

City Complexity:
Images of Hong Kong Culture and Space in Movies

Abstract

Hong Kong is full of complexities in its culture and space, showing in the movies. The clear imageability allows it presents itself through city structures, landmarks, and architectural objects in the city, playing a vital role for people to recognize and be impressed. In addition to the spatial aspect, the cultural complexities undoubtedly affect the daily life of Hong Kong people and further reflect on the living space, meaning the city. The relationship between culture and space is intimate, creating vivid and dynamic images of the city.

As the city image changes rapidly today, the cinematic image provides a way to capture the dynamic and fluid cityscape. The “city complexity – cinematic image” discussion is significant in the thesis, emphasizing the relationship between the city and cinematic image and showing how the cinematic images picture Hong Kong’s complexities. To understand the images that Hong Kong presents, it introduces several movies and analyzes the images from them, from the 1990s, transitional Hong Kong to further projecting the future. The cinematic images give an observation of living in Hong Kong and frame a broad picture of Hong Kong city space and its culture, providing another way to research city space.

Keywords: Hong Kong, movie, image, space, culture, complexity

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Introduction

The complexity is the leading feature of the Hong Kong city space image, related to Hong Kong's historical background. Hong Kong is located in the southern part of China and was an overseas colony of the UK from 1841 to 1997. During this period, the British set up businesses and built up the port area of Hong Kong for trading with other Asian countries. The British helped Hong Kong established its economic base and built the city's infrastructures, bringing the economic boom after then in the 1970s. Until now, Hong Kong still has its economic advantages and becomes a globalized city. Due to Hong Kong's colonial history, the lifestyle, architectural style, and urban features in Hong Kong are influenced by Chinese and English cultures, creating complexity. Besides, the high and quick development in Hong Kong also causes complicated situations, such as the chaotic city images. This research aims to understand the complexity in transitional Hong Kong urban space from the 1990s to now through the lens of different movies and tries to project the future city development in Hong Kong. Why do the city analysis through film? Moreover, what are the differences between the methods through films and architectural drawings in city researching?

There is no doubt that movies are related to cities. As a mass media and popular entertainment, a movie creates a city's image and gives the audiences a different view and imagination. Simultaneously, the city feature also influences how the moviemakers see it, imagine it, and present it with the scenes. Thus, the research in cinema and city not only brings the cultural and spatial ideas but also gives the understanding of the city's atmosphere through the character's emotional expression. It provides a different observation through stories and images. However, the main argument is whether the analysis in movie images can provide a way of city space research? How the movie images illustrate the city? What kind of city situation inspires most of the movie? How to analyze the city culture and space through movie scenes?

The majority of the authors have already written in city and film, focusing on Hong Kong. It is the city that almost represents the Asian city's image in movies, no matter Western or Eastern. The complexity of Hong Kong city space in those movies is the main feature, bringing the scholars' interest in its culture, history, and the transited process. While Mennel broadly analyzes films in particular countries in chronological and geographical order, Braester and Tweedie focus

on East Asia and collect articles from several redefinitions of the concept "cinema" and the "city," relationship between visual image and urban space. On the contrary, Abbas and Louie focus on Hong Kong culture, discussing cinema and space and other cultural forms in their researches. Abbas brings the concept of "disappearance" and emphasizes the change and the new culture strategies related to Hong Kong's new cinema, writing, and new ways of understanding urban space in his book, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Louie believes in Hong Kong culture's dynamism and tries to redefine it through different articles from different writers, collecting into the book *Hong Kong Culture: Word and Image*.

Amounts of scholars and authors are involved in cinema and city research, and the examinations include broad and local aspects. However, these researches are mostly based on the authors' cinematic, cultural, or literary background, rarely through the spatial and city planner perspective. Cinema not only brings the cultural discussions but also provides other points of view from the traditional ways of architects and urban planners to see the city space through closely observed stories and lens. Thus, this essay provides a different way in city space research related to film, culture, image, and space.

With the main research question: What kind of city image does a movie create and represent the city's culture and space? Start from the action fiction movie, *Push* in 2009, which is from America, shows Hong Kong's iconic city image: density. Then, *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*, directed by Peter Chan, shows the globalization and complex culture in Hong Kong. In the movie *Chungking Express*, Wong Kar-Wai discusses the emotional complexity of living in Hong Kong with love stories, expressing the anxiety and uncertainty of the transitional regime period in Hong Kong in the 1990s. Additionally, the two versions of *Ghost in the Shell* are from 1995 and 2017, respectively, telling the story in the future 2040 and imagining that the city feature in Hong Kong will be the future city's development direction. By analyzing the story background and city scenes of Hong Kong in several films, we might understand the complexities and how the space transit from the 1990s to now and how it will be in the future.

With the title, "*Images*": the complexities of Hong Kong city space and culture, the first chapter will give the opening with the method and position of "image" research and have the general overview of Hong Kong history and the transited change in the city, explaining the reasons for complexity. The discussion in

chapter two, namely *Complexities in the cinematic image of Hong Kong*, will analyze the images from movies and bring the cultural and spatial aspect of Hong Kong. Besides, the implied emotional expression of the characters in those movies also gives a different perspective. Finally, as the conclusion, the raised issue of future city image brings the inspiration of future development direction and challenges in Hong Kong.

Chapter 1

"Images": the complexities of Hong Kong city space and culture

How important is the "image" of a city? The image of a city not only shows the physical objects, such as space and structure but also presents the atmosphere or the urban life in a city. An American urban planner, Kevin Lynch, demonstrates that

The definition of what might be called imageability; that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment. It might also be called legibility, or perhaps visibility in a heightened sense, where objects are not only able to be seen but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses."
(Lynch, 1960: 9)

Lynch mentioned five elements compositing city imageability: the path, districts, edge, node, and landmark. The visual experience in a city is a significant effect, enhancing the feelings about a city. The style, structure, height, shape, and color are used to create the unique position of architecture in the city for people to recognize. On a bigger scale, the city structure, green and blue area, or infrastructure are the imageability elements that gather into city images. For the visitors, the image is the impressions that implant into their mind, making the visual image into a mental image. The image also influences the residents' feelings and happiness of living in the city. Creating vivid images leads to a deep impression and memory of a city.

Hong Kong presents a complex "image" no matter its physical city spaces or in the different media, such as websites, magazines, or movies. When searching Hong Kong as a keyword on the internet, the showing images are almost picturing the modern and global city spaces with super high-rise towers. However, if you have ever been to Hong Kong, you know that there are many city spaces, districts, and streets with old tower buildings with advertisement boards and air-conditioner condenser units on their facades crowding together.

The local market in Hong Kong city shows active living and shopping experiences. There are different sizes and colors of advertisement boards writing in traditional Chinese and English words together. The canopies in the market are also various and extended to the street as more as possible. Hong Kong city space experience is dynamic and uncertain because of the crowded city space, messy city appearance, and continually changing cityscape. In other words, the Hong Kong city experience is full of surprise, making the complexity of it without simply telling. Since the "image" plays a vital role in city space experience, which is hard to express in a single image, further discussion in this chapter will provide a way to capture the dynamic complexities in Hong Kong city space and tell the reasons behind them.

1.1 Cinematic image and city: Hong Kong

The cinematic image is a continuous image form, which can sufficiently express the dynamic and fluid cityscape, embracing the city complexities. Unlike other image forms, the film is an image continuously gathering media, providing a point of view by interventional stories. For those which film related to cities, it reveals various aspects of a city, including visual cityscapes and mental expression of people in the city, leading the audiences to a period, no matter past, now, or future, allowing them to experience a city through the lens. "[Films] provide fantasies for those who recognize their city and those for whom the city is a faraway dream or nightmare." (Mennel, 2008)

The film has a close relationship with the city. Not only it projects the city in some ways, but it also has a vital role in presenting a city, which might be social, cultural, spatial, and even economic approaches. "The city has undeniably been shaped by the cinematic form, just as cinema owes much of its nature to the historical development of the city." (Clarke, 1997:2) It seems that the way we see the city is influenced by the cinema. How the movie makers see the city and how the directors picture the city result in how the audience imagines and understand the city. In the movie, the well-organized space, including the characters' living environment, the space of narrative setting, and the geographical relationship of the story sequences, shows a place in pieces but can be puzzled to understand the scene contexts. The film is seen as a mirror reflecting the natural world and transforming into a fictional narrative, telling people a more enclosed plot and simple issue than the real world. It provides a defined sample for seeing a city space and its culture.

On the contrary, the city situation also influences how the moviemakers use it in the scenes. The unique positions, special features, or the atmosphere in a city may inspire and attract the filmmakers to take the city as a scene. Some aspects of the city are translated into scenes, showing in the way according to the story need. "Cinema is a peculiarly spatial form of culture." (Shiel and Fitzmaurice, 2001:5) Undoubtedly, cinema is culturally and spatially related. The cinematic city creates the parallel space of an actual city and presents it in a new way with the movie's thoughts and demands, forming a film culture.

The city's role in the movies is not just as a story background, providing a story basis and viewpoint, but has a crucial impact on the story and the characters' characteristics. "Cities have, moreover, played an important role in many films not just as locations, but as protagonists [...]." (Paalman, 2011: 15) When the audience always focuses on the characters, the city shows itself in some ways. The film camera is an invisible stranger experiencing the city and collaging a continuous montage picture of the city, creating a way of seeing the city. The city's space and architecture cannot totally represent the city, but they have an essential role in presenting a city, which influences the atmosphere and people's feeling of living there. The intangible culture accounts for a large amount of city expression, shows the city's complexity, and brings the city's fame by spreading to the world through movies.

However, there is a debate that film is fictional and illusory, which means it is just a compiled story, bringing people to a parallel universe without connecting the reality. So, does the film study can be one of the city research methods? Do the movie images provide evidence of city development? Does the fictional cinematic city refer to the actual city situation? Undoubtedly, the film not totally connects to reality, but it somehow reflects it. Film study focuses on whether the film theory, the culture behind the scenes, and the emotional expression, which is in a more phenomenological way, while city research needs to be more specific and concrete. It is debatable, but film forms its frame and concern of an issue in a city, giving the pictures of a city and translating it into a cinematic city, meaning the city created by the movie. The cinematic city is a concise city form that shows with scenes and provides better city phenomenon and atmosphere expressions than historical city pictures, drawings, and maps. The vital difference between archived city research, such as architectural drawings and cinematic city

study, is time. The city research is studying the past experiences and events in a city, while cinematic city analysis can see to past and provide a future projection.

Cinematic Hong Kong has become a symbolic East Asian city in movies and provides a way to see different Hong Kong perspectives and even projects East Asia. The reason could be connected to its film industry. The discussion is in two parts; the Hong Kong-made and Hong Kong image-related films made from other cultures. The film industry in Hong Kong has a vital influence on how people see it and its culture. As the movie's well-known type, martial art cinema emerged out of Hong Kong in the 1970s and represented Hong Kong with famous stars, like Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee. Kung Fu movie also influences the "image" of East Asian people and creates a stereotype that Asian people are Kung Fu people. Although martial arts movie is not particularly city-related, it constitutes the foundation of its film industry. Toward the more city-related film, the New Wave film boomed in the early 1980s. It was a totally new Hong Kong genre in that period, bringing the revolution of the Asian film industry. The New Wave filmmakers, who are the generation born after the war, grew up without memories of China and mainly were educated abroad. The Western experience and perspective had a great impact on these filmmakers, resulting in more focus on the social issues and the culture. The New Wave movie examines Hong Kong culture and society in depth through scenes and scenarios.

For those which Hong Kong image-related films, which might be made by Hollywood or other culture's filmmakers, they used Hong Kong as the city scene when the story is not talking about Hong Kong. Why? Besides the critical role of its significant film industry, the city's complex image, which partly represents Chinese culture, is also a vital factor that attracts filmmakers. The unique and iconic city image shows with super high-rise tower gathering in density, the small units on the residential building façade, the messy cityscape with extension stuff on the building, and the mixed culture images. With the global and local city space intertwining in density, it gives the future city developed imagination for the filmmakers to illustrate Hong Kong as a high-tech city and a dilapidated city at the same time.

Cinematic Hong Kong presents the dynamic cityscape through various scenarios and provides a way to show the city's complexities. The movie's images can indicate the different times of a city, including past, now, and projecting future,

but can also express the atmosphere and the hidden emotion of living in the city. As the Hong Kong culture scholar Ackbar Abbas said,

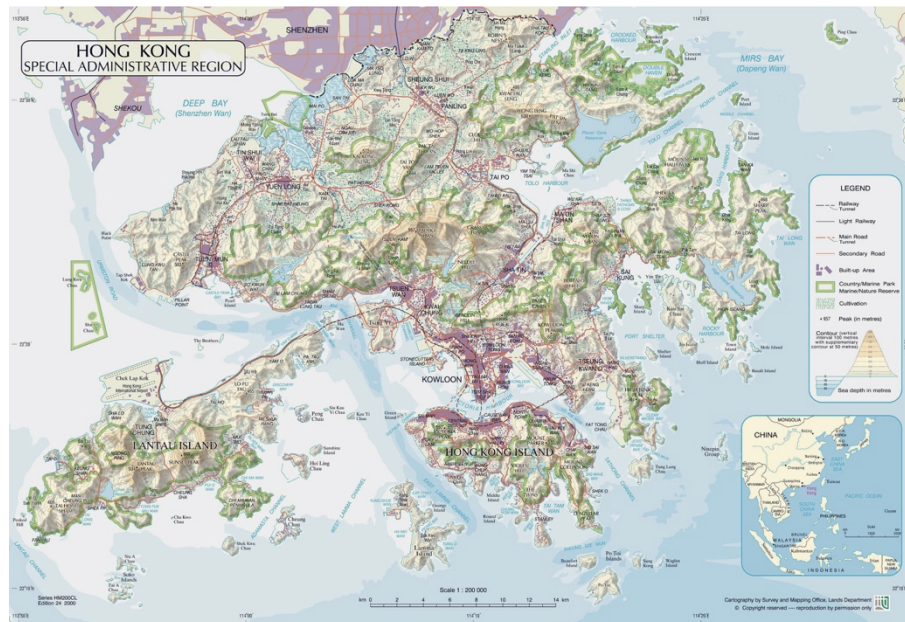
It becomes more varied and multifarious, oversaturated with signs and images, at the same time as it becomes more abstract and ungraspable. This brings us to the relation between disappearance and abstraction, to abstraction as the contemporary mode of disappearance. Consider as one aspect of this problem the status of the image. The more abstract space, the more important the image becomes (a point the Situationists also made), and the more dominant becomes the visual as a mode. (Abbas, 1997: 9)

The research in Hong Kong images attributes to the complicated situation and fluid cityscape in Hong Kong city space. Due to the various contexts of Hong Kong interweaving together, such as the colonial history background, the financial center status with global aspect, and the mixture of immigrant and race, the cinematic image gradually becomes a vital material in city researching, especially in such a complex city.

1.2 Hong Kong's complexities

The image of Hong Kong presents itself with complexities, which result from many different factors. The geographical location brings a great benefit to Hong Kong, creating its vital position in East Asia. Hong Kong is surrounded by the South China Sea on all sides except the north and sits in the center of Asian countries. The location gives the opportunities for trading, visiting, and transporting, making it easily connects to other Asian countries and global city network. The territory consists of Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon Peninsula, the New Territories, Lantau Island, and over 200 islands in a total 1111 km² land area. (Figure 1-2-1) The port, Victoria Harbor, is a deep-water seaport and one of the busiest ports in the world, dominated by trade in products and transport of passengers. Due to Hong Kong's geographical advantage, it becomes an Asian financial center and has a growing economic trend, leading to more space required and more modern high-rise towers built. Hong Kong urban development is concentrated on the Kowloon Peninsula, Hong Kong Island, and new towns. Although the territory is more significant than some developed cities in Asia, like Singapore, many lands are hills and mountains, remaining as country

parks and nature reserves. It means that developed land is limited, only 24.9 percent of it, restricting development to high density and mixture of residential and commercial spaces. With the third-largest number of high-rise buildings in the world, it creates vertical scape images with the skyscrapers, showing the modern city view. (Figure 1-2-2)



(Figure 1-2-1) The maps illustrate the geographical condition and the developed area in Hong Kong.
(<https://www.mapsland.com/asia/hong-kong/large-physical-map-of-hong-kong-with-roads-railroads-relief-and-parks>)



(Figure 1-2-2) The image shows the development in Hong Kong city space surrounding the coast in 2020.
(<https://hk.asiatatler.com/life/hong-kong-social-distancing-covid-19>)

Under the global images of Hong Kong, the cultural and spatial complexity in local city space results from its colonial history. In 1841, the Qing ceded Hong Kong Island to the British after the First Opium War. The colony expanded further by times until 1898 when the British obtained the New Territories. During the British colonial period, from 1841 to 1997, the British setup businesses and built up the port area of Hong Kong for trading. (Figure 1-2-3) Thus, Hong Kong became a vital entrepot from a farming and fishing village, serving the opium and textile trading between European countries and China. Due to the British built up Hong Kong, not only the architectural style but also the urban planning is influenced by the British. In the Preliminary Planning Report of Hong Kong, written by the British architect Sir Patrick Abercrombie (1879-1957) in 1948, there is complete planning and advice through architecture to infrastructure, suburbs to city, and economy to polity, picturing the future development in Hong Kong. Although Patrick's vision did not put into practice because of the land limitation and population density, the report's spatial impact is significant. The language impact of the British is distinctive, which embraces in its city space, such as road indicators and advertising boards on the building façade. Both Mandarin and English are official languages in Hong Kong, and during the colonial period, most of the government documents are even written in English. Globalization makes English more vital than Mandarin, influencing education, government, and society. Additionally, the important structures in the city are in the British style, comparing to the modern buildings. For instance, the Former Marine Police Headquarter, a colonial feature reflecting the Victorian architectural style, services the Hong Kong marine police from 1880 to 1996, except for the period during Second World War. (Figure 1-2-4) The different cultures gather in the city space and form a unique position and image of Hong Kong.



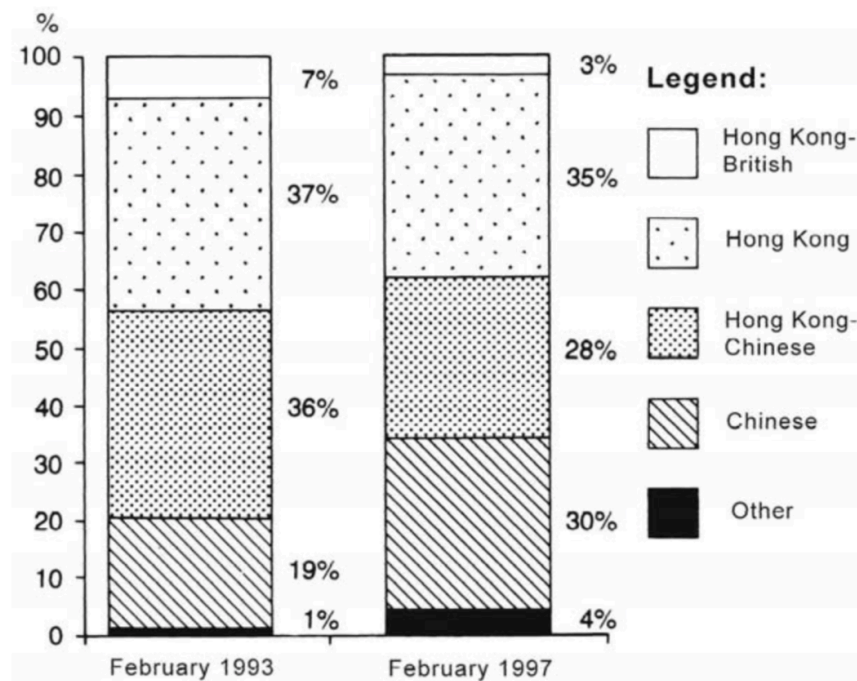
(Figure 1-2-3) The image shows the prosperous port area with British style architecture and many trading ships in 1930. (https://www.mardep.gov.hk/theme/port_hk/hk/gallery.html)



(Figure 1-2-4) The Former Marine Police Headquarter became an official heritage in 1994 and rebuilt in 2003. It is as the shopping center and hotel now, namely 1881 Heritage. (<https://zolimacitymag.com/hong-kong-colonial-heritage-1881-heritage-malling-of-history/>)

The composition of Hong Kong residents is in multiple racial and cultural backgrounds, being one reason for image complexities. After WWII, the population grows quickly and streams many migrations and refugees from China. With the rapidly increasing population, the colonial government began to improve the infrastructure and public services. The mansions and buildings established, making the city space denser. From the 1970s to the 1990s, the rise

of the “four Asian dragons,” including Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore, was manifested in their remarkable construction and economic boom. The prosperity in the Hong Kong economy provides more opportunities and attracts more people to immigrate there. As the composition of the Hong Kong population, the racial difference leads to identity complexity and cultural diversity. (Figure 1-2-5)



(Figure 1-2-5) The table illustrates the changing identity of Hong Kong's citizens from 1993 to 1997. It shows that many Chinese people immigrant to Hong Kong in the period of sovereignty transferring. (From the book, *Cities in Transition*, 2006, p70)

The ratifying of the Sino-British Joint Declaration between China and British in 1985 declared the sovereignty returning of Hong Kong in 1997 and evoked the Hong Kong people great anxiety and uncertainty in the transitional period. Due to the time length as a colony is almost a century, the British's impact is profound. The British not only brings prosperity to Hong Kong but also influences the citizens' living habit. When the sovereignty transferred to China, great concern streams in Hong Kong's minds, worrying about the economic recession in Hong Kong and the regressing of their living quality. In the post-colonial period, the citizen's identity definition causes an uncertain feeling, as well as the transitional identity of Hong Kong, which is related to its population composition and cultural diversity. It cannot be easily defined which part of Hong Kong belongs to the British and which part is from the Chinese. The

complex mixture is the feature of Hong Kong, no matter physically or emotionally, embodying in its culture and appearing in the city images.

However, what is Hong Kong's culture? Hong Kong has a complex culture which integrates with different time, a different identity, different regimes. Culture is the living style and is related to the cityscape. The language, the food, and the architecture are cultures that clearly show Hong Kong city image. Cantonese is the primary language spoken in Hong Kong, and English is also an official language used a lot there. The food provided in Hong Kong is diverse, mixing with Cantonese, Chinese, and European (primarily British) eating habits, and influences the "type" of architectural objects. Dai Pai Dong (Figure 1-2-6) is a type of open-air food stand in Hong Kong street, while dim sum restaurants and tea houses are in the buildings. The architectural style can divide into three main styles, Chinese, British, and modern architecture. Due to the land limitation in Hong Kong, the cityscape changes rapidly and mixing these types of architecture into Hong Kong street image.



(Figure 1-2-6) Dai pai dong is a typical street food stand that serviced in Hong Kong.

Culture is not a static form but dynamic, representing transiting and transforming, especially in Hong Kong, and bringing the more complex condition in the city. "culture in Hong Kong cannot just be related to "colonialism"; it must be related to this changed and changing space, this colonial space of disappearance, which in many respects does not resemble the old colonialisms at all." (Abbas, 1997:3) The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which claims the end of the

colonial period in Hong Kong, evokes the notice of the change. The change not only influences the psychological aspects of citizens but also the cityscape with rapid changes. The culture becomes intertwined, and the city space blurs without clear boundaries. The Hong Kong poet, Liang Bing Jun, had vividly described the local city image with the complexities:

The boundaries of Hong Kong's city space are blurred, overlapping, and permeating together. When wandering in these spaces, it is not easy to distinguish what is original and modern, what is Eastern and Western. The shop boards, the product signs, and the advertising symbols use a mixed type of text, which has mutual implications and involves different cultural contexts.¹

¹ Cites from the website (<https://movie.douban.com/review/10086791/>) and translates by the essay author.

Chapter 2

Complexities in cinematic image of Hong Kong

The imageability of the city plays a vital role not only for visitors to recognize but also for the filmmakers to capture the feature and form a lively story of the city. The complexities are expressed in various ways through the story by the filmmakers, showing in a simple but dynamic form, cinematic image. It is understandable that Hong Kong-related films vividly show the multiple perspectives of Hong Kong, which is easy for the audience to project cinematic Hong Kong. However, how can Hong Kong be recognized in which film story is not related to it? With the unique positioning image of Hong Kong, the specific landmarks and architectural structures, and objects in the city are imageable, as well as the crowded and squeezed city space. The culture mixture with Western and Eastern aspects collaging in a cityscape is the most significant feature of cinematic Hong Kong. Thus, no matter the film story is related to Hong Kong or not, the imageability of Hong Kong in movies is distinct.

Without a doubt, the cinematic image can provide a clear view of Hong Kong's complexities with the plots and can even project a further imagination of its future. What kind of image does the movie show Hong Kong city? What kind of feature in Hong Kong attracts filmmakers' interest? Moreover, how the cinematic story relates to these features? As a complex city, Hong Kong has various themes for the movie makers and the directors to imagine and picture it. No matter the global city view with modern skyscrapers or the local perspective with chaos and messy space condition, the Hong Kong image-related films display an excellent story covering Hong Kong's issues. Depends on the different storyline, the cinematic image presents a different aspect of Hong Kong. For example, the film-related story in modern Hong Kong might picture the global view, while the action and martial movie prefer to show the lively local space in Hong Kong. In addition to the spatial aspect, the hidden emotional expression of living in the city, reflecting the city situation and historical period, can also be seen through cinematic images, especially in those movies made by the New Wave Hong Kong directors. They show the anxiety and uncertainty in the changing postcolonial period of Hong Kong, illustrating the fluid cityscape and complex emotions of people. The distinctive characteristics also inspire the filmmakers to imagine Hong Kong as a future city of the world. For those science fiction movies

that picture the parallel world or future time, some use Hong Kong as the basis city scene and add special effects to it.

Since cinematic Hong Kong shows diverse perspectives, this chapter will analyze the cinematic images from different movies categorized into four topics with complexity. Then, it is understandable how the movie translates the city image into a cinematic image and shows the complexities, providing a way for city researching. The four sub-chapters give the vital features of Hong Kong, which are the local crowded living space, the mixing culture spreading in the city, the emotional complexity in such a dynamic city space, and global aspect with future projection respectively, from clear physical feature to atmosphere, from static to fluid, and from local to global. Although it seems that there are four separated texts without connection, they cover the significant images of Hong Kong, gather an outline of it, and provide a hint and evidence for Hong Kong city research.

2.1 Density and diversity: *Push*

Density is the image that represents Hong Kong the most. As a global city, such as Tokyo, New York, and London, Hong Kong presents itself not only through the modern high-rise towers but also a super density in its city space. The significant difference between these capital cities and Hong Kong is the vivid and lively images crowding under the homogeneous high-rise buildings, which sometimes emerge out and mix with the spectacular modern images. The local culture and citizens' living habits maintain a unique view of diversity from other global modern cities. As Robert Venturi (1925-2018) explained in his book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* in 1966, saying that "Less is bore.", it revealed that the diversity and variety in disarrange condition is an architecture should be. So does a city. The simple and clear shape of architecture, which results from modernism and globalization, lacks "life", evoking the rethink of modern architectural style and city space. Looking back to Hong Kong today, the cityscape is full of complexity and contradiction, showing density and diversity in its culture and space. The city image reflects postmodernism, which stands for showing the heterogeneous space.

The cinematic image with heterogeneous city space, crowding, and mixing the time and culture shows in the fiction movie *Push*. It is an American superhero film, telling a story about the escape and hiding life of the leading role in Hong

Kong. Why the director chooses Hong Kong as the film shooting place? Does Hong Kong have any feature fit the need of the story? The film sees Hong Kong as a chaos paradise where is suitable for seclusion. At the beginning of the movie, the scenes show Hong Kong's dense living space with the introduction of the main character and giving the background city image of the movie. The living unit where the main character lives is out of good condition. From the corridor's view, the paint peeled façade and stains causing by the long time ruining by dirt, rainwater, and other natural factors are obvious. The tiny units crowding in a small lane attract the eye and the variety of air-conditioner condenser units and their canopies. (Figure 2-1-1) The space condition provides the film story a great scene to project the secretive life of the character. Additionally, the image also pictures the common living condition of normal Hong Kong people, presenting one of the local aspects of Hong Kong.



(Figure 2-1-1) The living space is messy and crowded with air-conditioner condenser units on the façade.

The city's density and diversity create heterogeneity, showing a view with different architectural styles and height from different periods crowding together. Due to the Hong Kong government releasing the legislation in 1903, which restricted the building height, which had not been approved under the fifth floor, most of the buildings were built five floors high. Until 1955, the government modified the building height legislation, allowing buildings to be built higher. As the economy boomed in the 1960s, the skyscrapers showed up with the need for population growth. Thus, the film well presents the time difference with different building heights, showing its diversity and density of living conditions. The image (Figure 2-1-2) gives a clear view of three different time layers: the fifth-floor buildings in the front, the tall housing buildings in the back, and the modern one behind. The hierarchy expresses the heterogeneity as well as the complexity and contradiction.



(Figure 2-1-2) The different building heights reflect the time factor in the city space.

The street view with various advertising objects and boards in Hong Kong not only attracts filmmakers to take it as the scenes but also shows its complex culture in a specific form. The night street image in the film *Push* highlights Hong Kong's density and diversity with the neon signs floating on the cityscape. (Figure 2-1-3) It shows the vibrant nightlife in Hong Kong and expresses the characters' vivid adventures during the night. With different sizes, shapes, and neon colors of the neon boards, they picture the mix-used building function and culture of Hong Kong. The modern style with a clear brand name, the creative shape showing its product, and the English and Chinese texts written together can be seen. Besides, they have restaurants, electrical appliance stores, night bars, and other kinds of commercial activities crowding in the same street. Neon symbolizes the commercial and modern world, related to the media trend in nowadays cityscape. The film shows the iconic image in Hong Kong, which presents density and diversity with different spatial scales, different times, and different cultures in the city views.



(Figure 2-1-3) The neon advertising boards show the vivid night city view.

2.2 Mixed culture city: *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*

The culture mixture in Hong Kong reflects its colonial history and the further spreading globalization of the world, creating its distinctiveness. Due to the advancement of communicated technology and transportation, the “speed” eliminates the space distance and time difference, enhancing the efficiency of exchanging in finance, population, and goods. The cross-country network compresses the gap between different countries and areas and speeds up information transmission. Thus, globalization happens in those advantaged cities and influences multiple aspects, such as economy, space, and culture. Without doubting, Hong Kong’s location has a more significant interaction advantage than other neighboring cities to build its global position. Besides, the polity is also a matter. As a former British colony, good respect for international contacts is imaginable. After the regime transited to the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong has gained even more important notice and maintain a global city status.

Cinematic Hong Kong shows the “invisible” culture through several images in the film *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*, picturing a mixed culture in various living aspects. It is a Hong Kong movie that shows the 1990s Hong Kong, directed by the Hong Kong director, Peter Chan, and tells a love story between two immigrants from China. The story shows many aspects of mixing culture, for example, the population, the language, the pop culture, the food, and space. In the sovereignty transition period of Hong Kong, the population composites of British, Hong Kong-British, Hong Kong, Hong Kong-Chinese, and Chinese with different identities. Besides, globalization provides many workplaces and attracts people from different countries and cultures to move there. The movie characters show various identities with the immigrants from China, an American lover, a Thai, and an English teacher. Although the movie does not tell the story between a Chinese and her lover a lot, the image (Figure 2-2-1) shows the Western clothing style and somehow reflects British colonial and globalization. When the character tells the story of this picture, she mentions things from the Western culture, such as the afternoon tea habit. Cantonese, written in Traditional Chinese, is the primary language spoken in Hong Kong. In the movie plot, there is a trend of learning English, reflecting the need for global language and the power of capitalism and globalism. The scene shows the Chinese character is working in a cram school and learning English simultaneously. (Figure 2-2-2)



(Figure 2-2-1) The picture of a Hong Kong-Chinese with her American lover.



(Figure 2-2-2) The scene of doing a job in the English cram school.

From the 1970s, globalization had a striking influence on the world, with the American culture and brand spreading. The symbol of globalization shows a lot in the film with the fast-food restaurant, McDonald's, and the popular American character, Mickey Mouse, presenting the pop-culture spirit. The car scene of the film (Figure 2-2-3) not only shows the Micky Mouse but also leads the audience to see Hong Kong street view. The variety of advertising boards occupy the view and give a kind of introduction of the street, telling the building's functions. Most importantly, these signs are written in English and Traditional Chinese together reflect the language mixture. The movie also shows the cultural complexity in Hong Kong city space with different styles of architecture. In the front of the image, it presents the modern style buildings, while the British building shows in the middle of the image where the street adventure end. (Figure 2-2-4) Although

globalization takes a role in Hong Kong city space, Hong Kong's culture perfectly intertwines with the global culture, mixing into a unique cultural image.



(Figure 2-2-3) Mickey Mouse is a clear feature element in the movie.



(Figure 2-2-4) The city scene shows different building styles and the advertising board with two languages.

2.3 Complex emotional expression: *Chungking Express*

Due to Hong Kong's dense city space condition and cultural diversity mixing in the city, the cityscape seems lively and fluid, especially in the postcolonial period of Hong Kong. The citizen composition is complex with a large number of immigrants, and the culture is also mixed. The growth of population and land limitation makes the living space squeezed and out of quality, speeding up the removed and rebuilt buildings. The Hong Kong society shows the temporary

sense with the fluid identity, culture, and space. Besides, changing represents the postcolonial period and affects people's feeling of living in the city. As Abbas said, the postcolonial is not a specific time but practice and action, which means the postcolonial period is a process and an expression to reflect the colonial period.

Chungking Express illustrates the sharply changing Hong Kong cityscape with blurring background images and fragmented scenes, expressing the uncertain feelings in the character's mind. It is a 1994 Hong Kong film written and directed by the Chinese director, Wong Kar-wai. At the beginning of the movie, the director gives the movie a clear position: fluid, emphasizing the blurring images. (Figure 2-3-1) With the running scene of the main characters, the image flows faster. The movie is mainly shot in Chungking Mansions and Lan Kwai Fong in Hong Kong. Chungking Mansions was designed for residential use and completed in 1961, the time Chinese residents predominated. There were guesthouses and a wide variety of retails and restaurants in the building. After decades, people from different nationalities move in, living in the complex. The movie shows the crowded space and mixed culture in Chungking Mansions with India's guy selling modern style clothes and the "speed" implied blurring scene. (Figure 2-3-2)



(Figure 2-3-1) The speed is shown as the background in the movie.



(Figure 2-3-2) The crowded space and various nationalities in Chungking Mansions with speedy background.

Alienation and isolation are now the common issues of living in the city. Hong Kong is a modern and global city with a highly developed cityscape. Although the living space in Hong Kong is small, there is still a “big distance” between citizens, streaming a stranger feeling. The actress in *Chungking Express* is always wearing sunglasses during day and night, showing the protective and defensive mood and isolating herself in the city. (Figure. 2-3-3)



(Figure 2-3-3) The speed is shown as the background in the movie.

2.4 Future city imagination in *Ghost in the Shell*

What is the future city image that Hong Kong will become? It is already a dense modern city with a vital economic and central financial status, while some areas still show the local pictures with lively and chaotic space conditions. The city transportation provides a complete network with the subway underground, the bus, and the highway network. The ferry is also the way to go back and forth from different islands, such as Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula. The commercial prosperity shows with the vivid image of various stores and advertising boards, which shine in different neon colors. The markets have various shops and merchandise; the shopkeepers also decorate their stores and booth stands with colorful objects and boards. The vibrant images, including the food, shopping districts, the culture, and the varied city space in Hong Kong, are popular with visitors worldwide. However, there is a word from a Chinese popular song saying that “there will be nothing after the prosperity.” Will the local villages and districts be demolished and rebuild into modern high-rise towers? Will the city transport network become more complicated and take over the city skyline? Will the technology be used in commercial advertisements? Will the city development follow the smart city trend and create a cityscape fulling of virtual images?

Looking into two versions of movies of *Ghost in the Shell*, the Japanese classical version in 1995 and the American version released in 2017, they both take Hong Kong as a blueprint of their city scenes, imagining that the city feature in Hong Kong will be the future city’s development direction in Asia. The movie *Ghost in the Shell* mainly bases on the Japanese manga of the same name, talking about human beings can be augmented with cybernetic improvements and projecting the near future 2040.

In the 1995 version, the movie focuses more on the local living condition with the market, the housing, and the street, picturing life in that period. The scene (Figure 2-4-1) shows the globalized aspect of Hong Kong with modern and intense high-rise towers on the background of the image while illustrates the local, crowded and messy city space with many advertising boards on the buildings in the front. The commercial prosperity and the uncontrolled messy city image are shown in the movie (Figure 2-4-2), with different layers of walkways and roads. The yellow boat in the bottom gives an imagination of future transportation in the city. The movie’s most classical scene is the fight between

the leading role and the criminal in a flooded place. (Figure 2-4-3) The scene shows the global view behind and the messy and ruined place on the other side, revealing that the future city will be more complex than what Hong Kong looks like now and expressing the loneliness of city space.



(Figure 2-4-1) The scene in the local market with the skyscrapers behind.



(Figure 2-4-2) The advertising boards and different layers of walkways shown in the movie.



(Figure 2-4-3) Two sides of a place, showing the two contrast aspects of Hong Kong.

On the contrary, the American version in 2017 shows a lot of technological influence in the cityscape, mainly in the media. The cityscape in the movie pictures buildings with the media on the façade, and even the media itself becomes an architectural object standing in the city. These two images (Figure 2-4-4) (Figure 2-4-5) picture Hong Kong city's day and night view, respectively. Whenever during the day or night, the images diffuse an atmosphere with dark and chaotic phenomena, referring to the story and future despair, simultaneously displaying the vivid space with dynamic media effects. Hong Kong represents a quickly booming city with its economic and city construction. As the "speed" in the Hong Kong city space, it changes without well planning. This causes the feature with multiple complexities and attracts the filmmakers to project it to the future, assuming that the future city will change rapidly and significantly influence the media.



(Figure 2-4-4) The media plays a vital role in the city space.



(Figure 2-4-5) The night view of the city in the movie shows the dark and chaotic phenomena.

Conclusion

The imageability of Hong Kong successfully transforms into a recognizable cinematic image, picturing various complexities in the city. As a dynamic culture media form, the movie captures the fluid cityscape and tells an enclosed story, giving the scope of seeing Hong Kong. No matter the global aspect, the dense city, and the city space's mixed culture, the film provides a way to tell. However, the fascinating image of Hong Kong is the combination of these different points of view. Hong Kong city space fully displays the features, influencing people's feeling of being in the city. Although the cinematic image only provides a broad view and is analyzed in a general city space, it gives a deeper observation of local city space, the atmosphere aspect of the city, and citizens' emotional feelings.

With the understanding of Hong Kong city conditions, which show in different movies, and the worldwide trends nowadays, Hong Kong's future will definitely toward the media influencing. As the future movie shows, the untouchable media images intertwine with the cityscape, attract the views, and play a vital role in city imageability. Media, which not means a medium here, shows through multiple "screens," such as cellphone, computers, and building facades. It not only has a great influence on people's daily life but also evokes a notice on the architectural field. "Media, city space and urban living are strongly intertwined and with recent technological development, these connections only seem to grow stronger." (Hauge, 2011) How a media transforms the city? How media image becomes the primary view of a city? There is no doubt that the media issue of future Hong Kong and other modern cities worldwide is an inevitable topic for further research.

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