

Chapter One

Introduction

My attempt in this thesis stresses on Fruit Chan's consistent uses of fecal matters in his films. This scatological gimmick is greatly elaborated in his film *Public Toilet*, which has thus helped us to pinpoint the significance of fecal matters in his previous works. In line with Jacques Lacan's split subject and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, my argument centers on the impossibility of a fixed Hong Kong identity and Fruit Chan's emphasis on creating a new Hong Kong allegory from a more complex and mobile individual experiences.

1.1 Fruit Chan's New Trilogy on the Subject-in-Process¹

Chan is best noted for his "Hong Kong 1997 Trilogy," *Made in Hong Kong*, *The Longest Summer* and *Little Cheung*. The subjects of the stories shift from the juveniles, middle-aged Chinese soldiers retiring from the British garrison, to the children in *Little Cheung*. Their responses to Hong Kong's return to mainland China in 1997 form an overall anxiety among the lower class in Hong Kong society. Problematic identification becomes evident in these Hong Kong episodes. Together they give rise to a unique national allegory through Chan's independent filmmaking.

¹ Julia Kristeva makes a clear explanation of the term "the subject in process" in her article collected in *The Tel Quel Reader* (133-78).

According to Ka-fai Yau, this is how the new cinema interacts with the new geo-historical situations, since the three films all deal with the changing moment of Hong Kong's handover (545).²

However, this thesis, instead of referring to "Hong Kong 1997 Trilogy," aims at Fruit Chan's repetitive application of fecal matters to further create a whole new trilogy related to the formation of the subject, rather than an identity, in the psychoanalytic perspective. The new trilogy I will deal with are *The Longest Summer*, *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, and *Public Toilet*. These three episodes retell Chan's tale from the excremental viewpoint. Metaphorically, by confronting his protagonists with fecal matters, Chan tries to awaken the subjects in the condition of oblivion and to make them face destructive memory indigenous to their subjectivity.

The appearance of *Public Toilet* in 2002 attracts my attention. Its scatological debut provides a comprehensive expression of Chan's favor in using fecal matters in his previous films.³ In his previous films, Chan likes to farce them with abrupt fecal matters or other bodily fluids. For example, a pimp in *Little Cheung* is tricked with lemon tea with sanitary napkin soaked inside. The taxi driver in *The Longest Summer* throws his diaper filled with excrements onto girl students. Little Cheung urinates in the heavy rain. All these types of scenes are pushed the extreme in

² Yau calls his concept "minor Hong Kong cinema," which is an idea borrowed from Deleuze's article of thirdness of cinema. See also Heng Siu's MA thesis on Hong Kong identity in Fruit Chan's films (4).

³ In his latter film *Dumplings*, the scatological shots are pushed to an extreme. The female protagonist relies on eating human fetus to maintain youth and to get her husband's attention.

Public Toilet. Public toilets are a cultural scenic spot, which is set in the public sphere that encapsulates utmost privacy inside. In this unique film, Chan draws on people's avoidance of fecal matters or death to scrutinize their abandonment of the matters indigenous to them, especially their memories. The abundant disclosure of defilement in *Public Toilet* reminds us of Chan's farcical gimmicks in his previous works. The use of abrupt contamination is thus not trivial in meanings but rather significant enough to annotate why Chan's protagonists in various films would in the end land in the condition of oblivion.



1.2 A Literature Review on Hong Kong Identity and Fruit Chan's Films

There are many articles on Chan's films. Some stresses on the political change or Chan's film language (Bono Lee 54; Sharp Po 53-54). Also, Chan's presentation of Hong Kong buildings also becomes the subject of concern in Esther M. K.

Cheung's article, in which the public housing estate has caused Hong Kong to become an uncanny and haunting city full of frustrations (358-68).⁴ In particular, problems related to Hong Kong identity and identification are those which are predominantly dealt with. As the focus of Fruit Chan's films is on the subalterns⁵, articles on his

⁴ Natalia Cheung further applies Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" to such Hong Kong buildings. See also Heng Siu's further exploration of "the forgotten space" in Chan's Hong Kong 1997 Trilogy (31-49).

⁵ The term "subaltern" is firstly used in the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci's *The Prison Notebooks (Quaderni del carcere)*. The subaltern classes are inferior when facing hegemony and would thus sustain no meaningful role in a regime of power. Later, in "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

films tend to examine the marginalized people's problematic identities. The Hong Kong 1997 Trilogy are thus works that are much easier to fit such a discussion (Shum Longtin 140-43).⁶ For example, in Yingshi Chu's analysis about Hong Kong identity, Chan's films are read against the historical context of the 1997 handover.

Such a historic context is relevant to the allegory of family romance, in which Hong Kong, depicted as a child, hovers between its British foster mother and its Chinese biological one. As what Esther M.K. Cheung points out, such a filiation allegory is to some degree a hidden violence to naturalize Hong Kong's colonial history through the family relationship (2001: 572).⁷ To avoid this predicament and to help Hong Kong to articulate itself, the context of globalization cuts in from the angle of cultural representation rather than that of a political wrestling match. In particular, Ackbar Abbas and Tsung-yi Huang's concepts are explicit and they provide

Gayatri Spivak appropriates Gramsci's term "subaltern." She scrutinizes how the third-world subject is represented within Western discourse. She claims that the subaltern cannot speak. The first-world intellectuals who think they can represent the subaltern people appropriate their voices. Paradoxically, the subaltern people's claims and voices are missing through such a representation. That is why Spivak suggests that the subalterns cannot speak. Fruit Chan's films, focusing on the subalterns in Hong Kong, are also trying to represent those who cannot speak for themselves. However, Fruit Chan does not fall into the paradox that Spivak mentions (285). One of the reasons is that Chan comes from the bottom of the society. He shows in the films what he sees in his daily life. Besides, Chan is not trying to be the representative of the subalterns in Hong Kong society, but to truthfully show the audience the predicament of the Hong Kong subalterns through images. His films indicate that the subalterns' revolt to an entity of sovereignty is problematic. This is closer to what Gramsci says, "subaltern classes are subject to the initiatives of the dominant classes, even when they rebel; they are in a state of anxious defense" (PNII: 22).

⁶ Shum indicates that Chan creates patriarchal characters, such as Gay-in in *The Longest Summer* to represent Hong Kong.

⁷ This method of identification is questionable, for even with trying to build up Hong Kong's own identity through the correspondence among the three parties, such a discourse will contrarily lead us to the unsolved colonial paradox in which Hong Kong is up a blind alley. That is, the construction of Hong Kong identity would in the end not be as complete as one thinks, for it needs the aid of China and Britain to unpack its identity.

a productive reading to further understand Hong Kong identity in terms of “glocalization.”⁸

Both Huang and Yau-wai Chu indicate that, Chan’s films stress the stories of lower level Hong Kong residents and that the narrative form offers them a chance to reclaim their existence. The above-mentioned impasse can thus be solved.

However, while localization is overly emphasized, the postcolonial narrative might become a “myth departing from reality.” The articulation of self-identity will be easily transferred into the monologue in a restricted sense. That is why the context of globalization is needed. Such a context, according to Tsung-yi Huang, should not be removed from Fruit Chan’s stories. In his films, the work force from abroad not only flows into Hong Kong but also intermingles with Hong Kong people. This input of the globalization context to postcolonial discourse not only de-naturalizes the formation of Hong Kong identity, but also, most important of all, by doing so, the postcolonial identity would tend to be more reality-oriented, rather than

“narcissistical” (Abbas 12).⁹ Further, what Tsung-yi Huang tries hard to figure out is that without the interaction of these two conditions, the subaltern in cities like Hong

⁸ It is a term used in Huang’s article on *Little Cheung* to stress on the interaction between globalization and localization.

⁹ According to Ackbar Abbas, it is the “temptation of the local” that makes the postcolonial narrative attractive. But such a locality would result in a narcissistic identity, which can easily trap Hong Kong in such old binarisms as “East” and “West”, and “tradition” and “modernity”. But what Abbas mainly tries to pose here is that, with the complex component of Hong Kong people, there would not be just one locality that should be alluded to. So when referring to Hong Kong identity, the globalization frame should be included.

Kong will either be faceless or will lapse into a mere instrument of global mechanism (67). To conclude, in Huang's article on the production of identity in *Little Cheung*, the process of "glocalization" makes Hong Kong identity today a complex one.¹⁰

By the use of the term "glocalization," Huang's analysis of Fruit Chan's *Little Cheung* offers us an insight that there is no fixed Hong Kong identity but some floating identities in present day Hong Kong. It is exactly this mobility, or rather, the impossibility of identification that I want to discuss in Chan's films. Yet, rather than taking the context of globalization as a tool to present such a mobility, this thesis aims at deconstructing the fixed identity from Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection that illuminates the existence of the Lacanian split subject, further nullifying a falsely complete and stable identity in the Symbolic realm.

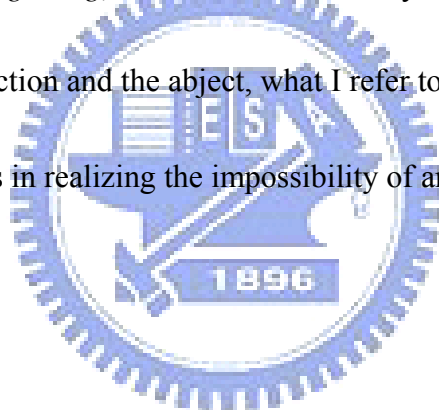
As a matter of fact, Kristeva's theory of abjection is well elaborated in Heng Siu's research on Hong Kong identity in Fruit Chan's films:

Waste matters, the most prominent abject in Kristeva's theory, appear in Fruit Chan's films like a motif. They can be read as metaphors to the situation of the marginalised characters, and so can the abject spaces.

(Abstract)

¹⁰ Along with Huang's idea, we can subsequently bring in Abbas. Actually, digging Hong Kong issues from cultural representation is how Huang can be related to Abbas (Huang 70). Owing to the fact that "cultural forms...can perhaps also be regarded as a rebus that projects a city's desires and fears...", this methodology enables both of them to depart from the postcolonial political structure, and further see how globalization nowadays works on Hong Kong's cultural representation (Abbas 1).

Based on Chan's 1997 Trilogy, Heng copes with the confusion of Chan's marginalized characters in facing the historic moment of Hong Kong's return to China. Complex nationalities and identities are brought onto the table. But as I mentioned previously, with the impact of globalization, the issues of identities should not be simply limited to the changing of sovereignty in 1997.¹¹ Moreover, the release of *Public Toilet* shows that the historical predicament in 1997 has disappeared. Personal experience of growth takes place in a macro context. Although my thesis adopts *The Longest Summer*, *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, and *Public Toilet* as my subjects of research, with Kristeva's theory of abjection and the abject, what I refer to echoes with Chan's protagonists' experiences in realizing the impossibility of any fixed identity in his various films.



1.3 The Application of Lacan and Kristeva's concepts: When the Awakening Split

Subject Moves on...

The second chapter, "Shit Happens: Split Narrative as the Prologue to Castration,"¹² probes into the abrupt fecal scene in *The Longest Summer*. *The*

¹¹ Abbas once puts that, the Hong Kong subjectivity should be "constructed not narcissistically but in the very process of negotiating the mutations and permutations of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism" (11). That suggests that the single historic moment of the handover in 1997 is **not** satisfying in explaining Hong Kong's problematic identity and subjectivity. Cultural representation is what we have to focus on instead.

¹² The phrase "shit happens" is borrowed from Meagan Morris' article on [Hong Kong] action cinema. She divides action films into the major and minor modes. For her, "shit happens", which is mainly applied in major action cinema, means the moment that unwelcome matters intrude into the present or the sense of the hero's stolid survivalism. Though, Fruit Chan's *The Longest Summer*

Longest Summer tells a tale of retiring Chinese soldiers from the British garrison.

The protagonist Ga-yin and his colleagues are frustrated by the transfer of sovereignty,

which would cause their unemployment. Ga-yin's younger brother Ga-shun,

working for a mob boss Wing, thus invites Ga-yin to take part in a bank robbery.

However, after July 1st, the day of the handover, Ga-shun is gone with the money.

Not being able to find his brother, Ga-yin breaks down and loses his memory after the

gunshot on his hindbrain.

The scene in which a taxi driver takes revenge on a girl student by throwing his
diapers with shit inside is an interlude within the narrative of *The Longest Summer*.

It is abrupt but significant in corresponding to Ga-yin's attitude toward his past.

According to Kristeva, first of all, fecal matters as the abject, are excluded from the
body to protect the completeness of the subject (3). Thus, the return of the abject

becomes a reminder of the exclusive moment happening before. That is as a result

how the boundary between the seemingly complete subject and the forgotten field,

such as the repressed memory, can be detected. In other words, with the shit scene as

a microcosm, the main character Ga-yin, as the beholder, is simultaneously

confronting his own split memory, which is castration in the Freudian term.¹³ And

would be grouped under the minor mode, in which main characters are surrounded by failures, Chan instead makes real shit happen in his film.

¹³ In this chapter, we first need to recall Freud's combination of anal eroticism and the castration complex. In his article "Anal Erotism and the Castration Complex", Freud illuminates the changes of egestion from gift to something that should be given up (*SE 17*, 72-88). The crux is the advent of the castration complex. To avoid being castrated, a child who is stuck in the anal stage has to abandon

with the allegorical faeces scene, we know that only by cleaning up one's body can one return to normal life, or to access the forgotten condition. In brief, while the faeces scene sustains the filmic narrative, it simultaneously inaugurates the prologue of returning to the castrated moment. And such a momentary trick indeed provides us with an alternative way to question the completeness of personal identity in Chan's film.

Following the aforesaid concept, in chapter three, I am going to discuss "*Hollywood, Hong Kong: The Journey to the Split Subject*," as the misrecognition of identity and the discovery of the subject as split. *Hollywood, Hong Kong* is an installment of Fruit Chan's "Prostitute Trilogy."¹⁴ The story revolves around the male desire for a prostitute Tong-tong from mainland China, while the prostitute desires to go further study in Hollywood. Tong-tong's dream is supported by the money she extorts from the Chu family and the pimp Xiao-fu. Her appearance turns the whole Tai-hom Village upside down. Men fall victim to her seduction and then come to themselves after receiving blackmail. The pimp Xiao-fu's hand is even chopped off during the process. Although the farce comes to its end, the chopped hand of Xiao-fu still bothers these men. In the last scene, the hand is seen attached

the erotism brought by the faeces in his or her anus (the anal erotic). Therefore, by giving away the faeces, the child wins a ticket to get to the phallic stage in which the faeces gradually loses its original meaning of pleasure. As a result, we can also say that egestion is an exchangeable object that can be further related to Kristeva's concept of the abject. Back to the "boundary" mentioned above, we thus know that this is the line set between anal erotism and the castration complex.

¹⁴ Chan has not finished his "Prostitute Trilogy," however. So far, we have only *Durian, Durian* and *Hollywood Hong Kong*.

to another man.

In this chapter, the concept of the abject is transferred into a bodily abruption, which still has the same remindful role as the faeces in Chapter Two. Besides, before the application of the Lacanian split subject as the axis of this chapter, I will elucidate its relation with Kristeva's concept of the abject. Since abjection has served as "a precondition of narcissism," the abject is accordingly the subject's vanguard in facing castration, which is then forgotten (Kristeva 13). What follows is the misrecognition of the subject as complete. Namely, before the shocking moment such as the reattachment of shit, one in amnesia is immersed in the identity he trusts and is living a happy life in his own reality. In *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, with the aid of the prostitute, men in the shanty village develop such a narcissistic identity that they cannot see themselves as castrated subjects. Then along the way, these men suffer from the Lacanian double awakenings: one is in reality and the other in the Real. In this regard, the prostitute working as a mirror not only reflects those men's narcissistic images, but also throws back to them the horrible but undetectable gaze at the same time. And such a gaze, according to Lacan, could annihilate the subject. Parallel to the progress of a child moving from anal erotism to the castration complex, the men in the film, trying to avoid total annihilation, provide the body parts as a compensatory ransom, to which Kristeva's theory can be applied. In the film, Chan

tries to make men in this film feel the prostitute's existence all the time; he combines different chopped hands together into one and makes it be seen by the men.

Therefore, aside from Lacan's formula of fantasy "\$◇a" being brought up in the film, the concept of the abject shows up again. Right here, we can detect that the abject and *objet a* are different but related. Actually, Kristeva has distinguished the abject from the object:

...as in jouissance where the object of desire, known as object *a*...bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, *there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops* so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence (9) (my emphasis).

At least from the film, we can see that the loss of the abject bars the subject from touching the real. And this is exactly what Kristeva means when considering the abject as the frontier of the body. Moreover, when Chan plays a similar trick of reattaching the abject (the chopped hand) to the human body, the return of the chopped hand at the same time works like a reminder of a horrible castration, and the immortality of the prostitute as the *objet a*. Accordingly, although these two concepts might in a way differ from each other, as a matter of fact, they can work very

well together. To conclude, whether it is cinematic narrative in Chapter two or the individual subject in Chapter Three, faeces does matter.

In contrast, the protagonists in *Public Toilet* are relatively conscious of the abject. This is a story depicting how the forgetting subject in the Symbolic awakes to face its split in the Lacanian sense and then moves back to the pre-oedipal milieu to conjoin the loving mother. In the fourth chapter, “Public Toilet: From the Refusal to the Acceptance of Bodily Contamination,” I would argue that the fecal matters play an important role as the indicator of abandoned/repressed memories. The subject’s confrontation with and acceptance of the abject manifest the fantasy of a fixed and stable identity. On the other hand, Chan makes use of the idea that life and death coexist in the cycle involving fecal matters to signify an infinite and circulating sense of self-growth. This is what Kristeva calls “the subject in process.”

Public Toilet is not a film with a single story. Various characters with various nationalities move around the world, seeking cures. However, that does not make the film overly complex and difficult to understand. Through the allegory of finding cures, the avoidance of death, and the subsequent acceptance of the abject as indigenous to one’s life, Fruit Chan successfully brings back his protagonists from the amnesiac condition to face their incompleteness. *Public Toilet* not only transgresses the geographic boundary of Hong Kong but also breaks away from the complicated

national identification. The film illuminates that the story of personal growth in Chan's tale-telling is bittersweet. The subject has to undergo the Lacanian split, forgetting, and remembering, so as to move on to what Fruit Chan discloses in *Public Toilet*: a dirty, obscure but warm destination filled with the Kristevan abject.

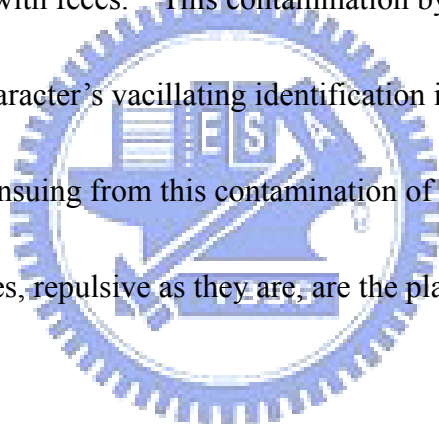


Chapter Two

Shit Happens: Split Narrative as the Prologue to Castration¹⁵

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, with particular reference to Fruit Chan's *The Longest Summer*, I will deal with the "faeces narrative" in Chan's works. My topic "shit happens," coined by Meagan Morris,¹⁶ refers substantially to the violent and abrupt images in *The Longest Summer*. I am going to discuss "pollution" and "abjection" resulting from the body's contact with feces. This contamination by faeces could be further applied to the leading character's vacillating identification in the film. The grotesque body images ensuing from this contamination of the abject will also appear. And these different bodies, repulsive as they are, are the places where Chan explores his stories of faeces.

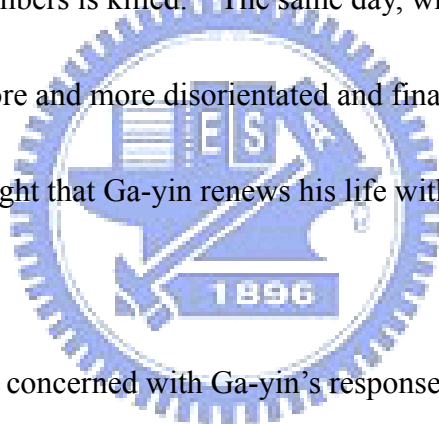


2.2 Shit Happens

¹⁵ In order to make Chan's films interconnected through the concept of the abject, I call *The Longest Summer* the prologue to the following castration in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*. However, that does not mean that there is no castration happening in *The Longest Summer*. The main character Ga-yin's loss of his job as a British soldier is a kind of castration executed by the Other, namely the authority concerned. Such a castration causes the subject's immobility. It will be further discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁶ The phrase "shit happens" is borrowed from Meagan Morris' article on Hong Kong action cinema. She divides action films into the major and the minor modes. For her, "shit happens," which is mainly applied to major action cinema, means the moment the unwelcome matters intrude into the mentality of the hero's stolid survivalism. Though Fruit Chan's *The Longest Summer* would be grouped into the minor mode, in which main characters are surrounded by failures, Chan instead makes real shit a key part of the film.

The Longest Summer,¹⁷ whose story spans a six-month period beginning in April 1997, follows the fate of five veteran soldiers of Hong Kong's Military Service Corps (MSC). Ga-yin (Tony Ho), one of the veterans, reluctantly accepts a job to be the driver for his brother Ga-suen's (Sam Lee) mob boss, Big Brother Wing (Chan Shan). Ga-yin and the other disbanded men, in order to secure some money for their retirement, decide to rob a British bank on the day of the official handover on July 1st. However, the robbery does not go well. The men bump into another band of robbers and one of their own members is killed. The same day, when Ga-suen flees with the loot, Ga-yin becomes more and more disorientated and finally loses his mind. It is not until he is shot in a fight that Ga-yin renews his life without any memory of previous events.



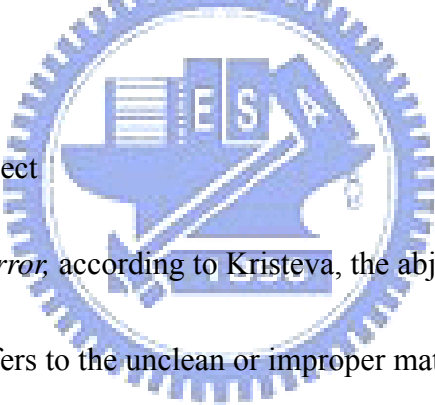
This story is mainly concerned with Ga-yin's response to his volatile identity during the handover. From being a member of the MSC to that of the gang, Ga-yin stays in limbo, with no sense of belonging. Owing to his ambivalence towards his identity, it is not easy for him to accept the upcoming changes, so that only by being driven to memory loss can he survive with one stable identity.

¹⁷ The Chinese title of *The Longest Summer* is literally "there are so many fireworks last year [去年煙花特別多]." 1997 is a year full of fireworks. In total, there were five grand celebrations in Hong Kong, including the Chinese Lunar New Year, the inauguration ceremony of the Tsing Ma Bridge [青馬大橋] on April 27, the Royal Armed Forces' Retreat Ceremony on June 30, the Handover, and the first National Day after the handover. For Hong Kong people, the sky in that year round was quite sparkling. However, what Fruit Chan brings us is a great contrast between the magnificent fireworks and the anxious marginalized people in Hong Kong society (Suly).
<<http://www.tokyochinese.com/bbs/viewthread.php?action=printable&tid=6728>>

But, what do the shit scenes have to do with Ga-yin? And more importantly, how do the obscene episodes interact with the whole story? In fact, the faeces only appears three times in *The Longest Summer*, and all in connection with an elderly taxi driver. Because of his abrupt appearance and insignificant role, one might consider the fecal scenes simply as Fruit Chan's gimmick. However, it is to be noted that this taxi driver not only helps to develop a complete story, but also interacts with the main character, Ga-yin. In the film, the taxi driver, after being fooled by one of the schoolgirl's menstrual napkins left in his car, never stops looking for the girl. And in all three of his appearances, he happens to give Ga-yin a ride. His first is when Ga-yin has newly become Big Brother Wing's subordinate. And this is also the day the driver receives the napkin from the schoolgirls. The second time, when Ga-yin is chasing his brother Ga-suen, the taxi driver tells him that he has not given up searching for the girls since that day. His final appearance is at the end of *The Longest Summer*. He cuts into Ga-yin's storyline and catches our attention by throwing his excrement onto the schoolgirl's face. "I remember you. You have done so many awful things. Eat shits," the taxi driver shouts. This scene is processed smoothly by a tracking shot. From the encounter between Ga-yin and Big Brother Wing's daughter Jane to the taxi driver's revenge, including the smiling face of Ga-yin, the smooth shot correlates both story frames (See Fig. 2.1). In the

juxtaposition of the faeces scene and the main story, we find that what has happened to Ga-yin parallels the taxi driver's experience. Ga-yin undergoes the metaphoric contamination of faeces and tries hard to get rid of it. However, he throws away the "faeces" from his life by losing his shitty memories. In this regard, Fruit Chan's obscene trick, as an arranged epitome of the leading character's experience, should not be overlooked and dismissed so easily. In the following paragraphs, reinforced by Julia Kristeva's ideas about abjection and the abject, I will further discuss Ga-yin's continuous effort to "purify" himself while facing the pollution of the abject.

2.3 Abjection and the Abject



In the *Powers of Horror*, according to Kristeva, the abject, such as waste, excrement, and blood, refers to the unclean or improper matter that has to be expelled from the body to sustain the integrity of the self. It is not an object *a*, but a "jettisoned object [that is] radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). Because of the abject's devouring capability, one has to extricate oneself from it. For example, when food, filth, waste or dung disgusts us, the act of vomiting or convulsing protects us from those things. And this response is what Kristeva calls "abjection," which thrusts one aside from the pollution of defilement. During the strong repugnance toward the abject, "I expel *myself*, I spit

myself out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*’ (3). This establishment of the self, like the aforementioned, undergoes the loss of partial self as the abject. And only by discarding the abject from inside can one acclaim one’s life against death, such as the body fluids, the defilement, and the shit related to the corpse.

With this new perspective informed by the concepts of the abject and abjection, let’s return to the taxi driver in *The Longest Summer*. His revenge on the schoolgirl is just like the reaction of one facing the abject. He casts away part of himself, namely his shit, to the one who shows him the abject, so that he can continue his life simply as a taxi driver, rather than retaining the nightmare of the faeces. In other words, by abjection, manifesting the demarcation between himself and his excrement, he is again “clean” as usual. Or we can also say that abjection is just like a purifying process, washing the dirt from his body, in a kind of spiritual parody; traditionally, shit has symbolized sin.

Following the driver’s return to his normal life, this visible clean/dirty contrast could be further extended symbolically to the proper/improper duality in social norms. Kristeva, with the formation of the subject in mind, applies her theory of abjection to cultural structures, and this can illustrate Ga-yin’s situation more clearly. Kristeva proposes that in a society, since there is a symbolic system to regulate matters, the

rule of classification there will evacuate that which violates it (Joyce C.H. Liu, xxvi).

That is, proper subjectivity is “based on the expulsion or the exclusion of the improper, the unclean, and the disorderly elements of its corporeal existence” (Grosz 86). This

is the case with Ga-yin. In *The Longest Summer*, Ga-yin, as an ex-MSA member, is

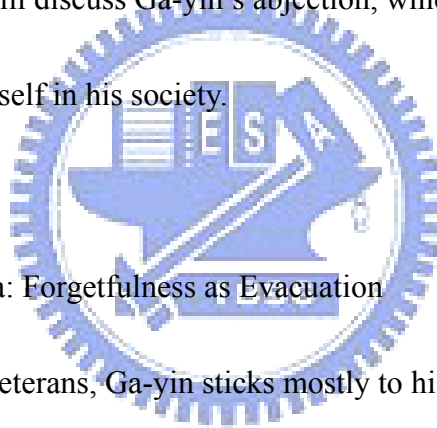
like the abject being extricated from both the colonial and newly formed communities.

If we consider the taxi driver scene, what Fruit Chan tries to say is more about how

one constructs one’s stable identity by exchanging the dirt within for a peaceful life.

And in what follows, I will discuss Ga-yin’s abjection, which, according to Kristeva,

re-establishes his proper self in his society.



2.4 Ga-yin’s Mysophobia: Forgetfulness as Evacuation

Among his fellow veterans, Ga-yin sticks mostly to his former identity, that which the British government had endowed him with. In the film, we find a lot of examples concerning his rejection of his new identity. When he joins the underground society, he keeps saying to Big Brother Wing, “I don’t think I am really what you think I am” (i.e., the mob). In order to preserve his honor as a soldier, he is the last one to agree to the robbery plan. For him, the ideal way to cope with the identity problem is by being happy at the passing on of the responsibility of guarding Hong Kong to the PLA. So on July 1st, Ga-yin salutes the marching troops with

great dignity. This not only seeks to put the Chinese and British forces on a par, but also enables Ga-yin to keep his British identity as an honorably discharged soldier. Such a military identity as his, no matter under what government, will remain “clean” as well as “proper.” But reality does not allow that to happen. Ga-yin’s sacred body is doubly polluted in becoming abject-like: first by the abandonment of British government, and then by being baptized by the mob.

Unable to find employment, Ga-yin is asked by his parents to secure a job in his brother Ga-suen’s gang. Detesting what Ga-suen does as a thug, Ga-yin initially sustains his dignity as a veteran. Sometimes he would even tell Big Brother Wing that some day he would rescue his young brother from this kind of life. He tries hard to keep his old identity and not to be too caught up in the underworld, but just like what the “napkin” is to the taxi driver, the improper matter has become attached to him. He soon puts on another costume called faeces. Consequently, Ga-yin suffers degradation from his “British” identity because of the situation between the two ruling political systems. This further reinforces the instability of his identification; before this, he would have preferred to believe that he belonged to the colonial regime. As a result, the action hero¹⁸ Ga-yin, is more like an anti-hero who, according to Meagan

¹⁸ As Fruit Chan himself has noted, in order to attract patronage, he has adopted the elements of Hong Kong action cinema to cater to the public. For instance, we can see that the way the characters make preparations for robbing a bank is quite similar to the war games. These men act in fact as action heroes. However, in the latter part of the story, Fruit Chan returns to his pattern of tale-telling, in which the heroes are dispatched as nothingness. < <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/CU-c/96954.htm> >

Morris's classification of action cinema, "live(s) with grief and loss" and always faces the problem in which the "bonding with a wider community is high on his or her narrative agenda" (188-89). In line with Morris's ideas, Ga-yin's being downgraded from a British army soldier to a mobster, is a transgression from the major (as an official hero) to the minor economies in action cinema. That is, no Hollywood kind of exploding scenes occur; we merely witness the distressed anti-hero Ga-yin trying to evade misfortunes. He is not like Harrison Ford in *Air Force One* solving problems so gallantly; instead, his problems provide his "solution". Such passivity makes Ga-yin become someone who is repeatedly expunging parts of himself in order to suit the law. Ironically, this is not the case, according to Morris, with the heroes of the major action cinema who would rather throw others away than themselves.

In *The Longest Summer*, Fruit Chan has indeed shown us abundant "throwing away" moments which are depicted in the same manner, that is, with slow motion and similar background music. These are the repetitive acts of abjection. Kristeva quotes Bataille: "Abjection [...] is merely the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding abject things (and that act establishes the foundations of collective existence)" (56). As a result, such an act in the film is used to some degree as a springboard to escape from the improper and to restore the social order.

As mentioned earlier, Ga-yin hardly approves of robbing the bank. His bottom line is to use fake guns, which would differentiate him and his company from real villains. However, Ga-suen breaks the rule and brings a real gun with him. When they arrive at the bank, another band of robbers (from the same outfit) rushes out and bumps into them. At that moment, they seem to come across their own reflections in a mirror. Fruit Chan's trick in making these people meet and mix together is, to some degree, a reminder of Ga-yin's failure as a genuine veteran, for all the other robbers are faceless, lacking any identity. And to people around them, Ga-yin and his colleagues are nothing more than accomplices. Later, by the side of the lake, Ga-yin asks Ga-suen to fling the gun into the water. This is the first time that Ga-yin tries to distance himself from improper matters. He supposes that since the gun and the robbing outfit have now disappeared, he can again be the same Ga-yin as usual.

The second occasion is after Hong Kong's handover, when Ga-yin casts away the helmet into the ocean. Ever since Ga-yin joined the gang, he always carried the helmet with him. That was the connection between his brother and him, for only when Ga-suen gave him a ride did he need the helmet. But the helmet, as a bond between him and Ga-suen, could meanwhile symbolize the disaster brought by Ga-suen. The attachment of the helmet leads Ga-yin to Big Brother Wing, and further challenges Ga-yin's identity as a soldier. With an attempt to purify himself

and regain the identity he needs, he flings the helmet from the Tsing Ma Suspension Bridge. That is an act of abjection, abandoning his relationship with his brother. In the film, these are not the only rejection scenes. Fruit Chan, in dealing with these scenes, makes use of slow motion. Thus, the flashing moment of dropping, or rejection, is prolonged, and the trajectory of the gun, the helmet, or the outfit is distinctly recorded. The repetitive and uniquely processed shots are impressive, for contrary to the film's chronological narrative, these scenes are relatively irregular and emphasized by extended time duration. Such an interruption of time appears again and again, and eventually becomes the "ritual" for Ga-yin to reiterate the purifying act. These jettisoned matters, destroying his identity as a British soldier, sustain a role related to all kinds of improper memories; by throwing them away, Ga-yin, as Kristeva points out, can therefore claim his proper existence. Just like what the taxi driver did to get rid of the shade of abject, Ga-yin gradually washes off the pollution on his sacred body through some ritual. In Barbara Creed's words, the result is that "the demarcation lines between human and nonhuman are drawn up and presumably made all the stronger for that process" (Creed 36).

Through these repetitive acts, a strong and bitter scene of abjection appears at the end of the film. This time, Ga-yin experiences a violent expulsion of his own body, and all previous memories are evacuated.

One night, Ga-yin gets embroiled in a fight between two youthful gangs. Losing his mind, he mistakes a young boy for his brother, and chases after him. He reiterates words like, “I am so disappointed with you... Why did you involve me in the underworld...” Then, in front of those young gangsters, he shows his anger by raising his middle finger. In the blink of an eye, he is shot in the back of his head and falls to the ground, bleeding, with the images of his past passing by in slow motion. In accordance with the way Fruit Chan deals with this scene, it parallels the scenes of Ga-yin’s series of abjections. Chan purposely manipulates the slow-motion take to display the exclusion of things. The appearance of these memories does not just emphasize how pathetic Ga-yin is. For me, the series of images are, in a way, jettisoned like those unwanted matters dumped by Ga-yin. What we see, again, is the process of abjection where parts of the self are being expelled. Memory loss thus endows Ga-yin with a happy life. Furthermore, after a total expulsion of the abject in his life, he nearly empties his body in his attempt to successfully blend into the new social norms. In Yingchi Chu’s words, “Pain and the crisis of identity can be solved only after the loss of the memories of the past” (132). And this message is also reflected in the different portrayal of the Hong Kong landscape before and after July 1st: one is shaded with heavy rain all over the chaotic city, and the other shows a clear sky, as well as empty streets in the end (Chu 132).

Since everything changes, no wonder we see Ga-yin smile like a total stranger.

2.5 The Grotesque Bodies

From the above, the concept of the grotesque body is raised. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva mentions a kind of body horror, leprosy. She notes that leprosy “visibly affects the skin...the abomination...becomes inscribed within the logical conception of impurity...intermixture, erasing of differences, threat to identity” (101).

Such impurity covering the skin creates bodily disfigurement, and thus a monstrous image emerges to destroy the original look. Just like putting on a costume, the identities of people who are infected with the obscenity become unknown. The taxi driver and Ga-yin are both cases in point. But the latter suffers an even more severe transfiguration under the sway of impurity. As we can see in the film, he casts no reflection in a mirror. His body is transformed into total invisibility. In the fantastic episode in which the question “Who am I?” is raised, Ga-yin is simultaneously asking what the thing in the mirror is. Namely, he repulses the self under the camouflage of impropriety, impurity and, furthermore, the abject. As the book’s title, “Powers of Horror” suggests, the horror lies behind the repulsion when one faces impurity (Joyce C.H. Liu, xxx). In this manner, we can also say that the reflection, via Ga-yin’s denial of the anomaly, turns into horror, which is

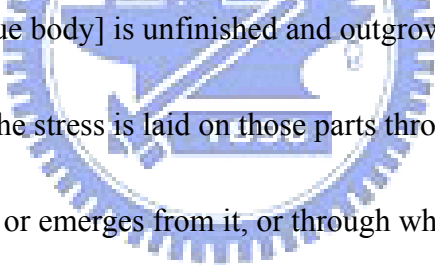
paradoxically, a visible invisibility. Fortunately, such a disfigured body is provisional, because the defilement is removable. Ga-yin's body and the taxi driver's body still look intact in the end. But in the film, another kind of body is inscribed by the abject on the contrary.

In the prologue of the film, a crippled youngster's face engages our full attention. A hole through his cheeks enables us to see right through; surprisingly, what is revealed are not merely the moving subway carriages, but also memories. It is Fruit Chan's film editing that makes the body talk. As we can see, followed by a tunnel shot, the close-up of the hole draws us into the scene on the platform where a station assistant is helplessly pressed into the car by the rushing crowd. Then with a cut, the station assistant Pang stands in the lake, saying to his buddies, "I am fired again." Smoothly as these sequences work, a rupture of time-space surreptitiously occurs. As we will find out in the end, the young man's scary image is in fact Ga-yin's work of violence. It is through the youngster's disfigured body that the preceding months before Hong Kong's handover are revealed. In this regard, the body becomes a metaphor of the present and the past. Furthermore, the space in the body becomes the place where two discrete locales of space-time connect with each other.

Here, I will appropriate Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the "grotesque body," which will first help to elaborate how this broken body works to encapsulate memories, and

secondly, accessibly tell the difference between the young boy's body and Ga-yin's.

To borrow Bakhtin's words, such a body with orifices will never be the "canonical body" consistent with the law. In his eminent book *Rabelais and His World*, he points out that the grotesque images of bodies are "entirely different from the ready-made, completed being. They remain ambivalent and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of 'classic' aesthetics..." (25). However, these incomplete bodies, though being excluded from established norms, are quite positive for Bakhtin. Apparent orifices or the lack of them relatively facilitates their connection with the rest of the world:



... [the grotesque body] is unfinished and outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world [...] the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs...the body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. (26)¹⁹

From the description of the grotesque body above, we can relate its boundless

¹⁹ In the book, Bakhtin would extend this grotesque body into a bodily stratum that consists of life and death. And I will reiterate and further discuss it in my last chapter on Fruit Chan's *Public Toilet*.

character to Fruit Chan's adoption of the weird figure. In the film, the grotesque body is exercised as a cinematic trigger of memories. The obvious apertures, destroying the boundaries of the classic norms, make the youngster's body penetrative. Thus, the deserted memories, qua the successive scenes, can be unfolded through the close-up of the holes. Following on what Mary Russo has called the "grotto-esque"²⁰, the space in the body equates therefore with a reservoir of the abject. However, the penetrability of the body is not simply a weakness in the container. The body, owing to the extra apertures, is in fact entirely permeated by impurity from inside out. Namely, the body coexists with the abject, such as memories. Furthermore, the body is inscribed by the past. And whenever we see the body, its grotesque image starts to narrate itself. Different time-spaces will revolve around the body. That means, by connecting the past and the present in one body, the story begins and ends at the same moment. The youngster's body is just like a crux making the straightforward time-line become a Mobius circle. Consequently, history is recurring. And even if the grotesque body walks forward, it will one day return to its memories. The body, though impure, has the power of the infinite, which is why Bakhtin would think of such a body quite positively.

²⁰ Mary Russo tears the word apart as "grotto-esque" once in her book *The Female Grotesque* as that which "evokes the cave...low, hidden, earthly, dark, material, immanent, visceral"(1). This makes Bakhtin's concept more subversive in the word itself.

Ga-yin's body, also damaged, is instead different.²¹ It is partially because the purifying rituals mentioned above renew his body in a perfect and proper fashion. Moreover, although the hole in the back of his head is akin to the youngster's extra orifices, it is sealed, rather than open. Thus his body does not work as a trigger of the past. It is, as we can see, complete and intact. So, no messages from yesteryear would come along with the close-up of Ga-yin's hole. Besides, Ga-yin's "resurrection" in the final scene is actually arranged outside of the youngster's body narrative. While Ga-yin is being shot to the ground, with his memories flowing away, Fruit Chan recalls the image of the crippled youngster, who is ready to get off the subway, to identify the disfigured body with the carrier of all the lost memories. Simply speaking, the moment when Ga-yin releases his past, the youngster's body absorbs it. To this point, the story, to which I refer as the youngster's body narrative, is complete. The additional scene of July 7th 1998 is already a whole new beginning.

In fact, the way Fruit Chan copes with the grotesque body reminds me of Taiwanese artist, Chieh-jen Chen's video installation, *Lingchi—Echoes of a Historical*

²¹ The orifices in Ga-yin and the youngster's bodies are both formed by gunshots. The latter even undergoes Ga-yin's purifying act. In the scene, Ga-yin thrusts his fingers into the youngster's orifices and drags him forward. This is something like a punishment, and also an act to clean the holes. His violent act reminds me of the final scenes of C  lin's *Death on the Instalment Plan*, in which the mad Father dismembers the corpse by sticking his finger into the wound to clean the dirtiness of the body (Kristeva, 150; *Death on the Instalment Plan*, 560). But despite the act, what Ga-yin does to the youngster is also a purifying act akin to this case, and yet the youngster's body is still a contaminated one. The reason is that, the orifices in him remain open, so that as a penetrative body coexisting with the universe, the youngster is undoubtedly different from Ga-yin, who undergoes a symbolic surgery.

Photograph.²² Chieh-jen Chen also draws on the bodily metaphor, of two holes on a tortured criminal's chest, to transcend the time-space continuum. In an interview, he indicates that he tries to see if the incomplete body would help to restate the ruptured history.²³ Meanwhile, by reviewing the body's dismemberment, Chen restores the power relation and the position of seeing in the historical site (Hui-hua Zheng).²⁴

These concepts enable me to retrace the way back to the grotesque body in the opening scene of *The Longest Summer*. In the same manner, through viewing the ruptured body, the monitored lives of Fruit Chan's characters are raised. On the subway train, we first see a little boy being attracted by a dozing youngster in front of him. Then the little boy disappears, his viewpoint entirely replaced by the camera. Before the holes show up, the dozing youngster is dismembered under a bunch of close-up shots. It is we who become the accomplices as well as the view-carriers to process the grotesque body behind the camera. Therefore, the body, in the dozing condition, is involuntarily monitored in this and successive scenes. They are indeed within the frame of the frame.

The grotesque body is the beginning of how men are depicted in this film.

²² Chieh-jen Chen [陳界仁], has started since 2002 to create the video installations such as *Lingchi* [凌遲考] and *Factory*. In his works, he combines various time-spaces and makes use of soundless images to probe into issues of colonialism, globalization or their relation to the past, present and the future. <<http://ruins.bluecircus.net/archives/001992.html>>

²³ Goya. <<http://goya.bluecircus.net/archives/004439.html>>

²⁴ Hui-hua Zheng [鄭慧華] <http://www.tfam.gov.tw/explore/explore3-art-fulltext.asp?article_id=1351>

Then, via the memories, Fruit Chan makes use of lots of documentary-type ceremonies leading to the day of the official handover, in contrast to the diegetic scenarios. This repetitive technique produces a frame of macro narrative, which, in a way, emphasizes that the leading characters serve as nothingness in the city. For example, Chan might make his characters stay with the crowds, and that is the moment when the characters are involved in the historical moments, however, in a disoriented way. Similarly, at the opening ceremony of the Tsing Ma Bridge, Ga-suen's murder scene is followed by the live telecast of fireworks on Ga-yin's television. This connection between two camera frames signifies, on the one hand, that the character is under the authoritative monitor; on the other hand, his story is relatively of little significance and can be erased from the TV frame. To some degree, these men's relationship with the society is nothing more than the object, which is meant to be expunged.

These men's immobility in the documentary frame is akin to the disfigured body being viewed by us. However, as Chieh-jen Chen's *Lingchi* works show, the fissure in a body becomes where the power relationship can be seen and restated. Thus, the jettisoned bodies, whether in the prologue of the film, or in the documentaries, are instead the sites where other viewpoints are developed. Again, the object in the body murmurs despite itself.

2.6 The Lasting Memories

In the trailer of *The Longest Summer*, a slogan states: “Leave the history in the memories.” However, it does not mean that the memories will disappear. At least for Ga-yin, the memories, or paraphernalia, he throws away do not vanish. Take the helmet that Ga-yin flings from the bridge, for example. In the flashback to Ga-yin’s memories, we see the helmet floating on the sea. It is not gone as Ga-yin or we would think. It is the same case with the white shirt, which Ga-yin tries to return to Big Brother Wing’s daughter Jane. The shirt is suspended in mid-air. In an interview, Fruit Chan indicated that the relationship between Ga-yin and Jane is just like the situation of the hovering shirt (Fong 52). The throwing back of the shirt signifies ‘breaking off.’ However, it does not work. A departure from the subject might take place, but the jettisoned objects do not fade away. Chan’s repeating shots remind us that those things simply return. Even in the final scene, when Ga-yin loses all of his memories, Fruit Chan arranges the episode of the taxi driver’s fecal revenge, parodying the Freudian “anal sadistic” which uses faeces as a weapon. That is another allegorized return of memories, but is unnoticed by Ga-yin. It is just like the gunshot to the back of his head, which is a blind point for him. Thanks to this oversight, Ga-yin misses the chance of facing or confronting his abject. He does not therefore have to react like the targeted schoolgirl, whose student identity is all at

once overthrown and covered by the excrement. On the contrary, without the reattachment of the abject, Ga-yin maintains his new identity in a clean, proper, and intact outfit.

Elizabeth Grosz indicates that Kristeva's concept of the abject is not entirely new.

But what is improved is:

...her claim that what must be expelled from the subject's corporeal functioning can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution. (86-87)

As the abject is viewed as the boundary of one's identity, "the subject must have a certain [...] mastery of the abject; it must keep in check and at a distance in order to define itself as a subject" (Grosz 87). But, since the act of abjection is a precondition of the symbolic world, where one gets a stable identity, how would the subject manage when transgressing the border named the abject? Such a question has not been dealt with in this chapter; neither has it been further discussed in *The Longest Summer*. In other words, no boundary is violated in the film. What we see is simply the castration executed by the authority on the subject. And the subject, such as Ga-yin, accepts it so as to stand safely in the new society. However, through Fruit Chan's cinematographic technique, by making the deserted past secretly lie

somewhere, the abject, to some degree, murmurs something that the subject does not catch.²⁵ In the next chapter on *Hong Kong, Hollywood*, Fruit Chan again manipulates the concept of abjection. But this time, the abjected part of self is transferred from faeces to ruptured body parts. Moreover, the men in the film suffer more severely than Ga-yin does. They have to face the returned abjection and re-experience the disaster. Those men are not going to lose their memory but they realize that they are wasted by the abject, and then by what lies behind it.



²⁵ Fruit Chan's purpose to make this film is to speak to Hong Kong people that it is pathetic to forget the past. He thus makes use of the disfigured body and the reappearance of the deserted stuff to indicate that these things are somewhere to remind people of the lost memories. (De-yu Chen [陳德瑜])

Chapter Three

Hollywood, Hong Kong: The Journey to the Split Subject

3.1 Introduction

Fruit Chan continues to consistently apply his philosophy of his gory violence to normal life in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*. As he says in an interview, the real horror “is deep down inside,”²⁶ rather than in things like phantoms. In *Dumplings*, which tells a story of female characters eating a fetus in order to remain young and beautiful, the girl student’s spirit passes through the main characters and yet she is less repulsive than the film’s dietary theme. Taboos work, as they subvert our daily life. By the same token, in *The Longest Summer*, the juxtaposition of the floating helmet and the youngster’s disfigured body serves as a reminder of the past, but at the same time, it is also a taboo to Ga-yin. However, when compared with Chan’s previous films, *Hollywood, Hong Kong* steps “out of bounds.” That is, apart from showing us the same kind of extreme horror found in *The Longest Summer*, Chan reattaches the lost matter onto the characters. This time, the expelled object is a chopped hand, which is revealed to the protagonists at the end of the film. As a result, the threat behind the object does not pass into oblivion; but instead, it is somewhere “spying” on the characters.

²⁶ In comparison, of the horror trilogy *Three...Extremes* (三更) in 2004, Chan’s *Dumplings* relatively contains less startling techniques. In the interview, Chan indicates that “the horror is all in the subject matter... [the film] doesn’t just create an eerie atmosphere. The real horror is deep inside” (Fong).

The plot of *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, revolves around Tai Hom Village, a shantytown to which a Shanghai prostitute, Tong-tong, brings all sorts of calamities. Tong-tong (Xiun Chou),²⁷ as a fantasy incarnate, seduces an obese butcher family and an aspiring pimp. However, her intention to extort money destroys every pleasurable thing she brought to them. Her disappearance in the later part of the film, is the cause of the breakdown of the men's fantasy, and subsequently embroils them in an everlasting shadow play. That is, the once desired object, in the Lacanian sense, turns into the object *a* protruding from the Real. This object devours the subject while he is staring at it. Therefore, as Fruit Chan shows us, the severed hand becomes something that has to be exchanged as a ransom for protection against the unforgettable threat. As Chan himself says, the reemergence of the severed hand at the end of the film refers to the prostitute's omnipresence; so consequently, the men are controlled by this missing woman who serves the role of the Lacanian object *a*. Although most critics would simplify the prostitute as a combination of devil and angel, they have, in this light, ignored the fact that only when she is absent, is her overpowering threat all the more felt (Rui-qin Cheng).²⁸ By drawing on the process from fantasy to nightmare, it will be illustrated in the following section, how the men

²⁷ There still lies some political significance in this film. For example, Chan plays a joke on the Chinese prostitute's name. In this film, Tong-tong has another two aliases. One is Feng-feng (方方), the other is Hong-hong (紅紅). Combined together, these three names can refer to tong-feng-hong, which is the flag's color of the People's Republic of China, Eastern Red. In this paper, I would stick to "Tong-tong" in order not to confuse readers.

²⁸ 鄭瑞琴 [Rui-qin Cheng].

in this film ultimately find out the Lacanian truth that they are divided subjects, rather than being complete.²⁹ Undoubtedly, having the severed hand as the abject will also play a huge role in the relationships between the subjects and their objects.

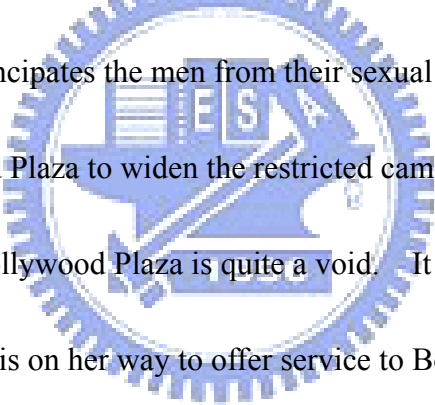
3.2 The Prostitute as “Fantasy Incarnate”

For those who live in the slum, Tong-tong is a “fantasy made of flesh” (Walsh 2002). She meets their two-fold needs exactly. One is the men’s sexual desires; and the other, their longing for a Mother (together they signify the Oedipal Complex).

Firstly, the aspect of sexual desire can be explored through Fruit Chan’s use of various shooting techniques. Before Tong-tong’s debut, the sexual desires of Boss Chu, Ming (Chu’s elder boy), and the pimp Wong Chi Keung are repressed. Only at night or in the bedroom are sexual secrets disclosed and exchanged. The villagers find sanctuary by means of cyberspace or on the telephone where they can explore their desires. Nevertheless, they cannot control the object of their desire. For example, since the internet porn-sites had not been renewed for a while, Ming couldn’t see nude girls. Similarly, while Boss Chu can call the hooker Ah-lui to

²⁹ There is a succession in the men’s journey to their splitness, which is similar to Choangtsu’s dreaming of the butterfly (莊周夢蝶). According to Lacan, it is not until the dream that Choangtsu starts to think of his subjectivity as a butterfly or a human being. And the dream thus becomes a place where one visualizes himself as a split subject, rather than an omnipotent and complete one: “...it is when he was the butterfly that he apprehended one of the roots of his identity—that he was, and is, in his essence, that butterfly who paints himself with his own colours...” (1981:76). By the same token, for the men in *Hollywood Hong Kong*, it entails the prostitute’s existence to get the insight. It is the woman leading them into the world out of so-called “reality,” and correspondingly, they journey back to the home they have ignored for a long time.

satisfy his sexual needs, he cannot stop her from cursing him. Owing to such imbalances in power, the men's desires eventually are confronted by failure, which to some degree implies their impotence. Thus, the lack of an equivalent response from the women indicates the impossibility of a sexual relationship and, furthermore, the women cannot fit the men's ideals (Žižek 1997:7). Consequently, in the opening scenes, the camera's frame remains fixed on the shabby village. A series of shots revolve around the narrow lanes or indoor spaces. Under such confines no skyline is disclosed until the alluring figure of Tong-tong shows up. From what we can see in the story, Tong-tong emancipates the men from their sexual frustrations, while she sheds light on Hollywood Plaza to widen the restricted camera frame.



In the beginning, Hollywood Plaza is quite a void. It is merely an ignored background when Ah-lui is on her way to offer service to Boss Chu. By contrast, with Tong-tong's relation to the building revealed, the Chu family and Brother Keung (the pimp) find their wannabe images, and their manhood by having sexual relations with her. In a sense, Tong-tong functions like a mirror reflecting the men's wayward fantasies. How she participates in their fantasies can be explained by the use of the shot/reverse shot device in the film.

The only chance the young pimp Keung has to meet Tong-tong is when she offers him her sexual service. After having sex in the tunnel, Tong-tong leads Keung

to the hilltop to see Hollywood Plaza. Staring at the five high edifices, she says, “I live in the Five-Finger Mountain.”³⁰ Then she asks Keung to stretch out his five fingers to imitate Hollywood Plaza. It is at the moment when Keung raises his hand that the camera lens’ focus instantly changes from Tong-tong’s face to a view of Hollywood Plaza. The angled shot of the edifices is not meant to be oppressive at this moment; instead, Keung is sublimating his desires. Looking at Hollywood Plaza soaring above him is just like staring at his own erection.³¹ It is the same with another scene. In the clinic, when the female doctor treats Keung by cupping him, she asks him how he usually “releases fire” (ejaculates). What follows, in slow-motion, is his recollection, of the underground passage scene where he chases after Tong-tong. The sequence fixes on Tong-tong’s back and her smiling face, and ends with their running up the long staircase hand in hand. The upward movement and angled shots obviously parallel the hilltop scene, and no doubt, Tong-tong is the medium through which all the pleasures of “elevation,” both sexually and visually are brought forth.

It is the same case with the hilarious swing scene. During her visit to the Chu

³⁰ The Five-Finger Mountain is adopted from the Chinese fairy tale *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji*, 西遊記). In the novel, the Monkey King is trapped in the Buddha’s hand, which is called Five-Finger Mountain. In Chan’s film, Hollywood Plaza is just like the Five-Finger Mountain restricting Tong Tong’s freedom.

³¹ Fruit Chan confesses that “By putting Tai-hom village and Hollywood Plaza together, I don’t mean to talk about the uneven distribution of wealth. Instead, ‘sex’ takes the leading position” (Rui-qin Cheng; my translation). So that, except for Tong Tong’s Hollywood dream, Hollywood Plaza could also stand for the men’s manhood, since Fruit Chan deliberately juxtaposes the view of the buildings and the men’s faces.

Family, Tong-tong gets their attention by swinging to and fro on a swing. Boss Chu, Ming and Tiny all get their satisfaction from staring at her playing on the swing.

The shot/reverse shots of Tong-tong reveal Hollywood Plaza off and on in the frame.

This format is repeated in the Tong-tong/Tiny/Boss Chu/ Hollywood Plaza sequences,

and thus the swing scene is sexually charged. Namely, it is a metaphor for sexual

intercourse. All of these people's satisfaction³² results from Tong-tong's encounter

with Hollywood Plaza. Her quasi-orgasm makes her body the focus of the men's

desire, reinforcing their masculinity (Qi Shi; Rui-qin Cheng). Therefore, the men

undergo the process of identification through using Tong-tong as a "mirror." In

accordance with Lacan's concept of the mirror stage as being "orthopaedic," and Boss

Chu, Ming and Keung "being caught up in the lure of spatial identification"

experience "the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body image to

a form of its totality" (1949: 4). Such a "surgery" by Tong-tong can be seen from

now on to inaugurate a new life for these villagers.

The second aspect of Tong-tong as a fantasy lies in her maternal image. Chan

points out in an interview that his leitmotif in this film is the absence of a Mother

(Chang 87). The roast-pork family is deserted by the mother. And the only mother

figure in the family is their pet pig "Mamma," towards which the maternal longing of

³² Here, the sexual satisfaction refers mainly to that of Boss Chu and his elder son Ming. Tiny's satisfaction results relatively from his ability to make this lovely woman, who is mother-like, happy, for he is the one pulling the swing for her.

the Chus “metastasizes into a dysfunctional, anthropomorphic affection” (Acquarello).

However, Tong-tong soon fills the position, mothering the little boy Tiny as well as

the men. None would deny that Tiny needs a mother.³³ But for the adults,

Tong-tong is also the embodiment of a Mother. In the article about the psychology

of love, Freud relates men’s object-choices to their primal fixations on their Mothers.

Owing to having such a fixation since infancy, men tend to make the following

love-objects the “mother-surrogates” (Freud 1910: 169).³⁴ These object-choices

attached to the mother, however, manifest the fact that the best woman has been lost.

It is then the image of “the best woman” that endows Tong-tong with the color of

fantasy, in which she is the revitalizing mother who grants the men in the village

whatever they want. In the film, because of the return of this lost mother, all the

men in the film start to laugh foolishly or swing the swing like little boys. And,

correspondingly, the other women, such as Ah-lui and the mainland woman in the

roast-pork shop are abandoned since they are just temporary love-objects. The bliss

of having a Mother rejuvenates the shabby slum. No wonder that Hollywood Plaza,

instead of being a threat, becomes a gift from the mother-like figure, Tong-tong.

³³ When in the Hollywood Plaza, Tiny tells Tong-tong that since his mother left, he has had no chance to visit the fancy plaza again. We can thus figure out from this confession that for Tiny, Tong-tong is simultaneously the incarnation of the lost mother and also Tiny’s access to the fantastic world, Hollywood Plaza. So as to say, even if the interaction between Tong-tong and Tiny is invariably pure in this film, her effect on Tiny is analogous to that on the adults. She is fantasy itself.

³⁴ Freud also mentions the same point in his essays on Leonardo da Vinci (1910c) and the tendency to men’s debasement of the love relationship (1912).

3.3 The Desired, the Devouring

However, the fantasy does not last long. With the disappearance of Tong-tong for two-thirds of the film, the discovery of her extortion attempt shatters the beautiful dreams of all the men involved. With the prostitute Tong-tong as the mirror, it instead becomes a place where a death threat ensues. The aforementioned identification with the desired image eventually turns out to be the misrecognition of “I.” According to Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage, the mode of imaginary identification is the subject’s narcissistic relationship with “others.” Such identification creates for the subject “the illusion of a corporeal coherence” through the reflected image (Grosz 82). Therefore, the subject would regard itself as the Cartesian subject which is omnipotent with a cohesive and stable identity. In their fantasies, the men of Tai Hom village indeed conflate themselves with the masculinity that Tong-tong gives them. They focus on every movement of Tong-tong, thinking that they have her in their power. However, Tong-tong’s effect on them, as mentioned earlier, is about misrecognition. These men are in fact the desire of the desired object. That is, they are entrapped by the fantasy based on Tong-tong’s hidden dream of visiting the real Hollywood. And when they are using Tong-tong as the mirror to reflect their wannabe images, they are simultaneously in the sights of Tong-tong, from which the death threat bursts out to disrupt their supposed complete

and omnipotent subjectivity.³⁵ To emphasize this point, Fruit Chan presents us with two different swing scenes. During the day it is Tong-tong being looked at on the swing, but at night dressed in a red garment, she swings into the men's dreams and peers at them. Tong-tong is depicted as an alluring spirit at that moment, and she elicits Boss Chu's nocturnal release. This is an allegory to the western succubus and the Chinese tale in which the spider woman lives by draining men's bodies.³⁶ But Boss Chu is so fascinated by his masculine self that he is oblivious to being overseen by the woman. Thus, Boss Chu, Ming and Keung are confronted with the same fate as Narcissus:

...Narcissus quenches his thirst. His image is no longer "other;" it is a surface that absorbs and seduces him, which he can approach but never pass beyond. For there is no beyond, just as there is no reflexive distance between him and his image. The mirror of water is not a surface of reflection, but of absorption. (Baudrillard 67)

Namely, the transgression of the boundary introduces death. Narcissus just sacrifices himself by looking at his reflection as another person. In Lacan's words, this other is the *object a* qua the gaze situated in the real. By Hans Holbein's *The*

³⁵ The ensuing threat can be illustrated with the direction of looking in the mirror mechanism. Being the medium between the men and their reflections in reality, the woman is the one being looked at. However, in the world of mirrors, the direction of looking is reversed and issued by the woman towards the men (Figure 3.1).

³⁶ This metaphor again echoes with the previous analogy of the Hollywood Plaza as the Five-Finger Mountain in the Chinese tale *Journey to the West* (*Xiyoubi*, 西遊記)

Ambassadors, Lacan illustrates his two superimposed triangles of vision (Figure 3.2), in which the subject is absorbed by *object a* into another scopic field and loses his self-control. In the painting, spectators can discern something discordant but veiled, a skull breaking down the so-called perspective and further reversing the spectators' position when looking at the painting. By determining the viewers' desire to see it, the skull brings in the true vision, exposing Lacan's second triangle in which the subject is "photo-graphed" by the gaze (Lacan 106). Accordingly, this look "as an object of desire ... functions as a question mark over... the mirror stage" claims the subject's failure in the imaginary relationship with the object (Rose 154-55).

Furthermore, this *object a* as the gaze becomes so determinant that it is "through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive the effect" (Lacan 106). In this light, the powerful Cartesian subject³⁷ breaks down. What takes place is a split in the subject, pinned down by its desired object that causes anamorphosis and becomes a devouring object. Narcissus's death, therefore, originates from a confrontation with the gaze from his lovely reflection; this is also the case for the men in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*. In the second half of the film, the romances are twisted with Tong-tong's place being superseded by blackmail. A death threat thus emerges

³⁷ A Cartesian subject, as opposed to the Lacanian one, is omnipotent. It controls everything without the awareness of its instability in reality. For the Cartesian subject, some Lacanian things won't exist with it. So that, it won't confront what the father in the story of a burning child has suffered. A Cartesian subject simply denies the other self showing in the dream. For in the dream, it would be no longer omnipotent. Also, the dream would reflect what it really is. The men in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, are falling exactly into this Cartesian myth.

again and again from the void where Tong-tong used to stay.

3.4 Abjection, So to Live

Jacqueline Rose has divided the exchange of looks between the subject and *object a* into three phases, “privation, frustration and castration.”³⁸ The third one means that the subject “is led to realize that this apparent reciprocity is grounded on the impossibility of complete return” (156). That is, the newly recognized subject, compared with the Cartesian one, is to some degree castrated. Here in the film, abjection embodies this castration.

It is noteworthy that the blackmail assumes the form of the law. Tong-tong’s friend, a lawyer named Peter, fabricates an accusation of the men’s sexual encounters with the under-aged girl. In the name of the law, the blackmail transforms into the medium by which the villagers can rescue themselves from Tong-tong’s gaze.

Namely, it is a deal grounded on the men’s extrication from reality into a society where they can maintain their identities. The precondition for them to do so is to give up part of their identities. Thus Boss Chu pays the ransom, and Keung lets his right hand be chopped off. In light of Ga-yin’s case in *The Longest Summer*, it

³⁸ In “The Imaginary,” Jacqueline Rose reiterates the shift of Lacan’s theory from the mirror stage to “the collapsing of the imaginary relation into desire” (155-56). The three phases she uses for illustrating the violations of the mirror stage stress mainly on the subject’s role as a voyeur or the one supported by the desire to see. Privation means that “the subject is dispossessed of its object” so that the subject cannot see what it wants to see. Frustration as the second phase indicates that “the subject realizes that it is not the only one looking” and the full equivalence between itself and another subject is impossible (156).

would be called their act of abjection. This abjection is parallel to what a child does while leaving the pre-oedipal phase to enter the symbolic order, where he subjects himself to his father. In this Freudian myth, the child gives up narcissism, and detaches himself from his beloved mother, who reflects in return a cohesive image which, however, is then negated by his father. To avoid the castration threat from his father, the subject chooses to draw closer to him.³⁹ Then in the symbolic world, the desired (m)other becomes relatively detestable, overwhelming. To maintain proper in the symbolic, the subject has to risk “the loss [...] of the totality of his living being [...] to ward off the subject’s fear of his own very identity sinking irretrievably into the mother” (Kristeva 64). This is an exchange by extricating part of self to gain back a stable identity. In this manner, to keep himself away from “where meaning collapses,” the subject needs to expel the abject from his body again and again.

(Kristeva 2) In the Freudian myth, the abject signifies the moment when he is with his mother, while in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, it is the time when the villagers are devoured in jouissance as provided by the encounter with the gaze. Therefore what Kristeva refers to as the Other would then come out to “keep the subject from

³⁹ By Kristeva’s abjection, Boss Chu and Keung’s abandonment of their treasure, or part of them, could also be understood by the child’s attitude to his faeces from the anal stage to the phallic stage. Faeces, as the child’s first gift, are what can make him complete with the sense of control as well as the feeling that faeces fill him up. He can sacrifice it to the one he likes. However, when the parents’ orders intervene negating the faeces as something bad, the child gives it up. He is then a subject to the world in which his faeces are taken as abject. He abandons it so as to enter the Other’s world. In Freud’s article “Anal Erotism and the Castration Complex”, he indicates that this is the prototype of castration (84). The notion is also showed in “On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism.”

foundering [in jouissance]...” by dropping the repulsive gift, the abject, as a border or frontier to keep “I” away from the abominable reality (9). Consequently, it can be said that the severed hand and the ransom ensuing from the intervention of the accusations are jettisoned as the abject to stabilize one in the proper social order. In the former chapter on *The Longest Summer*, the youngster’s grotesque body has been discussed. In *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, Fruit Chan again draws on the body’s monstrosity in the tradition of Swift, to express the attachment of the abject. The young pimp Keung has one chance to mend his broken body. However, the dismembered hand that Tiny brings him is someone else’s. He, in virtue of this error, now has two left hands, making him feel like a monster. Furthermore, as he says, the hands are similar to a pig’s trotters, which have no human value. Or to put it another way, his body with the abject attached to it, like the big hole on the youngster’s face in *The Longest Summer*, is a question mark sticking out of the social norm, meaning that this weird assemblage would elicit the horrible past in a similar manner. Incapable of identifying the grotesque body or taking the jettisoned hand as part of himself, Keung makes Ming chop it off again. Along with this intense disgust towards the abject, a territory is marked out “that I can call my own because of the Other, having dwelt in me as *alter ego*, points it out to me through loathing” (Kristeva 10). All the turmoil thus fades away.

But as indicated both in chapter two and at the very beginning of this chapter, Fruit Chan does not hide the abject this time. At the end of the story there is a scene of the roast-pork family sitting in the car, like a flashback to the opening scene before the prostitute's intrusion. All seems to be forgotten. Nevertheless, in the next shot, a man with two right hands bumps into the frame. The close-up of the hand reminds us of the frightening sequences in the first scene of *The Longest Summer*. Its grotesque image draws not only ours but also the Chus' attention. It is no longer like the blind point in the back of Ga-yin's head, but is relatively visible. The corollary is that the switch which relates to the past is turned on. While, according to the aforementioned, abjection prevents one from disappearing into the real, but by having the abject hovering in the border it instead signifies where the subject breaks away. As Kristeva puts it, the abject is "the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already lost" (15). This object, though lost, is nonetheless evoked through the act of abjection and the appearance of the abject. For the characters in the film, even though Tong-tong is gone, she still stays with them in various forms. Her existence is so indelible as to still be able to affect the men's peaceful lives.

It is exactly what Lacan's formula " $\$ \diamond a$ " explains: the subject exists in the symbolic with an object-cause in the real (Žižek 1994: 32).⁴⁰ It is also what

⁴⁰ This formula could be also related to Hegel's "simple negativity." The reason being that the living Substance as the *Subject* results from "the mediation of its self-othering with itself," so that there is a formula $A \neq A$. Further, "only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within

Rui-qin Cheng has said, the characters in this film are possessed by the spirit of an absence, namely Tong-tong. And undoubtedly, the returning chopped hand is the device which Fruit Chan uses to make those forgetful people aware of the internal and external cruelty lying within each of us, which also holds them down.

3.5 *Hollywood, Hong Kong as a Bittersweet Fable for Hong Kong People*

In the *Longest Summer*, it is seen that Ga-yin tries hard to dump the improper as well as the past. His ensuing amnesia secures him a happy life with a new and stable identity. As a matter of fact, Fruit Chan does not want his characters to thrust the past aside. In an interview, Fruit Chan states clearly that by means of his film (*The Longest Summer*) he wants to remind the people of Hong Kong that it is sad to forget the past (De-yu Chen). And this motif recurs in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*. The characters' encounter with the grotesque body in the last scene conveys what Chan tries to say. He wants the people of Hong Kong to look at their corrupted bodies, and bring forth their repressed and unacceptable past further into the present. For many critics, *Hollywood, Hong Kong* is a film which reflects the attitude of the people of Hong Kong after the handover in 1997. That is, most of them are as passive as the characters in the film waiting for the slaughter by mainland China. For instance,

itself...is the True" (Hegel 10). In a word, as it is in Lacan's formula, an invisible object conditions the existence of subject, which is thus divided and, named as an Hegelian subject rather than the Cartesian one.

the Tai Hom village as the microcosm of Hong Kong (Chang 86) is deployed “as a sign of the old Hong Kong bowing to the economic prowess of the new Mainland China” (Kaori 1). The villagers, unaware of the hidden threat, accept instead the temptations that accelerate the demolition. In Tong-tong and Keung’s sexual encounter scene, Tong-tong pities the fact that Keung was born in the place where the Hollywood Plaza always bears down on him. However, the threat from the skyscrapers is apparently the last thing he could care about. Instead, he follows Tong-tong’s directions and sees the beauty of the buildings. In another scene, Tong-tong waves a red scarf from where she lives, while on the tin rooftop Tiny and his father respond happily with a white cloth. An apparent connotation lies between the colors of red and white. These Hong Kong residents inadvertently subject themselves to the mainlanders. This kind of ignorance to threats and their own carelessness eventually lead to the men’s subsequent immovability, in relation to the prostitute’s manipulation. Another example is when Boss Chu falls asleep in the subway while Tong-tong takes away the ransom. The Chu family waits in the same place until the removal of Tai-hom village, while Tong-tong is already in the real Hollywood. The contradiction between immobility and mobility again highlights the aforementioned indelible role of Tong-tong. However, with Fruit Chan’s emphasis on the body’s incompleteness at the end of both films (*The Longest Summer* and this

one), the abject, which leads to the past, sustains an important role. It is the trigger shedding light on things in oblivion. Furthermore, through the abject, Chan questions the stability of Hong Kong's identity after the handover to China; when people find their seats in the newly formed society, such as the Chu family moving to another place to begin a new life, they are to some degree in the forgetting mode. This seemingly stable identity is in fact conditioned by something being lost. Upon accepting the new social rules the people of Hong Kong simply look forward rather than looking back at their scars. So, by combining the abject and the social body together, no matter if it is in *The Longest Summer* or in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, Fruit Chan implants new memories. His images help people trace a way back to their disastrous moments, and accept what are, nowadays, unsuitable rules for Hong Kong. The characters' active attachment to an abject will be seen in the next chapter on *Public Toilet*. And it is only then that we will find the relative indefinite body that offers an outlet for the so-called Hong Kong identity and the conditioned split subject to take shape.

Chapter Four

Public Toilet: From the Refusal to the Acceptance of Bodily Contamination

4.1 Introduction

“We are born between feces and urine.”⁴¹

St. Augustine

The story-frame of Fruit Chan’s *Public Toilet* is no longer limited to Hong Kong and mainland China. This time, Chan chooses to tell a story with a more global view. The film proceeds as a travelogue, in which all the characters travel around seeking cures or elixirs for terminal diseases. With transnational landscapes of Beijing, New York City, India, Hong Kong and South Korea providing multiple backgrounds, *Public Toilet* “encapsulates the fluidity of contemporary life, transcending traditional boundaries and barriers of geography, race [and] language” (Morrison 68). However, *Public Toilet*, as Chan’s first effort at digital filming, has been widely criticized as a

⁴¹ The original text is “Inter faeces et urinam nascimur,” which is misattributed, and the probable source is the homily by Bernard of Clairvaux (http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo). In Camille Paglia’s work on sexual decadence in modern visual art and western literatures, she refers to what St. Augustine says, “We are born between feces and urine” as a “misogynistic view of the infant’s sin-stained emergence from the birth canal [which] is close to the chthonian truth. But excretion, through which nature for once acts upon the sexes equally, can be saved by comedy, as we see in Aristophanes, Rabelais, Pope, and Joyce. Excretion has found a place in high culture. Menstruation and childbirth are too barbaric for comedy. Their ugliness has produced the giant displacement of women’s historical status as sex object. Women’s beauty is a compromise with her dangerous archetypal allure. It gives the eyes the comforting illusion of intellectual control of nature” (17).

loosely constructed work. One of the reasons is that the film does not belong to any trilogy, such as that related to Hong Kong handover or prostitutes, as Chan had previously promised. Instead of including the film in the context of Hong Kong-China relations, Chan presents his audience with an overt expose whose leitmotif is excrement and the excretory functions. Such grossness in images is seemingly the only element inherited from his former works, such as *Hollywood Hong Kong*. Nonetheless, it is the very grossness that matters.

As its name suggests, the film explores public toilets all around the world. It discloses bodily excretion in a variety of cultures. The jumping sequences in the five countries create a single panorama in which the public toilet is not simply a place of defilement but most important of all an intersection of life and death (Berry 460-61). Centered upon the characters' insights into life and death through the grossness of defilement, the film happens to match Julia Kristeva's elaboration on the relations among the abject, the subject and the unnamable maternal figure in "a land of oblivion" (Kristeva 8).

In an interview, Chan mentioned that the self-growth of people in different ages is a consistent concern in his works (Berry 478). Chan's previous films showcase how the characters deal with the problem of identity. *Public Toilet*, on the other hand, handles not just the violation of the subject's identity, but also, through the

organic “excremental vision” as Susan Morrison proposes, the film works on the subject’s awakening from a state of oblivion; the active attachment to the abject leads to the lost memory. The subject’s confrontation with the lost memory in *Public Toilet* is a great contrast to the other characters in Chan’s previous films. In this regard, *Public Toilet* is no longer unrelated to Chan’s former films; thematic continuity fills in the gap between Chan’s films.

4.2 The Surrogate of the Other

Public Toilet is pieced together by various characters’ stories. Men or women of different nationalities travel around, seeking remedies for themselves or those they love. The film is complicated in presenting its audience with a multi-faceted time-space continuum. However, the characters’ similar appearances, ages and purposes for traveling, all indicate that these characters are variations on one figure, Tong-tong. Recently, a film *I’m Not There* (2009) adopted such a tactic to depict various aspects of Bob Dylan. Six different actors’ stories “inter-cut and overlapping, spanning decades but apparently all taking place at once” (Jones 2). In *Public Toilet*, similar overlapping occurs in the characters’ images and plots. The characters act each other and continue each others’ journey. The scenic transition does not break off in relation to each individual’s search for a remedy. Instead, the combination of

all these trips accumulates more failures and underlines the impossibility of finding a panacea. In this chapter, among these overlapping characters, Tong-tong's story is the most pivotal and complete one.

Tong-tong is an orphan who was abandoned in a public toilet. His identification as an orphan, especially his lack of a mother, is constructed within a social context. His foster grandmother comes to his rescue and leads him to a new family. She might manifest maternal significance to Tong-tong whereas in the Law of the Father. That is why her existence cannot fully take the place of Tong-tong's biological mother. To begin with, as we can see in the film, she is the one pulling the baby out of the cesspit. Since the baby Tong-tong sustains his life by drinking urine, the cesspit becomes an environment similar to a mother's womb. The foster grandmother's act of pulling the baby out along with the crying of the baby is nothing more than delivering a baby. The foster grandmother is relatively an outsider involved in the separation of the child from its mother. To make it more specific, she is the one leading Tong-tong into the symbolic world where he obtains a specific identity through the procedure of adoption. A new family comes into being in the name of social regulation.

We can say that the foster grandmother plays a role of stabilizing the chaotic situation of Tong-tong's birth: "from chaos comes order". In other words, her

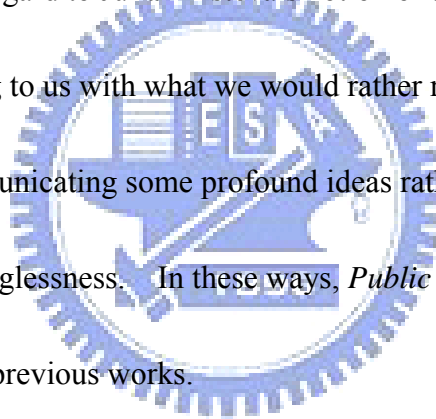
presence in the story frame terminates the relation between Tong-tong and his lost mother, regarded as his lifelong object of desire. This is a consistent pattern of Chan's male characters. If compared with Fruit Chan's male roles in his previous works, such as Ga-yin in *The Longest Summer* and the Chu Family in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, Tong-tong is also a male character deprived of his connection with his object of desire. As referred to in earlier chapters, Fruit Chan's male characters all undergo symbolic castration. All kinds of violently displaced castration, such as a gunshot to the head, blackmail in the name of the law or the cut finger is to bring the character back to normal life. The male characters are forced to turn away from what they desire and sink further into oblivion.

By the same token, Tong-tong's grandmother works as a surrogate of the Other (exaggerating the "otherness") to practice symbolic castration on Tong-tong.

However, oblivion does not happen to Tong-tong. Born in filth, he is more capable of overcoming the barrier put up by the Other. That is why his later acceptance of the contaminated body enables him to enter the cesspit and reproduce the scene of his own birth, which brings back his connection with the lost mother. This will be further elaborated later.

4.3 Abjection: the Exclusion of Memory from the Body

The overlapping shots of giving birth and excreting indicate the similarity of these two actions. It is the evacuation of objects from the human body that connects giving birth and excreting, however in a sorrowful way. The birth of the child in *Public Toilet* is nothing more than the expulsion of excrement from the human body. The curious parallel between the abandoned child and the feces in the toilet reveals something too unbearable and dirty to view, a double taboo. Yet, through the eye of the camera, the audience is forced to witness it again and again, since both acts are repetitive ones. With regard to Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, *Public Toilet* is indeed a movie revealing to us with what we would rather refuse to see. In other words, this film is communicating some profound ideas rather than what might appear at first glance, as meaninglessness. In these ways, *Public Toilet* tells a similar story to those of Fruit Chan's previous works.



As Kristeva puts it in *Powers of Horror*, the abject is “a deep well of memory that is untouchable and intimate” (6). Such a conflicting definition results from the abject's role as an undesired/repressed reminder stressing the existence of the object, namely the desired one; the object is dealt with through the act of abjection. Thereby, the subject undergoes a process similar to what Lacan calls the emergence of “the split subject.”

The abject, to some degree, is expelled from one's body. It is deserted and then

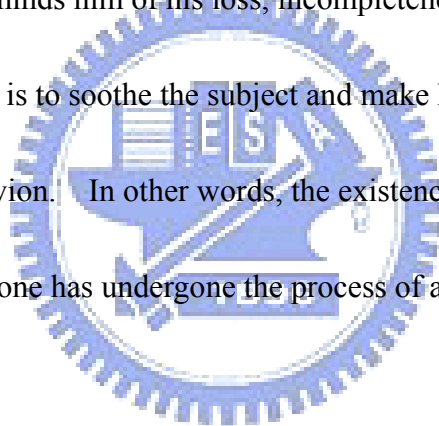
ignored by the body thereafter. However, in *Public Toilet*, Fruit Chan reverses the direction of evacuation, and in so doing, follows a scatological tradition dating back to Rabelais and Swift.⁴² He makes use of shots focused on the feces to endow the deserted matter with a special meaning. It is thus turns from nothing important into something “memorable.” In other words, it becomes a reminder of the moment of separation as well as the body from which one is divided; the result is a loss of integrity and identity. Through the act of abjection, the memory of separation is expelled as well. In Kristeva’s words, the act of abjection is a resistance to the inner memory:

...When I *seek* (myself), *lose* (myself), or experience *jouissance*--- then “I” is *heterogeneous*. Discomfort, unease, dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt against, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise. Thus braided, woven, ambivalent, a heterogeneous flux marks out a territory that I can call my own because the Other, having dwelt in me as *alter ego*, points it out to me through loathing.

⁴² François Rabelais (1494-1553) was noted for his scatological humor. He applied scatology in an aesthetic manner for comic condemnation. In the 18th century, Jonathan Swift was one of the prominent writers trying to deconstruct the romantic ideal of women. Instead of despising women, Swift adopts the scatological manner to represent the “natural, physiological aspects of human life and depicts women like ordinary human creatures, made of flesh and blood, with their merits and demerits” (<http://www.bookrags.com/essay-2006/2/12/18594/9774>). In his most famous poem “The Lady’s Restroom,” Swift confronts Strephon with his beloved woman Celia’s real life. Every physical detail of Celia is revealed with Strephon’s increasing abomination. Through such a satire, Swift successfully reflects his attitude toward women that they are not that different from men. Chan’s scatological tale-telling also tries to manifest the fact that fecal matters are part of us. That is nothing to fear and none of us can be above the call of such nature.

(10)

This inner memory is ripped off by the so-called Other which most of the time is incarnated as the law or anything related to regulations rather than anarchy; instead, it can further refer to the world constituted by the Other's counterpart, the mother figure, i.e., the object of desire. The process of abjection converges with Lacan's theory of the emergence of the split subject, who becomes oblivious to his proximity to the desired object owing to the process of "castration". However, the return of the desired object always reminds him of his loss, incompleteness, and moreover his scar. The purpose of abjection is to soothe the subject and make him stay in safe and tender non-confrontational oblivion. In other words, the existence of the abject is a reminder of the fact that one has undergone the process of abjection, or in Lacan's words, the split moment.



In *Public Toilet*, the characters' staring at filth offers us an excremental vision. It is this excremental vision that manifests the existence of the abject, and further helps the subject contact a world filled with chaos rather than order. The excremental view gets the subject to re-experience the process of abjection, albeit in a reverse direction. Tong-tong's case in the film can explain well what I mean by a reverse way. The excremental vision allows him to recall the past where lies his lost mother.

4.4 Corporeal Incompleteness: Bodily “Lack” Lets in Memories and the Reality of the Split Subject

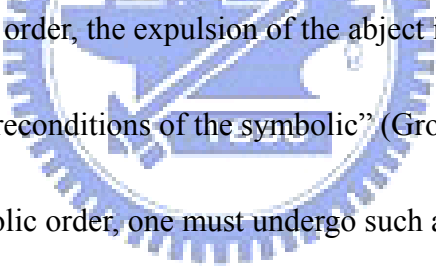
Before probing into Tong-tong’s contaminated body as physical incompleteness, let us review a shocking scene in *The Longest Summer*. The film begins with a youngster standing in the railway carriage, and clearly handicapped. However, it is actually the big holes on his cheeks which attract people’s attention. While the camera takes the place of the other passengers’ gazing through the holes, all the memories are brought into the story frame. In previous chapter, I dealt with the issue of incomplete bodies. The past lies metaphorically in the lack on the youngster’s face. His deficient body introduces a path to the violent memories, which cause his sense of reality to experience some instability. This is similar to the gunshot wound to Ga-yin’s back brain. The lacks on the bodies bring about the past. In *The Longest Summer* and *Hollywood Hong Kong*, such bodily incompleteness is apparent.

As for Tong-tong, his lack lies in the anus. The “crack” is innately a lack, rendering the body incomplete. However, most people ignore such a deficiency and even overlook the contents inside. Draining contamination from one’s body is the result of the act of evacuating. Through the act of abjection, the subject returns to the state of purity and stability. This is similar to the relation between Ga-yin’s gun-shot and his violent memory. He seemingly loses his memory by being shot.

However, the so-called state of purity is merely an illusion. The dropped matter, his memory, still lies there. As we can see in the last scene of *The Longest Summer*, the scar made by the gunshot wound to Ga-yin's back brain, although invisible to Ga-yin, is evident to us. That visibility thus makes his "lost" memory a haunting and undeniable fact.

By the same token, the hole in Tong-tong's body works in a similar manner; it is where his past hides, and also what causes Tong-tong's bodily imperfection. The act of abjection, namely defecation in *Public Toilet*, is to help him or everyone in the toilet remain clean. However, compared with Ga-yin and the Chu family's evasive attitude toward their incompleteness, Tong-tong instead embraces it. He dives into the cesspit and looks into his own feces, which reminds him of his deficient body and the breaking away from his lost mother. In *Public Toilet*, Fruit Chan correlates Tong-tong's exploration of his defecation with his own birth. As mentioned above, the cinematographic juxtaposition of defecation and childbirth indicates the analogy between these two actions. Furthermore, the bodily crack in the anus opens a channel to his contaminated past, a past which can be erased or transformed into myth in the social context. That is why we can only hear Tong-tong's narration of his birth in the toilet rather than in the public sphere. Such a narration and exploration of the past signifies Tong-tong's acceptance of himself as a split subject, in Lacan's words.

While the subject realizes that he is no longer complete but rather haunted by his lost object, then his reality is violated. In Tong-tong's case, however, his awakening to his incompleteness makes him able to penetrate further into the primal chaos, where he and his lost mother are combined together. Life and death no longer cause any trouble, for they are interdependent right there. In other words, Tong-tong's exploration into feces leads him to the recurring life instead of simply destruction as in Lacan's formula: $\$ \diamond a$. This is also what Kristeva conveys in her articles about the abject. The abject is contaminated, and is cast away in order to preserve oneself; however, it is also a directory indicating the location of the lost object or the maternal.



Within the symbolic order, the expulsion of the abject is executed. Since abjection is "one of the preconditions of the symbolic" (Grosz 87) to look for the stability within the symbolic order, one must undergo such a violence. In *Public Toilet*, Tong-tong and the other characters all face the challenge of death. Death threatens their stability and clears the way for the breakdown of normal life. For example, Tong-tong's social identity depends on the existence of his adoptive grandmother. Once his grandmother is on the verge of death, this would obliquely destroy his social identity as a family member. It would simply be unacceptable to be an orphan again, so he sets out to find the cure for death. It is interesting that in *Public Toilet* almost all the people are sick. In addition to Tong-tong's grandmother,

his friend Tony's brother, the Korean youngster, the female sea creature and the Indian father all get sick. The diseases they suffer are various but unspecified, and all are fatal. Death is thus the common motivator driving all of the travelers. Although they set out for cures, it is to circumvent death. Nevertheless, the shift in their attitudes toward death and life signifies why Fruit Chan entitled this film *Public Toilet*. From the excremental vision, life and death are recurring counterparts and no longer a definite binary relation between life and death.

4.5 Excremental Vision: Fluidity of the Object Indicates the Cycle of Life and Death

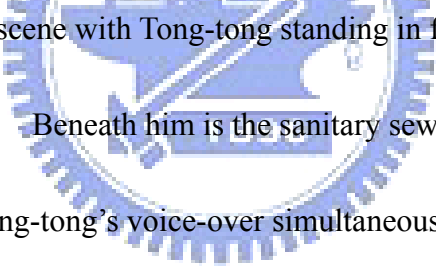
In this part, we will examine Fruit Chan's tactic: simply telling one story by various characters. *Public Toilet* is seemingly complicated with an assortment of characters of different nationalities. Despite that, all these characters are in fact different incarnations of each other, and share the same objective/fate of traveling around, looking for remedies. The problem of death, whether their own or their loved ones', elicits great panic. As a result, the quest for a cure can be referred to as a voyage to elude death; this common cause unifies the narrative and the characters. Besides, the images of these characters overlap. For one thing, the appearances of the youngsters are alike. Take Tong-tong's friend Tony, for example. His blonde hair is like that of a Korean fisherman in the film. Their brightly colored hair makes

it hard to distinguish them from each other. In addition to their similar outfits, film editing also helps to make these young characters interdependent. Susan Morrison's film review declares that "One of the dominant features of the film is that it encapsulates the fluidity of contemporary life" (Morrison 68); she is referring to the application of modern appliances, such as cell phones, which allow the characters to transgress each other's time-space and connect with each other, achieving an interdependence through communication. Rather, it is Fruit Chan's tactic of film editing that compresses and universalizes the various characters into one figure in one time-space. Identity, nationality, or location will not make any difference in the film. With these youngsters' similar appearances and the deliberate shift of scenes which erases the geographical barriers, these various characters seem to partake in a relay race, in which they continue each other's journey in various locations. It is an obvious attempt to make the film a transnational one by multinational images.

However, these separate journeys are all connected. The fluidity constructed by the filming tactic, such as the transitional scenes from one country to another and the use of digital cameras in the film, makes the world a single time-space, a huge public toilet. Public toilet, is not only the title of the film, but also signifies its key theme.

Each story contains the image of a public toilet: in Beijing, it's the communal cesspit, and in India, the Ganges River itself is a public toilet, polluted by human

cadavers and excrement mixed together. In addition, the mobile john in Korea offers the ocean girl and the Korean youngster a private as well as public space where they can communicate with each other. In New York, the public toilet becomes the main death scene of the gangster Sam. There is no doubt that the public toilet connects these characters' stories. With Tong-tong's story as the beginning and end of the film, Fruit Chan's intention to take Tong-tong's story as the prototype for all the other stories is apparent. Tong-tong's dialectic interaction with the public toilet, and with excrement, is represented both through his legendary birth and his journey to find a cure.



There is a recurring scene with Tong-tong standing in front of the public toilet and staring at the camera. Beneath him is the sanitary sewer from which a beam of light is shed on him. Tong-tong's voice-over simultaneously retells his legendary birth in the winter night. Then, at the end of the film, while Tong-tong has experienced the death of the gangster Sam in the public toilet in New York and his adoptive grandmother's death, the same scene appears. However, there are some slight variations. Tong-tong, standing at the same location, witnesses his grandmother carrying a baby in her arm and fading away from the frame of the camera. This fantastic moment introduces the motif of *Public Toilet*: the co-existence of life and death in the chaotic cesspit. The characters' purpose in

traveling abroad to preserve their beloved's lives is thwarted; the repeated imagery of the world as a huge public toilet defeats their attempt to avoid death. In the fantastic scene of Tong-tong's dead grandmother carrying the baby Tong-tong, the border between life and death is blurred. Tong-tong's role as the onlooker to witness his birth and his grandmother's death signifies his acceptance of the idea that both life and death are interdependent.

Tong-tong's previous disavowal of death is demolished through his act of witnessing. There are parallels to Oedipus whose knowledge of his patricide and incest causes him to blind himself in order to revive his place and identity in the symbolic order (Lacan's Law of the Father) and curtain off his desire for the (m)other. Similarly, Tong-tong and other characters attempt to avoid death through a displacement of punishment. Just as with Oedipus's sacrificed eyes, people in *Public Toilet* also undergo such an act of abjection⁴³, so as not to threaten the unity and stability of their identities. However, through Tong-tong's recognition of death coexisting with his own life, we symbolically witness Oedipus roll up the curtain and hug his mother.

Before the phantasmagoric moment, Tong-tong indeed tries to cast away death,

⁴³ According to Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, Oedipus blinds himself so as not to suffer the objects of his desire and murder of his father. However, this is not an action of castration. Instead, blinding is a "a symbolic substitute intended for building the wall, reinforcing the boundary that wards off opprobrium..." It is as a result "an image of splitting...which marks, on the very body, the alteration of the self and clean into the defiled" (84).

which is relevant to the act of abjection. Tong-tong and Sam⁴⁴, an assassin from Hong Kong, encounter in New York. The latter asks Tong-tong to tape his last mission for him. However, things don't go well; Sam is killed in the public toilet. When Tong-tong gets his camera back, what he sees is Sam's death. Witnessing the murder, Tong-tong is totally frightened by his encounter with death. His denial of viewing Sam's death makes him undergo a strong revulsion and repulsion both mentally and physically. He then rushes to the harbor and casts the digital camera into the sea (Figure 4.1). This is a scene of déjà-vu presented by Ga-yin in *The Longest Summer*, in which he throws his brother's helmet into the ocean. This ritually performed act again can be treated as an evacuation of part of the body from the self. Apparently, as Lee puts it from the view of Hong Kong people's collective amnesia, Tong-tong's attitude towards the camera is also "arguably a penchant for burying unpleasant memories" in the form of forgetfulness (Lee 275). Dumping the camera is the simplest way for him to leave everything behind. Sam's abrupt death nullifies Tong-tong's quest for his grandmother's cure. The image of Sam abruptly

⁴⁴ The role of Sam seems like a less coherent character in the film. He is not involved in the search for cures. Nevertheless, his confession proves that he is not different from the other characters in their attempt to obtain cures. In the scene where he and Tong-tong stand side by side looking at the Statue of Liberty across the sea, he talks about a great number of Hong Kong immigrants crowding into United State for better living. "It's a doctor of liberty." Sam says. The Statue of Liberty to some degree becomes a goddess those immigrants worship. In other words, standing for the United States, it is turned into a goddess offering the outsiders great expectations. As for Sam, he visits New York for the sake of making money. He expects that his last business deal, namely carrying out the last assassination, would help him make a fortune and go back to mainland China to inaugurate a new life. The Statue of Liberty or the United States is thus the cure for his depraved life. That is to say, Fruit Chan does not exclude Sam from his story.

changing from being alive to being dead is completely enclosed in the camera.

Since Tong-tong's journey is meant to extend his grandmother's life, the film clip of one person's death becomes an interruption in his search to preserve life. That clip forces him to face the inevitable fact that people, being mortal, are fated to die eventually, which undoubtedly clashes with Tong-tong's avoidance of death.

Although death confronts Tong-tong without notice, Fruit Chan does not mean to lead the whole film to some pious platitudes or illusory hopes. The clip of Sam's death actually showcases a dialectical interaction between life and death. Following the continual images in the video, Chan erases the absolute sadness of death from a perspective that is relatively consoling: life and death are interdependent. Fruit Chan has applied the feature of the digital camera to reproduce the recurring images of Sam. His confession to his girlfriend Jo and the scene of his death, in a normal sense, occur in order. However, the replay function of the camera breaks down this order, endowing life with death and death with life. In contrast with the cognition of the linear chronological progression of time, what Fruit Chan presents in the clip is similar to the Mobius Strip in which life and death are inextricably interconnected and no longer binary and separated.

This concept was in fact previously introduced in Tony's experience in India. During Tony's journey to the Ganges River, the documentary scenes indicate that

Ganges contains both life and death. The river is polluted by dead bodies and feces, while people of Hinduism believe that bathing in the Holy Ganges can cleanse one's spirit and permit one to enter heaven. The co-existence of life and death in the Ganges corresponds to the recurring video of Sam as well as to Fruit Chan's application of the cesspit as Tong-tong's birth place. In other words, if one can look back to the disturbing abject such as feces, death or memories, in this film, one would eventually face the possibility of re-birth. This explains why there is a scene in which Tong-tong stands in front of the public toilet viewing his grandmother hugging the baby Tong-tong and fading out of the screen.

Through the characters' reactions, especially Tong-tong's response to death, Chan has proposed an insight that "growth and decay are vital processes."⁴⁵ This is a notion that all the travelers in the film could not accept at the very beginning. They detest terminal disease or death as it continues to eviscerate their identities which are constructed by their relation to their loved ones. The search for a cure is an act of repulsion, or abjection in the logic of Kristeva's concept. Since death is an inevitable consequence, the characters' attempt to extricate death from their lives equates a disavowal of part of themselves, their human mortality. Despite their effort to evacuate the abject, in the form of memories or death, they are frustrated.

⁴⁵ This is a line spoken by Tong-tong at the end of the film.

The reason is that the subject's "refusal [of the abject] marks whatever identity it acquires as provisional, and open to breakdown and instability" (Grosz 86).⁴⁶ As we see in the film, although Tong-tong has cast the camera away, the camera still works. It sinks to the depth of the ocean and disappears from Tong-tong's sight, like a repressed memory, and as such, it protrudes like a fang into Tong-tong's life. The image of death cannot be left behind, and this cripples Tong-tong's identity.

The contrast between the nonstop machine in the sea and the images of Tong-tong's breakdown attest to Kristeva's elaboration of the impossibility of driving away the threat caused by the abject. According to Kristeva, "what must be expelled from the subject's corporeal functioning can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and possible dissolution" (Grosz 87). To avoid the destruction of self-identity, characters in Fruit Chan's previous works adopt the measure of amnesia, an extreme form of repression. After being shot by a teenager, Ga-yin in *The Longest Summer* forgets the brutal sequence caused by his retirement from the British government. Similarly, Qin-yan in *Durian Durian* suppresses her past as a sex worker in Hong Kong through the embrace of mundane activities. The heavy

⁴⁶ In *Public Toilet*, the incomplete and unstable identity is one of the reasons driving the characters to set off on their journey. For instance, Tong-tong's identity as an orphan revives due to his adoptive grandmother's possible death. This is a malfunction of the Other's law. To restore this broken identity, he rushes to find a cure for his grandmother in order to regain a complete identity as a family member.

make-up on her face and the costume she wears as a Chinese queen totally erases her former image as a sex worker. *Hollywood Hong Kong*, on the other hand, presents the Chu Family with tranquil expressions on their faces at the end of the movie. The drastic event of blackmail is replaced immediately. Forgetfulness works (Khiun 219).

Yet, Fruit Chan does not deal with Tong-tong's case in the same manner, instead he gives central consideration to Tong-tong's further acceptance of the abject; this is related to Tong-tong's grotesque body as well as "something maternal" behind the abject (Kristeva 208)

The video clip of Sam's death in many ways violates Tong-tong's identity related to the paternal law (Lacan's "non/nom" or law of the father). Sam's death occurs as a murder committed in a filthy public toilet, which is a relatively close space separated from the outside world. As a witness as well as the semi-accomplice, Tong-tong obviously turns into an outlaw in regard to the social regulations. Besides, death itself, as mentioned, is an attack on his identity as his grandmother's grandson. To begin with, Tong-tong rejects confronting death; this is why he throws away the camera with the record/memory of Sam's death. His negative attitude, namely turning his back on death, is quite similar to what lies in the close-up shot of Ga-yin's back brain in *The Longest Summer*; both are negations of the past. In the last shot in

The Longest Summer, Ga-yin does not turn around. Ga-yin's body language explains his rejection of past violence. However in *Public Toilet*, the repetitive images in the camera are even more powerful than the scar on Ga-yin's brain as a reminder of the past. By deliberate juxtaposition of the images taken by the camera and that of Tong-tong's breakdown, Fruit Chan is dealing directly with the character's confrontation with death or the abject. As shown in the film, Tong-tong does not experience amnesia. Instead, Tong-tong dives into the sea and gets back the camera (Figure 4.2). This active contact with the destructive abject leads Tong-tong to a maternal milieu, in which life and death are coexistent. It is explained well in the following scene. The moment Tong-tong dives into the sea, we can see that the on-going camera is surrounded by drifting matter, including feces and tissue paper. The seabed is apparently turned into a turbid environment similar to the ditch connected to the cesspit. Furthermore, with Tong-tong's image in the foul water, the scene is momentarily superimposed by Tony's bathing in the Ganges river, and the female sea creature swimming in the water. In contrast to these characters' previous hopelessness in facing death, diving into the water instead brings them life.

Diving into the water to retrieve the jettisoned camera allows Tong-tong to return to the womb, to re-experience the mother's amniotic fluid.⁴⁷ It is a harmonious

⁴⁷ The word "sea" is mother in both Latin and French.

moment when the mother and the child are not separated. That is also the moment when the paternal law does not interfere. In this deliberate mixture of defilement and the maternal environment, Fruit Chan applies the filth onto the characters' proper and clean bodies which are constructed in a social context.

In Tong-tong's return to the maternal environment, Fruit Chan conveys psychoanalytic ideas through cinematographic techniques. These ideas include the characters' acceptance of both life and death, the confrontation of the subject with its split and incomplete identity, and the abandonment of the proper body.

At the beginning of the film, Tong-tong is simply an observer; the borderline between the filth in the cesspit and him is constructed by the act of physical exclusion, namely abjection. Kristeva calls it "a resurrection that has gone through death...an alchemy that transforms the death drive into a start of life, of new significance [which is] anchored in the superego" (Kristeva 15). Draining in the toilet is thus an act of catharsis that cleanses, and maintains the subject's body in a proper condition.

Furthermore, the role of filth in this film is well-explained in the following passage:

Fecal matters signifies...what never ceases to separate from a body in a state of permanent loss in order to become *autonomous, distinct* from the mixtures, alterations, and decay that run through it. That is the price the body must pay...to become *clean and proper*. (Kristeva 108)

In *Public Toilet*, Tong-tong maintains his proper and clean body by purging the filth from his body. Outside of the public toilet, he is able to retrieve his identity in terms of social contracts. However, Fruit Chan draws a clear parallel between the process of Tong-tong's birth and that of bodily excretion.

With Tong-tong's voice-over, the use of sequential shots attests to Fruit Chan's attempt to relate Tong-tong's fascination with his feces to his birth in the public toilet.

In the scene, Tong-tong squats on the cesspool; this is followed by the sound of the feces falling into the murky water and then a close-up shot of a baby doll drifting inside, accentuating the parallel between the baby and the feces; Tong-tong's act of evacuating is reminiscent of his own birth. Through this daily ritual in the public toilet, he repeatedly re-experiences the moment of separating from the maternal body.

What is different is that he takes the place voided by his lost mother. There is in fact a Freudian interpretation of a child's imitation of giving birth by anal dejections:

... anal dejections constitute the first material separation that is controllable by the human being. It has deciphered, in the very rejection, the mastered *repetition* of a more archaic separation (from the maternal body) as well as the condition of *division* (high-low), of discretion, of difference, of recurrence, in short, the condition of the processes that underpin symbolicity.

(Kristeva 108)

As mentioned in the passage above, fecal matter contains a “symbolic value” (Laplanche and Pontalis 35). Feces is associated in early stages of development with gift, identity, weapon, and even the baby itself (Freud 127-33). Tong-tong’s excretion in the public toilet thus refers to “the symbolic meaning of giving and withholding” at the anal stage (Laplanche and Pontalis 36). The retention of the feces through the contract of the anus is one’s attempt to keep the otherwise lost object. Anal erotism is formed in this manner. Such a Freudian notion of a child’s disposal of his feces echoes Tong-tong’s initial position as a distant observer in the public toilet. The process of expelling part of the self is “inscribed in a symbolic system” (Kristeva 3). This is also a course “in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence” of bodily exclusion (Kristeva 3). Unlike his friends, Tong-tong might not have a similar abomination of fecal matter. However, the distance between him and the memory hidden in the cesspit allows him to keep his grotesque body clean since his birth was contaminated by filth. By extricating the filth out of his body, he is capable of returning to the orderly world, instead of remaining immersed in the chaotic cesspit related to the pre-symbolic maternal figure. However, excrement with “symbolic value” does not collide with its other name, the abject. These Janus-faced characteristics of filth show up in turn with Tong-tong’s various attitudes toward feces. Aply, it is Sam’s death that brings about changes.

As stated previously, death as an abject rushes into Tong-tong's life. His attempt to exclude death from his life is similar to his activity in the public toilet, bodily repulsion of death as pollution. However, during the violent interaction among the subject, the abject and the symbolic system, Fruit Chan gives Tong-tong a backward thrust and reveals his grotesque body by immersing him in the filthy water. He has Tong-tong jump into the ocean to get the camera back. This is an act that none of Chan's previous characters have performed. The contact with the abject manifestly pollutes Tong-tong's proper and clean body and further transforms it into a grotesque one: "degradation, filth, death, and rebirth ...and its images are precisely...abjected from the bodily canons" (Russo 8).⁴⁸ Tong-tong's contaminated body, as an abject, later becomes the medium leading him to a filthy milieu where the mother lies. But before probing into how the properties of the abject provide access to the maternal, a further inquiry into the similar water scenes in *Public Toilet* is required.

The scene of diving for Sam's video is an example of déjà vu reminding us of Tong-tong's draining activity in the public toilet. However, differing from his total immersion in the filth of the public toilet, here Tong-tong is simply an observer

⁴⁸ Mary Russo probes into the images of the grotesque body in Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on the carnival in *Rabelais and His World*. The grotesque body in Bakhtin's work mainly refers to a social body. This is a body different from the classic body identified with "the 'high' or official culture of the Renaissance and later with the rationalism...and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie" (8). Although the grotesque body is of historic significance, it is the characteristics of the grotesque body: "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing" that work well with Tong-tong's bodily transformation after the contact with the abject (8).

watching the baby doll being dredged out of the cesspit. There are multiple abjections, both in the physical and narrative aspects, carried out in this scene. In addition to bodily excrement, by re-telling the story, the memory of his separation from the lost mother is jettisoned into the filthy water⁴⁹. Whenever he is in the public toilet, he undertakes what is analogous with religious rituals; their “function... is to ward off the subject’s fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother” (Kristeva 64). Tong-tong in the public toilet as an observer as well as a narrator is, in this manner, underpinned by the symbolic context. Clean and proper as he is, he is risking “the loss...of the totality of his living being” (Kristeva 64). The baby doll in the chaotic filth is accordingly not identical with him as the observer at that moment; furthermore, the baby doll becomes an abject in turn.

Nonetheless, in the diving scene, the active contact with death, namely Sam’s video clip, suggests Tong-tong’s acceptance of defilement. With the contamination of death, i.e. the abject, Chan projects the image of baby Tong-tong onto the adult Tong-tong swimming in the filthy water. First of all, the superimposition of these two figures indicates that Tong-tong no longer fluctuates but has transcended the

⁴⁹ Taking place in the public toilet, Tong-tong’s narration of his birth is another form of abjection. His recollection of the past is to exclude the memory related to the lost mother from his body. In describing the writer, Céline, as a “phobic” applying narrative to avoid the unnamable lost object to the speaking subject (Parking 58), Kristeva indicates that “Narrative is the recounting of the suffering: fear, disgust, and abjection crying out, they quiet down, concatenated into a story” (Kristeva 145). Accordingly, I propose that Tong-tong’s narration of his own story is also a form of abjection.

boundary between subject/object, inside/outside, pain/pleasure and deed/word.⁵⁰ In Kristeva's definition of the abject, the concept of a fortress is mentioned: "the abject demonstrates the impossibility of clear-cut borders, lines of demarcation, divisions between the clean and the unclean, the proper and the improper, order and disorder" (Grosz 89). In other words, the abject is referred to as a filthy and devastating medium which indicates where the object of desire stays as well as where one experiences the bittersweet union with the *object*.

By regaining the extricated abject, the contaminated Tong-tong shatters the symbolic order, allowing himself to re-experience abjection, albeit in a reverse way. Previously, Tong-tong's every act of abjection, such as draining and casting away the camera, forces him to face self-destruction. Abjection is just like an instant and transient break in communicating with both the symbolic and the chaos. At the moment, at the brink of abjection, the subject's integral identity is briefly undermined. What takes its place is a split subject which contains the desired object in its crack. In this manner, when Tong-tong undergoes abjection in an opposite direction, there is no doubt that he will be confronted by the fact that his subject is split with the *object*, namely the (m)other as its missing half. By the same token, in Tong-tong's case,

⁵⁰ Freud writes at the end of *Totem and Taboo* that "In the beginning was the deed" (207), the murder of the Father in Freud's fictional myth. There lies an oedipal explanation in his so-called primitive man's patricide. Such a violent deed carries with it both the pain and the fear derived from the murder and pleasure, namely incest with the mother. That in turn causes *the advent of language* (Kristeva 61), in which the symbolic exchange and exchange of women occur to help constitute a society and symbolize the beginning. In other words, the "beginning" is an "anteriority to language" (Kristeva 61). Deed and word thus contrast with each other.

such a transgression steered by the abject, further permits the fusion with the maternal figure. In the film, the combination between the subject and its desired object takes the form of giving birth. Chan especially stresses the imagery of re-birth resulting from death; this helps to resolve the characters' ambivalence and their inability to evade death. What Chan tries to emphasize is that death is not an end; life exists through the very agency of death, and vice versa.

As mentioned above, the concept of rebirth can also be found in Chan's filming of the Ganges River. Death and life are interdependent qualities of the river. They obviously constitute a cycle; the images in Sam's clip also echo this concept.

Although Sam is dead, the replay function of the camera enables his images to repeat over and over again, like endless rebirths following endless deaths. Life (Sam's confession) and death (Sam being murdered), take place in turn. Fruit Chan once mentions his attempt to make such a filthy film thus:

The film is about AIDS, growing old, sickness and death. It is about how Asian people are always in search of some magic potions or elixir of life to make them better. (Berry 480)

As for this endless cycle, most of the time, people are oblivious. Each tries to maintain a clean and proper body which "must bear no trace of its debt to nature" (Kristeva 102). That is why all the characters in *Public Toilet* seek to evade death as

an abject in relation to their subject. However, no matter how hard they try to find the cure to death, it is in vain, for death is indigenous to life.

In psychoanalytic language, death as the abject cannot be obliterated from the subject; it is hovering at the border between subject and object. Horror “arises when the borders... collapse, when the edges break down and the body contents flow out, threatening repulsive engulfment” (Gounelas 62). Such a terrifying engulfment results from the finding that one’s subject is incomplete and is influenced by the *objet a* (Lacan’s term). A destruction of self is owing to not only the contamination from the abject but also the possible sinking into the abyss of the *objet a* or the (m)other, an incestuous son-mother relation in Freudian theory. To ensure the function of the symbolic, namely, to avoid such an incest, the subject would extricate the abject from its body. This act of catharsis will occur over and over again, since abjection ...preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal⁵¹ relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be—maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out. (Kristeva 10)

⁵¹ Yu-hsiu Liu’s (劉毓秀) article on the different theories of psychoanalysis from Freud to Luce Irigaray indicates the difference between Lacan and Kristeva. The former emphasizes the symbolic relation between son and father, while Kristeva places her notion further in that between son and mother, which is called the pre-objectal relationship (18).

In Kristeva's elaboration of the abject and abjection, she especially mentions that even though the function of abjection is to help the subject to extricate that which threatens it, the abjection does not promise a clear-cut exclusion. Instead, "abjection acknowledges [the subject] to be in perpetual danger" (Kristeva 9). Such a failure could be further explained in the following passage on the two-faced properties of abjection: "The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth" (Kristeva 9). The metaphorical application of time to abjection brings forth the two opposite yet interrelated terms at which abjection points; the latter is caused by an excessive accumulation of oblivion. That is why a land of oblivion in which the abject never ceases to separate is repeatedly remembered. In this regard, what *Public Toilet* pivots on is namely how the land of oblivion comes to the face of the subject through contamination by the abject. In *Public Toilet*, Fruit Chan has made a new twist in the characters' attitudes toward the abject. Compared to the characters in Chan's other films, especially the males, those in *Public Toilet* have a chance to awaken from their forgetfulness. Oblivion happens in the beginning; however the characters, whose quests for life are interrupted by death, start to accept the impossibility of obliterating the abject from their seemingly clean and proper bodies. That is why in the last scene, we can see all the people get together and stare at the john floating

from Korea. Their gazes converge on the floating toilet, indicating their witnessing of both life and death concluding in defilement. That nullifies their search for remedies. Simply put, their lives are ultimately polluted by the abject; no elixir or cure will erase the existence of death from life.

Life and death are coexistent. Chan endows the public toilets in various places with a power that offers repeated life through the abject. The Ganges River is a tenable example. People deal with life and death altogether in the river, making the river a huge public toilet with life and death intertwined. Besides, Tong-tong's birth place, the public toilet in Beijing, makes an even better interpretation of the relations among the subject, the abject, and a further encounter, "face to face with an unnamable otherness" (Kristeva 59). In the film, defilement works to propel the subject to fuse with the maternal figure behind it. What Chan especially stresses is the fluidity rather than the solidity and dead imagery of the abject. As a result, in the film's representation, the filth is connected with the ocean and further flows through the whole world. The public toilets in the film are then not restricted but contain an infinite quality.

Public Toilet tells a quite different story from those of Chan's previous films; however, from an excremental perspective, Chan has achieved an integral elaboration of his consistent interest in the characters' repugnance towards the abject. In *Public*

Toilet, he doesn't make the subject's abjection fade into oblivion; instead, the excremental view constitutes the subject's perception in accordance with the rule of the symbolic. At the end of the film, the viewpoint of the film converges from multinational perspectives to a single one, looking upward from the toilet. The toilet travels around various locales, and manifests a life of its own. Obviously, the moving toilet represents an articulation of the subject's contamination/defilement in the filthy water, retelling the story from a reversed angle/viewpoint.



Chapter Five

Conclusion

In the examination of Fruit Chan's three films, *The Longest Summer*, *Hollywood*, *Hong Kong*, and *Public Toilet*, we can see the changing relationship between the subject and its desired object. It is surprising that although Fruit Chan is a filmmaker, his tales of the subject and its object of desire have their origin in what is discovered in psychoanalysis. From Freud, Lacan, to Kristeva, a successive transformation of subject-object relationship shifts from the oedipal subject to a pre-oedipal one. The concept of the abject matters a lot even it is almost trivial and of no consequence in Chan's works prior to *Public Toilet*. But in terms of Kristeva's further elaboration of abjection and the abject, we find that feces is indeed significant in Fruit Chan's films. Kristeva's theory also offers a context for interpreting Fruit Chan's films on the issue of abjection and the abject.

Emphasizing the interactions between the subject, the desired object, and the abject, my thesis does not deal with the Hong Kong identity after its return to China in 1997. Instead, starting from a problematic identity lingering over ambiguous nationalities between Britain and mainland China, Chan's films introduce his audience issues about a never-fixed speaking subject, which in Kristeva's term is *subject en process*, the "subject-in-process" (Jensen 20). Hong Kong identity or

nationality is equivocal in Chan's early works. The issues about the handover in 1997 undoubtedly have great impact on Chan's filmmaking. In his early works called the "Hong Kong 1997 Trilogy," Hong Kong people's anxiety about the transformation of authority is stressed. Looking for a fixed identity or nationality consequently becomes the main concern for Chan's characters. However, if we can compare Fruit Chan's previous works with his later ones, there exists a rupture. We will be able to find that Chan's works all in all cannot just be limited to the identification of nationality. In fact, in Michael Berry's interview with Fruit Chan, the issues of national identification are mentioned. However, Chan indicates that his works are more than identification. If there is something related to identification, this is not about one's nationalities, but about one's growth. In Chan's words, his movies, "besides identity," are pivoted on "the process of coming into one's own"(Berry 476):

Actually starting with *Made in Hong Kong*, all of [my] films have being about growing up and coming of age. *The Longest Summer*, *Little Cheung*, and even *Hollywood, Hong Kong* are all stories about growing up...I have always been unconsciously exploring this theme." (Berry 476)

Behind a secured nationality or identity, the concept of the subject in process can further clarify the coherence in Chan's films. That is, with the gradual removal of

the nation context from his films, Chan's personas tend to suffer more from the unstable individual identity and what lies behind it, the confrontation of its object of desire and its incompleteness. The appearance of *Public Toilet* can thus decode Chan's intention in presenting us how the speaking subject grows into a seeing rather than a blind one in response to his object of desire and its own incompleteness in having a false complete identity.

The following reasons can further prove that the issue of national identification has come to an end in Chan's following films. First of all, Chan's films consist of transnational characters from mainland China or other countries. The personas in his films show various faces. They are no longer the native Hong Kong people who are confined in the narrow buildings striving for a politically correct identification. Take *Little Cheung*, for example. This film is the last work of Chan's '97 trilogy. In many postcolonial criticisms, *Little Cheung* is taken as Chan's "national allegory,"⁵² by which Chan makes use of the historic moment of Hong Kong's handover to reflect the so-called Hong Kong identity from a political perspective (Huang 178).

⁵² "National allegory" is a term repeatedly used to describe Chan's *Little Cheung*. The film is noted for its scenario in which Little Cheung and the illegal immigrant Fan argued about to whom the building across the ocean belongs. "Hong Kong is ours," Fan exclaimed loudly in the end of the reverse shot. The conversation and the interaction between the Hong Kong boy and the girl from mainland China refers evidently to the approaching handover of Hong Kong back to China on July 1st, 1997. Hong Kong people's anxiety about being taken over by a new authority is successfully performed through the children's naïve dialogue. *Little Cheung* thus becomes a less direct but elaborative allegory that narrates the paradoxical relation between Hong Kong and China. See also Ka-Fai Yau's "Cinema 3: Towards a 'Minor Hong Kong Cinema,'" Laikwan Pang's "Death and Hong Kong Cinema," and Tsung-yi Michelle Huang's "Revisiting a Post-colonial Global City: Fruit Chan's *Little Cheung*."

Although the story still focuses on Hong Kong people's responses to the possible life after Hong Kong's return to China, it is undeniable that the intermixture of transnational domestic laborers and illegal immigrants inaugurates a fluid atmosphere in this film. The concept of a fixed Hong Kong identity undergoes challenges. To put it in another way, this is a gradual departure from the issue of Hong Kong's local identity, since the characters in *Little Cheung* are different from the indigenous Hong Kong people in Chan's previous works. Further, with the global flow through globalization, it is no longer possible to regard Chan's artistic representation of people in Hong Kong as the authentic Hong Kong people. It would be more proper to adopt Ka-Fai Yau's term "the underrepresented" rather than the "Hong Kong people" to rename Fruit Chan's characters in his Hong Kong stories (543). The application of the term "the underrepresented", namely the subaltern people who are mostly ignored by cultural representation, helps to narrow down the national context in Chan's films and makes a shift from the problematic identification of nationality to a more specific and individual one. That is, with the removal of the national context, *Little Cheung* inaugurates Chan's main concern of individual sufferings and growth in his following films. The anxiety of Hong Kong's return to mainland China is shattered bit by bit either by the passing time or by the appearance of non-indigenous characters. *Little Cheung's* nanny, Armi, a Filipino domestic worker would be a

good example of Chan's non-indigenous character. Her foreign identity obviously does not contribute to a Hong Kong identity. Instead, her existence is a response to the complex social structure and the impact of globalization in Hong Kong. By the same token, the sex worker in *Durian, Durian* is also a correspondent example that makes Fruit Chan's Hong Kong a locus to exhibit a character's growth rather than a fixed Hong Kong identity. The sex worker is used to changing her names while receiving different patrons. By changing names, she is able to fabricate where she comes from. A fixed identity is thus unworkable in her whoredom. In other words, after Chan's trilogy of 1997, Chan's films are getting more and more concentrated on individual's struggle with false identities which are micro and limited to oneself rather than to the context inscribed by a macro national history.⁵³

Therefore, the central argument of this thesis is to deal with Chan's films from a

⁵³ My thesis emphasizes the removal of the national context and its further replacement by the foreground of the individual problems in Chan's films. However, that does not mean that the political significance in Chan's films should be totally ignored. In fact, in addition to the Hong Kong Trilogy, the relationship between P.R.C. and Hong Kong would be represented through the interaction between men in Hong Kong and women from China. The mobility of women in contrast to the Hong Kong male's immobility metaphorically retells the unequal relation between China and Hong Kong. In psychoanalytical terms, these men are "castrated" by these women so that they cannot move around. *Hollywood, Hong Kong* and *Dumplings* (餃子) both respond to this idea. Further, the slight variation in the Chinese titles and the English titles of Chan's films is another tricky part that we must also pay attention to. Take *Public Toilet*, for example. Chan adopts Chairman Mao's calligraphy "people" (ren-min) in the Chinese title, whereas the English title is simplified as "public toilet." In my own interpretation, with Chairman Mao's handwriting, the Chinese title, sounding similarly to "the people's commune" (人民公社 renmin gongshe) is a trick to the China government. In P.R.C., the people's commune was formerly one of the highest administrative levels from 1958-1985 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_commune; see also Dali Yang's *Calamity and Reform in China*). Fruit Chan plays with words by focusing on the keyword "commune." On the one hand, in the commune, people share everything. On the other, the word literally refers to one's intimacy and combination with others. The image of public toilet, in which people interact in the most private manner, thus emerges. Is there any sarcastic intention pointed toward mainland China hidden behind? Chan never clarifies it.

more individual part of the characters, so to involve Chan's following works without being limited to Hong Kong's postcolonial backgrounds. Despite a possible political overtone, looking for a fixed identity is still a relatively consistent issue in Chan's films. However, the main concern lies in the impossibility of a fixed identity and the subject's insistence on false identities. In this regard, psychoanalytic discourse that deals with the relation among subject, its object of desire, and the object is helpful to probe further into the mechanism working behind such false identities.

With the appearance of *Public Toilet*, Chan initiates a whole new allegory. It is an allegory concerning the formation of the subject. The fluid imagery and the lack of national boundaries in *Public Toilet* first of all call off the possibilities of fixed nationalities. Second, the emphasis of *Public Toilet* obviously shifts to a more personal but still coherent aspect: the onset of subjectivity. In the film, the problem of one's identity, which is dependent on the others' existence, becomes the reasons that the characters begin their journeys. However, in their journey for cures, the issue of stable identities is gradually put aside. What takes place of it is their confrontation with the past where the object of desire exists.

It is fascinating that with abundant application of feces in *Public Toilet*, Chan throws at us not just the meaningless fecal matters. Rather, he offers his audience great insights about Hong Kong people's inclination for oblivion through one's declination

of seeing the bodily abject. *Public Toilet* is thus not a deviation from Chan's previous works. It is a conclusion that pushes his filmic gimmick, the use of fecal matters, into extreme.

Kristeva's theories on the abject and abjection help to sketch the contour of evolution of Chan's subject through the fecal matters. Her *Powers of Horror* explores "the compelling power of archaic images—imagos—of the pre-oedipal mother in terms of the boundary state of abjection" (Smith 32). In *Public Toilet*, fecal matters work as both the abject and the indicator of the pre-oedipal mother. By making his characters immerse in the filth, such as the Ganges River or the drainages, Fruit Chan shows us the combination of the subject and this archaic image. Through the main character Tong-tong's active contact with the abject and his metaphorical return to the lost mother, Chan brings in a remembering subject. This is a subject contrary to the ones in *The Longest Summer* and *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, in which the main characters as subjects in forgetting condition are confined in the Oedipus complex. The later abandon part of themselves, which is the so-called abjection, to exchange for a stable place in the symbolic. In the story of Oedipus the king, he blinds himself by sacrificing his eyeballs so as not to see his incest with his blood mother. That is also a way to avoid his mother, namely his object of desire. Under the supervision of the symbolic father, which is conceived as "the sign of the subject's

separation [from the mother]... [and that] of the law against incest” (Smith 37), the subject hides its love and desire for the object and thus forgets its combination with the object in the past. This is what we see in *The Longest Summer* and *Hollywood, Hong Kong*. The characters in the two films are stricken by amnesia and they suffer from the loss of their desired objects. In a word, these two films probe into how the subject is formed along with Lacan’s account of the subject and its false identities.

Lacan sets the formation of the subject in the Symbolic through the mirror stage and castration. (1997, 1-7; 1995, 166; 1954, 73-88)⁵⁴ He recounts

the story of the child’s entry in the symbolic order as a transition that involves loss and splitting. In the mirror stage, the child’s subjectivity and desire depend on its separation both from itself and from the mother.

(Doane and Hodges 54)

Lacanian split subject is thus born. The fear for castration executed by the Other makes the subject decide to stay in the symbolic order. The mother-child dyad as a result has to be broken. The subject is then pushed into oblivion and represses its desire for the maternal figure. In *Hollywood, Hong Kong*, the Chu family abandon their object of desire, namely the prostitute, to live their life as before. Ga-yin in *The Longest Summer* also experiences amnesia, and becomes a forgetting subject relying

⁵⁴ See also Kelly Oliver’s article about the prodigal child (19).

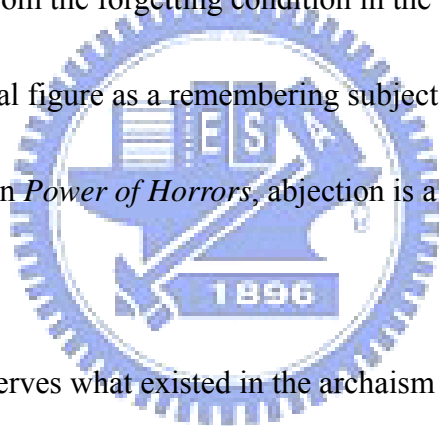
on the new identity given by the new government. In other words, what functions in these two stories is the Law of the Father. Only by abiding by the Law of the Father can the subject, or what we call the child in the oedipal triangle, be initiated into the society (Oliver 22). These characters in these two films further signify the fact that the symbolic order is taken as “a compensation for the loss of a relatively unmediated relation to the mother” (Doane and Hodges 55). If a subject refuses to give up the archaic attachment to the maternal object, it would have to, in Lacanian terms, turn around to face up not just the scar between it and the objet *a* but also the real.

The real is further transformed into “the Thing” in Kristeva’s emphasis on object-relations. However, Kristeva sets her theories in the field prior to Lacan’s mirror stage and the Symbolic, during which the Thing is incarnated also as a maternal but relatively benign figure. Kristeva does not refuse the existence of the Symbolic where the patriarchal restriction is referred to. She on the other hand suggests that Lacan’s “impossible real” is not just impossible. She terms it in another way as “unnamable drives.” And they are real that are able to fracture the Symbolic (1971, 113).⁵⁵ According to this logic, Kristeva brings in the concept of the pre-oedipal relation, in which the Law of the Father is absent and the subject finds it unity through the return to the maternal figure.

⁵⁵ See also Kelly Oliver’s comparison between Kristeva and Lacan’s theories (18).

As what Kelly Oliver puts in her analysis on Kristeva and Lacan's theory, there lies a continuity between them (18). Such a theoretical continuation is exactly the basis on which I rewrite Fruit Chan's films as a whole new allegory of the subject in process. The three films I presented in this thesis uncover the subject's journey tracing back through the Symbolic, the Lacanian mirror, and finally to a place where the subject confronts the maternal body. In his allegory of the subject's return to the mother, Fruit Chan application of fecal matters contributes a lot to the representation of the subject's change from the forgetting condition in the Symbolic back to the attachment to the maternal figure as a remembering subject.

As Kristeva puts it in *Power of Horrors*, abjection is a resistance to the innermost memory of the subject:



Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be-- maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out. (10)

In this case, we can also say that the retrieval of the evacuated abject in *Public Toilet* allows the subject to go back to the moment when the separation from the maternal takes place. That is, the character Tong-tong or Tony's active approach to the abject

makes the maternal figure come into view. The further reunion of the subject and this maternal figure gives rise to “the troubled incest,” which is well-elaborated in Kristeva’s overview on Céline’s “rhetoric of abjection” :

when Céline locates the ultimate of abjection[...] in the birth-giving scene, he makes amply clear which fantasy is involved—the mother’s body. The scene of scenes is here not the so-called primal scene but the one of giving birth, incest turned inside out, flayed identity. Giving birth: the height of bloodshed and life, scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty, sexuality and the blunt negation of the sexual... (155-56)

To Kristeva, Céline’s writing as the performance of abjection “comes to rest in the category of the maternal” (Russo 64). What catches our attention is Kristeva’s re-interpretation of the birth scene as a troubled incest, by which she sheds light on the exact moment when the baby is in-between the maternal body. Despite the fact that the word “incest” is a term borrowed from the relation between mother and son in the Oedipal triangle, what I have just mentioned above actually takes place in the pre-oedipal situation, in which the patriarchal character has not intervene. Under the guidance of the abject, the image of the maternal body emerges with contamination around, mixing with circulating life and death. In other words, if we compare this

maternal figure with the object of desire in the Symbolic, the former is a relatively benevolent one, while the latter is threatening with the metaphor of castration and the supervision of the Other.

In this regard, we can also sort out such a twofold image of the maternal figure in Fruit Chan's films. The difference between the maternal figures generates various subjects. Chan indicates that through the quest for cures in *Public Toilet*, he attempts to illustrate how Asians, not just Hong Kong people, are eager to find out solution to any problem (Berry 480). As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the search for solutions means to keep everything in order. All the characters in *Public Toilet* rush to find cures to the dead diseases; however, all the journeys end up with hopelessness. Such a condition of everything in suspense and without actual gratification echoes with the Lacanian formation of subject. While the subject enters the Symbolic, an orderly world, the subject has to search for "stand-ins," meaning its alternative satisfaction. The mother's body, namely the "phallic mother," becomes the source of all gratification (Oliver 23).⁵⁶ A fraud is thus proceeding in the name of the Father while the child is looking for the phallic mother in order to avoid the Lacanian castration. The phallic mother is just an alternative option which can only

⁵⁶ Such a quest for gratification results from the threat of castration. In Lacan's story, castration refers to the moment when the phallus is cut off. Therefore, in order to settle in the Symbolic facing the lifelong threat of castration, the child has to have the phallus rather than being the phallus (Oliver 22-23).

help the subject avoid, instead of stopping, the castration.⁵⁷

Such a situation of impossible gratification in looking for cures in *Public Toilet* is disclosed previously in the case of Xiao-fu's chopped hand in *Hollywood, Hong Kong*. Xiao-fu's right hand is cut off because of his affair with the prostitute Tong-tong.

With an attempt to return to the normal life, he undergoes the surgery. However, the transplanted hand is another man's. Xiao-fu thus asks a Chu brother to cut his hand off again. In the bodily lack in this way lies the subject's incomplete gratification.

The analogy of the chopped hand and the blind quest for cures in *Public Toilet*

work similarly. Both the cases are about the subject's attempt to find something to

refill the lack and to maintain complete and stable in the Law of Father.

Nevertheless, the subject is always left incomplete with the lack inscribed on it.

Only when the subject recedes into the condition of oblivion can it ignore the lack and

concentrate on his interaction with the Father. In such a relation, the object of its

desire signifies the lack of the subject, and further, draws a possible punishment from

the Father. Therefore, the object of desire as a maternal incarnation is negative and

would cause the destruction of the subject.

Although the subject's combination with the maternal body makes a debut in

Public Toilet, it is a brilliant conclusion of all Chan's previous fecal interruption in his

⁵⁷ In her article "Women's Time," Kristeva suggests that the Phallus means gratification (41).

other films. What is at issue is that Fruit Chan shows us an awakening subject in *Public Toilet*. In contrast to the forgetting condition of the split subject in the Symbolic, the subject in pre-oedipal period is a remembering subject. Its awakening is not to face the double destruction from the Father in the Symbolic and the Real. Rather, it gets rid of the Oedipal blindness and awakes from the false recognition of “I” as complete in the Symbolic. It then moves forward to where the Law of the Father does not work, re-experiencing the total combination with the maternal. In *Public Toilet*, the recurrence of the birth scene therefore suggests the subject’s acceptance rather than resistance to its inner memories.

To get closer to this abject memory with the maternal figure, the subject has to endure the contamination around the maternal milieu. This polluted body responds well to the subject’s clean and proper body in the Symbolic. And it is exactly this grotesque body that Fruit Chan smartly depicts in his films. Because of his characters’ bodily incompleteness, their contaminated memories are thus not hidden and are allowed to be inscribed in the bodily field.

Contrasting remembering subjects and the forgetting ones, Fruit Chan concludes in *Public Toilet* that one’s growth needs the company of the jettisoned memories. According to Liew Kai Khiun, amnesia is a less drastic way used by Chan’s subjects to extricate themselves from emotional and social burdens (219). However, in the

forgetting situation, one is lost with the false identity. Without the confrontation with its jettisoned part of the self, the speaking subject would never be as complete as it thinks.

Fruit Chan does not aim at solving the perpetual myth of life and death. On the contrary, Chan makes use of the unsolved and inevitable death to indicate that death, though causing bodily repulsion, is indigenous to life. The paradoxical concept of the object in relation to the subject is reiterated here. Besides, by the juxtaposition of life and death in Tong-tong's birth, Chan endows death with the sense of the future perfect tense. That is, though death lies in the faraway future, it is to some degree a completed destiny inscribed as a bodily memory that would be easily forgotten by the subject. In this regard, Fruit Chan confronts the subject with this object memory in an attempt to criticize the subject's denial of the part of itself to get a stable identity. This is what we can see in *Hollywood, Hong Kong* and *The Longest Summer*. A fixed identity or a stable position in the society is so seductive that the subjects would exchange part of the self for it. This part of the self comprises the unwanted memories which have caused the subject to exist. Amnesia thus takes place. Such an abandonment of the self is to Fruit Chan an ineffective and impractical cure to the subjects' problematic identification either in nationality or in individual perspective.

The last but not the least, all the characters in Chan's films are the representation

of his own Hong Kong experience. Chan moved to Hong Kong from Cantone in his early age. Not born in Hong Kong, he admits that the problem of identification has bothered him. That is why he tends to present people a Hong Kong burdened with hybridity rather than a specific identity. In his films, the significant changes in Chan's subjects from the local Hong Kong people to the "underrepresented," namely the subalterns, indeed make a fixed Hong Kong identity impossible. And we can also detect from his arrangement of characters a sense of mobility and the instability of fixed identity. For example, the reclamation of the name "Tong-tong" for both the hooker in *Hollywood, Hong Kong* and the orphan in *Public Toilet*, makes the so-called identity changeable. Further, the actor Sam Lee, who impersonates various characters in Chan's various works, presents us the metaphorical transmigration of the soul. The function of "naming" in the Symbolic is nullified. Fruit Chan here challenges the preferable fixed identity in a more archaic, fluid, and changeable manner by placing individual souls under a single name.

On the other hand, the application of the abject is not just confined to the plots of his films. The relatively imperfect bodies of the subalterns in Chan's films open a grotesque space for Fruit Chan to represent his personal memories about Hong Kong. Their contaminated bodies, in contrast to the intact image of the elite in Hong Kong society, are abject to the whole society. Only by the lack and the incompleteness of

such bodies can Fruit Chan disclose his personal memories of Hong Kong to the audience.⁵⁸

In view of this, we can further say that the importance of Chan's films lies in his personal experience in facing the past. Instead of referring to a fixed identity, Chan stresses mainly on a more mobile concept of the awakening subject in Kristeva's pre-oedipal relation to the maternal. That is why in *Public Toilet*, Chan has applied some never-fixed imagery of fecal matters to set a contrast to the traveling people, who are actually controlled by their desire to have a fixed identity. In *Public Toilet*, "the trans-Asian journeys around Hong Kong, India, South Korea and China highlight...a more pluralistic experience by his subaltern subjects" (Khiun 222). These subaltern subjects are relatively incomplete and deficient in their representation. However, through their lack, Chan is much able to offer us the plurality of possibilities of people in Hong Kong. Shit not just happens but matters so as to form Fruit Chan's new allegory of Hong Kong.

⁵⁸ This is the same as what I have previously discussed about how the disabled youngster in *The Longest Summer* becomes the trigger of the violent past.

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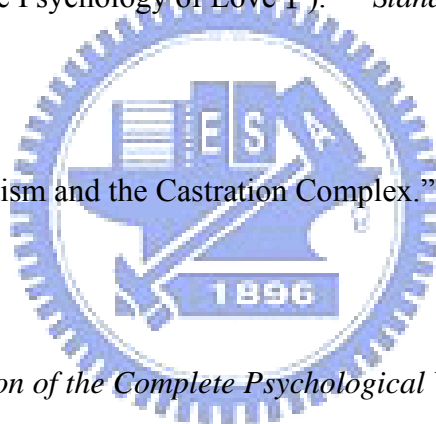
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