

國立交通大學

外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班

碩士論文

戲耍詭計與詭異：周星馳電影的喜劇策略

Toying with the Caper and the Uncanny:  
the Comic Devices in Stephen Chow's Films

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中華民國一〇三年一月

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## 摘 要

本文主要探討周星馳電影中的喜劇策略，以閱讀周的兩部電影《情聖》、《回魂夜》分析周的喜劇表演方式以及不同時期的改變，並從兩個面向析論。首先，從香港喜劇電影發展歷史回顧周的發跡以及定位；再探討周的電影及表演方式不僅僅只局限於搞笑與無厘頭，更試圖將無厘頭轉為一種氛圍；本文以九七移交做為周的電影探討社會議題之例，指出周的電影不僅關注社會，亦嘗試討論人與人之間的關係及情感；最後討論周的悲觀反英雄式的作品呈現。

首先，本文藉由分析《情聖》指出周在早期慣用的喜劇策略。透過分析此片完整的喜劇結構以及對白，探討周利用誇張肢體語言以及搞笑橋段製造喜劇氛圍並成就早期的成功。除此之外，此片亦嘗試帶進九七移交前中產階級的焦慮以及身分認同的混淆與渴望。

再者，本文從《回魂夜》中周星馳的疏離形象探討周的表現手法轉變。藉由疏遠早期土包子形象，周嘗試更為嚴肅的外型，無厘頭手法也不再只是誇張的肢體動作。此形象同時使周本身成為令眾人懼怕的對象，也呈現出香港人在九七移交前的集體恐慌；此片最後回到原有主題的爭議：究竟瘋是不瘋？回應了九七移交前的混亂及未知。

最後，總結這兩部電影，周星馳電影中的無厘頭元素一直存在，其手法跟著時代不同而改變並參雜情緒；其令人發笑但背後蘊含周想表達探討的社會議題。曾經令觀者認為的搞笑，其背後帶有悲觀的氛圍，與時事結合，呼應周的喜劇呈現手法不再只是讓觀者開心，而是以嘲弄的方式提供觀者更多參與批判討論的空間。

關鍵字：周星馳、喜劇電影、無厘頭、喜劇策略

# Toying with the Caper and the Uncanny: the Comic Devices in Stephen Chow's Films

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I try to focus on Stephen Chow's comic devices from two directions in his films *The Magnificent Scoundrel* and *Out of the Dark*. First of all, I revisit the history of Hong Kong comedy and start to bring up the significance of Chow's films and performing style. I argue that Chow tries to convey the ideas which respond to the social events in different periods of his films. I suggest that he deals with the issue of the 1997 handover in Hong Kong in his films. In addition, though being the hero in his films, Chow paradoxically subverts the idea of heroes, and *wulitou* tends to be his device to mock on the idea. As a result, *wulitou* would not be the main concern in his films but it builds up an atmosphere, chaotically discusses the central social topics.

First, I analyse the comic structure in *The Magnificent Scoundrel*. Chow uses physical gags and exaggerating facial expressions to perform the comic events in his early comic acting. Also, this film presents the anxiety that middle class would have and suggests the confusing mis-identity that the characters have. Chow's funny comic events help to dissolve the anxious feeling and also reflect the social atmosphere.

Second, I probe into Chow's unfamiliar figure in *Out of the Dark*. I argue that whilst being the ghost buster, Chow's character Leon and Chow's own image turn out to be the uncanny dread that reminds his viewer the upcoming handover which frightens most of the people in Hong Kong. By focusing more on the mental status and the inner side of human beings along with black humour, Chow changes his performing style and implants more ideas on humans into his films.

The purpose of my thesis is first to examine Chow's famous *wulitou* device to discuss how he builds his stardom and opens his era in Hong Kong comedy history and further concentrate my argument on Chow's performing style and his concern about social events. By examining the films I seek to suggest that Chow's films do not always seem merely playful and nonsense, but rather a more pessimistic and chaotic aura in his films which repeatedly explore the deeper inner side of humans and the social events.

Keywords: Stephen Chow, Comedy Films, *Wulitou*, Comic Devices

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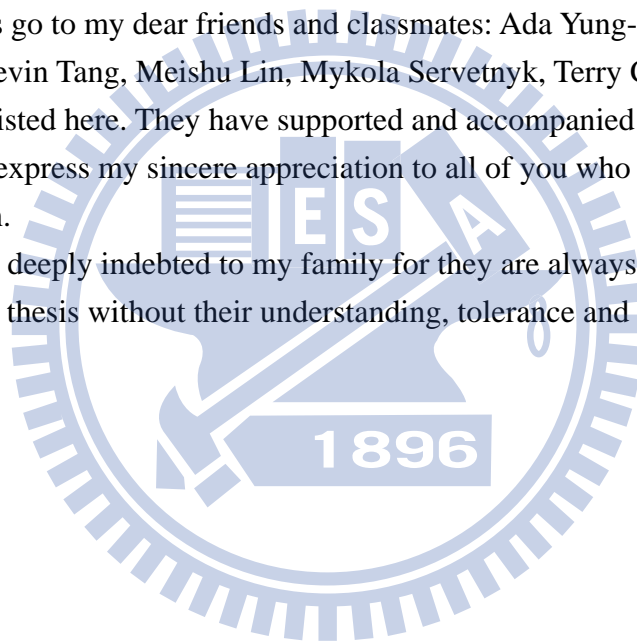
Writing thesis has been one of the most challenging experiences. However, I am really grateful that I always have my support during this time.

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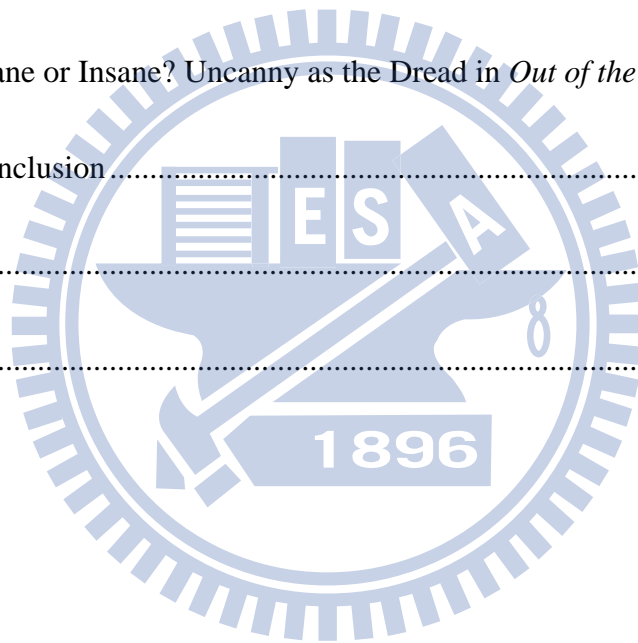
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## Toying with the Caper and the Uncanny: the Comic Devices in Stephen Chow's Films

### Chapter One: Introduction

Hong Kong cinema has been an influential and important film industry in Asia, especially in Chinese communities like China and Taiwan. When referring to Hong Kong films, one can easily point out that action film and comedy film are two major genres. Such stars like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan have remarkable works throughout the world. By means of magnificent martial art choreography, quick-paced camera movements, *mise-en-scène*, and other techniques, action film has become an achievement of Hong Kong cinema. In comparison, comedy film does not have that much achievement. Though Hong Kong comedy film has always been the most popular genre, it has not really been promoted successfully outside the realm of Chinese culture based countries.<sup>1</sup> Since the early twentieth century Hong Kong has begun to produce films that contain comic elements. Comedy films always take a big part in film production. In his article “Hong Kong Comedy Films Studies” (1997, my translation),<sup>2</sup> Yang Dejian points out that Hong Kong comedy has been influenced by multiple cultures due to its geographical location. Hong Kong Mandarin comedy originated from Shanghai comedy in the late 1930s. In the 1940s, Chinese Culture started to influence Hong Kong Mandarin comedy as Shanghai investors became involved with Hong Kong film industry with big investment and production. In contrast, Cantonese comedy at this time was filmed with low budget without clear themes and topics. It focused on the art of language more to make the audience laugh. In the beginning of the 1950s, Cantonese comedy was produced mainly for middle and lower class audiences, depicting the lives of their social status. Watching films reflecting their lives, lower class people found a way to escape from reality and make some fun of the difficult living situation. Moreover, in

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the language gaps that many non-Cantonese speaking viewers or non-Hong Kongers cannot fully understand the gags, which sometimes lead to the misunderstanding of the films.

<sup>2</sup> 楊德建。〈香港喜劇研究〉。《當代電影》：3(1997)：69-74。

(Yang, Dejian. “Hong Kong Comedy Films Studies” Contemporary Cinema. Beijing: Communication U of China. 3(1997):69-74. Print.)

the 1960s Cantonese comedy began to focus on the living condition, the reality and the lives in the city. The 1970s have been one important phase that Hong Kong comedy started to move forward to more mature production, and one of the major sub-genres, kung fu comedy, began to take its place. The city comedy remained popular and added some elements to depict the warmth of everyday lives. Yet after the 1980s, the horror comedy also became one big hit. As a Hong Kong critic, Lie Fu (列孚), pointed out in his article “Cinema in the 90’s” that “when the film market is declining, there will be ghosts on the screen. In the mid-1990s, the atmosphere of Hong Kong film market drops low. Horror films are presented continuously, even Stephen Chow participates in it” (qtd. in Lie 66, my translation).<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, when Hong Kong cinema proceeded into the 1990s, it is not easy for us not to notice Stephen Chow and his works.

Stephen Chow has been one of the most influential actors in the aspect of comedy in Chinese cinema. His films and charisma influence the young generation and has brought up an interesting sub-culture among Taiwanese people. For example, there are products named after Chow’s films and young people tend to talk with each other using Chow’s lines in the films.<sup>4</sup> How does Stephen Chow affect the sub-culture and why the young generation like to express themselves through Chow’s lines become my first interest. Though they do not necessarily come from himself, along with his performance, the lines are always impressive and easy to recite in the daily life. However, akin to some other comedians or genres, Stephen Chow and his films can sometimes be devalued due to their playfulness, and hence arouse very little research interest from academy. One reason is that ‘a fear of loss of respect’ as Matt Hills suggests in *Fan Cultures*:

<sup>3</sup> 列孚。〈90年代香港電影概述〉。《當代電影》：2(2002)：59-68。(Lie Fu. “Introduction to Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s” *Contemporary Cinema*. Beijing: Communication U of China, 2(2002): 59-68. Print. The original Chinese text is: 有不少人認為，每到電影市況低下，銀幕上就鬼影幢幢。香港電影的市場狀況的確有這種現象。90年代中段時間，港產片市道開始出現低迷，鬼片就接連出現，連周星馳也不例外。

<sup>4</sup> In the book *Stephen Chow* by Stephen Chow’s fans (周星馳的fan屎，《我愛周星馳》)，there is a chapter presenting different kinds of products designed based on Chow’s films, for instance, the t-shirt that has Chow’s famous lines on, and the meatballs that have shown in the film *The God of Cookery* (《食神》，1996).



Such respect . . . is an effect of the cultural system of value at work here. Respect is aligned with, and given to, the imagined subjectivity of the ‘good’ and rational academic who is expected to be detached and rational, even about his/her own investments in popular culture. Respect is not to be given lightly to those subjects who are ‘deficient’ or ‘defective’ and who deviate from the regulatory norms of academic writing or performance. (12)

Besides, when it comes to comedy study, scholars may not give credit to comic acting. When looking at comedies, normally the viewers pay attention to the plot, and the comic narrative to determine if they are successful, but neglect the comic acting of the comedians. Yet based on the box office and a group of fans, Chow can be seen as one of the successful actors/directors in Chinese cinema due to his comic acting. Steve Seidman mentions in *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*, “all of the films feature comedians who began their careers in other show business media” (2).<sup>5</sup> Starting his film career as a comedian from television show, Chow has spent some time developing his own characteristic comic style and is now well-known among Chinese people or even in Asia. His comic events do not necessarily relate to the real life, as some seem to be fantasised. We may take Jim Carrey as an example. Most of Carrey’s gags<sup>6</sup> or comic events come from the comic narrative with some exaggerating physical gags performed by Carrey himself. In comparison, Chow not only uses gags as Carrey does, but also adds some imaginative element to build the comic events. For example, a scene between Sing (played by Chow) and the Landlady in *Kung Fu Hustle*<sup>7</sup> can illustrate the use of special funny gags. In this scene

<sup>5</sup> Seidman, Steve. *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film*. UMI Research Press, 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990), in *Popular Film and Television Comedy*, explained the term of “non-linguistic comic action,” to show visual and physical action, and it came to mean “a pre-prepared piece of action” (51).

<sup>7</sup> In the scene which the Landlady finds out that Sing is still fooling around in the village, she starts chasing after him for giving him a lesson. Here we see a lot of use of special effect to show the tension how one is running and another is chasing. Indeed this animated sequence is not likely to happen in the real life. Yet it provides a funny moment to ease the uneasiness. Of course we would not assume that it only happens in Chow films. It is worth-mentioning that many Hong Kong films have the same characteristic, despite some of them would seem to lack depth.

the two characters are transformed into vehicles in the chase. Their legs become wheels and the characters themselves seem to have automatic transmissions that they can control the speed. This kind of special effect along with the comic narrative gives the spectators a sense of nonsense, but it creates Chow's well-known *wulitou* style. It makes him remarkable and easy to be recognised.

I will study Chow's films from two directions: first, I will discuss his film language in order to show that under some circumstances, film language does matter in a comedy film. For example, when it comes to telling a joke or acting funny, is there a better way to capture the event? If film comedy only focuses on the coherence, the integrity, the logic, and the psychological approach, how do the directors work it out together into a film? Therefore, the film language, and *mise-en-scène* might be one approach to achieve comic effects. Second, I will explore how Chow changes his acting style, and tries to deepen the meanings of his films. I would argue that Chow tries to convey the ideas which respond to the social issues in different periods. For instance, I would suggest that he deals with the issue of the 1997 handover in Hong Kong in his films. In addition, though being the hero in his films, Chow paradoxically subverts the idea of heroes, and *wulitou* seems to be his device to mock on the idea. As a result, *wulitou* is not only the device to create comic effect, but also the device to mock the phenomena caused by Hong Kong's transition. In this case, I will try to analyse two of Chow films, namely, *The Magnificent Scoundrel* (《情聖》, 1991), and *Out of the Dark* (《回魂夜》, 1995). These two films are directed by different directors, Lee Lik-chi (李力持) and Jeffrey Lau (劉鎮偉) in different periods of Chow. One of the reasons that I choose these two as my texts is because they can distinctly illustrate the contrast between Chow's comic devices in two different periods and at the same time they can reflect the social issues from two diverse dimensions: one focuses on the body language and middle class people more, and the other focuses on psychological ideology and lower class people.

In order to probe into how Chow builds his stardom, first I would like to re-examine the

idea of *wulitou*. Some critics point out that *wulitou* comes from Cantonese culture and it is merely an illogical expression. I would like to explore how it becomes Chow's comic device attracting Taiwanese audience. Similar to Hong Kong spectators, Taiwan's spectators may find an exit to unleash their anxiety in the uncertain political and economic situations from Chow's *wulitou* charisma.

Hong Kong director Lee Lik-chi (2003), who has also directed many Chow's films, comments on the origin of Chow's *wulitou* style in an interview:

Our comedies are different from the old-school comedies. We do not rely on the exaggerating facial expression and actions to make people laugh. The actors are rather serious most of the time, and the spectators look at us seriously. It is not the style then the actors come out and spectators just laugh at them. People do not know how to describe this kind of style and thus they call it *wulitou* (qtd. n. pag., my translation).<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, *wulitou* marks Stephen Chow a special comedian. Yet the idea still remains vague. Eric K. W. Yu considers this style as the idea "the logic of the absurd" that Jerry Palmer suggests: "intriguing incongruity is presented, which, no matter how ridiculous or illogical it may seem, could make perfect sense of in an albeit abnormal or insane way" (7). That is how we find the term *wulitou* being used most of the time. But, why do people laugh? Is it only because *wulitou* appears to disarrange the narrative or the viewers' logic while watching the film? I argue that Chow's *wulitou* always exists in his films, and how it is performed changes with time. In the beginning it is considered to be nonsense yet later on it is mixed with sentiments. The viewers feel funny at the first moment but then discover the serious feelings

<sup>8</sup> When being asked about how Chow and Lee work to attract fans, Lee explains the style of the films. The original Chinese texts is: 我們的喜劇跟以前不同，不靠誇張的表情和動作逗笑觀眾，演員大部分時間是嚴肅的，觀眾看得也很認真，不是演員一出來觀眾就笑個不停的那種。大家不知道怎樣形容這樣的喜劇風格，於是把它叫做無厘頭。

“無厘頭是怎樣煉成的？李力持細說周星馳”。大紀元時報，23 Apr, 2003. Web. 6 Jan, 2014。

<<http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/3/4/23/n303508.htm>>

“How does *wulitou* form its style? Lee Lik-chi Talking about Stephen Chow.” *Epoch Times*, 23 Apr, 2003. Web. 6 Jan, 2014.

in the film. The films present the rather pessimistic aura with Chow's ideas of social events. Whilst laughing at funny gags, lines, and sequences, the spectators see that Chow's characters struggle hard in each film to break the set rules in response to the social problems.

Chinese writer Ma Xiong-ying (馬雄鷹) divides Chow's films into four stages: the first phase is when he just started film acting but did not have many chances to perform. The second phase is when he started to act in comedies, trying to bring up the idea of *wulitou*. Many films produced in this period made a huge breakthrough in his career and started the sub-culture following him. The famous laugh and physical performances were added in the films. The third phase is when his *wulitou* style started to stand out and became his characteristic. He created the figure that is contradicted to modern moral ethics. *The Magnificent Scoundrel* (1991), the first film to be analysed in my thesis, was produced during this period, Chow's career peak. The fourth phase is when he started to participate in both producing and directing, and deepened the ideas of his films. The other film *Out of the Dark* (1995) that I would like to analyse in this thesis was produced during this period (qtd. in Ma, 172-73, my translation).<sup>9</sup> In regard to Chow's fourth phase, I would like to add one more characteristic: I observe that Chow tries to change his acting style and the elements in his films. For instance, his films directed by Jeffery Lau exemplify that Chow attempts to make some differences. Defamiliarisation is a novelty that he could add some deeper ideas in the films. Chow has built up his *wulitou* style and popularity during this period. In Chapter Two I will focus on *Out of the Dark* to explore more on Chow's defamiliarization and *wulitou* techniques. As he keeps changing his acting style, Chow establishes his own charisma and stardom.

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<sup>9</sup> 馬雄鷹。〈周星馳觀止〉。周星馳的 fan 屎。《我愛周星馳》。台北：商周，2005。171-80。Print.  
(Ma, Xiong-ying. "The Outlook of Stephen Chow." Ed. Stephen Chow's fans. Stephen Chow. Taipei: Business Weekly Publications, Inc, 2005. 171-8-. Print.

## Chapter Two: Money that Matters: Villain and the *Wulitou* device in *The Magnificent Scoundrel*

*The Magnificent Scoundrel* is a typical film of early Chow. The film is directed by Lee Lik-chi. This is the first film in which they worked together. Valentino (played by Stephen Chow) is a scoundrel who plays tricks to get money from others. One day he meets Kwan (played by Teresa Mo) who happens to be chased for debt by the moneylender in the street. Valentino then for no reason has to help Kwan pay the loan. At the same time, Fatt (played by Ng Ma) is also chased by the same moneylender. By a coincidence Fatt and Valentino choose the same house to disguise as the members in order to extort each other for money, when they finally find out that the moneylender is the same guy Tai-te (played by Roy Cheung), they decided to deceive Tai-te and get his money.

Although some critics might suggest that Chow has not yet brought his comic talent into full play because there are too many big stars in the film, and even though some Chow's fans do not know well about this film, this film still makes the viewers laugh out loud. One reason is because of its structured comic narrative. The other reason it makes us laugh is that it contains many comic events, either logical or illogical. Naturally, when referring to illogical comic narrative we think of Chow's noteworthy comic style: *wulitou*. With Lee Lik-chi, this film presents a typical *wulitou* style of Chow's early works. Although it only ranked the 17<sup>th</sup> in the box office in 1991, I propose that this film, along with the narrative, can be a representative work of Chow in his early career. More importantly, it reflects the anxiety of the 1997 handover. The film does not deal with the anxiety directly but makes fun of the stereotypes of mainlanders. Some episodes taking place in the middle and upper class revolve around mis-identities. The middle class people tend to immigrate to foreign countries in order to avoid the threat of Communist regime and identity crisis as of second citizens. In the film, the middle and upper class's immigration provides a good opportunity for the thieves to sneak into the house. Moreover, the scoundrels in this film also demonstrate the

idea of mis-identites (or fake identity). With the deception structure that I will discuss later in this chapter, the scoundrels as well try to “be” in the middle or upper class as their replacement. The sequences that Ng Ma pretends to be the host of the house can illustrate this idea of mis-identity (or fake identity) in pursuit of social and economic advance.

The opening sequence can offer the audience the first impression of the 1997 anxiety with mocking on the stereotypes of mainlanders. The sequence begins with the establishing shot which shows the Stanley Bay in Hong Kong panoramically. A bus with Western tourists arrives at the bay and whilst taking pictures of the scenery, the camera switches to the point of view from the sea. A man swims toward the beach, and then Stephen Chow shows up wearing the uniform of the public security of China. The tour guide shouts to the tourists to see the illegal immigrant who comes from mainland China. Next, Chow’s character Valentino starts to sell fake antiques to the tourists. Also, when two policemen come to stop them from selling stuff, Valentino funnily puts his head in the sand in order not to be seen by the police. This sequence can illustrate the stereotype that Hong Kong people have for the mainlanders.<sup>10</sup>

Before I probe into Chow’s comic style, I would first examine the comic structure of this film. It is an interesting piece of crime/caper comedy. Stuart Voytilla and Scott Petri point out the formula of crime/caper comedy, “the dominant arena in these films is crime, the crime comedies blend thrill with fun. The comedy often comes from smart-mouthed, underdog con artists and criminals, perpetrating outlandish deceptions’ and ‘have an increased importance on suspense and surprise” (Voytilla and Petri, 118). As to the audience expectations, it also serves the two wish-fulfillments: “first, to break the law and get away with it; second, to be the underdog and serve revenge or justice to a larger criminal force” (119). In *The Magnificent Scoundrel*, the main goal of the team is to fool Tai-te and get his

<sup>10</sup> Even though in this chapter I attempt to discuss the stereotypes of the mainlanders, there are still some interesting shots which suggest that Hong Kong people are no better than the mainlanders. For instance, the shots which the characters are trying to get a cab without any order and rules can imply that at the same time Hong Kongers are having stereotypes of mainlanders, they need to examine themselves as well. The stereotype will be replaced by deeper anxiety as the time approaches. As seen in Chapter 3.

money in revenge. What the viewers can notice is that, no matter what tricks they use, they are still doing something illegal. For instance, at the beginning Fatt listens to Tai-te and breaks into the fancy house to steal the antiques. Even though in the end they are just using the house to trick Tai-te back, the fact is they still break into someone else's house. In the end they do not get caught, but the screenplay is smart enough to get this fact back that though they take the money away from Tai-te, they still did something wrong. That is why the ending sequence is about them discussing and worrying about the evidence left in the house. Voytilla and Petri, in their discussion about what make the successful crime comedies, suggest that "the victim is a villain --- almost always a criminal of more devious proportions than our anti-hero . . . the mark must have an Achilles heel --- it could simply be greed that leads to the downfall" (119). Interestingly, in the film the villain Tai-te's Achilles heel is not only his greed but also his older brother (played by Yuen Wah). Throughout the film the spectators can indicate from many gags that his brother usually put Tai-te into disaster rather than helping him. For example, in the sequence that he just catches Kwan and Valentino and brings them to the office, Tai-te is demonstrating how Mishima Yukio<sup>11</sup> killed himself and Tai-te's older brother just opens the door suddenly that almost gets Tai-te to kill himself with the sword. In the next few minutes in the office the viewers learn that Tai-te is a cruel and crafty gangster. He uses various ways to force people to pay back the loan. The audience would assume that the whole gang must be cruel and evil as well. Astoundingly, Tai-te's older brother seems to infuse some "humanity" into the gang. The most impressive sequence of Tai-te's big brother being his Achilles heel is at the climax of the film when Tai-te finally fails and gets fooled. In this funny sequence, surprisingly Tai-te's big brother stands out to be the leading character. Normally we would expect the protagonist to be the shining star at the climax; in this case of course the spectators would anticipate that Chow brings us some remarkable acting. I am not suggesting that Chow did not do a good job acting in this

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<sup>11</sup> Mishima Yukio was considered to be one the most important author in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Japan. He committed the ritual suicide in 1970. Tai-te here is going to explain this to his entourage.

sequence but the narrative structure did give Tai-te's brother a chance to "show his best" to the audience. This sequence begins with the plan that Tai-te wants to buy a land from an orphanage and Valentino and his gangs set Tai-te up to get his money. The climax starts when Kwan shouts out that she successfully helps the gang. The camera follows Kwan with the frame which shows that Tai-te's brother is buying something from the vending machine behind her. The next shot brings them together looking at their watches at the same time in the frame. When Tai-te's brother turns around and sees Kwan, he asks with surprise what Kwan is doing there. Kwan looks scared and shouts out that the scheme has been discovered. Since Tai-te's brother also thinks that they are tricking someone, and he thinks that their plan is exposed. As a result he then runs and shouts out loud to inform Tai-te and his gang about this. At first Valentino pretends that he can cover for Tai-te and let him escape from it, but after Tai-te finds out he begins to catch Valentino and his crew. The most hilarious part would be after Valentino and his master got into a classroom when Tai-te is chasing after them. They do not want him to recognise them so they put on masks and squat to get out of the room with the kids. They fight for a while and Tai-te's brother sees this from outside that someone wearing a mask is beating Tai-te. He runs in and asks: "where is the pig head that hit my brother?" Valentino and master then point to a guy wearing the pig head mask. Here the audiences all know that this person is Tai-te, but his brother does not. He then beats Tai-te hard and kicks him out of the window. After he finishes, he asks them again where Tai-te is. Seeing how Tai-te gets beaten, with the funny frightened face Valentino answers that Tai-te has been kicked out by someone. Yu suggests the mental mechanism when seeing a funny sequence:

[W]e laugh at the blunders and infirmities of others, such as in the classic example of watching someone slip on a banana peel. Self-aggrandisement and sometimes self-righteousness are involved. When we see characters suffering from the "gotcha" tricks . . . we may laugh wickedly at the victims and admire the clever



ruses. And when we see that a prankster's malicious scheme fails and he or she is trapped, we may laugh out even louder, because what happens can be taken as poetic justice ("it serves him/her well"), as though we were entirely innocent of gloating over others. (5)

The spectators see it all that Tai-te is kicked out, and this is when laughter generates. Tai-te and his brother seem to get what they deserve in the end. Tai-te's brother wants to help Tai-te and keeps doing evil, as a result, they both end up in misery, especially Tai-te. In this scene not only the protagonist Valentino is leading the narrative, but also Tai-te's brother. This minor role thus vitalises the chasing sequence, bringing the slapstick-like sequence to its peak. Without his mistakes, this sequence would not be so impressive. With this sequence the film narrative surely organizes a distinct structure from some Hong Kong films which are sometimes criticised for fragmented structure. Then we may notice what construct this structure is its clear theme.

Deception is the theme of this film. According to Voytilla and Petri, deception is one of the tenets of comedy:

[C]omedy often works on several levels of reality or meaning. The verbal joke has a set-up that establishes one reality, and the punch line delivers the unexpected collision of a second level or alternative meaning of the reality. This form of **deception** is necessary to produce our payoff: laughter. We are led to believe one reality, but we realise we've been deceived when the alternative meaning is revealed . . . [t]his deception can work on a much larger scale in the comic story. A character is led to believe one level of reality, while another character, and the audience, is aware that this is all deception. (55-56)

If we examine *The Magnificent Scoundrel*, especially for Chinese viewers, there are three levels of deception in this film. Deception means the act of deceiving, or when people hide the truth, especially to get an advantage. Literally, the viewers get deceived by the film title

when they see the film for the first time. The Chinese title of the film is *Ching Sheng* (情聖), meaning a Casanova.<sup>12</sup> That is probably why Chow is named Ching Sing in Cantonese because it sounds like Casanova in Cantonese in the film as the viewers can see from the beginning when Valentino is going to answer a phone call. Whilst first seeing this, the viewers would wonder how Chow is going to perform some love tricks. Surprisingly, when the spectators get more absorbed by the interesting story, they find that it has nothing to do with its Chinese title. The title then becomes a special kind of “deception” for the audience. The second level of deception is between Chow and Ng Ma. Both of them disguise themselves to trick each other. At the beginning Valentino picks the house randomly and buys tickets for the concert so that the householders will not be at home then he can have the chance to steal valuable goods (interestingly enough, he still claims this to Kwan that because he uses tricks to get the goods, this still does not count as ‘stealing’). After Fatt accepts Tai-te’s offer, disguising as the owner of the house to fool the guest “Jacky” of the real householder to get money, he disguises himself as the house-owner and goes back to the house to prepare for Jacky to come. Meanwhile, Valentino and Kwan are leaving the house without successfully taking away anything. When Valentino first steps outside the house he sees a car coming. Being afraid of getting caught, Valentino leaves Kwan in the house and pretends that he is a passerby or a visitor to the house. Surprisingly, this act confirms what Fatt is expecting as he is waiting for Jacky to come. When they finally talk to each other, Valentino still does not know what happened but just follows what Fatt does and cheers back to him. The funny part of the sequence is when Fatt first opens his mouth and shouts out “hey” to Valentino; Valentino then becomes nervous and about to reveal his real identity. What is more hilarious is, Fatt then asks if Valentino has been here for a while, and Valentino answers that he has only been here for about half an hour. They then shook hands and greeted each other. Valentino’s facial expression is worth noticing. He looks surprised and

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<sup>12</sup> After the name of Italian author Giacomo Casanova, who was said to be a womaniser.

lost when Fatt approaches him anxiously. The viewers can observe that they are all nervous about playing who they are. That is why Ping has no idea what to do to greet Valentino/Jacky. Furthermore, when they are about to enter the house, we see that Valentino wipes his sweat away, indicating he is relieved that the unexpected plan works. The third level of deception is that after they both find out that they are not who they think each other is, they then try to trick Tai-te to get his money and give him a lesson. The whole plan then turns into another deception for Tai-te.

As we go deeper to the structure of the story, we find it useful of what Voytilla and Petri bring up the idea of deception and revelations:

The more deceptions you place in your story, the more chances that the deceptions will be revealed. And the more people who become aware of the deception, the greater the chance of masks falling. This builds suspense in your comedy, because the audience is anticipating that moment of revelation when the house of cards will fall. Often we cut to the comic chase as the hero desperately tries to maintain the deception as long as possible, or flee discovery, or race to claim what is most important. (Voytilla and Petri, 58)

There are at least three levels of deceptions in this film. What we can find out is that the audience can always know the characters' plans. Although it may not bring many surprises to the viewers when they find out what the characters' plans are, it brings extra expectations to the revelation. It is stimulating that the revelations are usually unpredictable in this film. The revelation between Valentino and Fatt is a good example. The scene can also explain the idea of the *wulitou* style. Both of them reveal to each other that they are not who they assume they should be, then they determine to find out who they are. Fatt insists that Valentino should reveal his real name to him. Valentino then walks about the house in a funny speed (that is, he can move quickly from here to there but the spectators cannot see how he does it),

and at the same time, says some lines as if he is performing *wuxia* (武俠)<sup>13</sup> here. He even says lines like “[i]n this awful (*jianghu*) world, I will not leave my name easily” in order to show the danger of his profession as a scoundrel. The next conversation tends to be *wulitou* as well:

“If so leave your head then!”

“I am an orphan, the only thing that accompanies all my life, is this head.”

“You want to take it away? I think it is not that easy.”<sup>14</sup>

We can notice that when Chow claims that it is impossible to take his head away, his facial expression is rather serious yet funny. Besides, he uses gestures to present his head to Fatt. Next Fatt goes on: “You forced me to do so. I want to use your blood to let the sea become red.” By this time Valentino magically walks around the balcony outside instead of the living room. Fatt here also looks surprised. Then Valentino continues:

“I am like a boat in the sea; I will not care about life.”

“So...try my Tai-chi.”<sup>15</sup>

When Fatt decides to use Tai-chi to force Valentino to reveal his identity, we can see Valentino suddenly rushes back at the back of Fatt, preparing to attack Fatt. Then they both play Tai-chi in a funny way in order to ask about each other’s names. The *wulitou* style is thus presented to the spectators since there is no need of speaking like the *wuxia* genre and play Tai-chi at the same time. Plus, the conversation is totally pointless. It soothes the tension between the two scoundrels and foreshadows the upcoming event. The revelation brings another surprise that Valentino and Apple were friends before, and thus connects them together as a team.

<sup>13</sup> This term means “the martial hero.”

<sup>14</sup> 阿發：「你到底是誰？」

程勝：「江湖險惡，我從來不輕易留下姓名。」

阿發：「你既然不留下姓名，那你留下人頭吧！」

程勝：「我一生孤獨，唯一相依為命的，就只有這個人頭。你想拿去它，我想不是易事。」

<sup>15</sup> 程勝：「我一生漂泊，仿如汪洋裡的一葉孤舟，早已將生死置諸度外。」

阿發：「好，既然這樣，你就領教我無堅不摧，殺人於無形的太極拳吧！」

After they reveal themselves, they decide to help each other with moneylenders. Before Tai-te shows up in the house to listen to their plans, they do not know that Tai-te is their creditor. Not until Tai-te shows up have they counterplotted Tai-te's plan. The viewers certainly can tell from the narrative that their creditor is the same guy. It builds the tension and suspense. This is one of the explosive revelations of the narrative. Yet it is still comical to see all of them shocked (including Tai-te himself) and change the plan. At first Valentino shows full confidence that he is well-prepared to fool Tai-te, but right after he sees Tai-te he turns scared. When he turns his head, the camera brings us Tai-te's brother with full shot showing that the house is full of Tai-te's gang. With a tracking shot from the left to the right, Fatt introduces Tai-te to "Jacky." In this knee-up shot we can see that Valentino turns his head away and pretends that he is not paying attention and has nothing to do with this. The next medium shot clearly shows Valentino's seemingly surprised facial expression. Within these two shots Chow performs himself from a confident scoundrel to the image of a dumb blockhead. (This method is used not only once in this film; Chow uses this in the sequence in which Apple and he go to the fancy restaurant and when someone tries to pursue Apple, Valentino pretends to be a mental retard in order to scare him away. This facial expression is identical in his early acting. The sudden change makes the audiences burst out laughing because of the obvious contrast of two distinct expressions.) In this sequence that Fatt and Valentino realise that Tai-te is their moneylender, Valentino then tells Tai-te that Apple is Jacky, the one they are going to fool. After Apple explains her plan to Tai-te (the plan is actually to fool Tai-te), Tai-te refuses her plan and knocks her out. Next, he assigns Valentino to be Jacky to follow the scheme. In this sequence, because everyone is shocked, the conspiracy suddenly seems complicated to all of them, and also to the audience. The narrative successfully confuses the audience of the plan. But in the end the plan is still the same, it is just Tai-te who comes into the trap himself. At one moment the plan seems to be changed, but in the end it is just a joke that the viewers feel confused for a while but nothing

has changed. Certainly the spectators know that it is no problem for Valentino to disguise as Jacky because he has always been a scoundrel as the film title suggests.

I would examine another sequence to illustrate the idea of deception and Valentino being a scoundrel to discuss Chow's acting. The sequence begins when Valentino tries to get a cab in the street. This is the first time that Kwan appears on screen. Knowing that many people are already competing for the taxi, Valentino disguises himself as blind. In a point-of-view shot from inside the car, Kwan's car slowly approaches Valentino. Kwan appears on screen in a close-up shot, proposing that she can give him a lift. The camera switches back to a point-of-view shot of Kwan looking at him. A close-up shot of the back of the car driving away suggesting Valentino accepts the proposal. Next, a series of two-shots presenting the two chatting is shown. In these shots the camera constantly switches from Valentino's side to Kwan's side. It suggests that because they are both thinking about something deceitful, the camera thus moves constantly to show: 1. their fast thinking (because they are going to trick each other;) 2. the tension between them (due to the reason they want to trick each other.) In the car Kwan tries to steal Valentino's money from his pocket but Valentino uses tricks to stop her. The funny part of the sequence is when Kwan decides to trick out of his money. She deliberately fakes an accident because she thinks Valentino cannot see. Owing to the reason, Valentino's next line tends to be really hilarious after Kwan drives the car on the pavement. He shouts out "what happened?!" and Kwan answers that she hits someone. The line seems to be funny because the spectators know that actually Valentino can see. Therefore, shouting out "what happened?!" then has two reasons that make us laugh: 1. Valentino reflects really fast. Since he pretends that he cannot see, of course he has to pretend that he does not know what happened. 2. Since Valentino can really see, this "what happened?!" then implies that he cannot get what Kwan is doing because he has been paying attention to Kwan. After this line Kwan says in an exaggerating way she hits someone. The following is a series of Kwan playing different roles according to what

Valentino says to make him believe that there is really an accident. It is worth mentioning here that Kwan plays the role of the public security of China. She starts with rude words and attitudes to threaten Valentino to pay the money. This role play reveals the stereotype of the mainlanders before the handover, which mocks on the uncivilised image of the mainlander whom Hong Kong people would be afraid to live with, let alone becoming a part of them.<sup>16</sup>

However, what makes the viewers laugh in this gag should be the innocence and ignorance of Kwan and Valentino's prank. The viewers see that in every Valentino's request Kwan looks serious and does her best to play the roles. Kwan's foolish acts make the audience laugh. But at the same time, both the spectators and Valentino himself know that Kwan is not really a bad person. That is why in the following sequence when Valentino sees her being threatened by the moneylender, he tries to help her. After watching this sequence the viewers would know that Valentino is not really a bad person either. The spectators laugh at Kwan's dumbness and mutter that Valentino should not make a fool of Kwan, but will do so by the time getting to know how the film wants to introduce these two characters to the viewers. I find it interesting how the narrative introduces every character in this film. There is usually the deception and then the revelation to show the true identities and personalities. The audience get to know both of them mean no harm and we somewhat feel warm when Valentino stands up for Kwan. This leads us to Yu's theory of comic style in his analysis of Chow:

[W]hen seeing an inept and unfortunate protagonist encountering a series of big trouble, we are worried about his or her fate (hence tension is built up); when the threat is suddenly averted or the problem solved, we feel immediately relieved...I shall call this "sympathetic comic relief." The joy so experienced is evidently altruistic and sounder morally. (6)

This idea provides a deeper understanding of comic relief. We grasp the reason why we

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<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, some film clips show that this part is edited and cut. This can also explain the issue implying the 1997 handover and anxiety was censored and cut.

would laugh at some certain gags. In this sequence the viewers do not necessarily laugh at Kwan's stupidity. Rather, the generated laughter is on the interaction between Valentino and Kwan, and Kwan's innocence. We are worried if Kwan would be penetrated by Valentino, and he might turn to fool her. Surprisingly, right after Valentino finds out that Kwan actually does not mean any harm, he just walks away (but of course before this he does try to play tricks on her to get some money but in vain). The first sequence that these two characters meet allows the audience to know that Valentino and Kwan are in fact not really bad people. Hence, we expect more about what the story would be like next. In addition, in this part, the camera switches constantly again when the two are talking. Many medium two-shots are used to show the fast-paced deceiving process. One thing worth mentioning is the use of these fragmented cuts in the sequence to present the idea of two people having a conversation. Since the spectators may want to know who is talking currently, the camera moves so frequently with some following shots. I argue that the cuts are too niggling. Since there are just two people talking, using this way to present the gag will distract the focus of the viewers.

Nonetheless, constant camera movement can still help film comedy to build its comic event. The sequence that Valentino and Kwan disguise as mechanics can illustrate this idea. Valentino decides to show Kwan how to trick people to get money. They arrive at a house which they pick as the target. Before going inside Valentino stands at the porch and explains to Kwan that how to start is the most difficult in this job. When Valentino shows his confidence, and asks Kwan to ring the doorbell, the owner of the house just opens the door and hurries them in. Valentino then says there is some problem with the gas supply, pretending that he is going to fix it. Meanwhile, Kwan stays in the living room and sees that the sleeping hostess is holding a knife in her hand and seems very dangerous. Kwan then tries to take the knife from the hostess but at the same time the hostess falls on the table. Valentino comes outside of the kitchen and sees what is happening. He thinks Kwan has



killed the woman. The following accident is when Kwan accidentally knocked off the man and Valentino thinks that she kills the man, too. There is the slapstick between Valentino and Kwan until the hostess and the host wake up and the sequence comes to an end as they do not get anything.

In this sequence the camera movement is fast. The camera switches frequently when it wants to capture the response of everyone in this sequence. This resembles the action films, but the purpose is different. The action films do so in order to show the fast pace of a fighting sequence. In this sequence, all of a sudden many events happen at the same time, and because it is an intrusion, Valentino and Kwan are under pressure and the situation is thus tense. Therefore, the camera needs to switch more often to bring out the tension here. Furthermore, the constant camera movement not only helps build up the tension, it also allows the audience to clearly see what emotions the characters are trying to convey. As to Chow's acting, the viewers can also notice that Chow uses a rather exaggerating facial expressions and performance. Sometimes he would freeze up and the viewers can see that he tries to figure out what is going on in the house but at the same time he himself finds it ridiculous.

Chow started developing his individualised comic style in the early 1990s. Therefore some comic devices that he uses in the early period can be indicated. For example, in the pre-title sequence, Chow appeared on the scene with a typical image of a bumpkin figure. Yu mentions about this image that “the bumpkin figure...already reveals a more innocent side of Chow's comic persona not incapable of sympathy and other delicate emotions” (2). Dressing like a mainlander swimming to Hong Kong, Valentino pretends to look shy and tries to sell some fake antiques to the tourists. At first the spectators are deceived by his bumpkin figure because his early image prior to this film was mainly similar to this.<sup>17</sup> Not until he tells

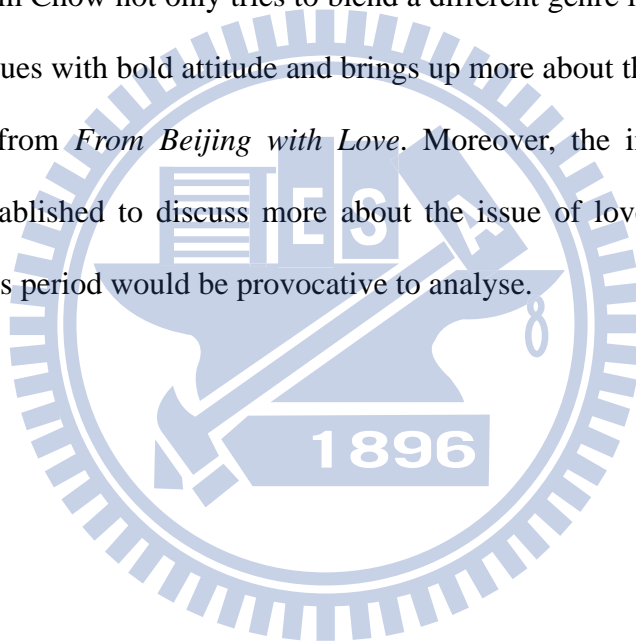
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<sup>17</sup> For example, in *All for the Winner* (《賭聖》, 1990) or *God of Gamblers 2* (《賭俠》, 1990), he has the image of a bumpkin that comes from mainland China. Of course, to emphasise on this image the story put effort to develop this image with many gags and incidents.

another man it is tricks he uses to make money have we realised that he is a scoundrel and he is smart. The bumpkin figure is subverted because the character is not innocent anymore. Yet it does not mean that Valentino is a villain due to his so-called profession. Valentino shows his sympathy on Kwan; for instance, he helps her with her trouble without any specific reason. Even though this is just a good deed that probably anyone would do, the positive figure of Valentino is thus built. Besides, there is another idea that holds my attention. This film came out in 1991, which was 23 years ago from now. The film can be funny due to its seemingly outdated style. The viewers may feel distanced from the time in the film. That is another reason that generates laughter watching comedies. The absurdity stemmed from time difference can also make people laugh. The audiences laugh at the characters because the films are outdated and outmoded. This can also be explained with the “superiority theory” mentioned by Yu. Though the theory originally explains why we laugh at people’s misfortune or mistakes, when “self-aggrandisement and sometimes self-righteousness are involved” (Yu, 5), the feelings for outdated people fits the theory as well.

However, there are some delicate differences even between the early and later bumpkin figures. In this film Chow often tends to exaggerate his facial expressions, especially when he tries to look dumb when there is a crisis. For instance, he tries to look retarded when Apple is harassed by a guy; or, he tries to look innocent when Tai-te is negotiating with the fake principal disguised by Master to propose to Master to accept Tai-te’s offer. This kind of acting even in *Love on Delivery* (《破壞之王》, 1994), in which the protagonist Ho-Kam Ang also shows the poor bumpkin figure that tries to fight against the evil power and win the beauty’s heart. In this film Chow uses the costume to aid his acting: the hat, the flat clothes, along with the dull facial expressions mold into the identical early bumpkin image. In the early period of his acting, this image often appeared to be his major representation. It also forms the classic image for people to recognise. I do not suggest that this is the only image he creates in his early period; he has built some other images such as the cunning tricky

expert in *Tricky Brains* (《整蠱專家》, 1991), or the honest police officer in *Fight Back to School* (《逃學威龍》, 1991), or even the well-known scholar in *Flirting Scholar* (《唐伯虎點秋香》, 1993) and the funny judge in *Hail the Judge* (《九品芝麻官之白面包青天》, 1994). Before the second period which starts with *From Beijing with Love* (《國產零零漆》, 1994), Chow's works basically give the audience the merry, playful impression. Within this period Chow puts much effort on flourishing his career and building his own characteristics for viewers to remember him; yet when he starts to focus more on film production, his performance changes as well. *Out of the Dark* stands out and becomes my next analysis because in this film Chow not only tries to blend a different genre into his film but also deals with the social issues with bold attitude and brings up more about the inner side of humans, a feature deriving from *From Beijing with Love*. Moreover, the importance of the female protagonist is established to discuss more about the issue of love. As a result, his comic devices during this period would be provocative to analyse.



### Chapter Three: Sane or Insane? Uncanny as the Dread in *Out of the Dark*

In this chapter I would like to focus especially on *Out of the Dark*, with Chow's attempt to change his comic style. The defamiliarisation of Chow allows Chow and the director Jeffrey Lau (劉鎮偉) to develop Chow's new device. Furthermore, by creating Chow as the uncanny dread figure with the horror sub-genre, the style distinguishes this film from Chow's other works, for instance, *Tricky Brains*, *The Magnificent Scoundrel*, and *Love on Delivery* which I have mentioned in the previous chapter. This film not only presents Chow's performance and image as rather unfamiliar to the spectators who might be expecting to see his comic style and the usual interpretation of *wulitou*, but also subverts the central idea that a horror usually focuses on. It is the time that Chow begins to add delicate feelings and more seriousness to his style. According to Taiwanese film critic Wen Tien-Hsiang (聞天祥) in *Stephen Chow* (《我愛周星馳》): It is the belief that gives the film its meaning, just like the latter Chow films. He also notes that this film is a fusion of horror and comedy, the contradictory genres; belief and craziness are two major topics (qtd. in Wen 254, my translation).<sup>18</sup>

This film will render the spectators ask the question again about: "is that really Stephen Chow?" It is the only Chow film so far that deals directly with the two genres: horror and comedy. Of course Chow has been in the similar genre before, dealing with the existence of the spirits. *Look Out, Officer!* (《師兄撞鬼》, 1990), for example, also deals with the topic of the spirits. But it does not question the real existence of the ghosts or spirits. Rather, it assumes that the idea of the spirits is already accepted. Yet *Out of the Dark* does not focus on the ghost itself. Rather, it deals with the idea between sanity and insanity, along with the central idea of belief, and the discussion of the true existence of ghosts or even, Chow's image and the character are what really scare people in the end. It is surprising that Chow's personal

<sup>18</sup> The Chinese original text is: 如果說，恐怖片和喜劇片是本片類型上的衝突與融合；信任 (Belief) 和瘋狂 (Craziness) ，則是主題上的兩大元素。

style appears to be a bit different from what he used to be. Perhaps it is just because of the imitation of *Leon: The Professional* (終極追殺令, 1994).<sup>19</sup> The appearance of Chow and the lonely figure are the same as the protagonist Leon in *Leon*. Also, Leon (played by Chow) has only one friend Kwan just as Leon in *Leon* only has Mathilda as the only friend. Both of Leons have plants to take care of, and both films have the idea of revenge. The real motivation of imitating *Leon* is not clear.<sup>20</sup> Yet, it is the first time that Chow parodies a role so obviously. It is said that *Out of the Dark* is not so popular or highly-accepted among filmgoers. After all, trying to make a breakthrough and at the same time catching the spectators' attention is not an easy job. From the perspective of the filmgoers, they want to see funny, bright, relaxing comic events and Chow's performance. Yet, this film presents a rather opposite way to Chow's previous films. Furthermore, the way Chow adds more emotional events into this film is also another issue. I propose that it is the director Jeffrey Lau that makes this film similar to *The Chinese Odyssey Part One* (西遊記第壹百零壹回之月光寶盒, 1995) and *The Chinese Odyssey Part Two* (西遊記大結局之仙履奇緣, 1995).<sup>21</sup> These three films' themes are about love and in the end we see that the results are sad. However, how Chow tries to express the emotion and at the same time to perform the comic events is the topic that I am most concerned about. This film gives us the familiar and also unfamiliar feelings about Chow all at once. I would like to argue that by making himself as the uncanny dread in this film, and using black humour as the technique to dissolve the horror aura, Chow reaches his attempt at ameliorating his performing style, and thus brings up the idea of the anxiety of Hong Kong before 1997.

*Out of the Dark* is directed by Jeffery Lau. By the time he had also directed *The Chinese Odyssey Part One* and *Part Two* (1995) with Chow. In *Out of the Dark*, due to an accident,

<sup>19</sup> This film is directed by Luc Besson. Jean Reno plays the role of Leon, who is a lonely hitman. Mathilda (played by Natalie Portman) begs Leon to help her take revenge for her brother. Interestingly, Mathilda's family is killed by the DEA agent Stansfield (played by Gary Oldman) who happens to be hunting Leon as well. In the end Leon sacrifices himself and dies with Stansfield to save Mathilda's life.

<sup>20</sup> It can be understood that this is a device Chow makes an attempt to internationalise his films.

<sup>21</sup> Also directed by Jeffery Lau and starred Stephen Chow.

the public housing is said to be haunted by old Mrs. Lee's ghost. Rumour has it that her son and daughter-in-law killed her; therefore, on the seventh day after her death, her ghost will be back for revenge. Leon (played by Chow) happens to be at the place and successfully scares the ghost away by shouting at it but unfortunately when Leon tries to negotiate with the ghost to let go, they are interrupted and the ghost runs away. Resident Kwan (played by Karen Mok) then falls for Leon because of his talent and bravery. But unfortunately Leon is considered insane and is sent back to the asylum. Kwan insists on visiting him and they both go back to the public housing because Leon claims that it is still haunted. Meanwhile, the captain of security Mr. Lo (played by Paul Lo) hears from old Mrs. Lee's ghost that her son and daughter-in-law killed her. However, this conversation gets overheard by Mr. Lee. The Lees then decide to kill all those who know the secret. Just when they are forcing Mr. Lo and Ming (a dooper who fools around the public housing and inexplicably gets involved) to jump from the rooftop, Leon and Kwan arrive on time. After Leon accidentally kills Mr. Lee, Mrs. Lee threatens to commit suicide to take revenge on the seventh day following her and her husband's death and finally she dies. Then the security team and Kwan follow Leon to learn how to fight with spirits. On the seventh day after the Lees' death, the ghosts return and the crew try to defeat them by all means. In the end Leon sacrifices himself to save the rests.

Before I probe into Chow's style in the film, I would like to start with examining the pre-title sequence. It starts with the traditional Chinese funeral custom with two papier-maché dolls/servants, the altar of the dead in the middle and lighted candles. The blue-toned picture indicates a gloomy atmosphere as the first impression of the film. It also triggers the Chinese spectators the unwanted confrontation with the topic of death and funeral, and fear. Next, the name of the film shown in black and white appears on the screen. The music sounds uncomfortably weird as well. The camera switches back to the first scene of the altar, with a brighter background. The actors' names are shown on the screen. Stephen Chow's name appears vertically in white with a close-up of the papier-maché doll, making

the spooky mood even stronger. The following shots consist of close-ups of the altar including the candles, the food served to the dead and the tablet which supposedly has the name of the dead inscribed but turns out to be the name of the film. The location of the film then is shown on the screen: a tall big public housing at night time with many windows which cannot even fit in the low-angle frame gives the spectators a bizarre feeling of the opening sequence. This sequence uses the taboo of touching the inauspicious topic of death to generate the uncanny feeling in the audience, especially Chinese spectators. The viewers would sense that it attempts to build the dreaded aura to indicate that this is a horror film. Moreover, the film borrows many elements from the old Hong Kong horror films. Many funny gags in this film are similar to the director Jeffrey Lau's old work *Operation Pink Squad 2* (《猛鬼大廈》, 1989), which is also a combination of horror and comedy genres. What is different is that in *Operation Pink Squad 2*, the crew performs a serious though funny folk exorcism. However, as the leading ghost buster in the crew, though his methods and mental status are questioned, Chow performs a rather different, or *wulitou* way of catching the ghosts. Unlike the folk style, using bells, spells, or amulets, Leon (played by Chow) simply asks his comrades to look "shiny and energetic" and provides a theory of what ghosts really are and how they affect the brain and nerves. Also, when the guards ask him how to actually catch the ghosts, he says they should "use the clear fling film paper and use chocolate to hit the ghost" and gives the reasons on both scientific and folk aspects. He explains that the fling paper can catch the ghosts and make them disappear, whilst there is milk added in chocolate, and ghosts are afraid of cows because in Chinese folklores oxen are Yama's guards. We learn that Leon is not a traditional ghost buster and this brings the idea that we should not be superstitious and thus the idea seeks to challenge the folk conventions. Nevertheless, even though the film comprises sequences to make it scary, the funny comic events deconstruct the uncanny aura and retain the Chow style as a comedy. Paul Wells points out in his research on horror genre that:

Stress was placed on the importance of humour in relation to scare effects, and was clearly a strong determining factor in the perception of the genre as “entertaining”...Comedy was also perceived as a clear mitigating factor in the acceptance of extreme scare effects and the potential levels of brutality. Horror texts were more often seen in the light of black humour or the “grotesque.” (28)

Using comic devices to deconstruct the scare effects is one strategy in this film. Being the combination of horror and comedy genre, it is obvious to detect some elements of black comedy. Whilst exploring further on the structure of this film, we can employ Voytilla and Petri’s theory of black comedy. Voytilla and Petri’s point out that “[b]lack comedy uses humour as propaganda. It channels anger into a drive for social change... Humour points out the unfairness or stupidity inherent in the original, unacceptable situation” (164). This responds to Chow’s being a novel ghost buster. His methods of catching ghosts not only present his *wulitou* style but also indicate that he wants to subvert the cliché with people being chased and haunted by the ghost and thus being afraid of it. Within the sequence that Leon (played by Chow) is chasing Wing, who is possessed by his grandmother old Mrs. Lee’s ghost. The ghost is scared of Leon and gets trapped in a corner. The ghost tries to look out from a hole on the door carefully, and sees Leon’s eye peeking back. Next, Leon catches Wing and forces old Mrs. Lee’s ghost to call back home and apologise for being scary. After scaring away again her daughter-in-law, Leon then scolds her for speaking in a disgusting way only because she is a ghost. Old Mrs. Lee complains that after all she is a ghost and Leon has gone too far. Leon replies, “so what? Who do you think you are?” In this sequence, the original idea of being afraid of ghosts is totally subverted. The ghost is the one that does not have any privilege and is threatened and scolded by a human. Furthermore, in this phase Leon cannot solve the problem that old Mrs. Lee’s ghost is still haunting the public housing. The ideas of the dead taking revenge and death keep returning to the viewers’ minds. As Voytilla and Petri put it:



In black comedy, the central conflict strives for institutional change. Something is wrong with the system and a Herculean effort is required to fix it. The situation may be unfixable and the hero will most likely fail, but that failure will bring enlightenment, either to those who have been left behind or to the viewer. The hero may not be aware that he is fighting or what he is fighting for...By exaggerating a story to its most ridiculous possible conclusion, black comedy reveals the targeted system absurd. (164-65)

Using horror as a sub-genre to construct the uncanny feeling is the device to challenge the existing superstition of the dead returning for revenge. Moreover, we are not sure if Leon, as the hero, is really crazy. Thus what Leon wants to fight for and how he stands on his ground are two intriguing points. If the film attempts to change the ideas of the return of the dead, what do the ghosts mean in the end?

To deal with Leon/Chow being insane in the film, I would refer to the elements of black comedy. Voytilla and Petri again indicate that “[s]ince the hero will be charismatic and passionate in crossing threshold and justifying his or her motivation, the audience will accept their logic. No matter how many people around them tell them they are crazy, the hero will stick to their convictions until the bitter end” (166). It exemplifies the main idea of the film. To get to the bottom of this, the fact that matters is that Leon believes everything about to happen be real. He asks the crew to believe what he believes is real, yet he never asks people to believe that he is not crazy. In this case the audience may not know why Leon comes to this public housing, and why he gets himself and his crew involved.

Here I would like to stress the issue of getting every irrelevant person involved. The public housing as the setting is one interesting point. First of all, this place is haunted, or more specifically, it was not haunted for a long time because according to the narrative it becomes haunted after the Lees’ deaths. It is just the “destination” and also homes for the ghosts to come back and take revenge. Second, as mentioned before, Leon the ghost buster

does not live here himself and the spectators may not know why he shows up here and tries to take care of old Mrs. Lee's ghost. Third, it seems that the public housing is as well not any of the security guards' homes. The only character who has the most connection with the public housing is Kwan. But the viewers can indicate in the opening sequence that she does not feel at home, either. Therefore, the place turns out to be an uncanny locale because no one is actually responsible for this yet the crew suffers from failure, complete shock, and even death. The idea of home leads us to Freud's concept of uncanny: "[t]he German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning 'familiar,' 'native,' 'belonging to the home'; [w]e are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar" (2). Though Freud suggests that the uncanny is related to the castration anxiety, giving the example of "The Sand-Man,"<sup>22</sup> the meanings of unhomey and unfamiliar tend to match the public housing. The public housing is too big as we know from many scenes to fit in the camera frame which implies there are many residents. Yet, despite the time that the Lees die that the residents come outside of their doors to gossip, in the film we do not see any occasion that the resident care about anything happens after. This weird situation gives bitterer sense to the lonely ghost-fighting crew. Besides, the three phases of the return of the dead as the repressed make people scared. The first phase is the return of old Mrs. Lee's ghost, and her son and daughter-in-law try to hide the secret why she dies. The second phase is the return of the dead Mr. Lee and his wife. The final phase is the return of Leon, which mixes and subverts the idea of the fear of revenge and actually makes Leon, and thus Chow, his image and style the uncanny dread.

Since *From Beijing with Love*, which he participated in directing and writing the

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<sup>22</sup> One story from E.T.W. Hoffman's "The Night-pieces," published in 1817. In this story, young Nathanael is afraid of the image of the sand-man, which has been haunting him from his childhood. The sand-man (in fact is his father's friend Coppelius) threatens to dig his eyes out after one accident one night. After he goes to college, he buys a telescope from the dealer Coppola and he falls for an automaton Olympia made by his professor Spalanzani. In a fight which the professor and his friend (Coppola, who Nathanael claims to be like Coppelius) tear the automaton doll apart. Coppola reveals his true identity as Coppelius. Nathanael goes mad after this scene. After recovering from his illness, Nathanael gets engaged with his girlfriend Clara. On the way to the tower to see their house, Nathanael uses the telescope and goes mad again. After trying to hurl Clara from the tower, Nathanael leaps down from it.

screenplay, Chow distinctly has tried to focus more on the mental and emotional narratives and hence has moderated his physical performance and acting. We see many exaggerating physical gags and facial expressions. Instead, the comic events and structures tend to be more compact and developed. In *Out of the Dark*, we can notice first that Chow's appearance somehow changes. I propose that the imitation of the protagonist Leon from *Léon*: already makes the audience feel absurd because the viewers are confused by the familiar figure of Leon from *Léon*, yet they might be expecting the familiar funny figure of Chow. This style is the first time that Chow copies a film character. In addition, most of the time in the film Chow is wearing his sun-glasses which hide his eyes from us. There are two specific times that he takes off the sun-glasses. One is when he is accidentally injured during the ghost-hunting lecture and is sent to the hospital, the other is when the Lees' ghosts return for revenge, and in a scene that he finds out that Mr. Lee's ghost is still around, he then takes the shades off and starts to show his eyes. This scene happens only at about 30 minutes before the film ends. Unlike his past images which would more or less rely on facial expressions to build the comic atmosphere, Chow does not seem to employ the idea here. What we see is one real dead-pan figure which tries to bring about the audience's fear, the fear of Stephen Chow not being Stephen Chow anymore. Perhaps we can also understand this device as projecting the fear of 1997<sup>23</sup> for Hong Kong people because what they used to see might disappear, and this responds to their anxiety and uncertainty when 1997 was approaching. This film had the worst box office compared with other three films he made that year in 1995. I argue in some ways this record shows that not only Chow and the director Lau try to go with the trend, making some horror films to reveal the decline of Hong Kong film market as explained by Lie Fu that "when the film market is declining, there will be ghosts on the screen. Indeed in the mid-1990s, the atmosphere of Hong Kong film market drops low. Horror films are presented continuously, even Stephen Chow participates in it" (qtd. in Lie

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<sup>23</sup> Hong Kong's sovereignty transferred from the United Kingdom to China on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1997 after 155 years of colonization.

66, my translation),<sup>24</sup> but also that Chow's attempt at changing his style improved because the viewers could not recognize him. As a result, the box office failure makes Chow an example of being the uncanny dread. Besides, around the same time there were also the release of *A Chinese Odyssey Part One: Pandora's Box*, and *A Chinese Odyssey Part Two: Cinderella*, both of these two did not have successful box office, either. Thus the release of *Out of the Dark* may be reckoned that Chow is coming back with some weird film to haunt his spectators.

I would like to examine another sequence to suggest that Chow is the uncanny dread in this film. The last 30 minutes of the film can be regarded as the climax. During this time the crew starts fighting the ghosts seriously. After Mrs. Lee's ghost is caught by Leon, Mr. Lee's ghost possesses one of the guards and tries to kill the rest of the crew. When the crew is trapped on the rooftop and has nowhere to go, Leon asks for some newspaper and folds it into paper hats to put on their heads and fly. This idea has been shown in the previous part in the film but no one believes him. By the time they have no choice, everyone puts on the hats and flies. Unbelievably, they all start to fly. The viewers may notice how serious Chow's facial expressions are in this sequence. Even if he feels happy that it works he still frowns. Only for one moment that he has the slight smile on his face but next second his leg is caught by the ghost again. More interestingly, he does not show fear as he should be but annoyed and surprised and then he tells it that his trousers are worth so much. After he puts a grenade in the ghost's mouth, he flies back to the crew which is still flying in the air to reunite. The four of them keep smiling, telling how wonderful this is and ask how far they could be, Leon jokingly says that it is the closest to hell. The three then suspiciously look at him. In the next over-the-shoulder shot we see Mr. Lee's pale face rising up in front of the camera, revealing that Leon now is possessed by him. Then he starts to bite off their hats to make them fall. Chow performs the most dreadful figure in the medium shot in which he opens his eyes wide,

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<sup>24</sup> See footnote 3.

and makes a wry face and spits out the paper in his mouth. The familiar funny bumpkin figure of Chow totally vanishes. The appearance and the unfamiliar aura frighten the spectators. This supposedly playful wry face loses its meaning of being funny but actually brings harm to people involved. Chow's face not only shows the exaggerating clown-like expression but also implies the terrible future. The last flying guard insists that he also has teeth to bite off Leon's hat; they start hilariously biting each other's hats. This scene dissolves the uncanny feeling and then all of them fall on the ground. After Leon picks up the electric saw, the crew run into the building and lock the door. Right at the time they think they are safe, the scene again turns dark and cold-toned, Leon jumps in the frame with one leg with the electric saw in his hand. This scene is also funny because Leon seems to perform *kung fu* and yet he looks serious as if he is going to punish them. Surprisingly, his body and face turn soft when he gets close to Kwan, handing the saw to her hand and begs her to kill him to solve the problem. The viewers also notice that in this long sequence, Leon/Chow tries to convey the idea of belief: to believe that you can fly and to believe that killing him is the right decision. This idea can respond to the previous idea of social context in Hong Kong before 1997. Hong Kong people were in great anxiety about their future after the handover. Here Leon seems to provide a solution to rescue everyone. Paradoxically, even though the characters can fly and escape from the predicament, they do not seem to "land" safely, and they still have nowhere to escape, and running even seems to be in vain. It implies the plight that Hong Kong people might be having at the time. Echoing the sequence that Leon teaches the crew how to fly with paper hats, this sequence implies that even though Leon provides the possibility for the future (which means to fly away, or to immigrate to foreign countries), most Hong Kong people still cannot escape from this land in the long run. Eventually Hong Kongers have to face and accept the reality. This idea can also be implied by presenting Leon as the uncanny dread who is resonating to mainland China. As a figure that makes his audience familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, Leon symbolically toys with most Hong

Kong people's fear and anxiety of China in the frightening situation. Being inseparable from China, Hong Kong people on the one hand share the same culture and "blood" with mainland China, yet on the other hand, due to the different systems and socio-economic status, Hong Kong people feel uncertain of the future after the handover. Whilst the security guards are not sure of believing Leon or not, they represent the collective anxiety when confronting with Leon's madness. Moreover, the examples of the collective anxiety can also be found in other scenes of the film. In the opening sequence, all of the security guards seem to play a game which tests courage. They form a circle at the plaza outside of the public housing, waiting for the residents to throw stuff out of the windows. They agree that the first one who let go will lose the game. I suggest that these guards represent most of the Hong Kong people, and the stuff thrown down is the difficulty and uncertainty which they are going to confront soon as the 1997 is approaching. They keep wondering why the stuff has not been thrown out yet but they "hear the thing is coming." The sequence seems ridiculous and funny that the guards find nothing to do but play some pointless game.

The opening sequence can further support the relationship between this film and the 1997 handover. Not only are the security guards trying to confront with the uncertainty, but also there is Wong Kar Wai's *Chungking Express* (《重慶森林》, 1991)<sup>25</sup> shown on television in Kwan's room. The broadcasting suggests that the film would deal with the anxiety before the handover, and Kwan herself is counting down, saying that after this minute she is going to forget her ex-boyfriend Johnny. Fortuitously, Leon answers "yes, I promise you!" after Kwan's words; Leon thus is endowed with the role of the redeemer which would help improving the situation later on. Furthermore, the security guards can be seen as the general Hong Kongers. In addition to the examples mentioned above, the characters feel hopeless and look for ways to die, as well as try to steal money from the public housing which they

<sup>25</sup> This film is directed by Chinese director Wong Kar Wai, starring Takeshi Kaneshiro, Tony Leung-Chiu-wai, Brigitte Lin, Faye Wong and Valerie Chow. It deals with two relationships which seem to be irrelevant to the other but in some cases intersect. Yet Wong not only tries to convey the idea of modern relationships and love, film critic Ho Li-yuk (何里玉, my translation) suggests that the film also discuss the anxiety and fear before the handover. See: < <http://holiyuk.mysinablog.com/index.php?op=ViewArticle&articleId=4543655>>

are supposed to protect; all these suggest the collective anxiety and chaos prior to the 1997 handover.

I would focus on Leon's possession by Mr. Lee's ghost. After being possessed by Mr. Lee's ghost, the image of Leon becomes the double of Mr. Lee. On the one hand, both of the characters are in one body, and on the other hand, Chow's image reaches the most dreadful in the film. Such circumstance is reminiscent of Freud's idea of "double" whilst discussing uncanny:

The one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own — in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime. (9)

Mr. Lee's ghost as Leon's double first seems different from Freud's uncanny "double" that shares similar knowledge and feeling: Mr. Lee wants to kill everyone and Leon tries to save everyone. However, in the end of the film, Leon is found to share the same motivation with Mr. Lee as his double — this will be further explained below. The double idea is interesting because Leon tries to manipulate people, impressing them that he is the one who has the strongest belief. He explains this when he comes back to the security office after Kwan stabs him by his request. He says that he is protected by God and asks people to try to believe him what he says is true. Kwan successfully hurts him only because his enteritis makes him feel painful and thus he loses his concentration. Whether he is protected by God or not is not my concern, but it is sure that he loses his faith for a short moment because of physical pain. Thus how Mr. Lee's ghost successfully possesses Leon becomes intriguing. However, after Leon is possessed by the ghost, I argue that the ghost buster image is just a cover, and in the end he is actually a psycho intending to kill everyone. In other words, his disguising as a professional ghost buster is just convincing people that he is not crazy while his ultimate

goal is to kill. Therefore, when he is possessed, he has the opportunity to identify with the ghost and reveal his intention without any difficulty. Consequently, as Freud points out, “the ‘double’ has become the gods [taking] on daemonic shapes” (10). Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the uncanny figure then turns soft in front of Kwan, the girl who believes in him from the beginning and never questions him. This shows how eager he tries to distance himself from the evil ghost. The faces of both Leon and Mr. Lee keep switching to build the uncanny aura since the audience is not sure when and which face would show on the screen. From this point I would explore the idea of illusion that Leon has always been telling the crew. When Leon is teaching the crew the right way to think about spirits, he points out that “the ghost is a kind of energy. It exists in the world day and night. If a ghost wants revenge, since its power is great, it can affect our retina and let us see illusion.” He also saves them from some supernatural incidents as he claims that they are illusion. I assume “seeing the ghosts’ faces” is also a kind of illusion. If they are, the possession does not exist in Leon’s case. The rest of the crew is at the weakest mental status that they cannot fight their inner fear. Meanwhile, Leon identifies himself with the dead and projects people’s fear. Then this sequence could be regarded uncanny along with the idea of the double. He wants to kill his double yet at the same time he identifies with him and wants to kill everyone. That could be the reason why the survivors are sent to the asylum afterwards. As mentioned above, Kwan plays the role of an optimistic Hong Konger whilst the crew represent general Hong Kong people. The guard at the asylum where Leon escapes can be seen as those who still do not want to accept the truth, keeping their eyes open when sleeping without seeing anything. The two foreign security guards are the foreign labours in Hong Kong society whilst many local people flee the country. Kwan’s belief in Leon and Leon’s suggestion that everyone should trust him imply the leader’s effort in keeping Hong Kong people’s faith in the future of Hong Kong. The ghosts represent the culture and ideology of China which Hong Kong people would like to evade by all means. That is the reason why Leon tells the



crew that the ghosts are everywhere. The new ways of catching ghosts suggest the new methods and life styles after the handover. However, the crew do not feel satisfied or assured with Leon's teaching. Leon provides the ways to see ghost (putting on oxen's tears on the eyelids), intending to let the crew believe and also let people judge by themselves if the ghosts exist and if the ghosts are good or bad. Unfortunately, only Kwan can see the kind-hearted old ghost which says "let's make friends." The old ghost can be understood as mainland China's offer to improve her relationship with Hong Kong people. As Leon is possessed by the ghost, he identifies with the ghost whilst at the same time losing his faith in Hong Kong people. As a result, his possession causes the huge collective hysteria from the crew. That Kwan as the optimistic Hong Konger kills Leon with tears in the end symbolizes people's attempt to seek alternatives. Even though the survivors are sent to the asylum, Leon's death suggests that Hong Kong people now have the courage and faith in adapting themselves to the upcoming change, and thus it provides Leon the chance to return and give Kwan the affirmative smile.

After the end of ghost-catching, an establishing shot of the asylum where the survivors are kept is shown to the viewers. Two characters are showing their attorney how to see ghosts, and they mention about "his soul did not come back." We can assume that the day is after the seventh day of the tragedy, and they are all waiting for Leon's ghost to show up. Unfortunately there is no one showing up, and the two behave silly, both of which make the spectators consider them insane. Next, the viewers see Kwan sitting on a bench waiting as well. In a low-angle middle shot, Leon walks in the frame, looking concerned. The film then has some shot-reverse-shots to indicate that they both look at each other, and Kwan could not believe that Leon is here. The camera slightly zooms in on both of them, presenting more and more complex emotions going on between them. Chow still frowns, but with a decent smile to present Leon's sympathy for Kwan. Kwan with gradation smiles heartily. Leon then tells Kwan that because he has too many friends, he has to attend many parties and that is

why he is late. He tells Kwan that she looks pretty. The film ends with Kwan's big smile. The final sequence is the last phase of returning of the repressed in my previous analysis. Unlike the previous returning of the ghost cases, this one does not bring any harm, and the spectators see the pure joy with tears in the eyes. This return thus becomes the reconciliation of the whole story. At the time the spectators may expect that the return of the ghosts should be scary, Leon provides us another outlook. I maintain that Kwan's trust in him makes him more human-like. Because Kwan still has belief, thus Leon comes back for her. Leon's return and the belief also deconstruct again the uncanny feeling throughout this film. Since the uncanny no longer exists, I argue that no matter it is the superstition that he wants to break, the social context that he wants to console, or even the fans' worry that his career is declining by using both horror and black comedy concepts, Chow makes a breakthrough regarding his acting style and charisma that subvert Hong Kong horror-comedy genre. Responding to Ackbar Abbas's idea that "disappearance is not a matter of effacement but of replacement and substitution, where the perceived danger is recontained through representations that are familiar and plausible...If visual representations make images disappear in clichés, it will be a matter of inventing a form of visibility that problematizes the visual" (8). This idea can help understand the last phase of the return. The image of the ghost is deconstructed and the uncanny feeling fades away. I claim that this anxiety also responds to the tablet with the name of the film. The purpose of putting the name on the tablet implies the anxiety of 1997 as a whole. Consequently, I propose that Chow's familiar image is defamiliarized as a practice and metaphor of disappearance and Hong Kong's anxiety of the handover.

If we focus on Chow's style up to this period, it is rare to see his films with a clear description of a female protagonist who strongly trusts him and follows him. The idea starts from *A Chinese Odyssey Part One: Pandora's Box*, and *A Chinese Odyssey Part Two: Cinderella*, wherein love and belief are discussed. The topic of love does not merely centre on relationships, but the sacrifice and the idea of eternal love and life itself, which can be

detected from his later films. The importance of developing a conspicuous female protagonist becomes one of his style transformations as he participates more in the production and the creation of his films. To conclude, Chow inserts some *wulitou* gags in the film in order to dissolve the horror aura and tension; for instance, the conversation between him and the captain of the guards, and the sequence which Leon tries to save Mrs. Lee's life. I maintain that the real *wulitou* device tends to be the film itself which not only deals with the ghost issue but also projects the anxiety of the handover in 1997. Even though in this film Chow also seems to suggest the solution to the handover,<sup>26</sup> Chow's uncanny dread figure, along with the double idea, suggests the social context of Hong Kong before 1997. Also, Chow's dread figure also evokes the fans' anxiety of the decline of Chow's career. The audience projects the fear of 1997 on Chow that indicates Chow may disappear with Hong Kong culture after China takes over the sovereignty. His image is not similar to his previous image as I analysed in the former chapter. As a result, the unfamiliar Chow's image discloses that his attempt at changing his style reaches its purpose.

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<sup>26</sup> In a sequence which everyone is scared and anxious about the upcoming ghost catching, Leon uses the famous quote of the former leader of People's Republic of China Deng Xiaoping that no matter what is going to happen, "we still dance as usual, and the horse race continues" (my translation) to tell the crew not to be afraid, just keep doing what they are doing.

## Conclusion

It becomes more obvious to see that Chow changes his style from happy playful bumpkin figure to a serious comedian, or, an actor. It is arguable whether comedians can act or not. In many of his late 1990s films Chow tries to convey the bitterness being a comedian. This would raise my interest as the definition of comedian. A comedian and his works are expected to entertain the audience. The viewers may expect the funny physical gags and jokes told by the comedian. In Chow's case, he makes a remarkable change of his style. I would still suggest it is his early films that build up his fame and stardom, and it is his built stardom that provides him the opportunity to try new elements of his acting style. Up to today, he still keeps his reputation as one of the most influential stars in Chinese cinema.

In my thesis I try to compare two of Chow's films to propose that Chow improves his performing style over periods. I state that even though Chow's comic styles change from different periods, his *wulitou* and his concern for social events can still be found in his films. I attempt to analyse Chow's early film *The Magnificent Scoundrel* in order to explore how he builds his fame. Started as a television comedian, Chow gradually puts into practice on his personae. In this early period, Chow tends to make use of physical gags and exaggerating facial expressions to construct the comic mood. Not only the gags are *wulitou*, the diegesis is *wulitou* as well. His personae are usually bumpkin figures that would evoke the spectators' sympathy and laughter. His films give the audience the playful, funny and blithe impressions.

After he starts participating more in the production and creation of his film, Chow has more opportunities to convey deeper meanings of inner sides of humans. In *Out of the Dark*, Chow subverts his previous characteristics and creates a different uncanny image. The horror genre clearly makes this film distinct from other Chow's films. I propose four perspectives of reading *Out of the Dark*, namely: the uncanny horror genre, Leon's possession by the ghost along with his mental status, the double of Leon and the ghost, and the film as a metaphor of the anxiety of Hong Kong before 1997. The comic events are practiced as the methods to

present the playful atmosphere and Chow's figure as a comedian actor. The black comedy elements dissolve the uncanniness in order not to make this film merely a horror film. When the uncanny elements are not too dreadful, the spectators may find the central Hong Kong anxiety theme. Building Chow as the uncanny dreadful figure, what really scare the viewers are not the ghosts and the ghastly revenge. Chow's image and his acting become the intrinsic uncanny element. This weird aura reaches at the climax when Leon (played by Chow) is possessed by the ghost and becomes the double of the ghost. The possession and the double extend the uncanny mood that Chow is the dreadful figure. In the end of the film the viewers may question if Chow has changed his style into the style unknown. The concern might reflect to the situation of Hong Kong before the handover. Hong Kong people are not sure about Chow's future plans, resembling the apprehension for the future after 1997. Therefore, Leon's character symbolises the Hong Kong subjectivity, which Hong Kong spectators may project themselves on. At the same time the ghosts, the return of the repressed would indicate the continuous search for subjectivities. As a result, I would propose that the return of Leon is the reconciliation of searching for subjectivities and belief in either the subjectivities or selves.

In recent years Chow has put much effort to social event. It is obvious that his recent films contain more about love and trust ideas, even though his *wulitou* style and diegesis cause the films unreal and dream-like. Comedies sometimes resemble each other, yet the devices that generate laughter can be subtle and complicated. The two films that I have analysed can be good examples of Chow trying different devices to discuss. Chow uses *wulitou* as his major device to connect distinct topics and plot in the films. It resembles the two sides of a coin that playfully and sarcastically, merrily and sadly, Chow provides his viewers with a more integrated point of view to read his films. As for the concern that his audience might have for the future and for his career, the final scene that Chow shows his decent yet bitter smile is adequate enough to respond to the questions regarding the future.

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