnic identity. This essentialist perspective, with its belief that certain ethnicities should present their culture in a certain way, has been seriously criticized by Chow. In today's literary world, it is already difficult to pursue pure ethnicity, and it seems even more pointless to seek cultural authenticity in Hong Kong cinema. "Welcome to the late twentieth century," writes Stephen Owen in his article, lamenting the death of ethnic culture (see Chow, 1993: 4). However, ironically, the point at which Owen is mourning the alleged death of ethnic literature is exactly the time when Wong Kar-wai, along with other Hong Kong directors, demonstrates cultural creativity without "authentic" ethnic culture.

As mentioned, Hong Kong is a city which has long been despised as a "cultural desert" which is inferior to traditional and canonical cultures. Rey Chow criticizes the cultural chauvinism towards Hong Kong culture, namely the discrimination against it by both the British and mainland China, which see the Westernized Chinese people and Chinese culture in Hong Kong as inferior and thus erase their values (1993). How can such

a “cultural desert”, which is removed from both “authentic” Chinese culture and “pure” Western culture, speak for itself? The question resonates with Spivak’s examination of post-colonial culture – can the subaltern speak (1999)? In her analysis, the dominant powers, such as the colonial authority and the local nationalists, always possess the narrative tools to represent the colonized and oppressed subaltern, whose voice and consciousness have been taken. Wong Kar-wai’s work proves the possibility of the periphery’s voice. Hence, how does Wong Kar-wai “speak”? I would argue that it is cinematic language that empowers Wong and Hong Kong culture. Cinema is regarded as Hong Kong’s most representative cultural form (Pang, 2010). As an imported technology from the West with its multicultural background, Chinese cinema’s very nature is transnational (Lu: 1997). Cinema and Hong Kong culture match each other because they are both culturally hybrid. Using this tool, Hong Kong speaks for itself to the world.

The Fear of being “Swallowed”

In the past five to six years when I was writing this thesis, the cultural-political picture in Hong Kong has changed remarkably. We have witnessed the decline of popular culture, including films, in Hong Kong. The crisis faced by the Hong Kong film industry is not something new. As early as in 1997, the media declared “the death of Hong Kong cinema” (Server, 1999) due to its shrinking overseas market, declining competitiveness and unsure future after the handover. Whilst some Hong Kong stars and directors have enjoyed international success, in recent years, only an average of fifty Hong Kong films per year have been produced – the smallest number since WWII (Pang, 2010). More significantly, in their struggle to survive, some Hong Kong directors have been co-operating with the companies in mainland China to make “co-operation films”, which are recognized by the Chinese government, allowed to be screened in mainland China, and exempted from the import quota. The screenplays of these films have to be approved by the Chinese officials before shooting. As a rapidly expanding film market, the overall box-office record in mainland China was 13 billion RMBs (around 2 billion US dollars) in 2011 (*China Reviews News*, 3 Jan, 2012). Targeting the market there is a way to survive and even to prosper for Hong Kong directors.

However, something is at stake in this co-operation: the local Hong Kong elements are removed from the films; the censorship in mainland China is still ungraspable for Hong Kong film makers (Pang, 2010); some films tend to be conservative to pass the censorship regulations and to please the mainland audience. At the same time, the once influential Cantonese pop music has lost its trans-regional power, and the quality of TV programmes in Hong Kong has declined (ibid). Pang Lai-kwan argues that, despite its fear of being “swallowed”, Hong Kong cinema cannot afford to give up the market in mainland China (2002). The position of Hong Kong cinema in mainland China is complicated: its forms of genre are appealing for mainland audiences, but it is not treated as a national product by the authorities – the government still sees cinema, including Hong Kong cinema, as a “foreign contamination” (ibid: 65). However, Pang argues that the Chinese government needs this kind of “contamination” – the power of the cinema – to play with globalization as well as to maintain its national profile, in which Hong Kong cinema is used for China’s political interests. Keeping their eyes on a mainland audience, some Hong Kong directors serve the ideologies there – as discussed in Chapter 3, Wilson Yip’s *Ip Man* (2008) and *Ip Man 2* (2010) promote conservative nationalism – but some of them still manage to deliver, usually in an implicit way, their Hong Kong perspectives – Teddy Chan’s *Bodyguards and Assassins* (2009) presents a Hong Kong version of Chinese contemporary history (Lei, 2010).

The predicament faced by Hong Kong cinema, especially the fear of being “swallowed” by mainland China, epitomizes the difficulties tackled by the whole city. The advantageous position that Hong Kong cinema, as well as Hong Kong, once enjoyed, is now being lost. Economically, Hong Kong now has to be to a certain extent dependent on mainland China: politically, Hong Kong struggles to fight for its own democratic system; culturally, the Cantonese culture produced in Hong Kong is no longer powerful. However, just as the anxiety experienced by Hong Kong people before 1997 had its cultural productivity as I have discussed, the disquiet felt by them today is not in vain. It urges Hong Kong people to reflect on their own culture and political situation. In this current context, the cultural meanings of Wong Kar-wai’s films are even clearer. They have foreseen the anxiety today and even in the future. In my discussion of his *2046*, I argued that he uses the unstable space of a hotel room to refer to the 1960s, 2000s and also the

future – 2046. Wong knows that Hong Kong's anxiety is never-ending, and can never be, or should never be, resolved. Hence, no matter whether it is in terms of filmic culture or not, the meaning of Hong Kong's case is still global. The never-ending anxiety found in Hong Kong, as a global "structure of feeling", is applicable to many other places under the dual trends of globalization and nationalism (Appadurai, 1996). We all struggle to maintain our uniqueness in globalization and to resist the exclusiveness of nationalism. We all experience anxiety over our identities and cultures.

Rey Chow has talked about the universal meaning of Hong Kong culture. Using its marginality, Hong Kong challenges the notions of cultural purity and authenticity, and initiates its new version of culture (1993, 1998). In its colonial period, Hong Kong was seen as a "borrowed place" in a "borrowed time" (Hughes, 1976). Even after the handover, both in spatial and temporal terms, Hong Kong, in its marginal position, is still always unstable, changing and becoming. This fluid platform is where Hong Kong creates its new form of culture. Wong Kar-wai's films that always carry this kind of fluidity, I argue, well demonstrate this kind of new culture. One of the most important missions of Bhabha's post-colonial writing is to examine the marginal culture that functions as an intervention into those justifications of modernity which focus on advancement, homogeneity, cultural organicism and nationalism (1990a: 4). In his discussion of Hong Kong's cultural struggle after 1997, sociologist Ma Kit-wai sees a positive role for Hong Kong – rather than being restricted by globalization and nationalism, Hong Kong identities should create and renew the two (2007: 18). In other words, when Hong Kong establishes its local identities, it simultaneously constructs the future of globalization and nationalism in a new way. Ma's suggestion echoes the question asked by Rey Chow: "[w]hat might Hong Kong tell us about London and Beijing, rather than vice versa?" (1998: 177). Here, London can be seen as the symbol of globalization and Beijing of nationalism. In the Introduction, I mentioned Appadurai's notion of "post-nation" against nationalism (1996) and Abbas's suggestion of Hong Kong's "postculture" against traditional cultural forms (1997), both of which explore a new, progressive culture in our time given the cultural and political contexts. Likewise, Bhabha argues that the emergent post-colonial culture cannot be explained by the pre-given discursive causality or origin (1990b). After my analysis of Wong Kar-wai's films, I

conclude that these texts are active and contributory participants in the making of this kind of inclusive and open new culture.

A “Political Turn”: Social Movement

With the decline of Hong Kong popular culture, a significant wave of social movements surfaces in Hong Kong after 1997 (Ma, 2007). Lo Wing-sang sees a “political turn” from the abstract debate and sentimental projection of “cultural identity” before 1997 to the exploration of and struggle for a “political identity” after 1997 in Hong Kong (2007b). Ma Kit-wai argues that the major source of collective Hong Kong identities has changed from being popular culture to being the social movements in which a new wave of cultural politics surfaces. These movements, including the cultural conservation of Star Ferry Pier and Tai O, involve affection for local landmarks and communities, reflection on the urban space, concern about social justice, and more importantly, the maintenance of local identities in Hong Kong (ibid). In addition, in 2003, more than 500,000 marchers in Hong Kong demonstrated against the legislation of Basic Law Article 23 (*Mingpao News*, 2 July, 2003)⁶¹, followed by an annual demonstration demanding democracy. After the handover, with the rise of mainland China, Ma indicates, the local identities in Hong Kong, now no longer dependent on popular culture, have not been weakened. This shift or “political turn” demonstrates a complex situation not only relevant to Hong Kong. On the one hand, the limitation of the cultural politics carried by popular culture is clear in the face of political agendas regarding social justice and democracy. In its post-colonial age under mainland China, Hong Kong people find the often ambiguous popular culture inadequate for making social-political statements. On the other hand, the shortcomings of this type of social movement are shown simultaneously – it sometimes involves the process of exclusion. For instance, the new wave of social movements evokes localism that causes an exclusive attitude and hostile emotion towards the “others” – such as the Filipinos and mainlanders. In the face of such a defensive Hong Kong local identity, the Filipino workers in Hong

⁶¹ It is an anti-subversion law against treason, whose bill was withdrawn after the demonstration.

Kong who try to get citizenship are discriminated against (Ip, 2011). And, to maintain a Hong Kong identity against mainland China, the mainland Chinese are labeled and denounced as “locusts” that endanger the crops, meaning the mainland Chinese’s damage to Hong Kong (Chan, 2012).

In this light, we can understand better both the cultural power and the weakness of Wong Kar-wai’s films. The value of Wong’s films is again confirmed since the ambivalence and hybridity carried by them rarely evoke hostile attitudes, and implicitly oppose any fixed cultural forms that might lead to exclusive emotions. However, without directly addressing political issues and social realities, they are inadequate for social movements. In fact, as pointed out in the Introduction, the notion of hybridity has been criticized as politically powerless and unconcerned with liberation and revolution (Parry, 2002). This dilemma brings us to a wider academic question: what is the role of textual analysis of such films, especially in post-colonial studies? In today’s global political and economic structure, is it more urgent to tackle something outside the texts such as the problematic American diplomatic policies and exploitative global economic system? Bhabha’s post-colonial theories have been criticized as guilty of merely concerning the textual level and being powerless in tackling political realities such as transnational exploitation, governmental violence, ethnic strife and sexism in post-colonial contexts (Liu, 2001). Similarly, filmic texts and the analysis of them, no matter how abundantly they carry meanings, are relatively weak in the face of oppression. We can say that by the standard of traditional film studies, the cultural studies of films have gone a lot further in political terms. However, writing a thesis focused on films that seldom deal with oppression, I was always aware of the fact that the political arena and social struggle are not the major subjects I confronted. However, despite its limitations, textual analysis in cultural studies should not be devalued, since texts, after all, do not only function on a textual level. Boehmer reminds us in her study of colonial and post-colonial literature that cultural representation occupied a core position both in the process of colonization and independent movement (1995). In his discussion of the “work of imagination” today, Appadurai states that the imagination offered by mass media becomes the projects for societies and the scripts for our lives, in which all our plans about mobility – departing, returning, and staying – are within the narratives in mass media (1996). Ma Kit-wai has given an example of a Chinese young

man who moved to a big city to work in a bar because of the Hollywood film he watched – Tom Cruise’s *Cocktail* (dir. Roger Donaldson, 1988) (2007). Thus, it remains crucial to analyze the texts, which are the “directors” of our lives and world. According to Spivak, indeed, the whole world can be seen as a text:

Without the reading of the world as a book, there is no prediction, no planning, no taxes, no laws, no welfare, no war.....The world actually writes itself with the many-leveled, unfixable intricacy and openness of a work of literature.....One must fill the vision of literary form with its connections to what is being read: history, political economy – the world. And it is not merely a question of disciplinary formation. It is a question also of questioning the separation between the world of action and the world of the disciplines. (1988: 95)

Hence, I believe, the analysis of filmic texts, including seemingly “apolitical” texts such as Wong Kar-wai’s films, is still necessary, even though we have to bear in mind that other levels, such as the social movement in the streets, have to be taken into account. In his discussion of Rey Chow’s academic position, using Hall’s idea that responsible intellectual work must say “yes” and “no” at the same time, Bowman explains how Chow simultaneously says “yes” to poststructuralism but “no” to its biases (2010). Chow’s attitude towards poststructuralism can be borrowed to characterize my view of Wong Kar-wai’s films. Most of the time, I say “yes” to his films and confirm their cultural values, but I still want to reserve some space for a “no”. As mentioned, his films are inadequate in tackling Hong Kong’s political problems today. Also, as discussed in Chapter 3, his films fall short as carriers of feminist consciousness. My “yes” and “no” to his films, similarly, are relevant to the question I just raised about textual analysis in cultural studies. Culture, as Hall has argued, “will always work through its textualities”, but “at the same time that textuality is never enough” (1992: 284): we must also tackle historical problems such as governmental policies and economic structures.

The (Unpleasant) Other Side of My Journey

At the end of this thesis, I want to show the other side of my trip to Portugal. Just as I was enjoying the cultural diversity in Portugal, I was greeted with racism. In a café in central Lisbon, surrounded by buildings blending Arabic and European styles, I was verbally

abused by a Portuguese-looking stranger due to my skin colour. This anecdote, along with the multicultural atmosphere there, I believe, epitomizes the dual cultural trends today: increasingly hybrid culture and growing exclusive attitudes towards the “others” – often in the form of nationalism – not only in post-colonial situation, but also especially in the post-9/11 era. This is not exclusive to Portugal: I have enjoyed cosmopolitan culture in London and Brighton and simultaneously experienced various levels of racism in the past several years. These first-hand experiences help me to understand Wong Kar-wai’s films and Hong Kong culture more clearly. Alongside the hybridity and ambivalence embodied in his films as a kind of global culture, there are always brutal political facts, such as racism and other forms of prejudice, as setbacks in the age of globalization. I cannot, in my thesis, directly deal with the blatant racism I experienced in Lisbon. However, these seemingly outside-the-text situations are not really outside the texts. The texts, produced by various kinds of competing powers in society, actually provide the scripts for these situations happening all over the world. In one single thesis I cannot handle every aspect of today’s cultural phenomena. However, I hope that I have managed to display how Wong Kar-wai’s films provide alternative scripts for us, which lead us to think about culture in progressive ways, and even to act in tolerant ways with open attitudes. These scripts, with their international popularity, contribute to the making of a world away from conservatism, fundamentalism and hostility.

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Filmography:

I- Wong Kar-wai's films:

As Tears Go By (1988)
Days of Being Wild (1991)
Ashes of Time (1994)
Chungking Express (1994)
Fallen Angels (1995)
Happy Together (1997)
In the Mood for Love (2000)
2046 (2004)
The Hand (2004)*
My Blueberry Nights (2007)

* part of an international cooperation comprised of three stories directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, Steven Soderbergh and Wong himself under the title of *Eros* (2004)

II- Other films:

92 Legendary La Rose Noire (dir. Jeff, Lau 1992)
A Better Tomorrow (dir. John Woo, 1986)
A Better Tomorrow II (dir. John Woo, 1987)
A Better Tomorrow III: Love and Death in Saigon (dir. Tsui Hark, 1989)
A City of Sadness (dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1989)
A Touch of Zen (dir. King Hu, 1971)
About Love (dir. Shimoyama Ten, Yee Chin-yen and Zhang Yibai, 2005)
The Adventure of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert (dir. Stephan Elliott, 1994)
An Autumn's Tale (dir. Mabel Cheung, 1987)
Apocalypse Now (dir. Francis Coppola, 1979)
Autumn Moon (dir. Clara Law, 1992)

Badlands (dir. Terrence Malick, 1973)
Beginning of the Great Revival (dir. Han Sanping and Huang Jianxin, 2011)
The Big Boss (dir. Lo Wei, 1971)
The Birth of a Nation (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915)
Boat People (dir. Ann Hui, 1982)
Born on the 4th of July (dir. Oliver Stone, 1989)
Boys on the Side (dir. Herbert Ross, 1995)
Breathless (dir. Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)
Buenos Aires Zero Degree (dir. Kwan Pung-leung, 1999)
Bullet in the Head (dir. John Woo, 1990)
The Butterfly Murder (dir. Tsui Hark, 1979)
Centre Stage (dir. Stanley Kwan, 1991)
Charlie's Angels (dir. McG, 2000)
Charlie's Angels 2: Full Throttle (dir. McG 2003)
City on Fire (dir. Ringo Lam, 1987)
Cocktail (dir. Roger Donaldson, 1988)
Come Drink with Me (dir. King Hu, 1966)
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (dir. Ang Lee, 2000)
Die Hard (dir. John McTiernan, 1988)
Die Hard 2 (dir. Renny Harlin, 1990)
Die Hard with a Vengeance (dir. John McTiernan, 1995)
Dust in the Wind (dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1987)
Eight Taels of Gold (dir. Mabel Cheung, 1989)
Eros (dir. Wong Kar-wai, Steven Soderbergh and Michelangelo Antonioni, 2004)
Everlasting Regret (dir. Stanley Kwan, 2005)
Farewell China (dir. Clara Law, 1990)
Farewell My Concubine (dir. Chen Kaige, 1993)
Final Victory (dir. Patrick Tam, 1987)
Fist of Fury (dir. Lo Wei 1972)
Five Fingers of Death (dir. Chung Chang-wha, 1972)
Floating Life (dir. Clara Law, 1996)

The Founding of a Republic (dir. Han Sanping and Huang Jianxin 2009)
Full Metal Jacket (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1987)
Gaslight (dir. George Cukor, 1944)
Gloria (dir. John Cassavetes, 1980)
He Ain't Heavy, He's My Father (dir. Peter Chan, 1993)
Hold You Tight (dir. Stanley Kwan, 1997)
Homecoming (dir. Yan Ho, 1984)
Illegal Immigrant (dir. Mabel Cheung, 1985)
In the Face of Demolition (dir. Lee Tit, 1953)
Ip Man (dir. Wilson Yip, 2008)
Ip Man 2 (dir. Wilson Yip, 2010)
Judou (dir. Zhang Yimou, 1990)
The Killer (dir. John Woo, 1989)
Last Year at Marienbad (dir. Alain Resnais, 1961)
Live Free or Die Hard (dir. Len Wiseman, 2007)
The Message (dir. Chen Guofu and Gao Qunshu, 2009)
Midnight Express (dir. Alan Parker, 1978)
Mission: Impossible II (dir. John Woo, 2000)
My Own Private Idaho (dir. Gus Van Sant, 1991)
Nowhere to Hide (dir. Lee Myung-se, 1990)
Once Upon A Time in China (dir. Tsui Hark, 1991)
Once Upon A Time in China II (dir. Tsui Hark, 1992)
Once Upon A Time in China III (dir. Tsui Hark, 1993)
Ordinary Heroes (dir. Ann Hui, 1999)
The Queer Story (dir. Shu Kei, 1996)
Raise the Red Lantern (dir. Zhang Yimou, 1991)
Rebecca (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)
Rebel Without a Cause (dir. Nicolas Ray, 1955)
Red Rose, White Rose (dir. Stanley Kwan, 1994)
Red Sorghum (dir. Zhang Yimou, 1987)
Rocky (dir. John G. Avildsen, 1976)

Rocky II (dir. Sylvester Stallone, 1979)
Rocky III (dir. Sylvester Stallone, 1982)
Rocky IV (dir. Sylvester Stallone, 1985)
Rocky V (dir. John G. Avildsen, 1990)
Rocky Balboa (dir. Sylvester Stallone, 2006)
Rouge (dir. Stanley Kwan, 1987)
Run, Lola, Run (dir. Tommy Tykwer, 1998)
Seven Samurai (dir. Akira Kurosawa, 1954)
Song of the Exile (dir. Ann Hui, 1990)
Suzhou River (dir. Lou Ye, 2000)
The Swordsman II (dir. Ching Siu-tung, 1992)
The Swordsman III: The East is Red (dir. Ching Siu-tung and Raymond Lee, 1993)
Terminator (dir. James Cameron, 1984)
Terminator 2: Judgment Day (dir. James Cameron, 1991)
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines (dir. Jonathan Mostow, 2003)
Terminator Salvation (dir. McG, 2009)
Thelma and Louise (dir. Ridley Scott, 1991)
Top Gun (dir. Tony Scott, 1986)
X-Men (dir. Bryan Singer, 2000)
Young and Dangerous (dir. Andrew Lau, 1996)
Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain (dir. Tsui Hark, 1983)