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碩士論文

《無間道》：類國族寓言以及「消失」政治

The Quasi-National Allegory and Politics of Disappearance in the *Infernal Affairs*
Trilogy

研究生：周怡欣

指導教授：張靄珠 教授

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研究生：周怡欣

Student：Yi-Hsin Chou

指導教授：張靄珠 博士

Advisor：Dr. I-Chu Chang



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中文摘要

本文主要以國家之間的曖昧游移，歷史空間(anthropological places)與過渡空間(non-places)間的辯證關係為立足點來閱讀電影《無間道》三部曲，並從三種面向析論。首先，從香港黑幫電影的曲折重新回顧香港的殖民歷史；並且探討九七移交對於電影《無間道》三部曲的重要性；最後以類國族寓言的模式來探討《無間道》所反映的認同問題。

首先，本文探討香港及其文化生產，以及黑幫電影的中間性。透過時間的斷裂與重組，《無間道》鋪陳出黑幫電影類型的傳統，呈現回歸母國懷抱時身分建構的曲折。藉由類國族主義的方式來呈現電影所反映的香港，英國，以及中國間的三角關係。

再者，本文從後現代拼貼的方式呈現懷舊氛圍；佛經中反覆闡述不可超脫的輪迴意象則讓主角墜向虛無。從江湖概念的紛沓開始，鋪展「跨文類的意義」；透過非全知敘事的時間重組，彰顯九七大限的重要性，並且帶出懷舊的主題。貫穿全片的主題「無間地獄」，則泛指佛教概念中「無間斷的受苦受難」，把存在焦慮，精神扭曲，以及躊躇徘徊的心態扣連起來。

最後，就「消失」政治而論，本文視香港為一「消失」空間，並且與主角的「消失」息息相關；而《無間道》三部曲中歷史空間與過渡空間的並置，更強調香港在九七之後的「曖昧游移」。歷史空間與過渡空間在電影中並非處於相對的位置，而既共存又相互映照。本文析論「消失」（隱藏，缺席，不存在）空間，透過警察與臥底間的「消失」來闡述互助共生以及偽裝的概念，更強化輪迴與墮落的主題。

關鍵字：無間道、黑幫電影、江湖、國族寓言、類國族、佛經、後九七、消失、過渡空間、馬克·奧古、阿巴斯

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Student : Yi-Hsin Chou

Advisor : Dr. I-Chu Chang

Department of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I try to focus on the slippage and in-between-ness of the nationhood, and the dialectics between anthropological places and non-places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, and conduct my investigation in three directions. First of all, I revisit Hong Kong's colonial past by mapping the refractions of gangster genre; investigate how post-97 atmosphere reinforces the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy; finally, how quasi-national allegory is generated.

First, I demonstrate the in-between-ness of Hong Kong itself, its cultural productions, and gangster films. Through the interruption and rearrangement of time, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy unfolds the heritage of gangster genre and provides the refractions in identity construction to embrace the Motherland China. A quasi-national allegorical approach in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy unfolds the triangular relationship of Hong Kong, Britain and China from a neutral perspective.

Second, I investigate the postmodern pastiche in the continuously nostalgia aura and the nihilism toward the Buddhism with repeating image of reincarnation. I start from the variation on the concept of *jianghu* to unwrap the "cross-generic signification", and then analyze the rearrangement of timeline that violates the total omniscient narrative in demonstrating the importance of the deadline 97, bringing up the theme of nostalgia. Moreover, the penetrating theme of "infernal" refers to the Buddhist concept of "continuous hell" which intricately interlocks all the anxiety of existence, psychological distortion and tottering instability.

Third, in terms of politics of disappearance, I focus on the space of disappearance in Hong Kong in connection with the disappearance of protagonists, and the juxtaposition between anthropological places and non-places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, accentuating "quasi-ness" in post-97 Hong Kong. Anthropological places and non-places in the *Infernal*

Affairs trilogy are not that polarized as they appear to be as they coexist and contrast with each other. I demonstrate the space of disappearance (non-appearance, absence, lack of presence) with the mutual-illumination and camouflage between the cop and the undercover through each other's disappearance, which reinforces the themes of reincarnation and degeneration.

Keywords: Infernal Affairs, Gangster Films, Jianghu, National Allegory, Quasi-Nation, Buddhism, Post-97, Disappearance, Non-Places, Marc Auge, Abbas



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Chapter One: Introduction

Despite that Hong Kong's handover to China took place a decade ago, the issues of "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong", "one country; two systems", or "the promise of remaining unchanged for 50 years"¹ still remain prominent in Hong Kong. The daily lives and cinematic representation of Hong Kong people are as if the 97 deadline has never been "due." The *Infernal Affairs* trilogy evidently exemplifies this phenomenon, not only in the character's anxiety of self-identification by the wishful thinking of cleaning up the past so as to lead a new life, but also in oscillation between police and gangster, that has been dramatized with the undercover with shifted and fluid identities. As the film title *Infernal Affairs* implies: the protagonists struggle in eternal turmoil, and endure fatal tragedies, much like walking corpses leading lives of endless sufferings. After the handover in 1997, have Hong Kong people attained the security and prosperity they were promised, or are they still struggling in between British the ex-colonizer and China the motherland?

From the struggle and wretched fate of the undercover to the playfulness of transitional identity, and political fidelity as metaphorized by the "changing face" (變臉)(Law 10) in Sichuan opera,² Hong Kong people have not only experienced the

¹ In 1984, Deng Xiao-Ping (鄧小平) proposed to apply the principle to Hong Kong after British government's dominance was expired, and upon this treatment, despite the practice of socialism on Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau can still retain their highly autonomy at least within fifty years. As Hong Kong Basic Law Article 5 reads: "The socialist system and policies shall not be practiced in the HKSAR, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years." However, after the 50th year reunification, either voluntarily or not, there is still the great uncertainty and possibility to be integrated into China's socialist system. As if trying to witness and scrutinize the promise, the theme of "unchanged for 50 years" is repeatedly represented in cinema and literarily works. See: <http://www.cmab.gov.hk/en/issues/basic.htm>. Chinese translation for these phrases are: Hong Kong people govern Hong Kong is 港人治港, country; two systems stands for 一國兩制; and unchanged for 50 years is 五十年不變.

² "Changing-face is a is an ancient Chinese dramatic art that is part of the more general Sichuan opera. Performers wear brightly colored costumes and move to quick, dramatic music. Their faces are vividly colored, for they are wearing masks. However, within a fraction of a second, their masks' change —

cultural flow in their everyday lives, but also lived in the imagined community of a destined nationalism and socialism. In this respect, I will try to focus on the slippage and in-between-ness of the nationhood, and the dialectics between anthropological places and non-places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, and conduct my investigation in three directions. First of all, I will revisit Hong Kong's colonial past by mapping the refractions of gangster genre, and then investigate how post-97 atmosphere reinforces the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, and finally, how quasi-national allegory is generated. In the second chapter, I will conduct the textual analysis from three perspectives: firstly, I will investigate the postmodern pastiche in the continuously nostalgia aura and the nihilism toward the Buddhism with repeating image of reincarnation. Next, I will analyze the quasi-national allegory that unfolds the intricate relationship among Hong Kong, China and Britain. Finally, I will conduct a comparative study on the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and the *Godfather* trilogy. As for Chapter Four, I will focus on the space of disappearance in Hong Kong in connection with the disappearance of protagonists, and the juxtaposition between anthropological places and non-places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, accentuating "quasi-ness" in post-97 Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's History and Gangster Film Genre

First, I will be engaged in revisiting Hong Kong's colonial past of administration-state and society by employing Ngo Tak-Wing's (吳德榮) theory in re-mapping Hong Kong before the handover. Ngo's viewing Hong Kong as the "comprador" shares the similarities with Law Wing-Sang's (羅永生) "collaborative colonialism" in his *Collaborative Colonialism and its refractions in Undercover*

revealing completely new and vibrant visages." Quoted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bian_Lian.

Movie.³ This term catches the characteristics of the ingratiation, and performative attitudes of Hong Kong toward China and Britain. It may provide an alternative perspective in revisiting Hong Kong movies, with an emphasis on the “conspiracy of forces and flows” and “illuminating the place’s rather murky pasts” in the political-gangster genre. In order to survive between the two powerful regimes, the in-between-ness becomes a risky, yet necessary device; therefore, Hong Kong still plays the role of middleman after the handover.

Besides collaborative colonialism, Law Wing-Sang also points out the intertwining relationship between colonial history of Hong Kong and gangster genre. Gangster films not only bring up the moral anxiety and conflicting identity crisis of Hong Kong, but also reflect the geo-political situation: a place located in-between local politics and British managed modern order. To rewrite and to represent undercover’s refractions can be regarded as to re-inscribe Hong Kong’s fate. For instance, *Man on the Brink* (《邊緣人》)(1981) allegorizes the incapability of the Royal police and the bushed future via the tragic death of the undercover, and brings up the question of Hong Kong people’s identity after 97. The classical gangster film *City on Fire* (《龍虎風雲》)(1987) suggests the dilemma between ethnical brotherhood and morality; the institutionalized duties among undercover, police, and gangster; and modulates the heroic but tragic image of the undercover. In addition, the gangster genre may combine with comedy, and rid itself from the image of social victims: *Fight Back at School* (《逃學威龍》)(1991) and *The King of Comedy* (《喜劇之王》)(1993) are two such examples of comic-gangster films. Moreover, Stephan

³ This paper is issued in the Fifth Annual Conference of the Cultural Studies Association (Taiwan) Jan. 8-9, 2005, National Chiao Tung University, Hsinchu. Transnational Chinese, Cultural Migrations in Chinese: 羅永生。解讀香港臥底電影的情緒結構和變遷。While the English abstract is accessed on Oct. 17th. See: <http://tinyurl.com/y6m8jc>.

Chow's (周星馳) "undercover is the best actor" explicates the performativity of undercover and dramatizes Hong Kong history from a comic perspective rather than a tragic one. Searching for identity and wandering between the good and the evil are the main themes in Hong Kong gangster films; however, after 1997, are gangster films still able to allegorize the in-between-ness of Hong Kong and its people? If the answer is positive, will there be any difference between the pre-1997 gangster films and the post-1997 gangster films? And if so, what cause the differences?

After briefly summarizing the tides and refractions of gangster genre by auteur from 80's; the great variety reinforcing the treacherous politics; and the fear of embracing the coming hangover, I will provide the affinities and dissimilarities between Hollywood and Hong Kong gangster genre. Gangster is a syndicate without legitimacy, which indicates that the underworld dominates the hierarchy beyond law reinforcement; therefore, breaking rules and conducting the violent deeds romanticize individualism, especially in Hollywood genre. In contrast, being a part of *jianghu*,⁴ individualism is embedded in gallantry, camaraderie, candor, and brotherhood with the values that interlock with traditional Chinese principles. By highlighting the undercover as the social actor, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy prolongs the aura of 97 and displays how it is categorized during the post-97; moreover, how the post-97 atmosphere embeds itself within the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy. The term "post-97" was first quoted from Cen Lang-Tian's (岑朗天) observation in his *Post 97 and Hong Kong Cinema*, which emphasizes the themes of "un-presentable and unattainable" that derive from postmodern theory to demonstrate the impossibility to reach the

⁴ Literally means "rivers and lakes" (江湖). In Stephen Teo's *Director in Action.: Johnnie To and the Hong Kong Action Film*, he gives jianghu a definition as: "[...] kind of mythic space[...], referring to the world in which triad-based gangsters, hired killers and even the police-detectives operate according to prescribed codes and rituals.[...] where "the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended" and in which the hero must be portrayed as "doing something." (Teo 4-5)

authenticity of memory construction. However, does post-97 have a definite ending? As Cen Lang-Tian's argument, post-97 will only be terminated until Hong Kong recognizes itself with a new identity.

The Quasi-National Allegory of the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

Finally, I will conduct the theory of quasi-national allegory by connecting two scholars' perspectives. The first being Chu Ying-Chi, her discourse in reading *Britain, Mainland China and Hong Kong as colonizer, motherland and self* supports me to define the triangular relationship. By verifying the contradictory concept of a "nation", I will employ Aijaz Ahmad's critiques on Fredric Jameson's theory in his national allegorical reading of third-world texts, and replace the concept of a "nation" with "collectivity". The term has retained the discrepancies of so-called third-world literature, and pointed out the distinctiveness of Hong Kong in-between Britain and China. Therefore, I would like to investigate the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy as a "quasi-national allegory."

Based on Fredric Jameson's "national allegory", it illustrates the necessity of connecting all third world texts to political unconsciousness, and points out the correlation between socio-political context and textual creation. While critics are dealing with issues related to fate and the uncertain future of a third-world nation, the political implications will be illustrated and displayed in the form of national allegories. However, here comes the question, that is, if Hong Kong is never a nation, could one read the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy as a national allegory?

Chu Ying-Chi postulates her argument in *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, motherland and self* by pointing out the triangular relationship among Hong Kong, Chinese the motherland and British the colonizer, and regards Hong Kong's national

identity as the “lack” without being endowed with political power and sovereignty.

Under intersected domination by China and Britain, Hong Kong will never be able to get away from the triangular relationship. According to Anthony Smith, the construction of “nation” requires two essential elements: territorial and ethnic (Smith 1989: 135); however, because the geopolitical identity of Hong Kong is border-crossing, and its cultural identity a hybrid, Hong Kong’s national identity is always under construction and never fixed. Therefore, Hong Kong’s status could be read as quasi-national allegory. Accordingly, an allegorical reading of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy is an effective method to analyze the deeply intertwining relationship among ex-colonizer, the motherland and the local milieu, and between personal/national and public/private.

To explicate the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy as a quasi-national allegory, I would like to assume the neutrality of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy itself, placing aside its cinematic representation of collaborative colonialism with themes of betrayal and loyalty; crime, choice and inferno. As the cinematic time has traversed before and after the 97 handover (from 1991 to 2003), the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy neither suggests that spectators should identify with Chinese ethnicity, nor does it construct the negative image of Royal Hong Kong police during British colony. On the other hand, it does not present China as the Other, nor emphasize the poverty of China in contrast to the capitalist lifestyle. It depicts the refractions of colonized Hong Kong as a journey through which the undercover searches for identity, brotherhood and personal loyalty. The demonstration given above brings up the uniqueness of quasi-national allegory in analyzing the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy of Hong Kong people who have undergone the times of turmoil. Everyone is an undercover in some way or another, when one tells oneself that “it will be fine tomorrow” in films.

Postmodern Pastiche in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy: Nostalgia and Buddhism

In the second sections of my thesis, I will firstly investigate the postmodern approach in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy to unmask the similarities and disparities before and after the deadline 97, which interlocks with many postmodern characteristics in retrieving back to 1992, 1995 and 1997. To violate the chronology is a way to violate the memory, to intrude the possibility of amnesia, and to unfold the atmosphere of nostalgia. The director demonstrates this turmoil in the prequel of *Infernal Affairs II* and the sequel of *Infernal Affairs III*; moreover, he uses a jumping timeline method in *Infernal Affairs III*. In *Infernal Affairs II*, the dichotomy between good and evil is still blurring, and the brotherhood, romanticism and camaraderie of *jianghu* are glittered. Being embedded within the ideology of such *jianghu* is a way to refuse the turmoil and sufferings; moreover, to secure his/her idealized authenticity. Buddhism penetrates through the trilogy, which emancipates or traps the anxiety and suffering of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy. The total omniscient narrative along with the rearrangement of time and space reinforces the repeated theme of “continuous hell”. Fatalism illustrates the impossibility to escape while nostalgia makes the past a secure place to hide, and the future becomes a falling into the infernal.

From the metaphor of gangster and police as families to Britain or China, the quasi-ness takes place allegorically in referring to the patriarchal structure. The withered Ngai Kwan (倪坤) and Ngai Win-Hau (倪永孝) symbolize the termination of real father figures in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, and the rise of Superintendent Wong Chi-Shing (黃志誠) and Hon Sam (韓琛) generates the epoch of surrogate father figures throughout the trilogy. Moreover, the appearance of Shen Chan (沈澄) and Superintendent Yeung Kam-Wing (楊錦榮) disturb Ming's self-identification, for

their shadowy and mysterious existence turns them into the substitute father figures of the Chinese gangster and the police of post-97 Hong Kong respectively. To elucidate, every death deconstructs and reinforces the quasi-ness of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy.

A Comparative Study of the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy and the *Godfather* Trilogy

In the final part of Chapter Three, I will conduct a comparative study of the family threshold between the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and the *Godfather* trilogy. Family relationship in Hong Kong gangster films is not as apparent as those demonstrated in Hollywood movies. In prequel of *Infernal Affairs II*, family relationship bounds intimately with the triad variations, this is further stylized in the *Godfather* trilogy directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Paralleling with the Corlen family with Mafia tradition, the triad infiltration of the Ngai family in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy shares two common perspectives of: “parameters of legitimate social society (the family and patriarchal power)” (Mason 2002: 130) and “hermetically sealed world” (131).

Politics of Disappearance and Spatiality in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

In the third section of my thesis, I would like to explore the dialectical relationship between places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy. Hong Kong is a city of transition, modifying from old to new, and wrestling between “anthropological places” and “non-places”. I will employ Ackbar Abbas’s theory of “space of disappearance”, and Marc Auge’s concept of anthropological places and non-places to verify the outwardly, inwardly, upwardly and downwardly in-between-ness, and to reinforce the struggle and turmoil of both the undercover and the city inside/out.

Spatially and symbolically, the shifts between anthropological places and

non-places are reminiscent of Ackbar Abbas' theory of "space of disappearance".

Abbas postulated "space of disappearance" in the year of 1997, when Hong Kong was faced with the deadline of the handover. Abbas indicates that disappearance does not refer to an erasure, but also to "reverse hallucination" (Abbas 1997: 6), which "is not seeing what is there". While the city is undergoing constant dismantling and construction, the skyline of Hong Kong becomes the competitive landmark of global capitals; hence, the outlook of Hong Kong is no longer recognizable. To this extent, even after the colonizer retreated from Hong Kong, the cosmopolitan urban blueprint still paves its way toward utopia and the globalization of capitals. Abbas considers that Hong Kong is "a city of transients" (Abbas 4), occupying a "strong sense of temporary" and "floating identity" (4). However, faced with the takeover of the upcoming ethnical but "alien" China, Hong Kong people caught by the "always already lost" and fabricated identity, suffered from the crisis of not knowing "who I am (which is exactly what the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy indicates)". Therefore, politics of disappearance not only regards the re/mapping of the physical and the cultural space, but also regards the mis/representation of Hong Kong people with their uncertain self-image.

Marc Ague describes, the anthropological places are "historical---combining identity with relations" (Ague 1995: 54); they provide residential memory and nostalgia, which are helpful in reconstructing identities. Relatively, non-places are the products of supermodernity, they "do not integrate the earlier places" (78), and have characteristics such as "anonymity, alienation and impermanence" (Tomlinson 1999: 110). Moreover, non-places are "sort of simulacrum of anthropological places" (110), such as clinics, airports, train stations, apartment houses, and so on.

Anthropological Places and Non-Places in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

In the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, there are obvious back and forth spatial movements to and from anthropological places and non-places. The anthropological places where the gangsters start and expand their underground business are distinguished with geographical names and historical allusions. For example, in *Infernal Affairs I*, Hon Sam's gangster business starts from *Tuen Men Tsuen* (屯門村), where he deals his cocaine business with his Thai friends in *Urmston Road* (or *Dragon Drum Channel*, 龍鼓灘); *Urmston Road* is actually one of the central regions in *Tuen Men Tsuen*⁵. The anthropological places do not only remind the audience of Hong Kong's past history, but they also highlight Hong Kong as "a city of disappearance". In other words, Hong Kong is a city where the undercover can metamorphose and shuttle between old places and new ones, shifting his identity between a gangster and a police.

The demolition of anthropological places and the construction of non-places simultaneously mark the dis/appearance of Hong Kong. Moreover, the architectures of Hong Kong and the psychological ambiguity of the undercover are made graphic in the space of disappearance. For instance, non-places such as the rooftop and elevator are gathering places of murderers, and they may also be seen as a passage from life to death, from heaven to hell.

As mentioned above, according to Marc Auge's argument, non-places are characterized as temporal, transitional and impermanent. Non-places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy correspond to what Abbas demonstrates as the space of disappearance in Hong Kong. In the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, the elevator can be regarded as an image of connection and passage, implying the dis/appearance in Hong Kong. On the one

hand, the elevator signifies Chang Wing-Yan's (陳永仁) falling and his death; on the other hand, the upward and downward movements denote Superintendent Lau Kin-Ming's (劉健明) struggle in lining up with his own expectation of rebirth. Therefore, the elevator is a passage and transit between heaven and infernal world. Despite the fact that both Chan Wing-Yan and Superintendent Wong Chi-Shing (黃志誠) are killed near the rooftop with their physical bodies falling downward (whether being carried by elevator or thrown down from the rooftop), their spirits seem to remain lingering on the rooftop, the non-place of their routine meeting, where both are identified with good police. Lau Kin-Ming, as sole survivor in this battle, bears all the hidden treacherous schemes, which imprisons his spirit and physical body without redemption. Non-place like elevator not only symbolizes special transit and temporal passage, but also functions as the carrier moving characters back and forth, life and death, good and evil.

The relationship between the shifted identities of the undercover and disappearance are made palpable by the downfall and the burial of undercover. However, compared to the endless sufferings of the living, death may not be such a bad outcome but rather a relief. In each opening and ending of the trilogy, there are Buddhist scriptures, which apocalyptically and allegorically illuminate the predicament of the undercover, and insinuate the dilemma of Hong Kong during the phase of transition.

Conclusion

To conclude, I will conduct this thesis from revisiting Hong Kong's colonial past

⁵ The English names and its relation are quoted from Wikipedia, Category: Hong Kong geography stubs, <http://tinyurl.com/wwpet>.

to view the imposed rule of “economic laissez-faire and political non-intervention” as the bilateral connections of “administrative-state society” relationship. Historical sketch of Hong Kong gangster film by auteur verifies the collaborative relationship and its geo-political in-between-ness, while Hollywood gangster films infiltrate and inject some similarities and differences in Hong Kong movies, as the transplanted modernity does in colonized process. Post-97 aura in memory reconstruction, nostalgia and amnesia continues to haunt Hong Kong cinema. Parallel with “one-country; two systems”, post-97 reincarnates the “un-presentable” and “unattainable” themes in the chronological timeline. Through the interruption and rearrangement of time, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy unfolds the heritage of gangster genre and provides the refractions in identity construction to embrace the Motherland China. The repeated theme in this paper is therefore to demonstrate the in-between-ness of Hong Kong itself, its cultural productions, and gangster films. A quasi-national allegorical approach in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy will unfold the triangular relationship of Hong Kong, Britain and China from a neutral perspective.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I will investigate two themes from a postmodern perspective: nostalgia and Buddhism: starting from the variation on the concept of *jianghu* to unwrap the “cross-generic signification”, the rearrangement of timeline to violate the total omniscient narrative in demonstrating the importance of the deadline 97, bringing up the theme of nostalgia. The penetrating theme of “infernal” refers to the Buddhist concept of “continuous hell” which intricately interlocks all the anxiety of existence, psychological distortion and tottering instability within a prison, which can not escape.

In the final section, I will demonstrate the space of disappearance through Abbas’ observation, and how two protagonists’ disappearances deal with each other,

and how reincarnation becomes a downfall image of degeneration by death.

Anthropological places and non-places in Auge's work are not that polarized as they appear to be, they coexist and contrast with each other.



Chapter Two: Hong Kong's History and Gangster Film Genre

Revisiting Hong Kong' Colonial History

It is the eleventh year since Hong Kong was retreated back toward China, the promises and political proclaims as “unchanged for 50 years” or “Hong Kong people govern Hong Kong” are waiting to be examined and have been repeatedly reinterpreted and anticipated in both literary and visual works in the supervised perspective. Within eleven years, Hong Kong has experienced and withstood the Asian financial crisis, SARS outbreak, the Article 23 controversies⁶ and the following parade to fight against the policy and to demand the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-Hwa (董建華)⁷, to step down. These turmoil and sufferings keep reminding me of the importance of 97, for it functions as a driving force of decision making, border crossing and reflective thinking of Hong Kong people.

There are too many contradictions of Hong Kong over 150 years under colonized rules. The most competing narrative revolves around the dichotomy between colonialism and nationalism, in which Britain turns Hong Kong from a fish village into a capitalist paradise, and this legendary transformation has constantly been emphasized by British government. It is often stated that nationalist interpretation views the colonized history as a part of China enduring the humiliation of Western

⁶ The hurricane of Article 23 originated from revising the security law, which Hong Kong Government drafted the National Security Bill to implement Article 23 and replace British colonial era laws on the subject”, and the protests of Hong Kong against the article by leading a massive demonstration. Hong Kong people worry about the law might erode the freedom of speeches for any organization banned by PRC under security reasons would also be banned at Hong Kong anytime. See: <http://www.basiclaw23.gov.hk/english/focus/focus5.htm>

⁷ The first Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (HKSAR) from July 1, 1997 to March 12, 2005. His Chief career is hampered by Article 23 controversies, Asian financial crisis, outbreak of SARS and his style of governance. His increasing criticism from both Hong Kong and central government attack his reputation and ability; finally, he announces his resignation due to his “health reasons” on March 10, 2005. Reference: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tung_Chee_Hwa

invasion, as such Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984⁸ after the handover was considered one of the main contributions to Hong Kong's development. These signatures preserve the colonial state-society indirect system in both perspectives of political non-intervention and economic laissez-faire. However, these narratives overly and ideologically simplify the underlying struggles of Hong Kong, and eliminate the variety of social factors influencing the transition between British domination and Chinese indigenous society. By highlighting the triangular relationship among Britain, China and Hong Kong, I will elaborate the benevolent, rebellious and even collaborate dimensions of Hong Kong, and try to avoid the established dichotomy of the ruler and the ruled (paradoxically in the context of transplanted modernity); moreover, I will demonstrate Hong Kong's initiative in shaping its own history. Furthermore, no matter how intertwined Britain and China are with Hong Kong during the transition, Hong Kong's role as the middleman will never be a devoiced witness and straddle; instead, it will struggle against the manipulated and assigned colonial identity, and then, create its own unique social-political landscape.

The view portrays British as the “administrative state” and the one imposing the semi-conducted rule of “combining the economic laissez-faire and political non-intervention” (Ngo 1999: 3). Despite that this indirect domination modulates the image of its neutrality, the liberal monopoly cannot maintain 150 years without resistance and complicated co-operation. As Ngo Tak-Wing observes in *Hong Kong's History*, Hong Kong hangs in suspense “on the painstaking process of state-society interactions in accommodating, dissipating, marginalizing or even suppressing the

⁸ Full name: The Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong.

conflicts” (Ngo 7). The deliberate distance retains local Chinese inhabitants as a less subordinate and oppressive colony, but emphasizes the economic policy of free markets and profits that transitional pivot could capture. By focusing on the business interests, the administrative state is not polarized as it claims to be; instead, it is supporting the elites collaborating with both sides, as claimed by what Ngo: “British business interests had to rely on the pre-existing Chinese trading networks in order to penetrate Asian markets” and then, “rewarded the collaborator with social and economic privileges so that they became the first generation of Chinese bourgeoisie in the colony” (4).

“Modernization is an agent of political manipulation in British Hong Kong”, as well as “the colonial state as being an agent of modernization” (Ngo 7), is further complicated by the constrained and advanced prosperous colonized state, the dominant financial and commercial factors. Though it is often stated that modernization in British Hong Kong accelerates the economic success and industrialization, it has not achieved the identical success throughout the whole society; instead, lower class as coolies and labors can only receive limited advantages. By highlighting the transplanted modernization⁹ as a transformation of colonized process and the bilateral connections of “state-society” relationship, the characters of “social actors--- including the Chinese compradors, the commercial and banking elites, the rural landlords, etc” become indispensable in the colonizing process. For “the

⁹ The idea of transplanted modernity comes from Taiwan’s prompt democratization after the declaration of Martial Law ended in 1987 till the first presidential election in 1996, and its collateral colonialism, which is against the process of how modernity is constructed in Western Europe. That is to say, modernity in Taiwan goes along with the propagation of colonialism and capitalism, but not from the cultural accumulation or industrial revolution; therefore, it is difficult to identify the modernity of Taiwan. So as Hong Kong, the modernity is not originated from where it is practiced, but comes along with British colony. The policy is furthered adopted by China. However, the modernity in Hong Kong is furthered complicated by the position of “social actor”, forming the assigned hierarchy. Therefore, I conclude the modernity in Hong Kong as “transplanted modernity”, which infiltrates from the administration-state, agent to the society.

group of social actors---big business” is the only colonial system that was “not separated from the state” (Ngo 3). The duality of social actors functions to collaborate with both the indigenous people and the state, and accelerates “the intermediaries between European imports/exports and native consumers/producers” (Hui 1999: 36-37) of pre-Chinese trading network. As well as building of new economic infrastructures, social actors could also be implemental in following out the transplanted modernization from the standpoint of forerunners and collectors or self-interests. With the unwitting separation and cooperation of bourgeoisie and indigenous people, the administration reaches its political, economic and social development successfully and shows that “legal discrimination existed at every level of Hong Kong society” (Carroll 1999: 14). Moreover, it constructs an ideological face of British Hong Kong: the image of free state and economic progress, in contrast with nearby China as the complementary and hypothetical enemy.

The pattern that Hong Kong is not a categorized colony is analogous to the situation before its indirect administration by Britain and consequently after its reunification toward China. Long been impressed by its in-between-ness, colonial politics can not be oversimplified as totally negative or totally positive, but negotiated, advanced and constrained by the bilateral connections to reach Hong Kong’s economic development and social stability. Analogous to the British regime of Hong Kong, Chinese government tends to buffer the expected rebounding of its calling of communist nationalism by the strategy of economic laissez-faire and political non-intervention after handover. Paradoxical as it appears to be, Hong Kong has to survive through maintaining its position as social actors, such as collaborator, comprador or the middleman during every transition of dominance. Therefore, identity of Hong Kong is either subordinate or autonomous from Britain or China, but

consistently under cooperation or resistance to both authorities, as well as the transplanted modernity underlying economic infrastructure limited within social actors. Coherently as what Hui Po-Keung (許寶強) argues, “their flexible loyalties to different national regimes also put them closer to the center of decision-making”, thus allowing them to advance their wide ranging business interests despite being politically marginalized (Hui 1999: 41). Consequently, colonial authorities maintain surveillance over Chinese residents and adopt the discriminating measures in Hong Kong. However, the colonial administration “continues its reliance on Chinese middlemen to manage and rule the domestic community” (Hui 40) in which the social actors play active and lucrative role in collaboration. Consequently, during the British domination, both the Chinese compradors and Hong Kong indigenous people have been equipped with discernible dualities: culturally, they lead Chinese ways of living in their everyday lives; politically, they endure to cope with the British system.

A Historical Sketch of Hong Kong Gangster Films

As above-mentioned, manipulation of conflicts (the dominant of pre-existing Chinese trading center and the transplanted modernization, etc) through these social actors is the vital reason to uphold the stability of colonized Hong Kong. This collaborative relationship and mutual hostilities constituted main faces of state-society interaction, and the character of in-between-ness becomes indispensable to multiple-colonized history, which modulates Hong Kong itself as the social actor, as well as the agent of modernization. The issues of collaborative relationship and in-between-ness further penetrate the refraction of film industry in Hong Kong. Just as martial arts film builds itself on rhyming swords and blades, *kung-fu* films embody the quintessentially Chinese disciplines through hardship and training, and gangster

movies apotheosize gun as stretching masculinity and admirable virtues that interlock loyalty, camaraderie, justice, gallantry and code of *yi* (義)¹⁰ to the extreme. The popularity and distinctiveness of gangster movie of Hong Kong lies in its multifariously inter-genre with the comedy, romance, crime, historical epic and thriller etc, which involve by Triad, a secret underworld hierarchy engaging in crime, such as trafficking drugs, gambling, money laundering. With the arbitrary blending of fictional and realistic narratives, gangster movie is further complicated by explanatory real-life figures as Limpy Ng Sik-Ho (伍仲豪)¹¹, Lee Rock (雷洛)¹², and Du Yueh-Sheng (杜月笙)¹³, whose melodramatic legends are remade into screen biographies in both representing corruptive defective of legal system and gangster-police collaboration of Hong Kong's colonial history.

Having highlighted the gangster film's characters in connecting with the daily

¹⁰ Chinese translation: 義. Stephen Teo's definition of *yi* is "an unwritten code that 'postulates a system of brotherhood, honor and justice binding all who operate within a (class-and-caste-defined) fraternity, whether criminal or otherwise.'" A person with the code of *yi* is willing sacrifice oneself for saving the other's life while his friend is in danger, as well as "A friend in need is a friend in deed"; however, *yi* should not be impetuously blind, but with reasonable judgment and wisdom to be helpful of friends.

¹¹ A real-life character, who is also known as Ni Sik-Ho (1930-1991), he starts his drastic life from an impoverished gangster in Triad and climbs up to the highest position, empowering the hierarchy by dealing with heroin and brutal actions. *To Be Number One* (1991)(Chinese title: 《跛豪》) is the autobiographical film is released after his released from prison, and this film romanticized triad actions and ignored moralist overtones through glorifying the power and triad lifestyle. Information of Limpy Ho, see:

<http://zh.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%E5%90%B3%E9%8C%AB%E8%B1%AA&variant=zh-tw>
Film information: http://hkmdb.com/db/movies/reviews.mhtml?id=7439&display_set=eng

¹² Lee Rock is also a legendary figure, who is correlated with Limpy Ho, and is served as the best prototype as modulating Hong Kong dreams. Lee Rock comes from China and joins police force for "putting food on the table," and "reaches the high position of chief of sergeant-majors before his resignation in 1969." *Lee Rock* (1991)(Chinese title: 《伍億探長雷洛傳》) is "melodramatic and glamorized depiction of this particular character, which owes much to Triad infiltration of the film industry and continuing problems of bribery and corruption in the police force." (Williams, 369) Film information, see: http://www.lovehkfilm.com/reviews/lee_rock.htm

¹³ Du Yueh-Sheng (1888-1951), a businessman involves in opium trade banking establishment, whose most notorious and infamous activity is participation of Shanghai Massacre of 1927 with Communists as a political machine. His autobiography *Lord of the East China Seas* (Chinese title: 《歲月風雲之上海皇帝》), is released in 1993, constituted by a serious historical betrayal of Du as a "victim of circumstances and a pawn in the political machinations of the Nationalist Government than as the key player he actually was" (Williams, 369).

Green gang history: <http://www.yiyou.com:1980/b5/shanghai.yiyou.com/html/14/168.html>
Film information: http://www.chinesetapes.com/movie_chinese/lord_of_east_china_sea.html

life of Hong Kong and its representative narrative in grasping the history, it would be easier to map how the visual vocabulary reinforces the director's style to allegorize the identity crisis, the blurred dichotomy, and embodiment of masculinity with traditional values. *Man on the Brink* (《邊緣人》)(1981)¹⁴, directed by Cheung Kwok-Ming (章國明), discloses the undercover story with its indulgence within French New Waves. The violent and unjust death of the undercover illustrates those who shuttle in between the police and gangster and bear the double but shadowy identity will end up in misery. While later on during 80's to 90's, John Woo (吳宇森) manufactures his "jianghu"¹⁵ with extreme masculine visual vocabulary from the prototype of aesthetics of violent. In *A Better Tomorrow* (《英雄本色》)(1986)¹⁶, *The Killer* (《喋血雙雄》)(1989)¹⁷, and *Hard Boiled* (《辣手神探》)(1992)¹⁸ dancing bullets wave simultaneously with complicated undulation of gallantry, candor and camaraderie between police and gangster. The depiction of royalty and brotherhood with choreographed gun-shooting sequences demonstrate the anxiety of identity in the film. As for Woo's visual vocabulary, it was appreciated the most as it combines symbolism with visual contradictories. For instance, he would have a battlefield scene situated in the church which is initially dark but lightened up by candles and has a statue of Saint Maria's sitting by with doves dispersing. The blurring of moral dichotomy, romanticized chivalry, and the idiosyncrasy of violent sequence

¹⁴ Cheung, Gwok-Ming. *Man on the Brink*. Hong Kong, 1981. See:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0185188/>

¹⁵ Literally means "rivers and lakes" (江湖). In Stephen Teo's *Director in Action.: Johnnie To and the Hong Kong Action Film*, he gives *jianghu* a definition as: "[...] kind of mythic space [...], referring to the world in which triad-based gangsters, hired killers and even the police-detectives operate according to prescribed codes and rituals. [...] where "the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended" and in which the hero must be portrayed as "doing something." (Teo 4-5)

¹⁶ John Woo. *A Better Tomorrow*. Cinema City Film Productions. Hong Kong, 1986. See:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092263/>

¹⁷ John Woo. *The Killer*. Film Workshop. Hong Kong, 1989. See:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097202/>

(convulsing audience's visual experience) of John Woo's films are the milestones of the 80's gangster movies in Hong Kong.

The penetrative reach of the gangster movies in Hong Kong continues to spread in the 90's. In contrast to the serious and decent narrative combining the philosophical but poetic visual vocabulary in John Woo's gangster movies, prolific Stephen Chow's *Fighting Back to School* (1991-1993) (Films title: 《逃學威龍》(1991), 《逃學威龍2》(1992), and 《逃學威龍三之龍過雞年》(1992) in respectively)¹⁹ series disclose the gangster genre with his “wulitou” (無厘頭)²⁰ viewpoint of “nobody”, ordinary people or lower class people with humorous, witty and relaxing attitude. In challenging the boundary of high and low art, Chow disengages himself from the 80's context in making gangster movies. Although Chow's films may seem superficial and reject reasonable narrative, they do not discredit his criticism against the corruptive government. *Fighting Back to School* unfolds itself from the classroom; the involvement of undercover exploits the problematic infiltration of Triad hierarchy and gunrunning business at school. In effect, the sense of *wulitou* emancipates the limits of gangster genre with facetious self-transcendence and semi-seriousness to fight against the untoward circumstances, which generates its exclusiveness in Hong Kong's political-cultural landscape.

If *Fighting Back to School* series expose Triad infiltration through school,

¹⁸ John Woo. *Hard Boiled*. Golden Princess Film Production Limited. Hong Kong, 1992. See: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104684/>

¹⁹ Gordon Chen. *Fighting Back to School*. Samico Films Production Company Ltd. Hong Kong, 1991. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103045/>; Gordon Chen. *Fighting Back to School II*. Win's Film Productions. Hong Kong, 1992. See: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105534/>; Jing Wong. *Fighting Back to School III*. Win's Film Productions. Hong Kong, 1993. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108293/>

²⁰ According to Wikipedia, the definition of *wulitou* is “ a name given to a type of humour originating from Hong Kong during the late 20th century. It is a phenomenon which has grown largely from its presentation in modern film media. Its humour arises from the complex interplay of cultural subtleties significant in Hong Kong. Typical constituents of this humour include nonsensical parodies, juxtaposition of contrasts, sudden surprises in spoken dialogue and action and improbable and deliberate anachronisms.” Quoted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mo_lei_tau

Andrew Lau's (劉偉強) *Young and Dangerous* series (1996-1998)²¹, popularly known as the *goowakjai* (古惑仔)²² series, reveal more. Unlike *A Better Tomorrow* or *The Killer*, the *jianghu* in *Young and Dangerous* lacks of modesty, fantasized gallantry, and overly romanticized aesthetics even on visual effects; however, apparently, that order, hierarchy, kinship-united collectiveness revitalize themselves in gangster movies. In *Young and Dangerous* series, Triad recruits the teenage students in trafficking marijuana and rearranging the gangster groups, rejuvenating the power of young rascals. *Jianghu*, in this context, is crowded with young mobs who are innocent and obedient but complicated with impetuous betrayal, and street violence; however, these rascals illustrate the primitive spirit of gangster movies with confidence and hope within the series.

After the handover, Hong Kong was initially embedded within the financial crisis of 98 and faced a gloomy future, so was the film industry. Johnnie To's (杜琪峰) *Election*(2005) and *Election 2*(2006) (《黑社會》and《黑社會2:以合為貴》)²³ reflect both the cinematic and psychological refraction in the post-97 period. In contrast to circuitous and ambiguous allegory of pre-97 gangster movie, Johnnie To takes gangster genre as the frame in criticizing the politics of the underworld. The sudden emergence of a new force disrupts the power hierarchy and distorts the traditional values through the seemingly righteous election. Protagonist like Jimmy Lee possesses the good and unpretentious manner but is forced to inherit the cold-blood

²¹ *Young and Dangerous* series contains six sequels and four unauthorized spin-offs. Originated from the Hong Kong comic book "Teddy Boy," which glorified impetuous violence of young adults and sketched out the triad hierarchy toward Taiwan. All the *Young and Dangerous* series are: <http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%8F%A4%E6%83%91%E4%BB%94>

²² "A term roughly translated as "young rascals" representing a younger version of the slang term "rascals" used by triad films." (Williams 363)

²³ 黑社會, black society is often referred to underground society, that is the Triad. The election is a symbolical sardonicism for the seemingly democracy, which is supported by inner struggles, violence and flowing conspiracies. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election_%282005_film%29

cruelty for climbing up the summit of the power hierarchy.

To elucidate, gangsters are indispensable to the colonial history of Hong Kong as they equip Hong Kong with characters of a social actor, comprador, collaborator and middleman. From *Man on the Brink*, *A Better Tomorrow*, and *The Killer*, to *Fighting Back to School*, the romanticized chivalry and heroic sacrifice for candor, brotherhood and gallantry reverse the myth-like heroism but engage the *wulitou* in humorous and witty ways to solve criminal cases. In contrast to the individualist movement of undercover in John Woo and Stephan Chow's films, street mobs collect themselves as a group in *Young and Dangerous*, *goowakjai* revitalizes the energy in neon-light over-filled urban city, young rascals brandish and hack out their Triad dreams with blades and swords. If personal ambition and self-interests override the hierarchy as in *Election*, its sequel must illustrate the conspiracies and power struggles in underworld. Traditional values of gallantry, candor and camaraderie dissolve in legitimate business enterprises. Johnnie To criticizes the Communist government in a sharp and heavy manner, and unfolds his patriotism in stylized *jianghu* mechanism.

The Affinities/Dissimilarities Between Hollywood Gangster Films and Hong Kong Gangster Films

Gangster genre originated from early American cinema; however, through the passing time, space and culture, it has gained remarkable popularity and has been adapted universally. Nowadays, films encompass a variety of genres such as comedy, tragedy, action or epic, as well as cop and robber movies, detective movies, crime and thriller movies, just as what Marilyn Yaquinto notes, “the gangster has a timeless quality, just like the sins he commits” (Yaquinto 1998: xi)²⁴; therefore, gangster

²⁴ Yaquinto, Marilyn. *Pump “Em full of Lead: A Look at Gangsters on Film.”* New York: Twayne

figures are prominent and their stories will be remembered and documented. Gangster films in America are as graphed by Fran Mason in the preface of *American Gangster Cinema*:

Cinema:

The American film gangster is an iconic figure of the industrial twentieth century in both its modern and postmodern forms, representing a culture of mobility, urban space, excess, and individual license. He is also; however, an anti-social figure within this context because he is the focus for a liberation from hierarchy and from the past (in his embrace of the modern) that society and ideology wish to repress. (Mason vii)

Gangster is a syndicate without legitimacy, which indicates that the underworld dominates its hierarchy beyond law reinforcement. From *Little Caesar* (1931)²⁵, *The Public Enemy* (1931)²⁶ to *Scarface* (1932)²⁷, American gangsters become the testimony of modernity, freedom, masculinity and space throughout the crime in the slums, the representation of police corruptions, the loss of individuality, and the “opposition between traditional ideologies and their dissolution in modernity, and it also expresses the contradictions of modernity itself” (Mason 13). *Little Caesar* starts its narrative from the chasing of the American dream: Rico leaves the poor provinces for the big city for desirable power and status, but ends up within the functional performance in a factory. Contradictorily, gangsters possess the discipline outside the real world by breaking up orders in violence, turning himself from “nobody” into “somebody”. While in *The Public Enemy*, Tom Powers has a similar street experience as Rico in *Little Caesar* as Mason illustrates: “The street is the paradigmatic experience of modernity, a place of movement, change and consumption [...], street as a site of narrative action expresses its embodiment of modern principles”. (Mason 17). Both of the films express street culture and their relationship with modernity, in

Publishers, 1998.

²⁵ Mervyn LeRoy. *Little Caesar*. First National Pictures. USA, 1931.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0021079/>

²⁶ William A. Wellman. *Public Enemy*. Warner Bros. Pictures. USA, 1932.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0022286/>

which family is the other constraint of freedom and individualism, the frame of traditional hierarchy and ideology. Gangsters in Hollywood films have three characters: “move freely between different spaces to transgress boundaries as if there were no exclusion zones” (Mason 19); offers this achievement of masculinity” (20); “fluidity allows independence and freedom to live a life of excess” (20). Gangster films metaphorically categorize gangster as a road toward crime, desire, power, or economy excess. However, in *Scarface*, excess to modernity becomes indispensable to violence, especially manifested with gun. Tony Camonte symbolizes his gun as the extension of masculinity and discipline; however, the embracing of modernity collapses his hierarchy while he kills his rival and colleague, Rinaldo. Embracing modernity is as risky as destructing it, while desires become uncontrollable. Romanticism, chivalry and brotherhood are interlocked Camonte, an ironic figure, is therefore carrying out “everything to excess” but also represents the flexibility and blurred dichotomy of gangster hero.

Paradoxical as it appears to be, Hong Kong gangster film also shares some affinities and dissimilarities with those in American gangster films, as both of them articulate themselves with the modernity, demonstrating not only resistance but also cooperation. Modernity in American gangster is against 18th century Enlightenment which demonstrates the rationality and liberation through the acquaintance of knowledge, but correlates with the economic bloom, technological advancement and established social orders. Individualism is obliterated by industrialization in that each person functions anonymously; therefore, being a part of gangsters is to escape and to be alienated from the constructed social institution. It appears to be free, and simultaneously, earns power and status. While being a part of Hong Kong gangster is

²⁷ Brian De Palma. *Scarface*. Universal Pictures. USA, 1932. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086250/>

more than its consideration for obtaining freedom and independence, such as Triad is originated by a patriot group and gradually being equipped with the character of comprador and social actor as the agent of transplanted modernity. As a result, gallantry, camaraderie, candor and brotherhood which are interlocking with traditional Chinese values define Hong Kong gangster films on mutuality, and dichotomy of good and evil are blurred to demonstrate chivalry and to praise romantic heroism. In contrast, American gangsters possess less apparent character in brotherhood than those demonstrated in Hong Kong in that romanticism centralizes on individualism and personal wish fulfillment, for participating in gangster is a ladder toward power and a dominant status. Family relationship appears to have weaker effects on the films mentioned-above, while gangsters in Hong Kong bond like a family with meticulous hierarchy, but family consanguinity is mostly devalued if the blood relationship is not inherent in the family business. Like American gangster films, family in Hong Kong gangster film is the embodiment of social orders and a place to be escaped. The display of masculinity and violent spectacles are common in both American and Hong Kong gangster films, and to dominate a gun is to manage the right to give order.

As what Mason notes: “The cultural logic of blur of modernity, the dichotomy of order and chaos, between liberalization and control of desires, and between excess and discipline” (Mason 14) articulate the instability of modernity itself. Both gangster films in America and Hong Kong articulate their modernity in different enlightenment and traditions; consequently, each achieves diversely in its cultural and political context. Romance and heroism in American gangster films are American-Dream stylized from the pursuit of freedom and individuality in industrialized institution, in order to grab power and status. However, with hope for redemption, romance and heroism is manufactured by gallantry, brotherhood, and camaraderie among peers or

even fracture the social hierarchy. Bonding with masculinity, which is extended by violent displays and visual spectacles, the gun-shooting sequences in Hong Kong gangster films possess the poetic aestheticism; however, the manner of gangster as family maps out even complicated and glamorized affections. What merits special attentions is the real-life figures of Al Capone in *Scarface* and Lee Rock in *Alias: Lee Rock I* (1991), as they help to shape the cultural identity in both historical contexts. While it is undeniable that Hong Kong gangster films are remarkably affected by American gangster ones; they both reflect their intrinsic value of gangster genre.

Historical sketch in previous section demonstrates the codes of *yi* (including brotherhood, gallantry, candor and camaraderie etc) in gangster genre. However, these codes have been constructed to extend and develop gangster genre than to reflect the history of colonial Hong Kong. Besides, these codes are recognized as the replication of cultural knowledge. What modernity demonstrates in gangster genre is intriguingly parallel to those in American gangster genre, which encompasses masculinity, romanticism, brotherhood, and hierarchy. Insofar as during the 80's, Hong Kong was immersed in the flourishing economic success, so was the film industry, thus gangster genres during that period was characterized by optimism, fearlessness and idealized utopia called "*jianghu*", where brotherhood and gallantry were aesthetically presented in visual spectacles with romantic heroism, just as what is perfectly embodied within *A Better Tomorrow*. Moreover, with blind hope, even a "nobody" in the street in *Young and Dangerous* series could blade out his own glamorized myth and then initiate a brand new life. Stepping closely toward the handover, gangster genre inclines itself to the postmodern phrase which has been an upsurge since the beginning of 1990 to meet new condition of free market capitalism. From the demonstration of *Fighting Back at School* series, the circularity of postmodern

injections is obvious: the artistically and aesthetically rejection toward codes of modernity, while characterized as “a tension between order and chaos, between liberalization and control of desires and between excess and discipline” (Mason 14). *Wulitou* itself is the best embodiment of postmodern gangster genre in that its innovative performance rejects the secure and traditional ways of modulating a fixed and collective identity.

Post 97 and Postmodern

As what was mentioned in the previous section, little is known before Hong Kong was given to Britain in 1841. Pre-existing trading network is frequently mentioned in the center of Kowloon (九龍) and its adjacent Canton, from initially a fish village to a transnational port after the handover. The obvious in-between-ness and its middleman character are integrated within the history of colonization, and further complicated by self-interests and the seemingly stable detachment of tolerant liberty in a state-society relationship. Characteristics such as duality, double alienation and flexible loyalty indicate that the collaboration between Hong Kong and Britain was constructed mutually. What merits special attention after Hong Kong's reunification with China is therefore not focal of the conflicts-free stability and one-sided colonial prosperity, but rather how disturbed the sense of in-between-ness and flexibility still are. Further, by the duality of cultural China and political Britain during the colonial administration, the gap of identification and everyday life aesthetics will even complicated after the handover. To this extent, the “post-97” narrative takes initial shape by tunneling through the deadline of 97.

The meaning of “post” in postmodern context is as what Jean-Francois Lyotard argues, “would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post)

and anterior (modo)” (Lyotard 1984: 81). To be granted, the “post” of postmodern does not connote the process of coming back, flashing back or feeding back, but of the Greek preposition “ana-”, which denotes back again, backward, throughout, upward, anew and again.

Post-97 starts from the handover, but does it have a definite deadline? Do Hong Kong people have a deadline to get over post-97 as they did in confronting the coming of 97? What emerges from the post-97 generally encircle issues of identity, memory and time, and is further complicated by the liquidation of the past, nostalgia and anxiety; finally, it responds to the in-between-ness of social actors.

It is not surprising to note that even the construction of identity has to do with resistance, cooperation, double loyalty, and mutual betrayal. Till the coming of 97, Hong Kong people’s awareness of given an assigned identity emerges with the uncertainty of old colonial one, which has not yet been fully ridden of. Therefore, the mass production of memory is urgently needed, even the rearranged identity will eventually disappear with the coming of post-97. In other words, the memory-reconstructed identity is doomed to disappear in authenticating its existence and reality. Furthermore, the legitimating of identity does not reach its authenticity, but rather modulates its sense of collectivity in retaining the memory of a reconstructed and rewritten one. To elucidate the point, memory completes itself by defining its disappearance, just analogous to what Lyotard demonstrates in *The*

Postmodern Condition:

“The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.” (Lyotard 81)

By focusing on the “unrepresentable” and “unattainable” aspects in postmodern, I

enforce the aura of reaching one's authenticity of memory reconstruction and representation. The 97 narrative is completed while the center is always already lost. According to Cen Lan-Tian's observation in his work on *Post 97 and Hong Kong cinema*²⁸, exchanging for the sense of nostalgia, the "unattainable" rewards Hong Kong's identity with "amnesia" and "memory restoration". By highlighting the wrestling on memory and the transplanted modernity in Hong Kong, the post-97 Hong Kong is contagious with the amnesic symptoms, its in-between-ness, and nostalgic collectiveness. Therefore, the equation from pre-97 to post-97 comes to: deny an oversimplified identity → memory (identity) reconstruction → memory (identity) falls out → identify with the disappearance²⁹ (Cen 2003: 35).

Besides the "unattainable" and the "unrepresentable" themes in postmodern characters that correlate to the irretrievable authenticity of memory and the nostalgia for reconstructing the "reliable" past, the character's identity construction oscillates fluidly between the past and the present. From postmodern perspective, the memory is reconstructed through non-realistic, fictitious and imaginative forms with great uncertainty. In the post-97 context, through self-reflexivity, the protagonists' identities shuttle between pre-97 and post-97; the playfulness in reconstructing identity lies in the oscillation between faithfulness and artifice toward the memory. Everyone has his/her way to reach the "plausible center and its legitimization" of one's memory. Therefore, what has been memorized is so-called "truth", while what has been forgotten falls into the nihility and disappearance. Simultaneously, the culture of post-97 era becomes the culture of selective amnesia.

The connection between postmodern and post-97 era comes from the

²⁸ 朗天。《後九七與香港電影》。香港電影評論協會。2003。

²⁹ The equation is due to my own translation, while the Chinese in the original text is: 拒絕簡單認同 → 搜尋/構作記憶(身分) → 失去記憶(身分) → 認同失去的。

unattainable of memory construction, rejecting fixed identification, and blurring dichotomy. In the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, postmodern perspective comes firstly from the discontinuous narrative that rearranges the time and space, especially in *Infernal Affairs III*. “Discontinuous narrative” challenges chronological time, confuses the identities of Yan and Ming, and dramatizes *jianghu* by blurring the boundaries among police, gangster and undercover. While disrupting and deconstructing the former narrative with the latter narrative, the fragmentation of narrative structure confuses not only the protagonists self-identification, but also in audiences’ perception: Ming fantasized himself as Yan in order to allow himself a chance to practice being a good person; however, Ming’s schizophrenia disturbs his self-consciousness and reverse hallucination by transforming him to someone else. Despite that the total omniscient narrative provides the audience to follow up Yan’s journey through his undercover life, his “self-reflexivity” through oscillation remains obvious. Better than Ming’s schizophrenia, Yan’s violent inclination revolves around his irretrievable police identity and inerasable undercover one; however, this narrative is followed by Ming, who tries to reverse the boundaries of good and evil, but finally reaches the verge between life and death.

Moreover, deconstruction in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy is correlated to the postmodern metanarrative through rearrangement of time and space as the latter narrative and action decenters the former one, and the total omniscient point of view becomes unreliable. Insofar as the discontinuity of time and space, the film digests and perspectives shift back and forth, confusing the audience and leading to the mutual betrayal between the audience and protagonists. Which fragments of timepiece are legitimized and are reliable to identify?

The anxiety of identities and the sense of uncertainty are intensified with the

handover; therefore, in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, nostalgia becomes a resistant tactic aesthetically and politically, which yearns for the Royal image and symbol with an ironic trust. The “metanarrative” in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy deconstructs the righteous image of Royal police before 97, such as that proudly pronounced by Jackie Chen in the *Police Story*: “I am a cop”; instead, the pronouncement, “Sorry, I am a cop” and “I want to be a good man” in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy modulates the vague identification of being a police.

Through the postmodern metanarrative mentioned above, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy subverts what total omniscient point of view could predominate, and allow the diverse interpretations of each character. However, in the ending of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, the Buddhist scripture illustrates the inescapable fatalism, as if retrieving the pre-modern stage, in which philosophical doctrines of divine good and evil make the enclosure (for instance, Yan and Ming first encounter in stereo store in the beginning of *Infernal Affairs I* and the end of *III*) beyond the turmoil of modernism and postmodernism.

However, does post-97 have a definite ending? According to Cen Lang-Tian’s argument, post-97 is terminated till Hong Kong has recognized itself with a new identity. No matter whether Hong Kong assimilates itself as a unit of colonial China or not, if the identification is still in progress, the period of post-97 will be procrastinated again as 97. Although seemingly contradictory, post-97 should be understood both chronologically and synchronically: the time has past and the authenticity could never be attainable, and the narrative of either 97 or post-97 can reincarnate.

In-Between-ness, Triangular Relationship and Quasi-National Allegory: Theories and Methodology

From revisiting the colonial past of British Hong Kong to its handover toward Chinese government, Hong Kong officially disengages itself from the colonial status but affirms the nationalistic account of the colony's economic policy and its legal system, which is to be preserved and promised in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, for Hong Kong to be unchanged within 50 years. However, no matter how the narrative modulates Hong Kong in relating to the autonomy versus subordination, or as squeezing between British the ruler and China throughout most of the history, the characteristic of in-between-ness, as embodiment of the middleman and compradors, will collaborate with Hong Kong after 97. Stepping into the post-97 period, memories were rapidly gathered and old identities converted and established in order to embrace the newly given one, yet the in-between-ness remains present.

In retrospect, the characteristic of in-between-ness can not only be detected from the political and economic dimension, but also shown from the ecological system of cultural productions after 97. So as not to over-simplify the relationship between Britain and Hong Kong as a stabilized dichotomy of a ruler and subordinate, and to forthrightly link Hong Kong itself to the China factor, I will elaborate the in-between-ness in the way of a triangular relationship, which is in Chu Ying-Chi's conceptualization of British colonizer, Chinese motherland and Hong Kong. Admittedly, within the network of this triangular relationship, Hong Kong is endowed with stronger advantages and disadvantages of a middleman, which is further complicated by bilateral or multilateral trajectories, conspiracies, missionaries, and secrets. To sum up, I will conclude the above-mentioned narratives within a "quasi-national allegory" in order to demonstrate the economic and political

manipulation from a cultural aspect and to utilize reflective thinking in representing and reconstructing the unattainable identity within the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy.

Quasi-national allegory is not merely a compound, which consists of a “quasi-national” and “national allegory,” but should rather be described as a collaboration, that is formed between elements while they wrestle against each other. In Chu Ying-Chi’s demonstration, “quasi-nation” upgrades the indirect domination and influence of British government and China after 97. It not only emancipates Hong Kong from the administrative-state relationship, but also actively partakes in shaping and reconstructing it. With regard to the allegory, I will attribute Frederick Jameson’s “national allegory” to reinforce the political and fictional resemblances in both consuming the compressed and condensed colonial history, and simultaneously search for the “unattainable” representation in cinema.

The penetrative term “quasi-nation” is derived from her “*Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, motherland and self*”, which can be detected from demonstrating Hong Kong’s inclination towards a “nation”. It has also been stated that Hong Kong cinema has long being recognized as “a geopolitically defined cinema after 1997 that it operates as a territorially defined business in the world market, and contributes a collection of specific ‘national’ products to film culture.” However, she postulates the proper limitation in understanding “nation” in the attitudes of Anderson: “The term ‘nation’ can be understood in three ways: as a political unit, as an “imagined community (Anderson 1983) or as a combination of the two” (Chu 2003: xii). As mentioned above, it was the administrative-state political manipulation that led Hong Kong to be a highly autonomous political and economic unit in its territory and in its own right. Simultaneously, as to the imagined community, it is “created by and within its community culture” (Bailbar 1991: 93-4; Guibernau 1996: 75-6) and is embodied

through the interdependency of the triangular relationship. Finally, she argues that Hong Kong is “imagining itself as part of the Chinese national community” (Chu xii), which can be traced from the events of “Diaoyutai islands in 1971 and 1996,” and “Tiananmen Square in 1989,” or “when China’s athletes won Olympic Gold medals” (xii). At the moment of crisis, Hong Kong exhibits its dual identity and flexible loyalty toward China; therefore, Chu regards the identity of Hong Kong as both exclusive and inclusive during the colonized period:

“Insofar as a national depends on the notion of exclusion, Hong Kong showed that the imaged community of Hong Kong was ambivalently based on both the exclusion and the inclusion of China. From this perspective too, then, Hong Kong can be perceived as a quasi-nation.” (Chu xii)

In conclusion, Chu’s definition of “quasi-ness” and “quasi-national” puts the administrative-state domination into an extending scale in demonstrating that the selectiveness of duality is not overall related to the advantages of self-upgrading. In that triangular relationship, Hong Kong no longer constrains itself in the question of autonomy versus subordination throughout the conventional attributes of a colony. Instead, Hong Kong absorbs the transplanted modernization in connecting with Chinese ethnical and cultural origin, and breeds itself into a more balanced and multifaceted nature. On the other hand, situated in the position of a social actor, the quasi-ness is seen no more than just the class who exchanges collaboration for social and economic privileges, but also functions as the negotiator in between the ruler and the ruled, the agent when modernization buttresses by the dominant bourgeois and indigenous people. As a result, quasi-ness displays itself both exclusively and inclusively in possessing and disengaging the colonial past and future. Moreover, it conceptualizes the importance of collectiveness in shaping Hong Kong’s identity toward the handover.

“All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very

specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, [...] Third world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic --- necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.*" (Jameson 2001: 319-320)

In this paragraph, the most controversial issue is the concept of the "third world" and "nation" with its hidden oriental mask. This has been criticized by Aijaz Ahmad, who criticizes the violent homogenization of third world in terms of its "experience of colonialism and imperialism" (Ahmad 1994: 568) and dichotomy on "description of the master/slave relation to encapsulate the first/third world opposition" (569).

Despite the fact that Jameson figured out the indispensable political relationship between its texts and social practices (creator and interpreter), the discrepancies and cultural heterogeneity of social formations are ignored, overly simplified, idealized, and perhaps even universalized. In Ahmad's observation, he replaces the "nation" with collectivity:

"[...]in terms of class, gender, caste, religious community, trade union, political party, village, prison---combining the private and public, and in some sense "allegorizing" the individual experience, without involving the category of 'the nation' or necessarily referring back to the 'experience of colonialism and imperialism.'" (Ahmad 577).

Moreover, in Ahmad's observation, collectivity seems to avoid much criticism of the first and third world, and emancipates the process of allegorization out of nationalistic terms. In addition, exploring deeper within the relationship "between private and public, personal and communal" (577) will result in a more distinctive third world literature, even in non-fictional narrative.

Hong Kong, as according to Jameson's typological constitution of the third world, is indeed enslaved and prompted by transplanted modernity and inserted capitalism. Admittedly, what "urban bourgeoisie" functions as the "social actors" in Hong Kong, and the narrativity of social actors maps out the stable but conflict

neutrality of the colonial past from the point of collectivity. Employing Ying-Chi Chu's observation in Hong Kong cinema, the definition of "nation" is possessed with the character of "collectivity", for the territory is recognized as a political entity without its authority to control; moreover, the interdependency between China and Britain renders Hong Kong to exercise the description of "class formation, class struggle" or "multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region and so on" (Ahmad 571). Furthermore, ambivalent nature of the exclusiveness and inclusiveness of China result in Hong Kong being perceived as a quasi-nation.

As what is mentioned above, Hong Kong is geopolitically third-world but retains British's legal, political and economic system in combining with the economic laissez-faire, political non-intervention and transplanted modernization; therefore, it is unfair to consider Hong Kong as utterly a third world. However, according to Jameson, Hong Kong could be the best presenter of the western machineries throughout its 150 years British administration. This flexible and dual interpretation of a national allegory is further empowered by the definition of allegory, which is "an expressive style that uses fictional characters and events to describe some subject by suggestive resemblances; an extended metaphor".³⁰ National allegory has now adjusted itself to represent the refractions in British Hong Kong by further connections with quasi-ness, which compensates and constrains the unique political landscape of Hong Kong even after the reunification of China.

By connecting the quasi-ness and national allegory, it would be wrong to assume that they combine and represent each other perfectly; instead, they conflict just like ruler and the ruled. As a strategy to survive through the "unattainable" identity in the

³⁰ Quoted from: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/allegory>

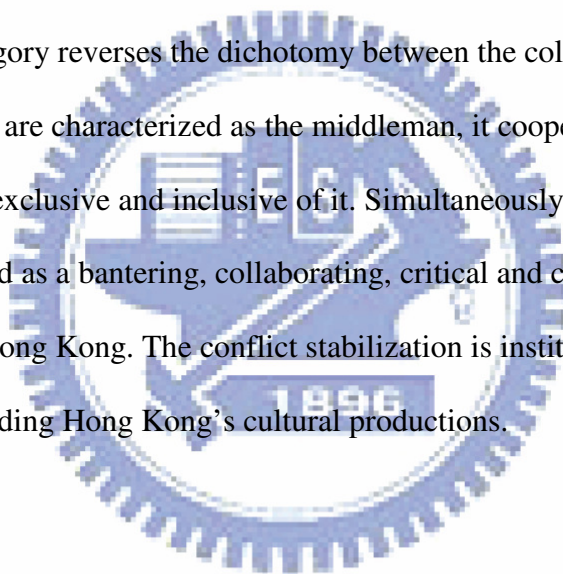
violence of memory reconstruction, to modulate the quasi-nation and nationality into the sense of collectivity; and finally, to quasi-allegorize the fictional metaphor to reinforce those representative politics and economic manipulation, quasi-national allegory maps out a spectrum of the in-between-ness character and unfolds the complex social relationships that form the backbone of Hong Kong's history.

Analogous to this intriguing narrative, in-between-ness is closely tied to film industry in rescuing the shrinking domestic market, which has to be renewed by foreign capitals. However, the quasi-ness does not become dismantled in that the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law keeps being engaged with the British colony. Admittedly, Hong Kong will embed itself within the Chinese identity through the delicate manipulation of social conflicts and maintenance of a stable regime, but it still has a long way to go, thus the quasi-national allegory reading of it.

Conclusion

This chapter starts revisiting Hong Kong's colonial past before the handover. During that time Hong Kong possessed an oversimplified power as social actor, in that it had an unambiguous relationship between the colonial narrative and nationalist interpretation. By highlighting the middleman and comprador characteristics of Hong Kong and British colony's administrative-state relationship in combining the economic laissez-faire and political non-intervention, Hong Kong was able to manipulate its flexible royalties. In other words, as a collaborator, Hong Kong had the convenience of taking to shape its history. Transplanted modernization and geopolitical marginalization turned Hong Kong into a transnational port. In the process, Hong Kong's innate culture gradually degraded and was left to become a cultural dessert. Thus, with the approaching 97, Hong Kong people felt rootless.

History can not be legitimized by someone who is not a participant from within; therefore, Hong Kong people need to clarify its own identity by memory reconstruction. Although the old colonial memory is not necessarily delightful, at least, it is reliable, predictable and helpful, subjected to change. The “unattainable” but “authentic” identity is repaired repeatedly in all kinds of cultural productions even in the period of post 97, just like Hong Kong unconditionally replaces itself in the in-between-ness for maintaining the predominant power over active representation. To elucidate the above-mentioned points, I will illustrate the “quasi-national allegory” in interpreting the cultural production in relation to the issue of 97 and post-97. Quasi-national allegory reverses the dichotomy between the colonizer and the colony, just as social actors are characterized as the middleman, it cooperates and resists China, and is both exclusive and inclusive of it. Simultaneously, the allegorical reading is reinforced as a bantering, collaborating, critical and commercial performativity of Hong Kong. The conflict stabilization is instituted as the methodology in reading Hong Kong’s cultural productions.



Chapter Three: The Quasi-National Allegory of the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

In this chapter, I will investigate the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy from three perspectives: the postmodern nostalgia, the quasi-national allegory, and the affinities and dissimilarities between the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and the *Godfather* trilogy. First of all, in the themes of postmodern pastiche, I will focus on nostalgia and Buddhism that recurrently appear throughout the rearrangement of time, and the inescapable degeneration of falling into hell. In quasi-national allegory reading, I will employ Chu Ying-Chi and Fredric Jameson's theories to demonstrate the necessity of allegorizing gangster and police's actions on the "quasi-national" scale. Finally, conducting a comparative study, I will demonstrate the similarities between gangsters in Hong Kong and Hollywood gangster films, such as: complicated kinship, masculinity, violent sequence, and the concealed hierarchy.

Synopsis of the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

The *Infernal Affairs* was first released in the year of 2002, the prequel *Infernal Affairs II* came out the following year in 2003, and the final sequel *Infernal Affairs III* was distributed in the end of 2003. After the handover, the Asian financial crisis eruption of 97 caused Hong Kong film industry to become immersed in a dramatically downcast atmosphere. The blockbuster of the *Infernal Affairs Trilogy*³¹ was a resounding success; it aroused the attention of audiences and gained popularity overseas. In 2005, the original scenario was adapted by Martin Scorsese and remade

³¹ Wai-keung Lau. *Infernal Affairs*. Media Asia Films. Hong Kong: 2002.
Wai-keung Lau and Siu Fai Mak. *Infernal Affairs II*. Media Asia Films. Hong Kong: 2003.
Wai-keung Lau and Siu Fai Mak. *Infernal Affairs III*. Media Asia Films. Hong Kong: 2003.

into the Hollywood version, *The Departed*³².

Infernal Affairs I sketches the inaugural map of the trilogy: Chan Wing-Yan is the undercover of Superintendent Wong Chi-Shing. He is secretly embedded within the triad of Hon Sam. Meanwhile, Sam's apprentice Lau Kin-Ming is sent to the police office and becomes a high-ranking and trusted officer of Wong. Undercover mirrors out the desires of cleaning up the past and becoming a good person; however, the pair of father figures, Wong and Sam, coincidentally die. Thus, authentic identity restoration ends up in nothing but violence and tragic reincarnation. If *Infernal Affairs I* sets off the temporal anxiety of the handover, and reflects the struggles and conspiracies, *Infernal Affairs II* goes on and challenges the binary concept that audience received in the introductory one. Time flashes back to 1992, when Yan and Ming sequentially leave the police school and start their undercover career. Via a totally omniscient narrative as foreground, we can figure out the unbalanced righteousness and evil proliferation between Superintendent Wong and Hon Sam. Yan's consanguineous brother, Ngai Wing-Hau, the tycoon of the gangster hierarchy and is ready to authorize his position through the public election. Yan and Hau's brotherhood are therefore twisted and implicated by betrayal and power. *Infernal Affairs III* continues to unravel the complex between police and gangster. Moreover, the appearances of Yeung Kam-Wing and Shen Chen demonstrate the indefinite relationship between Hong Kong and the post-97 Mainland China. In addition, in

³² *The Departed* is the remake of the *Infernal Affairs*, directed by Martin Scorsese, and starred by such big cast as Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, Jack Nicholson, and Martin Sheen. While film critics in Hollywood are in favor of this film, fans *Infernal Affairs* trilogy seem not satisfying with it. Despite that *The Departed* is produced with huge capital and big cast, it lacks coherence and dramatic tension. The theme of family bounding is absent, the family bond is absent, and the character of Oliver Queenan is understood as a minor character to foil Frank Costello, Queenan becomes a vice figure, and Costigan are portrayed as orphans (parents are missing, divorced, or abandon their children), there is no family bond or kinship, either in gangster group or in police group; therefore, the scenes that Oliver Queenan drops from the rooftop and Colin Sullivan shoots Frank Costello to death lack of tragic persuasion and shock impact. However, the most important discrepancy in *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and *The Departed* are brotherhood, kinship, and loyalty.

Infernal Affairs III, the identity of Ming is the main theme used to explore the death of Yan. Ming's identity is spilt by the self/other mole characteristics in himself, the madness of being incriminated, and his inability to restore the "good police" identity. Finally Ming is lead into the eternal hell, the infernal.

Postmodern Pastiche of the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy: Nostalgia and Buddhism

The *Infernal Affairs* trilogy were directed by Andrew Lau and Allan Mak. During the years between 1996-1998, Andrew Lau was also shooting the *Young and Dangerous* series. What is important to note is that he was exposed to the *goowakjai* street mob culture. In those series, *jianghu* no longer had connotations of righteous, brotherhood, and gallantry. Instead, principles of hierarchy and masculinity were preserved much like fairytales; contrarily, these young rascals revitalize the heroic bloodshed gangster genre in a triad-infiltrated lifestyle. Although seemingly contradictory, *Young and Dangerous* series share parallel solutions with *A Better Tomorrow* and *The Killer*: where villains are meant to die regardless of whether the killing was done by the heroes or not. Renewal and subversive characteristics of *Young and Dangerous* by Andrew Lau demonstrate the intermittent period of postmodernism. As Mason observes in his *American Gangster Cinema*, postmodernism in gangster films are equipped with "cross-generic signification" (Mason 146) and any gangster figure "encapsulates" (146) the contemporary culture of marginality within him/herself.

"There are many features that can be attributed to postmodernist aesthetic practice, some of which include: pastiche; nostalgia or the retro-mode, self parody; the mixing of codes; and generic hybridity. All of these features insist on the textualized nature of the postmodernist text, articulating an inability to represent reality not because it cannot be adequately expressed, but because it does not exist. Only simulations (or copies without an original) are available in the endlessly recycled images and commodities of postmodern culture." (146-147)

The *Infernal Affairs* trilogy takes on a total omniscient narrative throughout the story. From the very beginning, the audience is able to detect the transition of mentality in each character, especially in Yan and Ming. In the prequel, the dichotomy is further blurred, this can be seen from administrative figures such as Superintendent Wong and Hon Sam, who do not retain their absolute righteousness or immorality but maintain a delicate friendship with each other; to this extent, the chaotic balance of *jianghu* acts as a container for conspiracy penetration, confusion and uncertainty. The joining of Yeung and Shen in *Infernal Affairs III* celebrates the identity crisis, power struggles and the blurring of good and evil as result of self-interest. The subversive manufacture of characters not only interrogates the firmness of hierarchy on both the police and the triad, but also emphasizes the profound influence the environment brings to those who are trapped within. Therefore, the omniscient narrative neutralizes the dichotomy of each character's moral judgment with in-between-ness or double-dealing, and focuses on the complexity of the narrative and the characters' personalities.

Mapping Jianghu in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

If we compare *Infernal Affairs II* with *I* and *III*, we will find that the prequel slightly focuses on street mob gangster film, which resembles the *Young and Dangerous* series. Young Yan was recruited into the triad after his expulsion from police school. His identity was re-assigned to an impetuous rascal, Hon Sam, engaging in criminal activities. In order to gain Hon Sam's trust, Yan had to steal drug trafficking information. For instance, in *Infernal Affairs III*, upon receiving Sam's call, Yan has to suddenly turn a business lunchtime meeting into one of bloodshed where he had to smash Shen's brother with the ashtray on the table, just to

prove his loyalty toward Sam. Mob, as *goowakjai*, exits collectively in the *Infernal Affairs* and *Young and Dangerous*, here, righteousness is dispelled by chaotic domination. On the other hand, *jianghu* is wrapped in fantasized brotherhood and loyalty; heroic sacrifice and camaraderie are replaced by conspiracies and the betrayal of the undercover.

Deliberately, choreographed gun-shooting sequences and gorgeous action spectacles are repressed in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy. Instead of dancing bullets and spectacles that appear in John Woo's gangster films, the scenes of bloodshed violence and gang fighting are replaced by tensions generated from exquisite cuts, parallel narratives and editing, and the portrayal of the protagonist's characters. Guns subordinately retain themselves as functional tools. Here, guns, blood, and sticks no longer symbolize extended masculinity or the power of a hierarchy as apotheosized in classical modern gangster film.

Nostalgia: Traverse of Time and Perception of Violence

Nostalgia in post-97 functions more extensively than re-articulating and renewing in the gangster genre. By highlighting the significance of memory construction to reach the "unattainable" or even "non-existed" authenticity, *Infernal Affairs II* comes as the prequel of *I* and sequel of *III*. The indiscriminate narrative traverses time (2001, 2002, before Yan's death, 2002 etc) and rearranges time violently interrupting its chronological order; it is as if people's memory puzzles are robbed before they are able to be assembled. In other words, nostalgia can be considered a method to resist, and cooperate with handover, whenever tracing backward is trying to represent the "un-presentable" and resuming the old dependable past. After all, old colonial memory is not necessarily delightful, but, at least, the past

is reliably predictable. Therefore, rearrangement of time encapsulates the memory construction and amnesia of the past, while nostalgia turns out to be the painkiller, which is a device to refuse ongoing conditions and sufferings to secure his/her idealized authenticity.

Buddhist Inferno in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

The penetrating theme of “infernal” refers to the Buddhist concept of “continuous hell” which intricately interlocks all the anxiety of existence, psychological distortion and tottering instability; moreover, it functions as the fatalism of Hong Kong. Nostalgia deals with uncertainty and identity anxieties of the future, and falling into past provides the safest method in resisting temporal conditions. However, in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, the total omniscient narrative indicates the cruelty and violence of the distorted *jianghu* and its chronology. By rearranging the time sequence, the audience knows of Yan’s death before time. The audience knows that he spent six joyous months with the psychologist Lee Sum-Yee (李心兒), before being killed by Inspector Lam Ka-Tung (林家棟) (Ming’s colleague) in the elevator. It’s not at all as Yan posted toward Lee before his leaving: “It will be fine tomorrow.” The prophetic narrative brutally shapes the great contrast between cheer and devastation, and the sense of mutability and nihilism are therefore reincarnated all over again and again in the whole trilogy.

In *Infernal Affairs III*, the opening sequence illustrates the degenerate downfall of Ming as he descends downwardly in the elevator with his sharp and suspicious facial expression to the camera; he appears to be sailing himself toward the “continuous hell”. With the total omniscient narrative mentioned above, Ming should suffer above every other character in the trilogy, even far beyond his philosophical

twin, Yan. Yan is trapped within his undercover identity and bears great anxiety for betraying other people, the tragic death of Superintendent Wong and Yeh reinforces the impossibility of his escape from undercover identity. In his seemingly endless career life, Yan has to mesmerize himself of his intrinsic righteousness, or he will lose himself into the underworld. Instead of Yan's seemingly undisturbed calmness in confirming his police identity, Ming's self-delusional misery never stops steering himself towards infernal precipice.

Starting from the protagonist depicted in Mary's (Ming's wife) novel, who wakes up every morning and performs Ming's fictitious personality toward everybody, which meta-narrates the pathology of the protagonist. Mary simultaneously unmasks Ming's oscillation between loyalty and betrayal and dissociates his personalities. In order to become a good police, Ming chooses to cover up his unspeakable undercover identity. He exhausts all efforts to kill his surrogate father Hon in the parking lot and shoots his colleague undercover Inspector Lam in the elevator. He attempts to expire every single person that correlates to his undercover identity. However, his turmoil continues with the appearance of Superintendent Yeung Kam-Wing in *Infernal Affairs III*, whose superciliousness reminds Ming of his anxiety and suspense. However, unlike Yan's death which simultaneously restores and imprisons his identity, Ming fails to regain his new one. The decisions he make on his path toward his idealized righteousness eventually lead him to a crippled living death situation. Ming even loses his chance to finish his own life; and the infernal reincarnates all over again. However, the suffering has not stopped yet for the two Mary (Hon's wife, and his wife), as they stand simultaneously in front of and behind Ming. This is mutual proof to the saying of Ksitigarbha Sutra: "People of the like shall be cast into Avinci Hell

and will continue to suffer from Kalpas to Kalpas with no means of escape.³³ His boundless suffering liquidates his past, correlates with the contemporary situation and becomes further complicated by the timeless and unlimited space.

Embedded within the postmodern and post-97 aura is the theme of Buddhist nihilism, which modulates the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and which may even metaphorically indicate Hong Kong after its handover as it oscillates between the uncertainty, nostalgia and violence of memory. There is no escape, whether it is for the Hong Kong indigenous people trying to pursue the transcendence, or gangsters trying to escape from *jianghu*. The traditional codes of gallantry, justice, brotherhood, candor and camaraderie formulate the alternative underworld hierarchy and order, thus, the harder one struggles to get out, the deeper one sinks. The fantasized negotiation which links the present to the past in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy evokes the sense of historicity; however, *Infernal Affairs II* ends with the Buddhist scripture: “Continuous Hell embodies three components: Uninterrupted time, unlimited space, boundless suffering. Transgressors of the Five deadly sins fall into this hell forever. Condemned to the ultimate incessant suffering.”³⁴

Quasi-National Allegory of the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

As mentioned in Chapter Two, quasi-national allegory is a compound that binds Chu Ying-Chi’s “quasi-national” with Fredric Jameson’s “national allegory”. However, these two terminologies cooperate and resist each other, just like the social actor in British colonial Hong Kong, and the undercover who possesses the inescapable in-between-ness of gangster and police. The interdependency constrains the double alienation and flexible loyalty of Hong Kong and its exclusiveness and

³³ 地藏菩薩本願經卷上：「如是等輩，當墮無間地獄，千萬億劫，以此綿延，求出無期」。

inclusiveness of pos-97 China, while the declaration of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law combined with economic laissez-faire and political non-intervention make Hong Kong still embedded within the “quasi-ness” in a sense of marginality. The *Infernal Affairs* trilogy has its inclination toward political allegory, which is particularly evident in the prequel *Infernal Affairs II*, and the metaphorical theme of gangster as family maps out the parallel culture structure within the British colonial history.

The Ngai family modulates itself as the alternative hierarchy against the government, whose ambition is to legitimize the gangster factions and his own family through elections. While Hon sets a trap to make Hau killed by Superintendent Wong, the power transits from family inheritance toward power struggles of factions with an ironic assistance and witness of police. In the end, while the fireworks sparkle over July the first, 1997, the gangster transits from Ngai to Hon, and the recovery of the triad hierarchy replaces the family business; finally, Hong Kong is legitimately returned to motherland China.

If the absence of Ming and Yan in both of their family unmasks the national allegory of Hong Kong, the surrogate fathers of Hon and Wong represent the quasi-ness of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, which reinforces the indispensable patriarchy by the oscillation between loyalty and betrayal, honor and treachery, and, good and evil. Every death, especially the death of father figures, regardless of its form in gun fighting, assassination, or in betrayal, coincidentally consolidates the leading image of patriarchy and regenerates the power transformation. The supporting characters such as Mary (Mary 姐)(Hon’s wife) and Superintendent Luk Kai-Cheung (陸啓昌) (Wong’s colleague) appear to strengthen Hon and Wong’s power to the

³⁴ 「無間有三，時無間，空無間，受業無間。犯忤逆罪者永墮此界，盡受終極之無間」。

extreme, but they are finally killed by Hau. Ngai Kwun's assassination investigated by Mary in Hong Kong Martial Art Association symbolizes the withering of old triad-based hierarchy, and the death of four factions of Kwun reinforces the Ngai family's restoration. As an intellectual with economic knowledge, Ngai Wing-Hau runs the gangster-family business in an enterprise modernity type, correlating with what the administrative-state and society mold. However, the regenerating victory of the Ngai family does not last long, while the power of Hon replaces his family and his position. Despite that Hong Kong is transited from the "administrative domination of British government" to the "special administrative region of People of Republic China," the shape of the colony remains, and the in-between-ness gradually fades away and reincarnates itself through nostalgia and any memory or document relating to 97.

Although the death in *Infernal Affairs II* allegorizes the power struggles and transition during 1991 to 1997, the opening sequence of *II* demonstrates that: "It was the best of the time. It was the worst of the time. We were going directly to Heaven. We were all going directly the other ways."³⁵ The representation of the "forgotten period" encapsulates within a nostalgic aura of visual and soft violence. It captures the fading glory of the gangster, and contains the best and the worst of times, for the decorative but sincere relationship between Hon and Superintendent Wong mitigates to represent the dichotomy of good and bad. Superintendent Wong is the advisor of Kwan's assassination; the secret engagement with Hon's wife Mary pushed her investigation towards Ming's murder. While Hon avenges the Ngai family for the murder of Mary, he requests his Thai friend not to extinguish other family members who were sent to Hawaii by Hau, but his Thai friend, Paul, refuses Sam's sympathy

³⁵ 「這是最好的時代。這是最壞的時代。我們走向天國。我們走向地獄」。

and gratitude. Sam said: “Paul. Maybe we shouldn’t go too far.” “It was pure luck that you bumped into me. Otherwise, you’ve been killed. We’re destined to be partners, when my gun failed to kill you. You can never go too far, get it?”³⁶ Paul answered. The pristine heart for revenge is contrarily embedded within his trafficking heroine business and contributes to the triad’s globalization. Instead of blurring the dichotomy of betrayal and loyalty, the decorative friendship results in Hon and Superintendent Wong in parting ways, hindering and accelerating their fate in the face of the handover. By highlighting the fixed dichotomy, Hon and Wong stand as father figures, the best and worst are therefore conspicuous, which pushes both of them into the confronting infernal. In contrast to Hon and Wong who belong to fixed dichotomous categories, teenage Ming and Yan continue their quasi-ness as undercover in the handover of 97.

Shen, who engages in the gunrunning and smuggling business internet, is a decorative and shadowy character that reinforces the uncertain relationship after 97. While Shen’s brother Shen Liang (沈亮) exposes the treacherous economic and political relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland, he states: “There’re no triads in China. What China needs is wealth. Triads are all life-and-death. As long as money breeds money, we’ll let you run the show.”³⁷ It is denied by Hon, who leads the triad-based business and derides Liang’s “one-contry; two systems” declaration, demonstrating his mistrustful suspension of China. This seemingly stable state comes from the continuous instigation of hurting each other’s “brothers” and setting

³⁶ Paul: 「那就好了，以後我們合作，毒品直接賣到香港。倪家的人，我來擺平？」

韓琛：「Paul，別做的太絕，好嗎？」

Paul：「以前你碰上我，算你好運，算撿回條命。那槍沒打死你，我們注定是拍檔，一定要那絕。」

³⁷ 沈亮：「中國是沒有黑社會的，知道嗎？國家需要財富啊。黑社會談的是生死，生意談的是財。今天，我們是跟韓大哥來談生意的。」〔．．．〕「我們今天是來跟韓大哥談生意的。生意的事我們不過問。一國兩制嘛，只要是能生財生財，主權的事就隨便隨便啦。」

韓琛：「你還相信這個嗎？」

up a fraud to imput Yan. This intricate triangular relationship is best expressed by the trafficking scene. While Yan carries out his undercover mission and is trapped by Hon's fraud, Yeung is on the way to solve the conflicts between Shen and Yan, and then discover their undercover identity. "People like me can't see the light," and "just call me Shadow"³⁸, answers by Shen, reveal the concealment of his identity as being both reversible and expired. Shen's traversing identity from that of a Chinese gangster to that of an undercover from Hong Kong, results in his identity being both exclusive and inclusive of Mainland China after the handover.

In contrast to Yan who identifies himself as a good police, Ming suffers around the margin of moral dichotomy. Yeung in *Infernal Affairs III* manipulates his reversible identity with his expressionless face and confuses everyone. Whether intentionally or not, this confusion also reinforces absolute dichotomy between good and evil, between Superintendent Wong and Hon. Mary and Superintendent Luk Kai-Cheung functions to consolidate the patriarchal system in *Infernal Affairs II*. The identity of Yeung is only confirmed by undercover Shen, when the conversation unfolds at the military cemetery: "I am back," says Shen, "Let's get starting," answers Yeung, sitting in his car, indifferent with no facial expression. Ming kills Yeung as well as Inspector Lam who shot Yan to death in the elevator; the bullets fly directly between Yan's eyebows, this coincidental death with their eyes open is as if is Yan is witnessing Ming's degeneration and his journey toward continuous hell.

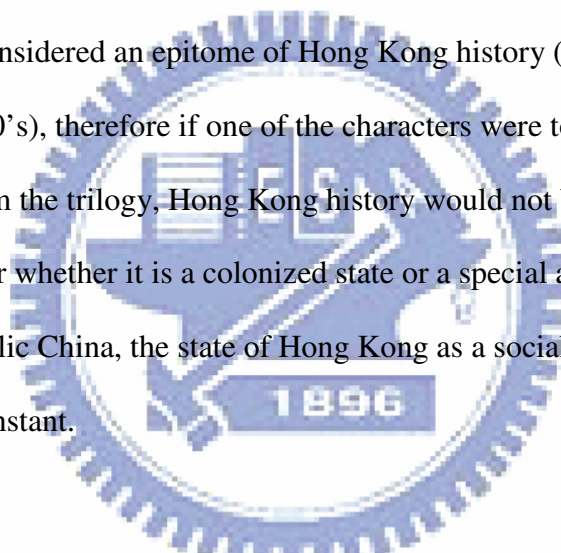
Both Shen and Yeung modulate the new substitute father figures in demonstrating the relationship after the handover: the shadowy existence of Shen carries out the uncertainty which is embedded within the conspiracy and distrust by Hong Kong gangster. Flexible loyalty and double alienation are still seen from Shen and Yeung.

³⁸ 沈澄：「幹我們這行，見不得光。」；「名字，我也不知道，就叫我影子吧。」

They shuttle amongst China, Hong Kong and gangster, and reincarnate themselves within this triangular relationship. Quasi-national allegory continues and the reincarnation goes beyond time and space in that the parallel narratives of 2002 and 2003 are fragmented puzzles. Shen returns to Hong Kong in 2003, when Hon, Superintendent Wong and Yan are all dead. Therefore, in 2003, Shen and Superintendent Yeung become substitute father figures, while Ming fantasizes himself as Yan's substitute. After the transition and the death of the father figures only Yeung, Ming and Shen are left. Ming is handicapped, he can not bleach himself from his identity of an undercover. His choice to commit suicide has expired, and all the sufferings are trapped within his seemingly carry-on mission, thus he embodies the continuous hell. However, Shen's shifting identity from that of a Chinese gangster to that of an undercover from Hong Kong is allegorized as both exclusive and inclusive from both sides; the quasi-ness is modulated by his shadowy, indistinctive and mysterious existence.

Quasi-ness in post-97 is extended by "one-country; two systems," which inescapably figures out the continuation of British influences in both perspectives of political non-intervention and economic laissez-faire; thus, the autonomy does not wither away with the handover, and stability simultaneously remains composed of conflicts. In order to defend the authenticity of history, memory is reinterpreted and represented in Hong Kong indigenous people's active shaping attitude after their formally retreat toward China. For instance, the termination of *Infernal Affairs III* embeds itself within the *Forgotten Times* in the stereo store, and the re-encounter of Yan and Ming is doomed to refract the moles in police and gangster. The absence of both Ming and Yan in their family makes the substitute father figures significant in an allegorized family. Even the deaths of the father figures are not strong enough to

emancipate the long imprisoned in-between-ness, as such the reincarnation continues. Parallel narratives that demonstrate the chaotic nature between 2002 and 2003 continue while Shen, the mysterious gunrunner from Mainland China, and Superintendent Yeung become transformed into father figures. The quasi-national allegory between the two pairs of father figures intertwines chaotically and overlaps with each other. This modulates the fatal impossibility to escape from this triangular relationship. Further complicated by the decorative and shadowy existence of Shen and the straight-faced conspiratorial Yeung, the distrust and uncertainty that bind them after the handover are ready to resurface. Each of character in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy is considered an epitome of Hong Kong history (part of gangster variation from 1990's), therefore if one of the characters were to disengage himself/herself from the trilogy, Hong Kong history would not be complete. After the handover, no matter whether it is a colonized state or a special administrative region of People of Republic China, the state of Hong Kong as a social actor or undercover will still remain constant.



A Comparative Study of the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy and the *Godfather* Trilogy

The representation of familial relationship differs in Hong Kong gangster films and Hollywood gangster films. In connectional, Hollywood gangster genre, American gangster regards “family” as the embodiment of social order which suppresses individual’s freedom; therefore, they rebelliously walk out of their families pursuing individual freedom and fulfilling personal desires. However, the *Godfather* trilogy portrays Mafia family by following Sicilian tradition, which maps the “familial relationships as part of a cultural structure that locates them within a set of historic traditions and origins” (Mason 130). Being a part of Mafia has nothing to do with

pursuing the individualism, but means constantly negotiating between family and the external world. Moreover, one is embedded in the patriarchal order and family bond.

In the prequel of *Infernal Affairs II*, the family relationship bounds intimately with the triad variations. Paralleling with the *Godfather* trilogy, the triad infiltration of Ngai family and Corleon family that originated from Mafia tradition share two perspectives: “parameters of legitimate social ideology (the family and patriarchal power) “(Mason 130) and “hermetically sealed world” (131) of underworld hierarchy. As what Mason observes in *Post-Classical Gangster Film: Nostalgia and Renewal*, the Mafia and family have mutual infiltration, as well as a private sphere and an external order:

“The film’s main focus therefore is its mapping of a tension in its vision of the Mafia as an entity that is distinct from the external world in its cultural ethos of family and paternal hierarchies, but also embedded in society in its business activities. The film narrates the transformation of the former into the latter in the Corleones’ inability to keep the two separate as the ‘family’ becomes even more porous and dissolves into the business of the ‘Family’” (Mason 130)

Corleon family represents the hermetically sealed world in which this internal order of punishment or reward is legitimized, and the external social system does not possess the power to interfere their hierarchical systems. While the Corleons try to physically extend their territory by moving to Las Vegas and become involved in a new capital, the family-based and ideological-economic system is dispersed through Michael at *Godfather II*. The “communal base” (Mason 131) that Vito Corleon passes on to Michael is somewhat assimilated into the external order, which Michael brings in from his American navy service experience. Therefore, as Michael becomes Don, the family becomes overwhelmingly fragmented into the global capitalist system.

Infernal Affairs II, Ngai family undergoes analogous transformation with the Corleon family, whether it is colliding with external system in legitimating the family business, or persisting on a traditional ideology that encompasses a systemized triad

hierarchy, as long as it refers to the constraint or contrast of interior and external orders, these two films correlate with each other. Triad is embedded within the mythic ideology of *jianghu*. This cultural signature is demonstrated by Stephan Teo in

Director in Action:

[...]This immediately invokes the kind of mythic space which the Chinese call the *jianghu* (literally, “rivers and lakes”), referring to the world in which triad-based gangsters, hired killers and even the police-detectives operate according to prescribed codes and rituals. (Teo 2007: 4-5)

Both *jianghu* and triad shape each other in gangster genre. They denote the “prescribed codes and rituals” of gallantry, masculinity, chivalry, brotherhood, candor, and camaraderie of male bonding. Struggling between the dichotomy of good and evil, brotherhood and betray, *jianghu* is a carrier where realistic narrative blends with romantic heroism and flowing conspiracies. In the underworld, gallantry and violence triangularly bonds with each other and fictitious blood ties dominates over the principles of resentment and morality. This vague, family-like friendship or rather kinship flows around and within the signifier of “*jianghu*”. In *Infernal Affairs II*, individuals can not help but be constrained by the environment. In other words, they are doomed. Once shattered, there is no turning back to past glories.

Both Mafia and Triad have their own unbreakable order that can not be interfered. There are doctrines that support the fictitious kinship and brotherhood. The “hermetically sealed” world identifies both Corleon and Ngai families; however, they are disabled from territorializing the legitimate society through elections. In *Infernal Affairs II*, Hau’s intellectual background of the British colony and his persistence in ensuring patriarchal law both helps and harms himself and his family. He wishes to legalize his family and leaves his crime business to the surrogate fathers: Gandhi (甘地), Negro (黑鬼), Kwok Wah (國華), Ching (文拯), and finally, Hon Sam. While Hau decides to eradicate the surrogate fathers to consolidate the unity of Ngai family,

he is simultaneously dispersing the traditional arrangements of a power hierarchy. Symbolically, Hau loses his own identity in the process of assimilating himself with the family business. In other words, not only does he invest his identity with the family business, but the family's desire becomes his own desires and will: "Dad often says: what goes around comes around"³⁹, there must be something he has to pay. Thus, his failure does not merely indicate his own death, but that of his entire family's. They all become tragically involved, despite their relocation to Hawaii. Consequently, the takeover of Hon Sam after 97 is symbolically the reunion to Chinese domination, and the fleeting British colony withers away with the downfall of Nagi family.

Hau's assimilation is not happening on Yan, who functions as both an inclusive and exclusive member of Ngai family, just like the young Michael in the *Godfather* trilogy, who

"[...]is already more identified with external society than he is with the family; as he says: 'That's my family, Kay, not me.' Michael is shown as an outsider at the wedding, not simply because at this point he has apparently turned his back on family- as-business, but because he will in the future effectively divest the Corleons [...]" (Mason 131)

Analogically, Yan undergoes a more painful struggle in the battle of "a hermetically sealed world". Yan often states in a casual yet resolute manner that "I am a cop" when Superintendent Wong questions him. This identity of his along with the external hierarchy constrains him from the calling of Hau's kinship and the patriarchal laws. Parallel with the wedding scene in *Godfather I*, there is also a birthday party held for Hau's daughter in *Infernal Affairs II*. Yan and those surrogate fathers were invited in the form of a family reunion. Yan appears to be an outsider in the banquet, carrying on with his undercover mission. It is here that the triangular relationship articulates in the arduous struggle for balance. Does the external social order of triad based fictional

³⁹ 爸爸說，出來跑遲早要還的。

blood ties and kinship ever confuse Yan? The multiple struggles and Yan's insistence in his police identity cause the Ngai family to scatter and eventually pushes Yan into the endless circulation of being an undercover. When Hau finds the wiretap on Yan at the point of his death, he transfers his sufferings and regret to Yan.

Conclusion

This chapter conducts three perspectives of analyzing the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, namely: postmodern nostalgia, quasi-national allegory, and the comparative study between the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and the *Godfather* trilogy. The three perspectives comparatively shape one another. To transgress the cultural logic of order and chaos, discipline and desire, justice and unfairness, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy blurs the absolute dichotomy and modulates the struggles of each character as one of fate rather than choice. Embedded within the aura of post 97 with memory construction of "unrepresented" and "unattainable" in reaching the authenticity of history, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy are conducted in the total omniscient narrative. By puzzling the fragmentations together, these multidimensional narratives function as a symbolic resistance to the unitary of authority concerned, confusing the arrangement of time and space, and equipping it with Buddhist subheading to articulate the sense of nostalgia and fatalism in endless suffering. Nostalgia comes from the anxiety and uncertainty towards the future. It contrasts with the reliable and predictable past, as well as the reincarnating sufferings of the in-between. Symbolically, the trilogy is terminated in the stereo store when Yan and Ming first encountered each other. As to the Buddhist theme intertwining among the trilogy, it articulates the inability to escape from the disordered identity, and the internal suffering which surpasses beyond time and space, or simply the status quo after 97.

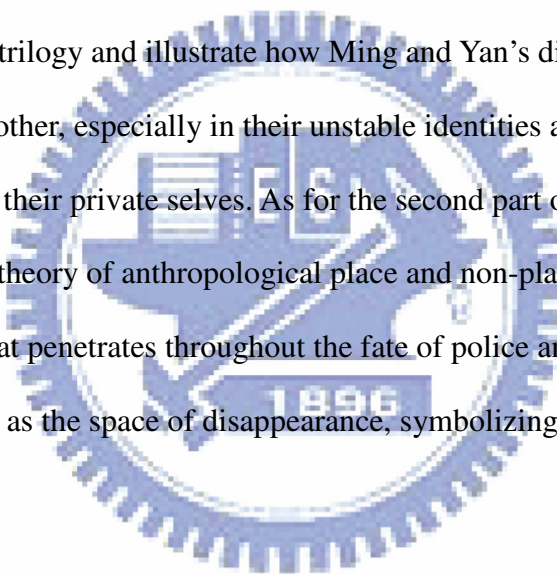
Quasi-national allegory blends together Chu Ying-Chi's "quasi-nation" and Fredric Jameson's "national allegory" to extend the critiques of the triangular relationship among Hong Kong the self, British the colonizer and China the motherland, and the necessary projection of films in cultural dimension. Embedded within the post-97 aura and the traversed time and space, which symbolically trap the continuous struggle between justice and evil, the triangular relationship reincarnates itself. It is further complicated by political non-intervention and economic laissez-faire and the so-called "one country; two systems" policy after the handover. Quasi-national allegory in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy unfolds itself by the coincidental absence of Yan and Ming from both their families, while Superintendent Wong and Hon Sam become their respective surrogate fathers. With Yan and Ming camouflage themselves deep within their opponents, their identities constrain themselves toward the infernal with no possibility of escaping. Moreover, the quasi-ness follows the parallel narratives and the decisive characters as Shen and Yeung to reinforce the uncertainty and mutability among triad Hong Kong gangster, police and China. Hong Kong, as a function of a social actor for the British colony, is still on a mission.

The comparative reading of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and the *Godfather* trilogy focuses on the result of family-as business in their trilogies. Especially in the prequel, their similarities are striking in that they both put emphasis on family. The apparent persistence on patriarchal laws and the heritage of family makes family a "hermetically sealed world". Analogous as it appears to be, the Mafia and triad possess a family-like hierarchy. The family-as-business extends with ambitious involvement of global capitalism; thus, the family becomes dispersed and fragmented. Both Michael and Hau, whose identities are integrated with their families, wither away in the end.

Chapter Four: Politics of Disappearance and Spatiality in the *Infernal Affairs*

Trilogy

In this chapter, I will investigate the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy in themes of a space of disappearance along with Abbas' observation on architectural and cultural space. With the birth of the Chinese identity after the handover, will the transition and decadence also retreat with Hong Kong? Hong Kong has been a witness to global political-economic scenarios; therefore, the disappearance of Hong Kong is always under construction. I will introduce this programmatic observation to protagonists in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and illustrate how Ming and Yan's disappearances create and influence each other, especially in their unstable identities and in their mis-recognitions of their private selves. As for the second part of this chapter, I will apply Marc Auge's theory of anthropological place and non-place to illustrate the intricate network that penetrates throughout the fate of police and gangster, and how non-places function as the space of disappearance, symbolizing the downward fall into nihilism.



Space of Disappearance in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

According to Ackbar Abbas, in his theoretical dissertation on *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, the phenomenon of disappearance is the result of “floating identity”, “decadence” (Abbas 1997: 4), the “dialectic between autonomy, and dependency”(5); finally, “reverse hallucination”(6). Floating identity demonstrates the imaginary tension toward Chinese aggregation and stabilizes the possible existence of Hong Kong itself. Criticizing the over-emphasis on the miraculous economic contribution in colonial-state Hong Kong, Abbas regards the

progress of Hong Kong as being restrained to one-dimension, and the existence of Hong Kong culture as being a barely recognizable “cultural desert”⁴⁰. Finally, the “reverse hallucination”⁴¹ continuously provides the empirical evidence that Hong Kong’s culture experiences desertification and the refusal to identity itself, as if “not seeing what is there (6)”. The disappearance is characterized as a “radically changing status: from reverse hallucination, which sees only desert, to a culture of disappearance, whose appearance is posted on the imminence of its disappearance (7).” Because of its mutability and transition, disappearance here comes to demonstrate and represent how Hong Kong itself and its people are fighting against the threatening handover.

Yan’s Disappearance

Visual disappearance in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy correlates with the two main characters, Chan Wing-Yan and Lau King-Ming, whose identities are replaced and traded with each other. The blurring dichotomy starts from betrayal: for both Yan and Ming, they have to betray others adjacent to them in order to acquire the empirical criminal evidence. Ming’s identity is further complicated as he eradicates the others in order to assign himself his idealized police identity. In the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, Yan seems to suffer less disappearance than Ming does, for death does emancipate him from disappearance; however, director Allan Mak reincarnates and re-invents Yan’s disappearance by way of rearranging time and space, and by employing the total omniscient narrative to make the audience invisible participants to

⁴⁰ Cultural desert here does not imply that there is no cultures in colonized Hong Kong; instead, it means “not that there was there was nothing going on in cinema, architecture, and writing (Abbas 6)”. That is to say, cinema, architecture, and writing are not recognized to be culture in Hong Kong.

⁴¹ In Abbas’ illustration, hallucination means “seeing ghosts and apparitions, that is, something that is not there (Abbas 6)”, the reverse hallucination means “not seeing what *is* there (6)”, and “negative hallucination indicates the one “who possessed the art of not seeing and not recognizing people who are

his disappearance. It is further complicated if Hong Kong people relate the disappearance of Yan to their own “disappearance” in the post-97 era.

From the beginning of Yan’s undercover career, he is equipped with two identities, with one camouflaging the other. Yan’s police identity is undermined by his repeated pathological violence, and by his identity being interrogated by Superintendent Wong:

“Wong: “Don’t tell me you’re really going nuts. Have you forgotten that you’re a cop?”

Yan: “ You told me it’s only for 3 years. But after the three years comes another 3 years and another. It’s almost 10 years now, boss.”

Wong: “Can you be a bit courteous to me? I am the only one in Hong Kong who knows your real identity now. Maybe it’s simpler for me to erase your file, so you can stick with the Triads for the rest of your life.”⁴²”

The disappearance on the rooftop conversation clearly demonstrates the wrestling of Yan’s identity, between an illegitimate child of the Ngai family and the police. Interestingly, in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, disappearance of identity never ends with the deadline of 97, but follows with the file saved within the computer and with the existence of the surrogate father figures. Therefore, in *Infernal Affairs I*, the disappearance of Yan is constituted by “non-appearance, absence, or lack of presence (Abbas 7)” of Superintendent Yeh and Wong in succession. That is, the death of the father figures traps Yan’s police identity, for Superintendent Yeh and Wong are the only two persons who can verify Yan’s undercover identity and who can possess the power to restore his police one. When Superintendent Yeh’s hearse harshly passes by Yan, all he could do is salute to it in a hidden place; thus, the disappearance of Yeh simultaneously represents Yan’s identity is on the verge of disappearance. Moreover,

actually present (6)”(original italics).

⁴² 黃警官：「難道你真的心理變態，你忘自己是好人還是壞人？」

陳永仁：「明明說好三年，三年之後又三年，三年之後又三年，就快十年了，老大」。

黃警官：「你對我態度好點行不行，現在全香港只有我知道你的身分，我回去乾脆把你的檔案摻除掉。你一輩子做古惑仔，我也不用煩了。」

witnessing the downfall of Superintendent Wong from the rooftop also evokes Yan to recognize the impossibility to wipe out his undercover identity as well as his mis-recognition of being a gangster. The disappearance is a reincarnated theme in the prequel of *Infernal Affairs II*, by the rearrangement of time and space, the substitution, replacement and mis-recognition repeats recurrently beyond transgression. Yan's disappearance is terminated when he gets killed in *Infernal Affairs I*, but is revived in the prequel when time reverses back to his undercover career in 1995.

The Ngai family wrestles between the inherent tradition and the new perspective of being legitimized, leading the family into disappearance: Hau is killed by Superintendent Wong; while his family members in Hawaii are all shot to death by Sam's Thai friend. Therefore, starting from the "elimination and effacement (8)" of the five factions of Ngai-Kwun, the disappearance of Ngai family develops from "replacing and substituting (8)" its gangster identity to Ngai Win-Hau's legalized and plausible one. However, the "elimination and effacement" of the Ngai family do not retrieve Yan from his gangster identity, but prolongs his undercover career. The disappearance in *Infernal Affairs III* deals with Yan's confusion over his self-representation. His violent inclination and psychological consultation continues as he refuses to identify himself as an undercover.

If the disappearance of Yan is predominately focused on identity, which becomes trapped within and retrieved by death, the disappearance referring to identity is far more complicated for Ming. What merits attention is that the deadline of 97 has less influence on Ming and Yan, but has much more on Superintendent Wong and Sam, whose power stabilized their positions as absolute dichotomy. Instead, the disappearance never stops being represented and reappears in both Yan and Ming. The suffering in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy is inheriting from the surrogate father

figures, and reincarnation is without boundaries and endings.

Ming's Disappearance

Disappearance of Ming has more coherence with Abbas' observation, which correlates to surveillance, performance, self-representation and reverse hallucination. In the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, in order for Ming to eliminate his mole identity and to embrace his self-assigned identity as a good cop, he needs to struggle and betray more. Wiping out his surrogate father Sam in the parking lot and Inspector Lam in the elevator initiate his disappearance as the means of legitimating "what is not there". Furthermore, his action also reflects his desire to maintain the constructed possible existence between gangster and police. Finally, Ming cleans up the trace of disappearance, recollecting and representing himself to "not see what was there."⁴³

In the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, total omniscient point of narrating modulates the impossible transformation of Ming from an undercover to a real police; therefore, throughout the trilogy, Ming is constantly portrayed with mirrors and monitors. Identity through the reproductive image of mirrors and monitors indicates the distortion of his true identity, for it demonstrates the uncertainty and the lack of authenticity, and thus, leads to his disappearance. In *Infernal Affairs III*, Ming's disappearance starts from the minutes he steps into the elevator, gazing suspiciously and distrustfully toward the spy camera above him, and his descending symbolizes his downward fall into the infernal. The spy camera also functions as surveillance, it

⁴³ In Abbas' illustration, hallucination means "seeing ghosts and apparitions, that is, something that is not there", and the reverse hallucination means "*not* seeing what *is* there." (original italics). However, in Ming's condition, his experience of disappearance from hallucination to reverse hallucination is "re-reversed". This indicates his desires for wiping out the gangster identity makes him want to preserve his superintendent position that is reverse hallucination, instead of being successful as Yang, his reverse hallucination suspends him beyond any hallucination. He is no longer a gangster nor police, but keeps his undercover career as a living dead; therefore, the hallucination process goes from "see what is not there" to "not to see what is there", to finally, not see "what is not there".

indicates that Ming assumes he is being watched, and tries to engage the faux performance in maintaining his self-assigned identity. Hereafter, his mis-recognition and yearning for a police identity overlaps with Yan's, who tries his best with great anxiety to unmask the undercover sent by Sam.

In *Infernal Affairs III*, while Ming is trapped by the tape, which is sent by Yan eavesdropping the conversation between him and Sam in the cinema in *Infernal Affairs I*, he says: "Ming, this is your last chance" toward Superintendent Yeung, and fights against Inspector Ng, shouting: "What're you doing, Ming is over there. We agreed to bust him. Why are you helping him?" Apparently, Ming identifies himself as Yan and mis-recognizes or substitutes Superintendent Yeung as Ming. "I am a good guy. Why should I be careful? Why? I work so hard to...help you guys...kill all of Sam's moles. Why can't you give me a chance? I wanna be a good guy too. Why can't you give me a chance? Why? Answer me." Superintendent Yeung answers, "Sorry, I am a cop."⁴⁴ This answer analogically parallels with what Yan said to Ming on the rooftop in *Infernal Affairs I*: "Sorry, I am a cop", then Yeung got shot and died.

Ming's identity dangles between his real identity and the plausibly imaginary one, which is complicated by his paranoia and schizophrenic symptom to defend his disappearance. With the chaotic shuttling between time and space, what is rearranged is not limited within the review and prolong of entangled quasi-ness between British government and China, but also in practicing and supervising the so-called "one country, two systems" of post-97 era. Therefore, there is reason to believe that the characters in *Infernal Affairs III*, such as Superintendent Yeung Kam-Wing and Shen Cheng, may merely be figments of Ming's imagination. When Ming and Dr. Lee were

⁴⁴劉健明：「我是一個好人，為什麼我要小心？我那麼努力幫你們殺光韓琛的臥底。為什麼你們不能給我一次機會？我也想要變成好人，為什麼不能給我機會？回答我。」
楊錦榮：「對不起，我是警察。」

in a car crash and was sent to the hospital, there was a superficial conversation among Superintendent Wong, Yan, and Ming. Their conversation starts out as a discussion between Superintendent Wong and Yan about Hon's trafficking details, when Ming interrupted and joined in:

“Yan: Beware of Yeung first.
 Wong: I will.
 Yan: Can you bust him?
 [...]
 Ming: I will take care of Yeung.
 Yan: You?
 Wong: Don't worry. Ming is a great helper.
 Yan: Do you know what you are saying? If it weren't for Ming, you would still be alive. Don't you want us dead?
 Ming: That was an accident. I only wanted to be a good guy. Can't you give me another chance?
 Yan: Sorry, I am a cop.”⁴⁵

Yan stands up and points his gun toward Ming. Dr. Lee walks in from the other side of the corridor and witnesses Ming's strange behavior. Therefore, the “reverse hallucination” of Ming (refusing to see what is there) is to substitute and to mis-recognize himself as Yan, and the disappearance of Ming is to replace himself as his self-assigned identity through various representations. By killing Hon Sam, his wife, Mary, and the undercover sent by Sam, Ming is imbued with the redemptive thinking of reassigning himself as a real police. Just like Mary's (Ming's wife) male protagonist in her fiction, who suffers from multiple personality disorders, and cheat

⁴⁵ 黃警官：「看來韓琛還沒完全信任你。」

陳永仁：「你要小心那個楊錦榮，有沒有證據抓住他？」

黃警官：「他跟韓琛在一起，這證明不了什麼，怎麼抓？」

陳永仁：「老闆，我在外面出生入死，你在這潑冷水？」

劉健明：「楊錦榮那邊，我會搞定。」

陳永仁：「你？」

黃警官：「你放心好了，小劉幫的上忙。」

陳永仁：「你說什麼？要不是他你也不會出事。」

劉健明：「那次是意外。」

陳永仁：「你不是很想我們死嘛？」

劉健明：「我想做好人，我不知道會搞成這個樣，再給我一次機會。」

陳永仁：「對不起，我是警察。」

people with their different identities, Ming's misshaped identity becomes a fact within the fiction. Likewise, Hong Kong squeezes between Britain and China in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy.

Anthropological Places and Non-places in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

In Ackbar Abbas' observation in *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, the disappearance is not limited to cultural, political and economic perspectives; it also manifests in the architectural space: the space of disappearance. The way space in Hong Kong reinvents itself is conceivable in: "the combination of rising land prices, property speculation, and the presence of large corporations vying for prime space results in a constant rebuilding that makes the city subtly unrecognizable" (Abbas 63). The constant rebuilding, dismantling, and reconstruction not only problematize the representation of Hong Kong, but also allure visual consumption of architecture in the cinema, which encourages the politics of gazing in selective preservation of buildings to correspond to the disappearance of history "in site" and "in sight" (66).

If historical preservation of buildings exemplifies the importance of "abstract and ungraspable space" (Abbas 69), then the image and anamorphic objects will take the lead in the space of disappearance. From "channeling and socializing the desire through gaze" (67) to occupy the image as identity, to "imply the substitution of one thing for another, a displacement", (68) till the reproduction for preserving the historical sites, the space of disappearance is "being caught between two colonialities (Britain's and China's)" (69). In this section, I will conduct Marc Auge's observation of places to respond to the seemingly homogenized space through colonial gaze in order to demonstrate how the space in Hong Kong is congested with quasi-ness and

permeated with traces of disappearance that contextualized with Abbas under globalization. Furthermore, the space in Hong Kong highlights the intricate relationship between British government and Chinese factors and policies in mapping the quasi-ness of post-97 Hong Kong.

Anthropological Places in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

Anthropological place and non-place are not immobile in their dichotomy, but “rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relation is ceaselessly rewritten” (Auge 79). Therefore, the coexistence of anthropological places and non-places makes Hong Kong an ambiguous and “unrecognizable” space of disappearance. According to Auge’s postulation in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*⁴⁶, anthropological places have three characteristics in common: “they want to be—people want them to be—places of identity, of relations and of history” (52) and “necessarily historical from the moment when--- combining identity with relations—it is defined by a minimal stability” (54). By highlighting these three characteristics which intertwine with one another, it would be easier to correlate the anthropological place to the accumulation with time and space, so that inhabitants are “living in” history instead of “making” it (55); moreover, by emphasizing the relationship, it brings out its bounding with identity. Therefore, if the anthropological place is the place living within history, it could be awakened and “come to life”. It could become the object of nostalgia, offering the historical trajectory to map out the “pre-existing Chinese trading networks” (Ngo 4).

⁴⁶ Auge Marc, translated by John Howe. *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of*

Tuen Men Tsuen (屯門村) is the place where Hon Sam starts his trafficking business in unlocking the gangster epic in *Infernal Affairs I*. That exact place could be traced back to the Tang dynasty as a place harbouring ships on international trade routes. The next anthropological place mentioned in trilogy is *Urmston Road* (瀧鼓灘), a location where Sam loses his cocaine, and the first ferry serving between Hong Kong and Macau. By exemplifying the anthropological places, they reinforce the geopolitical relation, and bound them with real localities in both Hong Kong and the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy. In addition, the geopolitics demonstrates the undercover as a social actor who shuttles between anthropological places and non-places; moreover, anthropological places modulate the importance of non-places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and make the “infernal” seem more realistic.

Non-Places in the *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy

Non-place, as what Auge argues, could be the counterpart of anthropological place. It is “a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (Auge 78-79). Moreover, it indicates its estrangement from the locality or “do not integrate” to the “status of ‘place of memory’ and assigns to a circumscribed and specific position” (78). Non-place no longer supports the identity for its characteristics of transition, ephemerality, reconstitution, embellishment or even unreliability; however, because of its impermanence, non-place becomes the “real measure of our time” (79). What merits special attention in non-place is its ubiquity, intertwining with network-like strongholds of anthropological places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy; moreover, it accentuates how the unrecognizable buildings function as witnesses to the

disappearance, and how Hong Kong reflectively dissolves the crisis of its flexible identity.

Non-places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy are best exemplified by the rooftop, elevator, monitor, and mirror-like skyscrapers, and even the stereo store brings out the indivisible boundings between Yan and Ming.

Rooftop is said to be the most obviously alienated and quotidian space in Hong Kong, since standing on the top of the building is disdainfully analogous to the surveillance, searching the way out, confessing the schizophrenia and violent inclination, dissolving information, and even flashbacking and unmasking the identity. To Yan, rooftop serves as the concealment of secrets and bears the duality of his identity. Only when he meets Superintendent Wong, can his undercover identity be temporarily retreated under the sunlight. Coincidentally, Yan occupies most of the rooftop scene, and this barely visible non-place is both alienated from the interior of the skyscraper and from the ground; therefore, this seemingly abandoned and exposed non-place hinders Yan's path backward to the police and suspends his identity in-between police and gangster. Straightforwardly, Yan has absolute confidence in retrieving his police identity, but when Ming is walking on the corridor of the rooftop, his image that is reflected on the window of skyscraper is decomposed, fragmented and ephemeral, symbolizing his impossibility to retrieve his identity.

Rooftop in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy not only exposes the question of double alienation and a flexible connection between gangster and police, but also employs the imminent danger of falling downwards and death itself. Starting from the familiar information exchange on the rooftop, Yan says: "I still don't know who Sam's mole is, but he seems to be confident to find me out." "In that case, we'd better stop it. We're

gonna lose for sure. What else can I do? We'll die," replies Superintendent Wong⁴⁷.

This conversation illustrates the destination of all the people involved within the infernal; in the end, does the falling symbolize the freedom of being retrieved? While Superintendent Wong degenerates from the rooftop, he falls from the non-place, which is indispensable to the transnational capitalism, witnessing the disappearance of Hong Kong's architecture through the construction of economic laissez-faire and political non-intervention, and finally reaching the philosophical nihilism.

The "falling into inferno" image is not merely realized by the perish of Superintendent Wong; moreover, it is considerably applied to other non-places such as elevator throughout the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy. From the opening of *Infernal Affairs I*, the rigorous and trembling fall into hell is modulated from the introduction, as if leading the audience into a world congested with disgraceful crimes, violence and sufferings, while among the inflamed rocks, the face of Buddha appears indistinctly. Analogously, the downward elevator can be correlated with the degeneracy or personality transformation.

In *Infernal Affairs III*, Ming steps into the elevator exhausted and depressed but somehow he suspiciously sharpens his perceptions toward the spy camera above. On the monitor, it seems that Ming is experiencing the suffering and distortion while the elevator brings him down closer towards inferno. Besides, his personality transfers as his wife, Mary, illustrates: "I can't finish my novel. I don't know whether he's good or bad. I think only he himself knows⁴⁸". On the verge of schizophrenia, Ming encounters the threats made by Yan and supernova Superintendent Yeung, as well as

⁴⁷ 陳永仁：「韓琛的臥底到現在都還沒有查到，不過他好像很有把握把我挖出來。」

黃警官：「這樣搞下去，我們輸定了。」

陳永仁：「不會吧？」

黃警官：「什麼不會？會死人的。」

⁴⁸ Mary：「這本小說我寫不下去了，我都不知道他是好是壞人。這個我看只有他一個人知道。」

his wife's abandonment. His decline haunts him downward towards hell.

Characteristics of non-place are best demonstrated by what Tomlinson argues as “solitude (even in the presence of others), silence, anonymity, alienation, impermanence (Tomlinson 1999: 110)”. In *Infernal Affairs I*, as Ming is gunned down by Inspector Lam, Ming finds out that his undercover identity is exposed, and the elevator goes downward. Within seconds, Ming kills Inspector Lam and reverses his identity in the almost transparent but concealed non-place; he assigns himself as a “real” police, and the death of Yan and Lam contributes to maintaining Ming's mole identity. However, the non-place can never support one's identity, which is shown by the shuttling between the ground floor and the rooftop. Thus, Ming's identity is rootless, which indicates that the reversed identity could eventually be reversed someday. Moreover, undercover Yan and Inspector Lam die with their eyes opened; their identities are grounded, and Ming's identity is under surveillance, forever.

Unlike Yan and Superintendent Wong, who meet on the rooftop in broad daylight, Ming and Sam could only be trapped within the theater. Furthermore, once they completed exchanging information, they separate through underground, maze-like tunnels in the dark night. Impersonality in non-places is demonstrated by Chu Ying-Chi:

“Fear and depression are shown in the portrayal of the Hong Kong landscape. [...] Hong Kong's skyscrapers and shopping centers are presented as sites for potential danger threatening unexpectedly and suddenly in elevators, air-conditioned tunnels, nearby streets and parking areas.[...] Hong Kong's pride in its modern buildings and confidence in the control of its technology are absent in the post-1997 films.” (Chu 130)

However, in *Infernal Affairs I* and *III*, the stereo store is the non-place where Ming and Yan encounter each other. During their encounter, the song “forgotten times” was played, which penetrates through their nostalgia, memory and identity. Coincidentally,

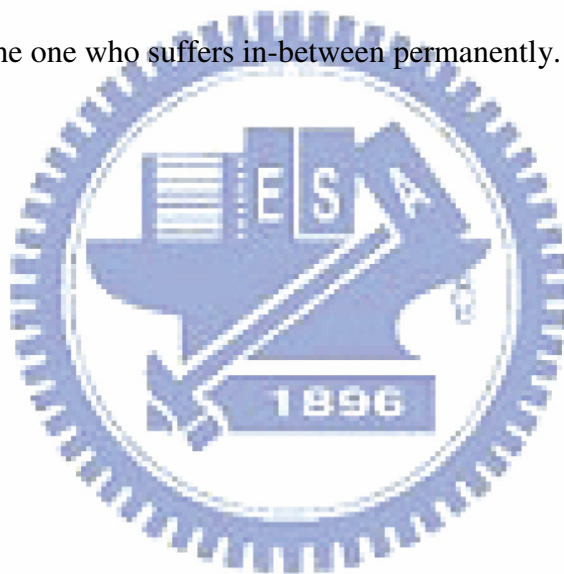
the stereo store functions as an enclosure for both undercovers' lives. As if wrapped up and hidden away from all the urban scenery of a capitalist world, the stereo store encapsulates all the primitive memories. Meanwhile, Ming and Yan seem able to set themselves free of their camouflage and put themselves out of the conspiracies and the turmoil of *jianghu*. Among all the chaotic and violent sufferings lifted out of time and space, and the nihility of the inferno, the pessimistic atmosphere of the trilogy gives away to the warmth in the ending.

Conclusion

Both the disappearance and the analysis are equipped with certain quasi-ness, and are demonstrated from the architectural unrecognition and the reverse hallucination in shaping the struggle and double alienation or flexibility in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy. The vacillation between anthropological places and non-places serves as the network and intricacy in creating each other. The image of falling permeates throughout the trilogy, as if downwardly degenerating into the inferno. Yan's disappearance is originated from his desire to be a good person; therefore, he ignores the calls to the reunion toward the Ngai family and as a result, causes himself to be partially invisible in his undercover identity. In contrast to Yan, Ming suffers from multiple disappearances connoting his schizophrenia, and is portrayed from the fragmented reflection in mirrors, and on the skyscraper and the gazing of the spy camera. The disappearance continuously vapors in the post-97 era, as if repeating without interruption through the chaotic arrangement of time, which reinforces the inescapable fatal theme of Buddhism in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy.

Non-places are the most ubiquitous of places in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, and are characterized by what Tomlinson argues as "solitude (even in the presence of

others), silence, anonymity, alienation, impermanence (Tomlinson 110)”. Rooftop in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy occupies many crucial scenes which expose the identity crisis and conceals secrets, and the falling from non-place buildings further emphasizes this symbolism. Not only is Wong’s life terminated by the fall, but the possibility of Yan ever retrieving his short-lived plausible authentic identity also perishes. By highlighting the characters of non-places as a transition, the rootless elevator functions also as the oscillation between good and evil, undercover and the anxiety of identity retrieval. Ming gunshots Inspector Lam at the downward elevator to maintain his camouflage as a Superintendent; however, his attempt is ephemeral, and he finally turns himself into the one who suffers in-between permanently.



Chapter Five: Conclusion

What is going to be re-announced in this thesis is the in-between-ness of Hong Kong, which is seen in Ngo Ta-Wing's *Hong Kong's History*, Chu Ying-Chi's *Hong Kong Cinema: the struggling and hybridization between Coloniser, motherland and self*, and further complicated by Law Wing-Sang's *Collaborative Colonialism and its Refractions in Undercover Movie*. The neutrality reverses the absolute dichotomy of the ruler and the ruled but maintains the administrative-state and society relationship during the 150-year colonization. As a social actor, Hong Kong has developed many qualities, including those of a secret keeper, and the economic initiative qualities. The policy of "economic laissez-fair and political non-intervention" will be indispensable as what is promised in "one country; two systems" after the handover.

Next, I regard the undercover in gangster films as the "social actor", the agent in elaborating the collaborative relationship and mutual hostilities in the historical sketch of Hong Kong gangster films. Masculinity and admirable virtues such as camaraderie, justice and gallantry are recognizable characters in gangster movie; moreover, its fictional and realistic narratives are further embodied with real-life figures. Hong Kong gangster film is therefore connected with visual vocabulary to reinforce the style of auteur chronological. From the prototype of aesthetics of violence with romanticism and heroism that bound with brotherhood, the *jianghu* of John Woo transgresses beyond the hierarchy of police and gangster. In Stephan Chow's comedic-gangster films, undercover is dyed with "*wulitou*", where the humorous, witty and relaxed attitude challenges the romantic individualism, celebrating the superficial and rejecting reasonable narrative. Andrew Lau rejuvenates the territory of young rascals in his famous "*Young and Dangerous*" series, the *jianghu* in these

series are no longer crowded with romanticism, but innocence and impetus. In contrast to the primitive spirit of *Young and Dangerous*, Johnnie To's gangster film after 97 is equipped with strong criticism, that is, through the seemingly impartial election of the gangster leader, the hierarchical distortion of power relations tears apart the principals of morality and justices. Gangsters posing as social actors are indispensable to the colonizing process of Hong Kong; however, different director have his/her stylized *jianghu* mechanism in interlocking with the society.

Gangster films in Kong Hong are inevitably connected with Hollywood gangster ones; both of which has the incomparable popularity and universal adaptability of encompassing a variety of genres. Gangster is a syndicate without legitimacy, which indicates that the underworld dominates its hierarchy beyond law reinforcement. In the American gangster film *Little Caesar*, the motif of being a participant of a gangster is to chase out the individuality and to access the modernity by discarding the traditional hierarchy, for family is the embodiment of the social order. However, to embrace modernity is as risky as deconstructing it, while desires become uncontrollable, "everything to excess" also represents the flexibility and blurred dichotomy of gangsters.

After the comparative study of Hong Kong gangster films with Hollywood ones, I focus on the subject of post 97, which inherently put emphasis on the position of social actors, on those who possess the flexible loyalties toward different national regimes, and on their manipulations of social power which allow them to be influential both politically and economically, even though they are politically marginalized. Therefore, if "post" shall be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) and its anterior was as what Lyotard indicates, then the narrative of Hong Kong as a social actor shall continuously be tunneled through the deadline 97.

Memory constructions and representation of the colonial past as well as the embodiment of uncertainty and fearsomeness of China still shadow over Hong Kong people. Focusing on the “unpresentable” and “unattainable” perspective toward authenticity of memory reconstruction, Cen Lang-Tian brings up the equation from pre-97 to post-97 as follows: deny an over-simplified identification → memory (identity) reconstruction → memory (identity) falls out → identify with disappearance.

Hong Kong’s disengagement from its colonial status simultaneously affirms the nationalistic account of the colony’s economic policy and legal system and further imposes the in-between-ness of Hong Kong itself. Quasi-national allegory is the collaboration of “quasi-national” from Chu Ying-Chi and “national allegory” of Fredric Jameson.

My thesis conducts three perspectives of reading the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy, namely: postmodern perspective, quasi-national allegorical reading, and the comparative reading between the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and the *Godfather* trilogy. To reverse the cultural logic of order and chaos, discipline and desire, justice and unfairness, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy blurs the absolute dichotomy and modulates the inevitable struggles and sufferings. In order to obtain an authentic representation of history that depicts the memory construction of the “un-represented” and “unattainable” embedded in the post-97 aura, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy were conducted from a total omniscient narrative. By puzzling the fragmentations together, confusing the arrangement of time and space, and equipping it with Buddhist sub-theme, the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy articulates a sense of nostalgia and the fatalism in endless suffering. Nostalgia comes from the anxiety and uncertainty towards the future. Symbolically, the trilogy is terminated in the stereo store when Yan and Ming first encounter each other. As to the Buddhist theme intertwining among the trilogy, it

articulates the inability to escape from the disordered identity, and the internal suffering which surpasses beyond time and space, or simply the status quo after 97.

Quasi-national allegory blends together Chu Ying-Chi's "quasi-nation" and Fredric Jameson's "national allegory", and extends the critiques of the triangular relationship among Hong Kong the self, British the colonizer and China the motherland. Embedded within the post-97 aura and the traversed time and space, which symbolically traps the continuous struggles between justice and evil, the triangular relationship reincarnates itself. This relationship is further complicated by political non-intervention and economic laissez-faire and the so-called "one country and two systems" policy after the handover. Quasi-national allegory in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy unfolds itself by the coincidental absence of Yan and Ming from their families, while Superintendent Wong and Hon Sam become their respective surrogate fathers. With Yan and Ming camouflaging themselves deep within their opponents, their identities constrain themselves toward the infernal with no possibility of escape. Moreover, the quasi-ness continues with the appearance of characters Shen and Yeung who reinforce the uncertainty and mutability among triad Hong Kong gangster, police and China. Hong Kong still functions as the social actor among the triangular relationship after the handover.

The comparative reading of the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy and the *Godfather* trilogy starts as a result of their trilogies. Especially in the prequel, their similarities are striking in that they both put emphasis on family. The apparent persistence on patriarchal laws and the heritage of family makes family a "hermetically sealed world". Analogous as it may appear, the Mafia and triad posse family-like hierarchy. The family-as-business extends with ambitious involvement with global capitalism; the family becomes dispersed and fragmented. Both Michael and Hau, whose

identities are integrated with their families, eventually, wither away.

Both the disappearance and analysis are equipped with a certain type of quasi-ness. The quasi-ness of disappearance will be demonstrated from architectural un-recognition. While the film vacillates between anthropological places and non-places, the image of falling penetrates throughout the trilogy and symbolizes as if downwardly degenerating into the inferno. The disappearance of Yan and Ming interlock with each other. Yan intends to retrieve his authentic police identity, but his disappearance continues to reincarnate via the rearrangement of time and space. In contrast, Ming suffers from multiple disappearances, which connote his schizophrenia, and is demonstrated by the fragmented reflections on the skyscraper and by his gazing at the spy camera. He replaces himself with Yan, and intends to use Yan's disappearance to deal with his own identity, hoping that he may recover his police identity, but ends up as a walking corpse in the in-between-ness.

Disappearance in space is demonstrated by the constant construction and dismantling of the buildings. Anthropological places provide a historical background for the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy to work against in a chaotically and violently interrupted narrative. However, the "solitude (even in the presence of others), silence, anonymity, alienation, impermanence" of non-places reveals and exposes even more identity crisis and secret missions. By highlighting the characters of non-places as the transits, the rootless elevator also functions as the oscillation between good and evil, undercover and the anxiety of identity retrieval. Ming shoots Inspector Lam in the descending elevator to maintain his camouflage as a Superintendent; however, his act is ephemeral, as he finally ends up being the one who suffers permanently in in-between-ness.

In-between-ness of Hong Kong in the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy is composed of

undercover, post-97, traverse of time, perception of violence, and Buddhism, disappearance and the oscillation between anthropological places and non-places. This trilogy unfolds the anxiety, nostalgia, identification, and the uncertainty after the handover. Finally, in the reincarnation and encounter of Yan and Ming in the stereo store, good and evil are vacuumed and concealed with no need to be examined and verified. “Tomorrow will be fine,” says Yan, as he puts on his jacket and says goodbye to Dr. Lee; however, the audiences know he has no tomorrow. Despite the fact that disappearance still reincarnates itself, the optimistic aura of the ending indicates a bright and better future for Hong Kong.



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