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LIKE A POSTCOLONIAL CULTURE:
HONG KONG RE-IMAGINED

Introduction

Again and again what we have to observe is in effect a *pre-emergence*, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named.

(Williams, 1985: 126; emphasis in the original)

In all the analyses of the viability of Hong Kong's autonomy preceding the transfer of sovereignty, the assumption was that threats to it would come from the mainland. There was little discussion of the flaws and fragility of Hong Kong's institutional arrangements.

(Ghai, 2000, a local legal scholar)

Mutation is solid.

(James Wong, Hong Kong Cantopop lyricist and television personality)

WUIGUAI (in Cantonese; *huigui*, in Putonghua), handover, transition, decolonization, reinstatement, restoration, reversion, retrocession, reunification, 'returnification', and even fall and death: four years after the historic turning point, the consequences, multiple and ideologically fractured as they are, are far from clear in Hong Kong. Life, as well as discourse, goes on with a wide-eyed understanding that our story is still unfolding. Commerce, which is at once taken as the formative pillar of Hong Kong society and constituted as its ruling bloc, turned out to be where our sense of change, fear and frustration,

ambivalence – that is, our ‘crisis of confidence’ (Chan, M., 1997) – was materialized. To say that the political beginning of the People’s Republic of China’s sovereignty over the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) was eclipsed by an economic recession that has continued to plague Hong Kong since the autumn of 1997, would be to give a selective symptomatic reading of change. Rather, these two ‘events’ have bifocalized our view of the current SAR polity (see Ma, 2000). In deep financial, social and psychic hardship over 1998 and 1999 (with slight recovery in 2000 and 2001), the people of Hong Kong have experienced an economic rescue effort through a Chinese, and not Crown, polity for the first time. In the same breath, we re-imagine our ‘home’ and ‘Chinese identity’, acquiring our new nationality and experimenting with a creeping democracy framed under ‘one country, two systems’, through the shocking economic storm. Put in a local lexicon, the rice bowl suddenly slipped and shattered, but on different soil and thus with different remedies and consequences. At the end of the (postcolonial) day, the unfolding but parallel events of nationalization and economic hardship co-stage a fuzzy historical vista.

Hong Kong un-imagined (once again)¹

Blurry-eyed, what can and can’t we say about Hong Kong now? Well, mostly can’t. Not yet anyway. Administratively, our political destiny has been settled. However, the politics of administration has so far been most unsettling.² I share Fred Chiu’s view that leading up to 30 June 1997, the intense debates over Hong Kong’s future that were undertaken in a hothouse atmosphere may have been ‘overplayed’ (Interview with Chiu, 1999). Passing the handover, seeing that Hong Kong has not disappeared from the face of the earth, and discovering new sites and new political dynamics of struggle, we must now patiently construct our future. For that purpose, I suggest that a position that entails a withholding of historical imagination is necessary and consistent with an incomplete (post-colonial) historical process. Conversely, a designation of incompleteness enables a discursive position that can incorporate the past and imagine a future. In the case of Hong Kong, we are talking about a position situated between imminent decolonization (pre-1997) and ‘re-nationalization’.³ Over the past few years, both the flurry of reflections on postcoloniality (before and immediately after the handover) and the subsequent critiques of administrative failures, lie somewhere in this liminal space. As S. Chan (1998) aptly asked one year after the handover, ‘What, we still do not know, has been the politics of representation and interpretation when one re-figures the alignments, desires, and identities of one’s own alienated past, and discovers with shock its trajectory of alienation in ourselves?’ (Chan, S., 1998: 118). We have reasons to believe that liminal postcoloniality is the present space where socio-historical as well as subjective disorientations are

just now being outlined. In this sense, I suggest that the impossibility to say anything certain about post-1997 Hong Kong is part and parcel of how (post-colonial) cultural studies is articulated in the Hong Kong context, and Hong Kong in cultural studies, here and now.

Why then, we might ask, produce a special issue on Hong Kong? How does Hong Kong, with its international political and economic import in global capitalism as well as its unique set of historical and cultural problems, escape from a (possibly parochial) locale and rise to the level of historical and theoretical consideration of a broader kind? Put in another way, for those who did not experience the postcolonial transition in Hong Kong, how does its story transform from a 'case' to a 'context' for cultural studies? I must admit that the most frequent questions asked of me over the past few years from my American and European friends – 'How is Hong Kong settling with the new changes?' 'Is Hong Kong okay?' 'Why all the mess?' – are signs that we need a critical exchange entailing what may be called intersubjective forms of knowing and desire. Aside from being locked in a mix of honest curiosity and narcissism (both of which positions western cosmopolitanism and democracy as the center of comparison), foreign interests in the welfare of post-handover Hong Kong in fact release a series of demands. The primary demand has to do with a rendering of Hong Kong into a 'context' with, hopefully, a legible historical and geopolitical narrative. I share Abbas's (1997b) view that the handover has occasioned 'a moment that demands open declarations, when the tacit has to become explicit, when the ambiguities of the place (Hong Kong) have to be quickly straightened by one or another formula' (Abbas, 1997b: 296). I take this to mean a reimagination of a new context for critical inquiry. Whether as a result of foreign demands or local needs, we find ourselves poised for a new social imaginary.

No doubt, my own history as someone who was raised in Hong Kong (as an ethnic minority) and then moved to the US in the mid-1980s, structures my own gaze on Hong Kong. Yet my history is not unique; many writers and academics from Hong Kong like myself share a similar outline of a trajectory thematized by dislocation, mobility, professionalization in the west, and a chronic need to problematize our 'local identity', 'belonging', and 'return'. Writing as a de-localized but returning local, I very much have the themes of movement, transition, and liminality in mind.⁴

Inevitably, writing about Hong Kong involves a triangular articulation of Chinese nationalism, British colonialism, and globalism, which also evokes the impossibility of serving three masters. As Hong Kong prepared for its transition, all sectors of the society passed through these not-so-innocent filters. The education sector saw the most intense debate about the linguistic medium of instruction (and its ideological impact) in years (Mother-tongue education? English? Cantonese? Putonghua?). The information technology sector began to seriously weigh the benefits and disadvantages over who counted as the 'right experts' to propel us into high-technological modernity (homegrown graduates? locals

trained in the west? imported brain heads from the mainland? retention of western expatriates?). And the tourism sector kicked itself into high gear in order to manage the material and imagistic cultures of the city (preservationism? new high-investment creations, such as a new airport, a cyberport, and Disneyland? or postmodernist reversals, such as nostalgic preservation packaged as new creations and new tourism attractions promoted for nostalgic consumption?). Meanwhile, the cultural sphere – film, television, popular music, radio, performing arts, comic books – has been a theatre of productive hysteria. Three-headed as it were, the cultural sphere offers diverse scripts of divided loyalties, unclear breaks, residual connections, and ambiguous hopes for the future. Such is the new context, which is already multiple and disjunctive, for an open declaration of the practice of cultural studies in Hong Kong.

Vigilantly, the local progressives continue to offer tentative critiques and reflections on post-handover policies and social conditions. In the airwaves, on screen, in newspaper columns, universities, political organizations, cultural centres, and on the streets: new and established voices continue to fill in the details of the changing context. All the while, we know we must avoid being besieged in (another round of) historical amnesia. We took heed of the enduring lesson learned during the transitional period leading to decolonization (1984–1997) that in order to have a future, Hong Kong must desire history. Wanting our own history has been a political act at that time, for it disrupted attempts of historical erasure and rewriting by the departing colonialists and by the southward nationalist historians (see the essay by Cheung in this volume). At the same time, wanting our own history has also meant a self-reflexive critique of our colonizing tendencies, a point I shall return to later. Especially during the last few years before the handover – in other words, during the state of imminent decolonization – this desire for history fueled a scholarship aimed at documenting and theorizing our rapidly transforming identities. Through different analytical routes, in various complicated institutional spaces, and across twisting and turning psychic corridors, cultural studies practitioners in Hong Kong created ways to re-create a critical local historical discourse. The ‘archives’ were everywhere, in official discourse, public sphere, and popular play alike.

This volume has two main objectives. The first is to re-desire history in the form of sketching in the details of the context of a historical moment situated at the cusp of decolonization. After the mad and frenzied attention to the handover was over, ‘Hong Kong’ once again dropped off the global discursive radar, including the global map of cultural studies (if there is one). In order to understand our current state of ‘liminal postcoloniality’, the authors in this volume set out to gaze back at that discursive hinterland where and when the spotlights, cameras and microphones were switched off.⁵ Between imminent decolonization and an emerging postcoloniality lies what we consider to be a significant history: a history of becoming (postcolonial) Hong Kong. To cast our gaze back to that moment is part and parcel of a necessary logic by which we became ‘historical’,

by which we desire history. Apropos the situation in Hong Kong, I find Morris's (1998: 5) view about how to have history particularly compelling:

(W)anting history is not a primal human desire. We have to be taught to want it, to learn that history is the name of something we lack, and this particular pedagogy of desire and lack has been intimately bound up with nationalism as a project aspiring to govern change. On the other hand, given this history, a longing for history need not be nationalist in impulse or citizenly in force. In cultural studies, it is more likely to be organized by transnational constituents of subjectivity and experience, and by mobile figures of resistance or excess.

In different ways, the essays in this volume confront this desire for history at the cusp of decolonization by considering its relationship with a series of dichotomies implicit in Morris's perspective: nationalism and transnationalism, desire and lack, citizenship and resistance.

The second goal of this volume is to give some sense about the shape of cultural studies in Hong Kong, because it is too a part of us wanting history. To echo Morris again, theory lends a partial and often temporary commonality to experiences and events across the transnational space (Morris, 1998: 6). Something in the order of charting or mapping the evolution and development of cultural studies in Hong Kong is important, less because theory travels (of course it does) than because, like cultural studies in China, Japan, Taiwan or Australia, theory can help to recast a locale useful for 'cross-conjunctural' comparison. Needless to say, much of the cultural studies research that takes place in Hong Kong has been influenced by the transnational circulation of cultural theory (and theorists). By mapping the ways in which cultural studies flourishes in Hong Kong, I hope to, once again, fill in the details of the context about how local progressives in Hong Kong in the 1990s practiced their own rigorous cultural analyses and critiques, and in turn, how cultural theory performs its transnational translations. At the cusp of decolonization, this translation was not only necessary; it was urgent. By design and by default, the arrival of cultural studies has meant: (1) a proliferation of local intellectual and public debates; (2) legitimation of various discursive positions to reclaim, position, and even disorient 'Hong Kong' in postcolonial times; (3) formation of new political alliances (and fragmentation); and more recently (4) establishment of the first academic degree programme in cultural studies at a local university.

To think through this 'new context' further, it is not difficult to see that a cultural study of Hong Kong (not yet Hong Kong cultural studies) engages with a broader context, namely cultural studies' own 'internationalist' desire, not to mention its desire for an 'Asian turn' (Ang and Stratton, 1996; Chen, 1996). Some of the overlapping philosophical questions that this internationalism raises include: the politics of (uneven) flow and distribution of knowledge;

translatability of (traveling) theory; methodological constructions of locations, locales, and the locals; 'authority' in a context where US – and UK – based cultural studies is being de-centered; and the continuities and disjunctions of 'alternative time', 'alternative place', and 'alternative modernity' as theoretical mediations. Meanwhile, practical concerns include issues of language translation as well as issues of support and vision on the part of publishers and other academic venues (e.g. conference organizers). The success of cultural studies in proliferating critical intellectual engagement with more and more places and spaces around the world is raising interesting questions locally in Hong Kong, questions that underscore the very structural problem of what Chew has called a 'post-colonial intellectual field' (see his essay in this volume). In addition to the plethora of concepts that circulate, such as 'disjuncture' (Appadurai, 1996), 'translation' (Sakai, 1997), 'vectoral politics' (Wark, 1994), 'hybridity' (Bhabha, 1994; Canclini, 1995), 'critical syncretism' (Chen, 1998a), to name a few that come to mind, we might ask what unique symptoms Hong Kong presents to international cultural studies, and cultural studies to international Hong Kong. There are three possible points of relevance to consider here.

First, I echo Kuan-Hsing Chen's concern (1998b) about the danger of the discourse of 'Asian triumphalism' that in recent years has been associated with decolonization movements in Asia, when in fact it has largely been a conservative discourse deployed to solidify the political-economic ruling bloc among elite Asian nations and the Asian entrepreneurial class. We do not need to celebrate Hong Kong culture, or mourn its limits, but we need to ascertain its continual mutations along the contour of global-Asian capitalist formation.

Second, there is the question of global consumerism, which is such a significant element in and about Hong Kong culture, setting up a discursive loop that feeds Hong Kong's well-known international identity to the west, through Southeast Asia, across East Asia (with China being a particularly important 'partner-master' of course), and back onto Hong Kong. Cultural studies has yet to figure out the theory and strategy of this configuration of global consumerism that so epitomizes and symptomatizes Hong Kong all at once.

Third, in terms of the formation of knowledge, we have to consider what kind of institutional and disciplinary frameworks to capture and legitimize the critical study of what Abbas (1997b) calls a 'fractal city'. For instance, how will a cultural studies of Hong Kong be positioned vis-à-vis national cultural studies (e.g. cultural studies of India, China, Portugal), regional cultural studies (e.g. Latin American cultural studies), or ethnic cultural studies (e.g. African American cultural studies)? And how does Hong Kong figure in the gaps and folds between these formations of cultural studies and, say, China Studies, Urban Studies, or Asian Studies?⁶ While knowledge about these academic regions has been rather transparent and descriptive, analogous to that of the sciences, the cultural studies of Hong Kong does not rest on any secure epistemological authority. In fact, speaking about East Asian Studies and 'area studies' more broadly,

Barlow (1997) has convincingly argued that old understanding about Euro-American centered ideological and colonial power in the world has been substantially reshaped by emerging alternative modernities, such as the emergence of 'Asian modernities' characterized by flexible global capitalism. The result is that 'area studies' needs to awaken to the 'unworkability of vested theoretical and evidentiary categories', due to the 'contemporary reworking of geopolitical relations into shapes not yet fully tangible' (Barlow, 1997: 2). If Hong Kong is considered a province of cultural studies at all, its possible role in the rearticulation of 'Asian modernities' entails posing new questions about vested theories of nationalism, globalism, and the most troublesome of all, 'postcolonialism'.

The crisis of the name

What about locating Hong Kong by way of 'postcolonial cultural studies'? Reading Fanon and Memmi in Hong Kong? Asking questions about 'nativism' in postcolonial Hong Kong, such as the role of Confucianism? Looking for Said in the middle-class ideal? As I suggested before, we may be postcolonial in the historical and administrative sense. But discursively, postcoloniality is nothing but the materialization of a distortion, of a surplus of confusion and perturbation introduced by a continuous sense of mutation into the so-called 'objective' Hong Kong historiography (Abbas, 1997a). This distortion nonetheless assumes the shape of 'something'. Chow's (1998a) diagnosis of the transfer of sovereignty in 1997 is instructive here. She argues that this transfer of sovereignty signals our predicament of being 'between colonizers'. This is no doubt a useful way to name the hazard introduced by the distortion. Chow is primarily concerned with Hong Kong possibly misrecognizing itself as possessing a 'native origin' in Chinese historiography:

Being in the south, having been colonized by the British, having been occupied by Japan during the Second World War, having become Westernized and commercial, and now been 'returned' to China, the history of modern Hong Kong could always be written as some form of quest for a 'Chinese' identity that preempted and made impossible from the beginning, and most significantly by its ineradicable colonial 'taint'. Hong Kong's quest for China, then, would be judged in accordance to its fundamental futility: the more Hong Kong tries, the more it reveals its 'lack' of 'Chineseness' and the more it is a deviation from the norm of the folk. The past would follow Hong Kong like an unshakable curse of inferiority.

(Chow, 1998a: 163)

Indeed the 'lack' Chow points out is more radically unstable than she allows, since the Chinese 'norm of the folk', that impossible goal of Hong Kong's

postcolonial desire, is itself rapidly mutating. I do not think anyone in Hong Kong in his or her right mind is chasing after an anachronistic China. It may be the case that Hong Kong is measuring its supposed 'inferiority' against a modernizing and capitalizing China. But for Abbas, Hong Kong is far from inferior:

Ironically, it is Hong Kong's colonial history, the only history it has known and a history that cannot be forgotten overnight, that has distanced Hong Kong culturally and politically from China and that will make their relationship not simply one of reunification. When sovereignty reverts to China, we may expect to find a situation that is quasi-colonial, but with an important historical twist: the colonized state, while politically subordinate, is in many other crucial respects not a dependent subaltern position but is in fact more advanced – in terms of education, technology, access to international networks, and so forth – than the colonizing state.

(Abbas, 1997a: 5–6)

Between 'living as the continually colonized' as prescribed by Chow (1998a: 187) and a new cynicism producing an 'enlightened false consciousness' as argued by Abbas (1997b: 311), Hong Kong's postcolonial predicament is anamorphic.⁷

To catch a glimpse of this distortion, one only needs to look at the strange reverberation of Chinese 'patriotism' exhibited in the highly emotional politics of dispute over Diaoyutai Islands. Historically, the Islands have been a point of geopolitical dispute over asserted sovereignty between China and Japan. In September 1996, both the Japanese foreign minister and the Japanese consul-general in Hong Kong characterized the dispute as a 'minor matter' and re-cast Japanese sovereignty over the Islands. Hong Kong Chinese spontaneously rose to a patriotic defense, resulting in impressive public protests and demonstrations. Unlike the massive protests over the same issue in 1971, this new round of activism provoked little reaction from the departing British colonial regime.⁸ Concerned about diplomatic relations with Japan, Beijing authorities expressed their 'understanding' but became intolerant of the anti-Japanese activism. Between the local Hong Kong Chinese's unexpected patriotic defense and Beijing's astonishing intolerance lies the slippery *realpolitik*: the PRC authorities interpreted this expression of patriotism as a prelude for local subversion involving alliance between the pro-democracy lobby, the local grassroots progressive front, and possibly the pro-independent Taiwanese faction (see Ming Pao, 1996; Mathews, 1999). Evidently as far as Beijing is concerned, the political imagination surrounding 'postcolonial' Hong Kong places the territory in and out of the national imaginary at the same time. Seduced into the national imaginary but marginalized from it, Hong Kong occupies a 'third space' (Abbas, 1996: 300).

Another factor in the unsettling formation of postcoloniality in Hong Kong has to do with its own expansive, colonizing tendencies in the East and Southeast

Asian region. Since the 1980s, Hong Kong local cultural production, most impressively its films, has deeply penetrated and dominated the movie-going market in East and Southeast Asia. In the 1990s, this ‘colonized empire’ (Lii, 1998) has successfully broken into the mainland Chinese market, embarking on what numerous local scholars have called the ‘northbound imaginary’.⁹ Hong Kong cantopop music and television series is by now ubiquitous in Cantonese-speaking southern China, while Hong Kong-style tabloid magazine culture is actively proliferating its semblance in the mainland newspaper stands. Needless to say, on a broader historical scale, Hong Kong’s deregulated economy and capitalist lifestyle have been adopted to develop special economic zones (SEZs) in Southern China, most notably in Shenzhen, often resulting in bewildering simulacral effects (see essay by O’Donnell in this volume).

In Lii’s (1998) study of what he calls ‘marginal imperialism’, he poses these rhetorical questions:

(I)t becomes an interesting question to ask if the new type of imperialism in the periphery is the same kind as the old one in the core, or if it represents a different category from the old one? Does a colonized empire create a rupture in the development of capitalism, or does it just continue, reproduce or even deepen capitalistic expansion?

(Lii, 1998: 125)

Comparing it with the Hollywood empire (the ‘old’ logic of cultural imperialism from the core of global capitalism), Lii argues that the Hong Kong film industry actively invites investment and intellectual partnership from other Asian countries in order to guarantee its penetration in a ‘culturally relevant’ manner. Film narratives and forms can be adapted according to local market demands. Thus, this ‘colonial’ expansion and incorporation signals ‘an emerging form of transnational operation’ (Chen, 1998b: 34). A ‘postcolonial colonizer’ is a twisted, but vastly productive, fate.

Under the warped conditions sketched above, how do we place Hong Kong culture within the name of postcolonial studies or postcolonial theories? It is not that this recognizable academic region is the ‘wrong’ framework in cultural studies to place Hong Kong. Rather, a culture and history such as Hong Kong’s is too slippery for such a framework of knowledge and academic pursuit. Frankly, if the cultural studies of globalization has relevance here, it is only because it is still a fuzzy area of study, shifting on its own slipperiness. As Jameson (1998) would have it:

Globalization – even the term itself has been hotly contested – is . . . the modern or postmodern version of the proverbial elephant, described by its blind observers in so many diverse ways. Yet one can still posit the existence of the elephant in the absence of a single persuasive and dominant

theory; nor are blinded questions the most unsatisfactory way to explore this kind of relational and multileveled phenomenon.

(Jameson, 1998: xi)

Against the theoretical articulations of 'the global' and 'the postcolonial' in cultural studies, Hong Kong is too urbane and too parochial, too willing and too reluctant, too fast and too slow, too soon and too late all at once. Put in another way, it is a 'fugitive' that cannot ever clearly escape; all it does is to circulate endlessly around dreams of globalization and hazy horizons of post- or decolonization.

Let me point out briefly an instance in which Hong Kong has been somewhat 'misrecognized'. In the enormously ground-setting book, *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (Chen, 1998a), the framing of Hong Kong is telling. *Trajectories* represents for the first time a cohesive, and highly collaborative, articulation of cultural studies into the inter-Asian context in the era of globalization (including the 'globalization' of cultural studies itself). The two essays concerning Hong Kong both appear in the section on 'Refiguring the Colonial'. In 'Managerializing colonialism', Law (1998) outlines the political collusion between the local middle-class bourgeoisie and mainland nationalists in order to explain why the nationalist project has always needed, if not actively incorporated, the colonial regime. He traces this collusion to the post-war colonial government, which produced social scientific and intellectual dicta that denied the existence of political consciousness among local Hong Kong Chinese.¹⁰ The second essay is the study of Hong Kong as a 'colonized empire' by Lii, which I discussed earlier. I am concerned about the way Hong Kong is cast within what Chen, the editor, calls the 'decolonization question'. From the two well-argued essays in the volume, Hong Kong nonetheless figures only within the colonial order. It is cast as a site of failure insofar as the 'decolonization question' is concerned.

In his introduction to the anthology, Chen frames the central question for Inter-Asia cultural studies in this way:

Here, in this introductory chapter, as a continuing effort to push forward decolonization projects, a rather simple theoretical proposition is put forward: the history of colonial identifications has set limits on the boundaries of the local cultural imaginary, consciously or unconsciously articulated by and through the institutions of the nation-state, which in turn has shaped our psychic-political geography.

(Chen, 1998a: 2)

Reading this statement from Hong Kong, I cannot help but to ask to what extent the city's 'local cultural imaginary' has been bound by colonial identifications on the one hand and the nation-state on the other. Are we to assume that bedfellows

such as the Hong Kong elite bureaucrats (who wear white and Chinese-national masks simultaneously), the British colonialists, and the Chinese nationalists, built the only bed for the local common populace of Hong Kong to sleep in? Hasn't the local cultural production – its own quirky, imaginative ways to deal with matters of colonialism – been a vibrant sphere within which our political sensibilities are shaped by way of questioning, through serious or frivolous means, the sincerity, honesty, and integrity of our colonial and nationalist rulers?

Besides, where have the local progressives been in Hong Kong? What would it be like if the attention given to Hong Kong in *Trajectories* be lodged not in the section on 'Refiguring the Colonial' but in the other section of the book, 'Renegotiating movements'? Are there no social movements from Hong Kong to report on, social movements operating within the larger imperative of 'decolonization'? If Hong Kong is mounted onto the discourse of 'Inter-Asia cultural studies', how would the work on social movements in Hong Kong fit in, such as that on the local labour movement and industrial conflicts (e.g. Chiu, 1991), the feminist movement and the documentation of women's conditions and resistance in general (e.g. Salaff, 1981; C. E. Chan, 1995; Jaschok, 1995; Choi, 1997), the student's movement, the rural protest movement (e.g. Hayes, 1983; Chiu and Hung, 1997), the voices struggling for human rights (from the works of Ghai in legal studies, to grassroots works of Man's)? How do we account for, and honour, the visible and critical voices of so many local Chinese progressive intellectuals involved in vigilant critiques over the radio, in newspaper columns, and in artistic presentations (such as efforts by Kwok-leung Ho, Foon Leung, Ping-kwan Leung, Tim-ming Lee, Tai-lok Lui, Kit-wai Ma, Kuo-ming Ma, Man-hung Sze, to name only a few)?¹¹ All I am suggesting is the multiplicity in the local progressive circle, who, with obviously diverse political views and alliances, are clearly offering many more local scripts of resistance than acknowledged in, and implicitly omitted by, *Trajectories*.

I raise these questions not because the problem of colonial imagination and practices should be downplayed in the discussion of Hong Kong – Hong Kong is far from achieving the goal of decolonization (who isn't?). I do so because I worry about the emergence, or re-emergence, of a consensual view, even in critical cultural studies, that pre-empts multiple histories and progressive practices from being recognized in Hong Kong. More specifically, I worry that in constructing Hong Kong's 'failure' with regard to the 'decolonization question', we slip too easily into a consensual reductivism that casts the city as a degenerate society of hyper-commercialism, that is, a city without culture (once again). No doubt this has been a chauvinistic consensual view emanating from the defenders of Culture in the mainland (Chow, 1998a; and see Chew's essay in this volume). If my metaphor of 'fugitive' is useful here, then I suggest that we must not confine the city's history and culture to the colonial frame, assuming its full captivity. Abbas (1997b) is right by arguing that underneath the 'hysterical symptoms' seen in contemporary life in Hong Kong lies a more elusive history that is slipping away

from the public and the consensual. This 'other history' may be tacit, but I do not think it is overly elusive. The 'fugitive' leaves his/her traces.

A mapping of cultural studies in Hong Kong

A history of the emergence and development of cultural studies in Hong Kong has yet to be written.¹² It is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide this history. Instead, I only want to point to a few traces on the road, as it were, suggesting construction ahead.

Under the colonial framework, intellectual debates over the formation of local culture and history, the questions of cultural identity, representation, media practices, and the like, was strongly underpinned by sociological, anthropological and educational concerns. In the 1980s, cultural studies in universities emerged in the form of a social practice in Hong Kong, linked on the one hand to the examination of social welfare, poverty, consumption, the urban/rural divide, domestic life, distribution and allocation of social and cultural resources, and so on, and on the other hand to the attempt to think through educational issues clustering around the promises and pitfalls of various curricular formations and their ideologies (e.g. a Chinese-based curriculum, an English 'colonial'-based curriculum, or the complex 'hybrid' curriculum). In Sze's words, it is a collective 'social desire' that fuels our concern for cultural politics, for the welfare of the Hong Kong people, and for a general (non-populist) measurement of our culture's strengths and weaknesses (Interview with Sze, 1999). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a great deal of attention was devoted to the 'legitimation' of local culture and identity, including local commercial popular culture (see Matthew Chew's essay in this volume). Cultural studies in Hong Kong was therefore sensitized to a certain politics of measurement of our culture's 'worth'. According to Chew, this sensitivity for cultural worth may be a unique 'postcolonial' condition, insofar as it is constantly mediated by several visible cultural and political problems, including that of 'nativist essentialism', 'regional cultural imperialism', 'complicity with the economic or political status quo', and 'reinforcing cultural imperialism of the west'. I alluded to this earlier by asking how our local cultural studies would be 'appraised' against, say, China Studies? Indeed, as local academics struggle to legitimize cultural studies projects and curricula, they faced challenge, hostility, and ostracization from traditional disciplines and elite cultural formations, a situation not unlike cultural studies in other countries and locales.

In the early 1990s, the attempt to define a boundary for cultural studies led to two distinct disciplinary formations. First, cultural studies 'migrated' to Comparative Literature departments in order to find a supportive home for interdisciplinary works. Politically speaking, this home also enabled innovative approaches to a colonial-based educational regime; for instance, its comparative nature allowed students to challenge the politics of English literature studies and

studies of western philosophical models in Hong Kong. Second, as the banner of cultural studies was becoming more and more visible in Hong Kong, it received recognition as a pursuit of a humanities-based liberal education, and was thus seen to be adaptable to General Education. Meanwhile, cultural studies research and courses continued to appear in Sociology, Anthropology, Communication, Art, Design Studies, and Education.

Local practices of cultural studies in Hong Kong have also been marked by the transfer of cultural theories (and theorists) from the west. The rigorous contextualization of works by well-known theorists and critics from the west had continuously appeared in seminars, in international conferences, and in publications. For instance, Stephen Ching-kiu Chan presided over the publication of the 'Hong Kong Cultural Studies' series, comprising seven volumes published by Oxford University Press (Hong Kong) between 1994 and 1998, and the journal *Hong Kong Cultural Studies Bulletin* (also published within the same period). With grant money, he also organized four international conferences during the same period, to a certain degree making cross-fertilization possible between local and foreign scholars.¹³ Today, cultural studies conference and seminar activities abound in Hong Kong, variously hosted by nearly all major universities in the territory.¹⁴ Most recently, a new collective known as the Hong Kong Institute for Cultural Criticism has been formed to coordinate and cultivate cultural studies research and alliances throughout all of the major universities in Hong Kong.¹⁵

The quest for a base for cultural studies training, for a fertilization of cross-disciplinary teaching and research, and for a longer-term development and expansion of the field, has led to the establishment of the first Honours degree programme in Cultural Studies, which was implemented in Fall 1999 at Lingnan University.¹⁶ According to the Head of the Department of Cultural Studies at Lingnan, Stephen Ching-Kiu Chan, the degree programme is uniquely tailored to the need for producing an intellectual – and dissenting – class sensitive to cultural and political matters in Hong Kong, China, and the world (Interview with Chan, 1999). In a city with a strong commercial and entrepreneurial pulse, it was surprising that over 3000 students applied to the programme in its first year. Accepting only 25 students in its first year of operation, the program emphasizes 'transdisciplinary' work involving the development of socio-political analysis, literary and aesthetic sensitivity, as well as historical consciousness (Programme Document, 1999: 7). An important catalyst for the formation of this unique programme in Hong Kong was the social and economic instability experienced in post-handover times, since the new political configuration, the Asian economic crisis, and the public's dissatisfaction with the first postcolonial administrative government of Mr Tung Chee-Hwa, opened up the space for critical inquiry (dissent?) leading to new educational reform (Interview with Chan, 1999).

The proliferation of cultural studies in Hong Kong, which has taken to the materialization of programmes, conferences, and publications, recalls a certain co-optational tendency in American higher education by which the politics of

'culture' and of cultural studies are potentially systematically neutralized. Readings (1996) has articulated this tendency:

The idea of cultural studies arises at the point when the notion of culture ceases to mean anything vital for the university as a whole. The human sciences can do what they like with culture, can do cultural studies, because culture no longer matters as an Idea for the institution.

(Readings, 1996: 466–7)

In Hong Kong, cultural studies seems to be developing under a similar condition, namely that cultural studies is 'no longer being developed on the groundwork of Culture, but (is) led to dwindle under the banner of excellence' invented by the 'unrestricted power of the bureaucracy' (Chan, unpub.: 13). Building on Readings's conviction that 'cultural studies. . . does not propose culture as a regulative ideal for research and teaching so much as recognize the inability of culture to function as such an "idea" any longer' (Readings, 1996: 487), Chan suggests that in Hong Kong, as in other places exhibiting similar symptoms of university bureaucracy, cultural studies ought to be less an investment than a re-investment. In many ways, the path of development of cultural studies in a non-western locale, with a strong cultural tri-focalization (colonial culture, global culture, and national culture), inevitably necessitates a continuous re-investment – in fact, re-articulation – of our own context.

But in an institutional environment of highly competitive, and often highly bureaucratized, access to resources, in a relatively small network of progressive intellectuals, and in a city that thrives on division and distraction, practitioners of cultural studies in Hong Kong still face the challenge of fragmentation. In my view, the 'success' of cultural studies in Hong Kong thus far (if 'success' is an acceptable measurement of existence) ought to carry on with a sustainable sense of community and belonging. The advantage of opening up more spaces for collaboration *without sacrificing diversity of interests* is that cultural studies in Hong Kong will be more prepared to face increasing challenges to its legitimation as it becomes a more and more visible mainstay in academic corridors. Moreover, a collective front reduces the problem of curricular or programmatic duplications in a small territory. Facing 'external' factors, a collective front can also more effectively address the politics of international knowledge formations as well as the politics of 'Asianization' in cultural studies. Intellectual partnership with critical collectives in Taiwan and China demands a more cohesive and collaborative progressive force in Hong Kong than we have seen. A collective front need not mean homogenization; but it would mean the formation of critical alliances capable of forming an 'alternative community' of hope and dissent, albeit a community made in a slippery time and place.

Traces of ‘liminal postcoloniality’ in Hong Kong: the essays in this volume

I shall remember your multiple nudities/when you become fully drest.
(Ho, 1997: 65)¹⁷

Broadly speaking, the essays in this volume represent various entry points into the social and cultural milieu of Hong Kong around the period of the handover. They are mostly situated at the cusp of the reunification, raising provocative questions in a period signaled by time/space recoding (see essays by Chan, O’Donnell, and Yau), various forms of cultural realignment (see essays by Chew, Li, Lo, and Ma), and bewilderment in the redefinition of history and identity in decolonizing Hong Kong (see essays by Cheung and Fung). Readers will come across two fairly distinct approaches among the essays. Some of the essays employ a mix of social scientific and interpretive methods, often entailing working with empirical data that are read for their broader cultural meanings. The other essays prefer to be more speculative and evocative in order to destabilize ‘empirical Hong Kong’ into a more dynamic field.¹⁸

I support Ma’s coinage of the term ‘satellite modernity’ in his essay ‘Consuming satellite modernities’ for a better designation of our conditions of liminal postcoloniality than my metaphors of slippery and fugitive culture. In his essay, Ma looks at the consumption practices of those who literally move and flow across borders – the immigrant class from southern China to Hong Kong from the 1970s to 1990s – in order to perform what he calls a ‘middle range’ theorization of interacting modernities. Hong Kong as a site of interface between ‘high modernity’ of the affluent west and ‘developing modernities’ of many Asian countries: this is an energetic notion realistic enough to say something about the city’s history and neoliberal capitalist culture, and imaginative enough to ascertain the complex notions of ‘hybridity’ (Chan, 1997), ‘disappearance’ (Abbas, 1997a), and ‘flexible citizenship’ of the transnational Chinese middle-class (Ong, 1999). Employing ethnographic methods, Ma reads the border crossing experiences of his informants over details of their consumption rituals and emotive associations. Significant in his study is his delineation of power relations that structure these immigrants’ experience of ‘adjusting’ to various stressful and disciplinary aspects of Hong Kong’s ‘relayed modernity’. His is a study of immigrant consumption experience and identity-formation, as well as a broader, empirically-based theorization of the discursive ‘magnetic’ pull of Hong Kong capitalism, which is destined to absorb, re-code, and relay western and mainland Chinese consumption ideals.

A number of authors in this collection concern themselves with the general condition of reading Hong Kong as a ‘nodal point’, which is to say they are concerned with mapping the real and imaginary coordinates that produce ‘Hong Kong’. Whereas Ma focuses on consumption as a social practice revealing

complex interplay of Hong Kong, western, and mainland cultural hierarchies, O'Donnell, in 'Becoming Hong Kong, raising Baoan, preserving Xin'an: an ethnographic account of urbanization in the Shenzhen special economic zone', offers a fascinating look at the Hong Kong/China interface from "the other side," as it were. O'Donnell carefully delineates what she calls the 'spatial imaginary' that sutures together Hong Kong and its immediate mainland neighbour, the city of Shenzhen (which has been designated in the Deng years as a 'Special economic zone' within Chinese territory). Here, 'Hong Kong' is read through the history of economic and cultural development of post-Mao, reform era Shenzhen; the two are locked together in an interesting Derridean gestalt (one needs the other for definition and basis for mutation). There is even a name for it among the locals: Shen Kong. Based on anthropological fieldwork in Shenzhen, O'Donnell works through municipal records, village reports, and economic indicators, interviews Shenzhen residents (including local officials), and examines policy changes within the city's built environment. She argues that the spatial flow of multi-national capital and transnational families between Hong Kong and Shenzhen leads to a temporal realignment, which is needed to: (1) legitimate the penetration of Hong Kong capital into Shenzhen; and (2) produce a palpable imagination of Shenzhen as 'more Hong Kong than Hong Kong'. Looking from Shenzhen, she writes, 'I posit that urban planning and historic preservation partially manage the Shenzhen desire for Hong Kong by splitting the object of this desire into two distinct temporalities. In addition to continuing the project of modernization as urbanization, Shenzhen urban planning figures Hong Kong as (Shenzhen's) future, while historic preservation domesticates Hong Kong as (Shenzhen's) past.' Yet power differentials are not obliterated in this splitting: 'Crudely put, the permeability of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen border facilitates capital mobility, while the relative impermeability of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong border regulates and disciplines labour.' Like Ma's essay, O'Donnell's piece offers a dynamic theoretical model for considering the material processes that both mark and distort 'Hong Kong' along vectors of power.

In the 1990s, especially near the handover, this 'distortion' took a fairly visible shape, when seen through the increasing migration of Hong Kong film talents to Hollywood. But 'going Hollywood' has not been an innocent movement, for according to Lo in his 'Double negations: Hong Kong cultural identity in Hollywood's transnational representations', it procures a 'transnational Hong Kong' that doubly negates its own sense of identity. Lo reads the transplantation of such famous figures as Jackie Chan, John Woo, Michelle Yeoh, Chow Yun Fat and Sammo Hung to Hollywood as neither an indication of the trite thesis of western cultural imperialism nor a romanticized nativist cheer that they have 'made it'. Like Ma and O'Donnell, Lo treats transnationalism as an active and strange process of recoding Hong Kong identity. Focusing on a careful reading of Jackie Chan's Hollywood career, Lo proposes a useful framework for seeing how 'Chineseness' is twice negated, first because Chan and other migrating Hong

Kong film talents carry with them only a simulated Chineseness distinct from mainland identity (even as they are typically asked to play mainland Chinese in Hollywood productions), and second because Hollywood's racial gaze recoded these Hong Kongers only according to another simulation, that of Chinatown-style crudely stereotyped Chineseness. Simulation stacking upon simulation, this transplantation practice raises serious questions about what makes a Hong Kong identity. The mobility of film directors and actors are but a symptom of a much broader and deeper scope of movement among the populace of Hong Kong during the transitional years. The notations of 'double negation', 'spatio-temporal displacements', and 'satellite modernity' help us see Hong Kong more clearly, but only when we learn how not to see it with a direct or literal gaze.

Learning to see indirectly was indeed a political necessity for a decolonizing Hong Kong. In cultural terms, it was a (textual) strategy to manage our imagination for our past, present, and future. What can Hong Kong cinema, that most ubiquitous and internationally recognized (if over-recognized) cultural form, help us to see? One of the most interesting aspects about this 'successful' industry in Hong Kong has been its ability to provide 'records' of the nature of and change in Hong Kong society without being documentarian. Our films are often unorthodox social investments; they are incredibly creative in responding to changes in our history, politics, and social attitudes. But they are frequently a mediated social realism at best, through employing various textual strategies such as irony, clichés, chopsocky actions, exaggerated melancholia, (senseless) humour, and magical realism. And then there are the fantasmatic genres of *wuxia* (swordplay) and kung fu films set in distant dynastic (i.e. pre-modern) worlds, genres that similarly work to 'record' social reality only by evoking it. Put in another way, these are genres that deposit only registers of the real.

Employing the notion of the 'filmic imaginary', Stephen Ching-Kiu Chan, in 'Figures of hope and the filmic imaginary of *jianghu* in contemporary Hong Kong cinema', wrestles with how Hong Kong films in the transitional period (1984–1997) evoked a chaotic Hong Kong. He identifies significant works in the period that are textually rich with suggestive images and narratives representing our own political and affective struggles over an unknown future. Chan posits the central concern of the films – and of our social collectivity – as that of 'hope'. In his essay, hope is both a textual site of struggle (for a context with a 'livable future') as well as a social condition of possibility (for change, critical evaluation, management of disillusionment, and honest soul-searching). At the cusp of Hong Kong's entrance into the formless world of 'postcoloniality', this filmic imaginary offers useful perturbation of such categories as 'home', 'the world out there', 'legitimation', 'the invincible East', 'the evil West', 'love-hate relationships', 'justice', 'comradeship', 'risk', and of course, 'hope' and 'disappointment'. (In fact, many of these categories are personified in numerous enigmatic characters in the *jianghu* movies). Chan first unpacks the features and mis-en-scène of the *wuxia* genre. He then carefully delineates the allegorical significance of the

categories listed above. Leading us into the filmic world of *jianghu*, Chan shows us where the contorted registers for the 'other world' (Hong Kong) lies. I read his essay as a declaration of dissent against any official discourse of 'success' (ill-) promised for Hong Kong by both the departing colonialists, the coming nationalists, and the circling globalists.¹⁹ As such, the essay provocatively invites us to consider an important theoretical question for a 'postcolonial cultural studies' in Hong Kong: how to identify, if not produce, a shared secular idealism that pulsates critique and hope at the same time in order to better manage our cultural and political survival?

Like *wuxia pian* (swordplay films), kung fu films are often allegories of Hong Kong (and Chinese) history and society. But unlike swordplay, kung fu designates the (muscular male) body – *wugong* as hand-to-hand martial art combat – as the instrument of violence, masochism, self-defense, vengeance, and justice all at once. In 'Kung Fu: negotiating nationalism and modernity', Li revisits Hong Kong kung fu cinema and traces what he terms its 'self-negating operation'. By that he means the representation in the kung fu cinema of an 'impure Chinese-ness' embodied in a hybrid city (a point made slightly differently in Yau's essay in this volume). Here, Li's essay dovetails with Lo's: both of them unfix Hong Kong identity, yet whereas Lo traces the continuing negation of this identity in transnational Hollywood productions involving Hong Kong film talents, Li links this unstable Hong Kong identity to the (internal) implosion of national Chinese identity. Both authors suggest that in order to understand Hong Kong identity, we need to carefully outline the way it is interlocked with its own otherness – both an otherness developed through coming in contact with foreign cultures (e.g. Hollywood) and one emerging from Hong Kong's quest for an authentic Chineseness.

Li's concern is with those kung fu films that were made locally in Hong Kong and that exhibited national Chinese martial art choreography. The 'national', Li suggests, is fairly clearly represented through the films' near 'universal' historical backdrop set in the national past – the Qing dynasty to the Republic era of the early 1900s – which helps to outline the imaginary space for a 'defensive' nationalism (specifically against the bullying forces from Japanese imperialism and western colonialism). The iconography of this liminal historical era takes the abandonment of swords (the iconic instrument in *wuxia* films) and the advancement of guns and firearms, thus leaving empty-hand combat to its own (post-national?) defense. Besides the nation/foreign split, the myth of kung fu rests on the ancient/modern, fantasy/realism, mimetic/anti-mimetic, masculine/feminine dichotomies as well. Little wonder that under these conditions, 'kung fu fighting' conjures up highly conflictual imaginations (and also why it is so spectacular!). Li goes on to unpack the self-dismantling Chineseness he identifies in two major kung fu filmic legacies: that of Bruce Lee (the 'transcendental signifier of Chinese kung fu') and Wong Fei Hung (who was reinvented in the 1990s by Tsui Hark to deal with the post-Tiananmen and postcolonial crises in Hong

Kong). Li's focus on these important figures helps us to recall and reconstitute the shifting ground in, and cultural heterogeneity of, Hong Kong. A self-dismantling imaginary is not an argument about a failure of identity, I surmise from Li's essay, but a necessary, compressed task for critical rebirth.

If 'Hong Kong' is a theoretical object (and a subject of theorization), and if it is an historically shifting signifier striving toward its rebirth, then sooner or later we would have to work through the question of 'resistance' necessary for this rebirth. And like the multi-layered culture itself, resistance in Hong Kong is a condition and strategy that also passes through various forms of imagination as part of its very process of materialization. 'Reading otherwise' is one form of resistive imagination, whereas 'reading against the grain' is another. In addition, measuring dissent in the form of people's own identification of such label as 'Hong Kongers' against that of 'Chinese Hong Kong', that not-so-subtle symbolic gauge of selfhood, is still a third way.

The strategy of 'reading otherwise' does not presume the object's marginalization. In fact, when a person, city, or culture is outright discriminated against or marginalized, we would not need to 'read otherwise' to discover that! In contrast, through 'reading otherwise', marginalization is evoked out of the unspoken recesses of a dominant system. In the late 1990s, over the tumultuous struggle with the colonial-national-global complex, it was still hard to imagine a 'marginalized' Hong Kong. By the global capitalist order? Unlikely. By Chinese nationalism? Depends on whom you talk to.²⁰ By our own internal contradictions and complacencies? When we find ourselves in the state of fatigue. However, this dominant system known as Hong Kong is peopled by neglected lives, silenced stories, and distorted truths. The onset of postcoloniality suddenly illuminates our unstable identity from without, and at the same time, cast a spotlight on where weakness exists in our culture, the marginalization from within. Hong Kong's filmic world, especially in the hands of a few young 'alternative' filmmakers such as Kar-Wai Wong and Fruit Chan, has in recent years been an instrument for casting that spotlight. Still, lodged in the larger imagination of resistance, their films only show marginalization by suggestive evocations.

In Yau's provocative essay, 'Cinema 3: towards a "minor Hong Kong cinema",' he coins the phrase 'minor Hong Kong cinema' to designate an alternative strategy for dealing with change. 'Considering the fact that this minor cinema cannot represent Hong Kong cinema, it also highlights the potentialities of Hong Kong cinema that cannot be covered by dominant discourses,' argues Yau. Taking the hint from Deleuze's two-part cinema project, Yau attempts to locate a 'modern' Hong Kong cinema by way of its metamorphoses in order to urge its own 'becoming', which is to say to urge its utterances of resistance during the transition/trauma. In Yau's contemplation of Fruit Chan's trilogy of films on '1997', he focuses on the elusive spurs of imagery that turn out to be imprints of the neglected, the silenced, and the distorted (which Yau calls 'the failed, the vanished, and the under-represented'). This mode of reading otherwise, Yau

continues, is demanded by the films of Fruit Chan, since he literally makes films about Hong Kong from leftovers, as it were.²¹

The theoretical project here points to a new 'minor' possibility for making films about Hong Kong at all after '1997': a minor possibility that dwells precisely on the dominant system – the surface – in order to re-work the (traumatized) relation between the dominant and the under-represented. Let me then be parasitic upon Yau's assertion: 'Considering the fact that this minor possibility cannot represent democracy, it also highlights the potentialities of democracy that cannot be covered by dominant discourses.'

As for 'reading against the grain', the search for democracy takes Cheung not to film, but to the historical and fictional writings about Hong Kong. In 'The hi/stories of Hong Kong', Cheung sets out to re-read the narratives of unity, progress, completeness, and transcendence in the dominant colonialist historical imagination provided by British historians (e.g. Birch, Cameron, Welsh). One of the underlying principles about 'reading against the grain' is to identify points of tension, pressure points in the text, as it were, where the illusion of unity and continuity is hard to cover up. What is interesting about Cheung's essay is that rather than reading tensions in individual historical writings, she juxtaposes those Crown historical writings (which she calls 'the epics') with two other types of historical works – the micro-historical and the allegorical – so as to locate and expose the strains. In this way, any grand narrative will be doubly dismantled: first by the urge of dissection, and then by the demand of bricolage. Behind Cheung's concern for opening up the historical field for Hong Kong in order to challenge the basis for 'colonial modernity', lies a divisiveness in disciplinary thinking. By dissecting those three genres of historical writings in Hong Kong, Cheung exposes the disciplinary thrusts that partition the historical field: the epic genre glorifies Economics, the micro-histories support Anthropology, and the allegorical genre validates Literary Studies. Dissatisfied with these divisions, Cheung creatively re-weaves those historical genres around varying recurrent themes spanning them (such as the 'natal trope' of Hong Kong's 'biography', visual representations of the city, the theme of the rural Hong Kong, and the 'tragedies' of 'the ordinary'). In the end, behind the urge for rethinking Hong Kong historiography at the juncture of decolonization lies a critical task of returning history and identity to the 'local'.

Fung's essay, 'What makes the local? A brief consideration of the rejuvenation of Hong Kong identity', adds to this critical endeavour. Fung proposes that a different way to interpret the change of history is not to let us be bogged down by the weightiness of hermeneutics. Self-conscious of his own location in the institutional context of the Hong Kong academe within which knowledge is often produced (and valorized) through social scientific methods entailing the generation and processing of empirical data, Fung takes this hegemonic condition and makes something useful of it. In asking how the local Hong Kong people imagine themselves as they move through the fateful years before and right after the

handover, Fung proposes a utilization of empirical survey data and social scientific instruments to obtain a kind of non-empiricist 'baseline' understanding of the local's changing self-definition of their identities. He plots their rise, fall, and convolution of identification with the labels 'Hong Kong people' and 'Chinese', as well as with the various national icons that saturate the media environment around the handover. His multi-year empirical study (1996–1998), he argues, is a viable measurement of the locals' struggle that is of use to cultural studies. Fung effects a different cut into cultural politics, yet like many of the other essays in this volume, his essay shares the same intellectual concern about the danger of an annihilation of 'the local' in the re-nationalization process.

Last but not least, Chew's essay, 'An alternative metacritique of postcolonial cultural studies from a cultural sociological perspective', elaborates the institutional and discursive conditions under which the study of popular culture in Hong Kong flourishes. Chew uses the term 'postcolonial' liberally, adhering to global asymmetry of power as an overwhelming historical grid within which the cultural predicament of Hong Kong is marked out. For Chew, Hong Kong as a postcolonial cultural field both predates 1997 and widens after it. Using Bourdieu's structural cultural sociology, Chew surveys the political-discursive pressures that impinge upon the local progressives' articulation of 'the popular'. Chew's analysis is multileveled, usefully moving in and out of various overlapping cultural fields (such as elite Chinese national culture, dominant global western cultural influence, and modern post-Mao Chinese culture) in order to demarcate the boundary of popular culture studies in Hong Kong. For those of us who believe in what Chew calls a 'legitimative project' in our study of local Hong Kong film, comic books, cantopop music, and so on, his essay offers a kind of refractive prism through which 'the popular' passes. Put differently, it is not a simple straightforward legitimative project. Even hybridity is suspect, according to Chew, since the postcolonial condition already prefaces uneven mixing of cultural currents.

Final remarks

Since I began working on this special issue in late 1999, six major events have significantly marked a chaotic Hong Kong SAR: the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Establishment of the PRC (National Celebration Day on 5 October 1999); the Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa's two most recent policy addresses (delivered on 6 October 1999 and 11 October 2000); the announcement on 3 December 1999 of plans to build Disneyland in Hong Kong; the imminent success of the PRC to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) (announced in Beijing on 16 November 1999); and the Robert Chung affair (summer 2000). There have of course been other important events during this transitional period. A focus on these selective events, however, will give us a sense about how symptomatic

events like these feed off each other, offering no clear mooring of how Hong Kong will move in the flux of political and global economic tidal waves.

In what ways are we having a national identity, and acting as if we had one during the grand show of patriotism on National Celebration Day? Who were the rejoicing class amongst us in Hong Kong? How was Hong Kong as an 'administrative specialty' represented in the national parade on Tiananmen Square on that day? And how was China as 'nation-home' in turn represented in local celebration programs in Hong Kong? The satellite-linked events of the day between the center and its specialty suggest that patriotism, on the one hand, can be criticized for its nationalistic and homogenizing presumptions, even as it was practiced, on the other hand, as an honest soul-searching quest for identity. But just as the question of national identity was being mulled over in Hong Kong, the expectation of China's entrance into the WTO was already producing new ambivalences here: who will it benefit, within the context of what Abbas calls 'a decentered network of global cities' besides Hong Kong (see his essay in this issue)? what will happen to Hong Kong's freeport privileges as China now vault toward modern economic globalization? how will expected discrepancies in cultural policy between 'cosmopolitan Hong Kong' and 'globalizing China' be shaped, and with what consequences? Quite clearly, for Hong Kong, re-nationalization has so far been a bittersweet pill to swallow. Yet the precariousness of sinocization is mirrored in the equally unsteady project of keeping Hong Kong a cosmopolitan, outward-looking, civil global city. During the same time caught in a hesitant pull toward re-nationalization, both Tung's recent policy addresses and the government's plan to build Disneyland in Hong Kong attempted to project a renewed globality for Hong Kong, but in uneasy terms. For instance, how do we cope with blatant contradictions between a discourse of environmental sustainability made grandiose in Tung's 1999 policy address on the one hand, and a discourse of world-class tourism made ostentatious in the government's plan to build Disneyland, a plan with considerable environmental costs? And how will Tung's desire in that policy address to build a world-class educated professional Chinese workforce who are 'bi-literate, tri-lingual, and IT-literate' square with the rise of a low-paying lumpen labour class anticipated to staff tourist-oriented ventures (such as Disneyland)? Is a vision of cosmopolitan modernity too grand, and too culturally cross-eyed, for a depressed Hong Kong economy? How will the projected economic and cultural benefits of these environmental, educational, tourism, and other 'reform' efforts be measured in the short term, in the mid-range future, and in the long run? These burdens would of course become points of reassessment and practical adjustments by a politically embattled Tung in his 2000 Policy Address.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong's half-baked enthusiasm for 'freedom' was shaken by a testy, 'ticklish' subject: that of 'academic freedom'. What the Chung affair in the summer of 2000²² revealed to us – a strange yet familiar kind of revelation – was a case of two overlapping truths that, given the right mix of skewed

international cosmopolitanism and local tabloid urges, are capable of rocking the town. On the one hand, dirty little secrets of hierarchical control exist in a still conservative society, especially among elites. On the other hand, such secrets are in fact part of the socialization process for those involved, forming what Ying Chan has famously dubbed a ‘culture of subservience’. Covered secrets met open secrets, lending not only a helpless embarrassment to the professional institution and professionals concerned, but also a broader sign of social fatigue toward those who have (and abuse) power during unstable times.

Aside from this brief sketch of recent events, the problems of unemployment, slow recovery of consumer confidence, stagnant stock and property markets, tabloidization of journalism, continued struggle for local democratic and legal autonomy (witness the explosive ‘right of abode’ issue),²³ and new challenges to human rights in the mainland (e.g. crackdown of Fa Lun Gong; renewed hostility toward the question of Taiwan independence), continue to permeate a deep sense of ambivalence among us about Hong Kong’s political and cultural future.

The long-term effects of these recent events remain to be seen. Produced four years after the historic handover, this special issue is just now catching up with what can be considered a ‘pre-emergence’ at best. I hope it provides readers with a deeper understanding of a changing Hong Kong. Our current predicament of ‘becoming postcolonial’, where the construction of a new context is just beginning to emerge in fuzzy forms, ought to properly alienate our political expectations about Hong Kong and about China, and thus hopefully open up new forms of apperception for a different kind of ‘postcolonial politics’ and ‘post-colonial cultural studies’ at large.

Notes

- 1 I am borrowing from the title of a provocative book (in Chinese), *Hong Kong Un-imagined* (Wong *et al.*, 1997), in which a traditional imaginary about Hong Kong is challenged so as to help outline its future.
- 2 Hong Kong SAR’s first Chief Executive, Mr Tung Chee-hwa, and his administration, has over the past two years been the target of many Hong Kong people’s frustrations. Besides contestation by various political parties in the Legislative Council, grassroots organizations have arisen to protest against Tung’s administration for its lack of direction, its social and economic policies that further polarize class stratifications, and its ‘impractical’ demands for quick reforms in many social and labour sectors. Civil servants, teachers, students, labor activists, pro-democracy politicians, doctors, and even middle-class homeowners, have all staged separate street protests, deepening the schism between the people and the Tung leadership (and by implications between the people of Hong Kong and Beijing). See Mitchell (2000).
- 3 I use ‘re-nationalization’ in order not to forget that although Hong Kong was

politically cut off from China in 1842, and although many Chinese fled the cultural revolution and adopted a colony as their (temporary) home, different forms of Chinese ‘cultural hegemony’ continued to be instituted in Hong Kong, largely through family social networks. In other words, the notion of a communal imagination of “Hong Kong” was never completely isolated from Chinese nationalism. See Ip Iam-Chong (1998) for a discussion of how a sense of community was incited by nationalist discourses in the 1960s in Hong Kong. See also S. Chan (1995) for a discussion of how the 1997 crisis was in fact pre-figured by earlier local crises of identity in the labour movement of the 1920s and riots in late 1960s.

- 4 Over the 1970s, like many Chinese youth, I listened to Sam Hui’s working class Cantopop; watched Chan Po-chu and her ‘factory-girl’ tales about the working class Hong Kong; became mesmerized by the soap operas on TVB detailing the popular imagination about Hong Kong through folk, traditional, and modern capitalistic ethos; danced disco in mini-parties held in friends’ apartments and ball events; became a sideline fan for both the Wynners and the Beatles, Leslie Cheung and Donny Osmond, Chow Yun-Fat and John Travolta, Jackie Chan and Sylvester Stallone, so on and so forth. Not quite mainstream and never quite marginalized, I learned how to perform a mental and psychological ‘shuttling’ between being Chinese and being, well, ‘ethnic’. Since the late 1980s, besides moving around in the US for various academic and professional pursuits, I have also been coming back to Hong Kong and Asia on a regular basis. Most recently, since 1999, I have been working here.
- 5 See Chow (1998c) for a reflection on the handover and its aftermath.
- 6 For useful discussions about the intersection between cultural studies in Hong Kong and Chinese studies before and after the handover, see Wang (1998), Lee (1994) and Tang (1995). For an interesting contemplation on Hong Kong urban studies, especially having to do with the maddening rise of real estate value, see Turner (1995).
- 7 I understand anamorphosis as a particular kind of image, a drawing that presents a distorted image which appears in natural form under certain conditions, as when viewed at a raked angle or reflected from a curved mirror. Of course, this is a descriptive condition for an image and a psychoanalytic recognition of it at the same time.
- 8 In the Diaoyutai Islands movement of 1971, the British colonial police force violently suppressed civil disobedience from protesters, many of whom were students. At that time, the government tolerated police brutality. But in 1996, the protests took place in the era of the Bill of Rights, which covered freedom of assembly and speech.
- 9 The thesis of ‘northbound imaginary’, which has been employed to theorize the politics of Hong Kong cultural penetration into China, remains a critical aspect for understanding the territory’s past and future. See Chan (1997).
- 10 For a similar effort to dismantle the by-now infamous assertion of Hong Kong people’s ‘political apathy’ through a study of how the local literati-modernizers (mostly securely situated in social science departments in universities)

produced this discourse of political apathy in post-war Hong Kong, see Chiu's well-argued essay, 'Politics and the body social in colonial Hong Kong' (1997).

- 11 For a useful discussion of the continuous presence of the local progressives and their influence on social and policy debates, with a particular focus on the case of a progressive student magazine called *The Chinese Student Weekly*, see Ip (1998). In addition, for works on human rights discourse in Hong Kong, see special issue on this topic in *Hong Kong Cultural Studies Bulletin* (Man, 1997).
- 12 For earlier discussions of the emergence of cultural studies in Hong Kong written in the early 1990s, see H. M. Chan (1995) and Ng (1995).
- 13 Over the years, the conferences included presentations given by such international scholars as Allen Chun, Nulifer Gole, Wu Hung, Leo Lee, Benjamin Lee, Trinh Minh-ha, Meaghan Morris, Charles Taylor, and many more.
- 14 Specifically, various programmes have continued to host cultural studies conferences in Hong Kong, including the Comparative Literature department, the Centre for Asian Studies, and the newly formed Centre for the Study of Globalization and Cultures at the University of Hong Kong; the General Education Centre of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University; and the Centre for Cultural Studies of the University of Science and Technology of Hong Kong. At the time of this writing, the English department and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the City University of Hong Kong is planning an international conference, which is being convened by this author, entitled 'Hong Kong and beyond: East-West critical dialogues in Cultural Studies', for June 2001.
- 15 For information about the Institute and its planned activities, readers may contact this author (enerni@cityu.edu.hk).
- 16 The establishment of this degree programme in Cultural Studies in Lingnan University of course does not mean that cultural studies isn't being consolidated in other institutions in other formats.
- 17 From 'Extension II', a poem by Hong Kong poet Louise Ho (Ho, 1997: 65).
- 18 I believe these two approaches somewhat reflect the condition of working in cultural studies in Hong Kong, because either through partitioning or mixing theoretical and methodological approaches, authors need to confront the implications of a (hegemonic) social scientific tradition dating back to the 'scientific impulse' in the colonial regime of knowledge production and a (negotiated) interpretive tradition linked to the regime's 'artistic impulse'. However, it is beyond the scope of this introduction to elaborate on this plausible differentiation.
- 19 In decolonizing Hong Kong, 'success' has been coded in terms of 'One country, two systems', 'Unchanging in fifty years', and other largely economic formulations.
- 20 One of the most outspoken critics who has written about Hong Kong as marginalized by Chinese nationalism is Rey Chow. She even goes so far as to intimate a political victimage effected from Chinese writings by employing metaphors of a feminized Hong Kong (including the metaphor of 'rape') and

- an infantilized Hong Kong (using the analogy of an abandoned “bastard child”). See those references in Chow (1998a, 1998b).
- 21 Literally, Fruit Chan made his first film, *Made in Hong Kong* (1997), from the leftover film stock in a studio of another filmmaker he has worked for.
 - 22 In July 2000, a University of Hong Kong professor Robert Chung, who specializes in polling research (including research of the popularity of government officials), charged the Chief Executive Chee-Hwa Tung with trying to interfere with and stop his polls through an ‘unnamed third person’. Chung later named HKU’s Vice-Chancellor as the third person. Seeing the severe implications of this scandal over academic freedom, the HKU Council appointed an investigative panel and held hearings. The Council report, issued on 26 August 2000, indicated foul play on the part of the Vice-Chancellor and of one of Mr Tung’s close aids. On 6 September, both the Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of HKU resigned, but admitted no guilt. Hundreds of articles appeared in the newspapers to cover this scandal. The whole scandal broadened to Beijing, playing over to Beijing’s dissatisfaction over Hong Kong media’s alleged tendency to discredit SAR officials appointed by Beijing.
 - 23 In January 1999, two years after an explosive public and legal debate over the ‘right of abode’ issue concerning whether children born in China (by Hong Kong citizens) have the right to immigrate to Hong Kong, the Basic Law in Hong Kong, which was crafted explicitly under the ‘one country, two systems’ framework, came under severe stress. Chief Executive Mr Chee-Hwa Tung, legal professionals (from HKSAR and the PRC), legal scholars (pro-Beijing and pro-democracy), the popular media, the business community, and the general public were deeply divided about the social and economic implications of a possible 1.67 million population boom. For the first time since the PRC’s resumption of Hong Kong, the fragility of the Basic Law for securing ‘local’ governance was brought into focus. Article 48(3), which grants inherent power to the Chief Executive to seek ‘reinterpretation’ of Basic Law, and Article 158, which resides ‘final authority’ to interpret Basic Law in the hands of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (SCNPC), install a power to challenge, if not erode, local legal rulings and legal practices. In early December 1999, the SCNPC issued its stunning reversal of the local Court of Final Appeal in Hong Kong, and left thousands of mainland immigrants facing removal. A bloody riot and protest broke out on 3 December, involving more than 1000 protesters. For an insightful analysis of this troubling loss of autonomy, see Ghai (1999). In August 2000, some angry mainlanders bombed the reception area of the Immigration Department, leading to several deaths and an escalated social antagonism.

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