Icons, Culture and Collective Identity of Postwar Hong Kong

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Abstract: Icons, which take the form of images, artifacts, landmarks, or fictional figures, represent mounds of meaning stuck in the collective unconsciousness of different communities. Icons are shortcuts to values, identity or feelings that their users collectively share and treasure. Through the concrete identification and analysis of icons of post-war Hong Kong, this paper attempts to highlight not only Hong Kong people's changing collective needs and mental or material hunger, but also their continuous search for identity.

Keywords: Icons, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Chinese, 1997, values, identity, lifestyle, business, popular culture, fusion, hybridity, colonialism, economic takeoff, consumerism, show business

1. Introduction: Telling Hong Kong's Story through Icons

It seems easy to tell the story of post-war Hong Kong. If merely delineating the sky-high synopsis of the city, the ups and downs, high highs and low lows are at once evidently remarkable: a collective struggle for survival in the post-war years, tremendous social instability in the 1960s, industrial take-off in the 1970s, a growth in economic confidence and cultural arrogance in the 1980s and a rich cultural upheaval in search of locality before the handover. The early 21st century might as well sum up the development of Hong Kong, whose history is long yet surprisingly short- propelled by capitalism, gnawing away at globalization and living off its elastic schizophrenia. On the other hand, were we to read between the lines, one particular point — the endless search for identity— serves to string the decades together, raising questions apparently unanswerable but apprehensible in the colonial past of Hong Kong. While the quest for identity will never reach completion (Stuart, 2003, p.7), it reveals rather how we see ourselves at different points in time.

Who exactly are the so-called *heung-gong yan* (Hong Kong Chinese)? Turner (1995) argued that *heung-gong yan* is "an identity of life-style," "an ambiguous construction that was more than "resident" yet "less than a people" (p.22-23). Tu (1991) acknowledged Hong Kong as "part of the Chinese Diaspora" if "at least in spirit" (pp. 13-14), neither part of the majority of "authentic" Chinese living in the mainland, nor a portion of the "minority nationalities." The handover of Hong Kong further added to the drama- *heung-gon yan*, torn between a desire for nostalgia and a puzzle over the future came to stand in another junction, this time between locality and nationalism (Ang, 1998). In a sense, Hong Kong people witness a juxtaposition of dual identities, standing in-between, being both local and global, semi-diasporic in mentality yet geographically and politically disqualified. Hence, the so-called *heung-gon yan* and the fabrication of a unique Chineseness, fed with cultural hybridity and ambiguity.

Hong Kong culture was permitted, even encouraged, to expand and flourish under British rule. It is thus safe to confirm what Lo suggested—there is indeed no Sino-British clash in a sense of external difference between contending civilizations; instead, an internal affair within a culture is realized and the city is actually struggling with itself (2005). Regardless of the end, which never seems to have a plausible stop, traces and shout-outs for local Chineseness, *heung-gong yan* and the question of identity can be found expressively in local culture and in a more condensed manner, icons.

2. Culture, Business and Icons

An icon (*eikon* in Greek) is an image in the likeness of "prototype or mode." Icons represent mounds of meaning stuck in the collective unconsciousness of different communities and are shortcuts to phenomena, thoughts and feelings. Because of the paradoxical and universal association that comes attached to icons, the icon itself is part of a collective unconsciousness representing values, identity or feelings communities collectively share and treasure without intentionally recognizing it at all.

It is to be added that icons help create or strengthen collective identity and consciousness among their users. As **Sassoon and Gaur (1997) emphasized, in the past "**iconography has always been well suited for communications between groups living beyond the normal confines of society: special social classes, secret societies, esoteric religious communities and those operating outside the law" (p. 48), and "those sections of society which, either by birth or from choice, function, at least in part, outside conventional society: Freemasons, criminals, terrorists, thieves and all types of social dropouts… need, by necessity, a form of communication, intelligible only to themselves, and to this end iconography is ideally suited" (p.51). It is through using commonly accepted icons, which take the forms of signs, symbols, pictures, fictional figures, etc. that members of certain communities identify themselves and communicate with each other. Icons, in this sense, work like passwords that grant access to members and exclude non-members. In the medieval religious context, people respecting the same icon shared the values and meaning it stood for and developed among themselves a strong collective identity (Zelensky & Gilbert, 2005). In the 1960s fans of Elvis Presley were easily recognizable because all of them talked the language, wore the hairstyle and danced the steps of their idol.

Basically, an icon is artistic creation, symbolic discourse (Read, 1972), open interpretation (Betsky, 1997), perfect, paradoxical and universally associated, it entails lapse after lapse of meaning and depth. If allowed to grow, an icon, like a multi-authored narrative, gains substance continuously. However, icons that represent "greater" social and political meanings are usually created and reproduced by the powerful and educated few. In the Middle Ages, the church commissioned artists such as Thephanes the Greek, Andrei Rublev, Daniel Cherniy, Bogfan Saltanov and Simon Ushakov to create icons that showed converts ways to heaven. To legitimize his rule and to respond to people's growing demand for stability and prosperity after waves of revolutions, Napoleon III mobilized journalists, writers and artists to create for him a public and lasting image of " justice, equity, and the general good." (Kertzer, 1988, p. 40).

But the monster machine of capitalism soon takes over, creating incessantly icons that

can generate profit. The process of production escalated with much intensity in the post-World War II era when production method, scale and consumption all shot sky high (Nye, 1996), thanks to the unfolding of a "society of spectacle" sustained by nothing but the basis of appearances (Mulvey, 1995). Icons that associate memory and pleasure with "image" more than words promised profit and success. Therefore, enterprises soon found that for much of their ambiguity and marketing frenzy, icons sold, and when they did, they boomed in general. For the sole reason that capitalism tended to "burgeon from [this] calculated production of meanings"(Sternberg, 1999, p.3), "the making of illusions which flood our experience" by means of marketing, branding and packaging "has become the business of America" (Boorstin, 1971, p. 5-6). Accurate business calculation, sophisticated production and distribution networks and above all, successful strategies of associating icons with cultural values and collective hope and desire add up to a long-lived icon, perhaps a brand-name or an identity, that continues to reinvent itself (Turner, Bonner & Marshall, 2000).

Particularly outstanding is the fact that icons are made, not born; the creation ought to be an expression of sentiments and the support shown thereon says something that represents the mass, especially pertaining to collective needs and mental or material hunger (Read, 1972). It is also important to reiterate that icons act as repositories of meaning that vary from time to time, place to place. Through the concrete identification and analysis of icons, Hong Kong society after the Second World War can be decrypted, revealing a series of historical events, local mentality and the continuous search for *heung-gong yan* as intertwined in shortcuts that capture the footprints of Hong Kong through the sands of time.

3. Hong Kong in the 1960s and the Not-so-Modern Connie Chan (陳寶珠)

For many Western observers, two words could be said about Hong Kong in the post-war years and early 1960s: divided and proto-industrial, a race early in the roots of, as many scholars and politicians tell and retell, a barren culture (Endacott, 1973). For Turner (1995), the annual Chinese Manufacturers' Exhibition of Hong Kong Products Exhibitions, the Colony's largest festival next to the Chinese New Year, triggered a pattern for Hong Kong's future identity as a consumer culture, "an identity suspended between the fantasy of export promotion and the grim experience of factory life, neither colonial nor nationalistic, yet predominantly Cantonese" (p. 28).

Colonial, Chinese and local cultures seemed to coexist peacefully in Hong Kong for quite a long time. Colonial values and lifestyles were always shared by the very few. For a British historian, the founding of the City Hall, whose foundation stone was laid in 1960, witnessed the colonial government's effort in engineering a sense of "community." This symbolized a displacement of colonialism and Chinese tradition, the establishment of a civic center where political swearing-ins of Governors, beauty pageants, Cantonese opera and marriages took place, representing "a Hong Kong citizenship based on loyalty to the local community and characterized by a fusion of European and Chinese traditions" (Endacott, 1973, p. 323). The reception of the landmark, however, appealed to a small group of well-to-do families, society notables and civil servants of higher education.

Outside the City Hall, observable practices of clothing in *saam fu* (traditional pantsuit) and
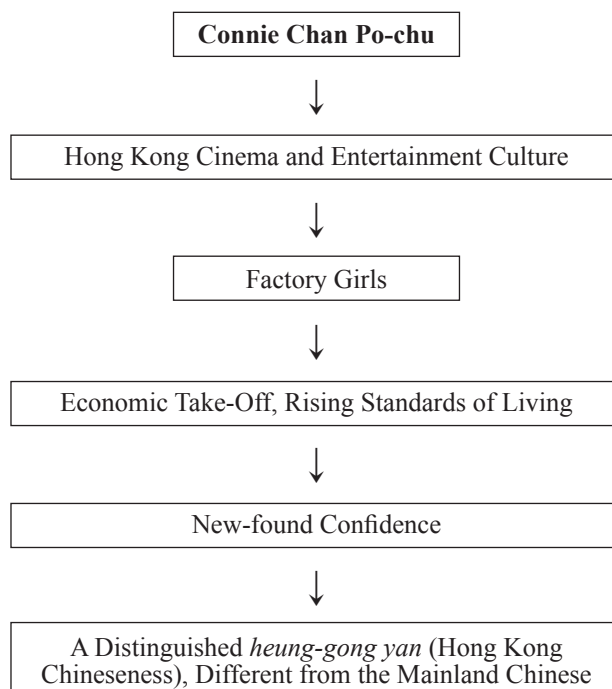
cheong saam (traditional long gown), religious beliefs rooted in Pearl Delta, and the domination of the Mandarin language in cinematic productions testified Hong Kong's cultural linkage with the wider Chinese world. The martial arts movie series "Wong Fei Hung," starred by Kwan Tak Hing and a group of new-rising local actors/actresses, highlighted the fusion of local culture and traditional Chinese values in post-war Hong Kong. Presented in the Cantonese dialect, the 77-episode series kept telling the stories of how the great martial arts hero, who lived from 1847 to 1924, fought to uphold high-minded virtues such as bravery, courtesy, benevolence and self-discipline during China's transition to modernity (Pollard, n.d.).

The pivotal economic shift away from regional exports to manufacturing for Western markets served simultaneously as a commercial and ideological transformation. Engineered by the Government-inspired Federation of Hong Kong Industries which was also founded in 1960, the move allowed the local economy to achieve not only independence, but sufficient space for progression. For one, the autonomy achieved through the industrial take-off spurred new-found confidence in being Hong Kongese. For another, the improved standards of living meant local life-styles began to deviate greatly from those of Taiwan and mainland China. For the first time, the population found itself different — alienated from China, better-off than their mainland counterparts and increasingly realizing a new "self" that would come to be *heung-gong yan*. At this point, sentimental attachment to the motherland had appeared to wear down in its beginning stages. The official promotion of a Cantonese-medium broadcasting and primary school education and the founding of District Offices further strengthened Hong Kong people's local identity.

1967 marked another turning point as the rhetoric of "citizenship," "community" and "belonging" was deployed on a large-scale to counter Communism. On the one hand, the 1967 riots indeed demonstrated the strong ideological influence Communist China had shadowed over the Hong Kong people, but admittedly, this was effective only within a portion of the society. What should be pointed out, instead, was the fact that the Cultural Revolution distinctly appeared to quite a number of Hong Kong people as "less an inspiration than a threat" (Mathews, 2003, p. 59). In a way, mainland China had stopped, at least for a while, to be the vibrant haven that the Hong Kong mass once aspired to. As a reaction, "Hong Kong Week" was engineered to include popular entertainment, exhibitions, fashion shows and a floats parade which would later evolve as the much larger "Festival of Hong Kong" where ideas of "community as one" and "a show-window for democracy" were given a solid platform. A "community" and "sense of belonging" could even be witnessed in the subjective change of the locals' attitude toward the city as seen in the increasing focus on local issues like the 1966 Star Ferry riot — Hong Kong was now close to being a city of its "own" rather than a stop-over.

If China had become distant to the Hong Kong people, the British understandably could never be home. Encountering the clash "between official rhetoric and lived experience, between the local and the international, factory life and trade promotion of exports" (Turner, 1995, p. 31) and the "separation of language from reality" (Anderson, 1983, p. 15), Hong Kong had to be the last resort in search of oneself — simple lunches, *Siu Lau Man* (little vagabonds) comic books, Connie Chan Po-chu's movies of factory life, gossip about local film idols — these thus came to be the icons of the day, representing the collective unconsciousness of *heung-gong yan* that was on its early days of becoming locally-conscious in search of a middle road.

In the context of iconology, the following diagram reveals an attempted interpretation of one of Hong Kong's brightest cinematic stars in the 1960s, Connie Chan Po-chu (陳寶珠) as a symbol representing *heung-gong yan* in this particular decade:

| **Connie Chan Po-chu** |
| ↓ |
| Hong Kong Cinema and Entertainment Culture |
| ↓ |
| Factory Girls |
| ↓ |
| Economic Take-Off, Rising Standards of Living |
| ↓ |
| New-found Confidence |
| ↓ |
| A Distinguished *heung-gong yan* (Hong Kong Chineseness), Different from the Mainland Chinese |

Connie Chan 陳寶珠 懷舊串燒 主題曲女殺手 / 掃蕩群魔 Photo MV (5 May 2009). In *Youtube*. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wuxQsN-s3U

Notably, the image of Connie Chan entails lapses of meaning that all go back to disclosing the Hong Kong that existed in the 1960s. At first look, Connie Chan represents Hong Kong cinema as a whole simply because she was one of the best-known celebrities of the decade, further exposing trends, styles and social tastes regarding entertainment, fashion or in Western terms, pop culture. The second level of iconic interpretation refers to the emerging culture of factory girls, which Connie Chan well represents in many of her movies. To Hong Kong mentality thus, she expresses that sense of confidence from the city's economic autonomy and increase in living standards and finally, the emergence of a new Hong Kong identity is suggested by the end of the day — all these with reference to the icon in Connie Chan. Extending from thereon, individual feelings of adoration, obsession or pride in the actress that differs from person to person serves to overcast another lapse of personal possession over the myth enclosing the icon.

It should not be neglected that iconology in Hong Kong at this stage does not equal that of the Western world. Connie Chan still stood for traditional values such as diligence, frugality and self-discipline to the extent of asceticism. While an evident hippie-culture and a fast-growing

pop culture was ongoing progression in the West, Hong Kong had just conformed to settling down with its new or renewed "self"- local consumer taste was yet to become full-fledged and although the economic miracle successfully boosted standards of living, consumerism still awaited further propelling.

4. Samuel Hui (許冠傑) and East-West Fusion in the 1970s

A sense of distinct Hong Kong-ness was further developed in the 1970s for "the backbone of Hong Kong's prosperity," referred to by Siu (1993) as those whose "social and emotional ties to China are relatively weak" (p. 32-33), otherwise the first haul of local-born Hong Kong people had reached adulthood by now. This generation knew only Hong Kong as home and had rather little attachment to mainland China. Exposed to Western culture in their youth, their world was no longer limited to factory life in Hong Kong or Connie Chan. Instead, *Grease*, the Bee Gees, Carpenters were for them household names that added to modern-styled TV series such as *Shanghai Tan*. Hong Kong identity then came to find a heaven of its own in this very melting pot of hybridity.
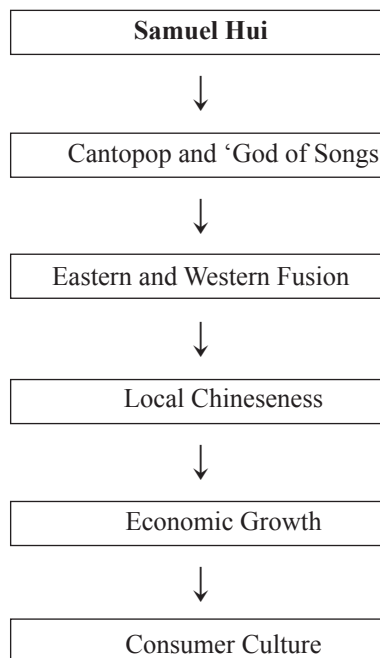
The locals became more community-conscious than ever as the British government continued to provide social welfare including compulsory primary education in 1971 and nine-year free education in 1978. In infrastructure, the cross-border tunnel was opened and the mass transit railway system drafted. A ten-year housing plan directed at 1.8 million citizens was suggested and the ICAC set up in 1974. This strong sense of building a sound society was echoed in reviews and articles from the government annual reports that read *A Better Tomorrow* (1973), *The Community: A Growing Awareness* (1974), *A Social Commitment* (1975) (Wong, 1998). For the first time, the colonial government was making an effort to provide directions for the people; the locals, in turn, robustly responded to challenges. In participation and expression, *heung-gong yan* had emerged to take their own stance in debates relating to the city, consciously realizing the realities of the society and unconsciously becoming a nucleus of Hong Kong Chineseness.

Another sense of "new" that had much impact during the 1970s was the extensive growth of the TV culture and its domination over local life. From the mid-1970s onwards, the tube would act as an important medium in the creation of the Hong Kong life-style and rapid East-West exchange would be witnessed from hereon (J. Ng, 2009). Between 1978 and 1984, Hong Kong was the largest exporter of television shows in the world (H. Ng, 2003). Locally, dramatic series particularly those of the Television Broadcasting Company (TVB) were able to captivate up to 70% of the entire population of Hong Kong on a nightly basis — celebrities became household names and were even considered part of local families (H. Ng, 2003). This resulted in the standardization of mass culture, as the entire society waited eagerly for the next episode of *The Strongman* and discussions surrounded the Miss Hong Kong beauty pageant. Television songs, sung in Cantonese, became the earliest traces of the emergence of Cantonese pop culture that swept over East and South East Asia in the 1970s and 1980s, including mainland China. With television soap based on a backdrop of Hong Kong's refugee past quickly incorporating storylines concerning the stock market, upward mobility and tycoons, it was ascertained that Hong Kong emerged as the center of an "alternative" Chineseness, a culture that has combined

past and present, East and West.

New times called for new icons, if the icon of the sixties represented economic take-off, then the seventies should symbolize more than that, what with the growing elements that have so far made the web of Hong Kong society much more complex:
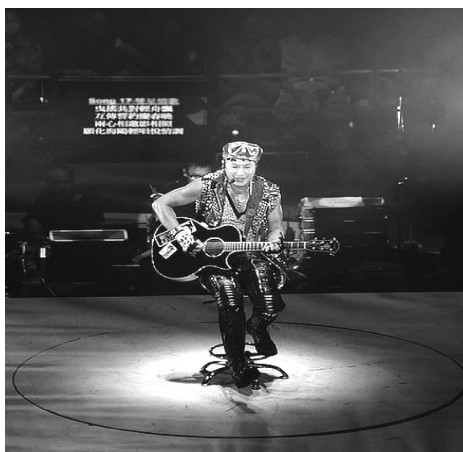

| Samuel Hui |
| ↓ |
| Cantopop and 'God of Songs |
| ↓ |
| Eastern and Western Fusion |
| ↓ |
| Local Chineseness |
| ↓ |
| Economic Growth |
| ↓ |
| Consumer Culture |

鬼馬雙星 [Game Gamblers Play] (last modified 29 July 2009). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from: http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sam_dc01.jpg

Taking the iconology of local musician/celebrity Samuel Hui, usually know as Sam Hui, the image initially suggests a singer highly popular in the 1970s. For those who are familiar with him, he popularized Cantopop (W. Ng, 2001) and holds the nickname "God of Songs" in Hong Kong, representing the majority of the locals with his humorous interpretation of the harsh working lives of middle and lower classes in the territory (which probably signifies Hong Kong people's consciousness of their community). This particular picture was chosen because it physically reveals another lapse of meaning in the icon: that of the merging of East and West to form Hong Kong culture and *heung-gong yan* — Samuel Hui's jumpsuit was a fashion statement based on Elvis, who Samuel Hui claimed to have influenced his musical taste. While his hairstyle echoes the Beatles and his guitar a must-have of popular Western bands, his choice of Cantonese and the local backdrop of his lyrics completely denotes Hong Kong-ness. Further looking into Samuel Hui's image, we find a Hong Kong that has a fast-increasing standard of living, growing purchasing power and from there, a consumer culture that was capable of devoting time, money and mental dependency on the singer. Of course, there is again one's

personal possession of Samuel Hui — musical guru, fashion consultant, mental support, ideal lover — the list could go on forever.

Icons at this stage have reached a leveling with Western icons. Owing to consumerism and the capitalist culture of the seventies, Samuel Hui was able to branch out in numerous aspects of the entertainment industry, successfully building a recognized money-generating machine behind his brand name and retaining influence even after retirement. Included in his impressive projects were music hits (*Silence is Golden/沉默是金*), movies (*The Private Eyes/半斤八兩*, *Front Page*, *The Legend of Wisely/衛斯理傳奇*), hosting gigs (*The Hui's Brothers Show/精裝 雙星報喜*), as well as international concerts. The longevity of Samuel Hui's name and image was proved to be valid when in 2004, he came out of retirement to hold multiple sold-out concerts and in 2007, he released his first album in 17 years.

Samuel Hui (last modified on 25 December 2012).In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved January 10, 2013, from http:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Samhui2009.jpg

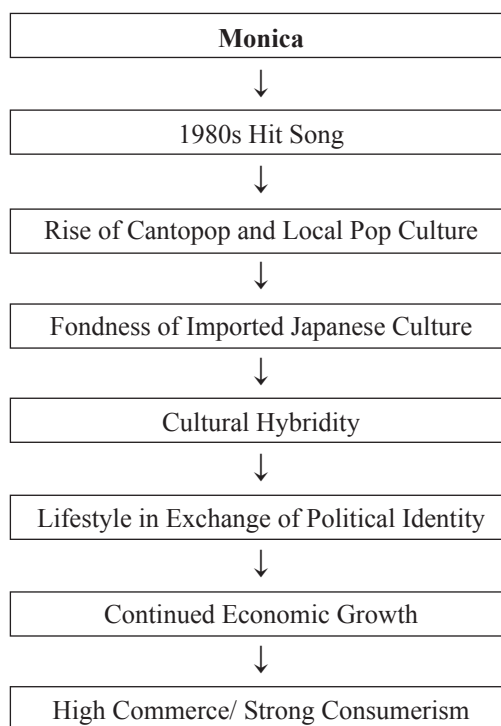## 5. The 1980s: Joint Declaration and Anxiety Facing an Uncertain Tomorrow

On the eve of the seventies, Hong Kong became the world's 12th largest trading economy; locality evolved to be far more independent, interdependent, hybridized, modernized, international, capitalist and the Hong Kong identity itself more evident as a "popular imagination" finally saw its footsteps creeping around the corner of the vast city. However, a wave of identity crises stormed over Hong Kong, this time stressing the territory's stakes at autonomy in the next decade.

In 1984, the Joint Declaration was signed between Deng Xiaoping and Margaret Thatcher, proclaiming an agreement between the UK and the PRC that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) would be regarded under the "One country, two systems" principle and that Hong Kong's previous capitalist system would remain unchanged for a period of 50 years until 2047. Instead of collectively rejecting the former ruler or completely embracing the to-be mother state, a divided society quickly emerged — the folding and retreat

of pro-Taiwan rightist papers like the *Hong Kong Times Daily* signified the influence of the mainland and politically neutral dailies were transformed into pro-Hong Kong papers aligned with a pro-China sense (Lo, 2005). Simultaneously, immense efforts to study Hong Kong's popular culture and social structure appeared in search of a distinct Hong Kong identity different from that imposed by Chinese nationalism. At bottom, most investigations converged on the point that it was Hong Kong's unique lifestyle that distinguishes this small seaport from China. Ng Chun-hung complained therefore that "after all these years we were still basically at the stage of *asserting* the presence or otherwise of a Hong Kong way of life" (1996, p.123).

Surely, Hong Kong economy continued to prosper and in the context of East meets West, of a sense of sophistication and worldliness, of reaching new heights in consumption, the Hong Kong people started gratifying themselves in imported pop culture, particularly from Japan. Locally, Cantopop soared as Anita Mui (梅豔芳), Leslie Cheung（張國榮), Allan Tam（譚詠麟), Sandy Lam (林憶蓮）and Danny Chan（陳百強）became household names. More notable is the way Japanese elements were incorporated into Hong Kong music as a number of representative songs were translated from Japanese into Cantonese. To complement Hong Kong iconology in the eighties, Leslie Cheung's hit "Monica" shall be used:

Monica
↓
1980s Hit Song
↓
Rise of Cantopop and Local Pop Culture
↓
Fondness of Imported Japanese Culture
↓
Cultural Hybridity
↓
Lifestyle in Exchange of Political Identity
↓
Continued Economic Growth
↓
High Commerce/ Strong Consumerism

張國榮 (Leslie Cheung) (last modified 10 January 2013). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Leslie84.jpg

http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Finalencounter.jpg

Using a song as an eighties' icon is neither random nor merely attributed to the fame of "Monica" (1984). Superficially, "Monica" represents a continuous upward mobility of Cantopop and also, the rise of Hong Kong pop culture as Leslie Cheung came to be an idolized figure and his songs widely broadcast on TV and radio stations. Simultaneously, the song being translated from a Japanese version symbolized cultural hybridity or what scholars have suggested as the lack of identity could be sensed in the injection of Japanese elements — instead of continuously creating uniqueness of its own (note how the lyrics no longer echo social issues as the 1970s had), Hong Kong culture boasted its East meets West or here, East meets sophisticated imports from neighboring Japan, which was fast rising as a representation of high trends. In addition, a continued economic flourishing has allowed locals to spend time and money on pop stars and music, unveiling a capitalist culture at its highest and in turn, this excessiveness in consumption suggested the making of a Hong Kong "lifestyle" as opposed to a political identity. Adding to that, again, are personal feelings of possession to "Monica" — a wild teenage life, eighties fashion, childhood memories, mental back-up, a craving for music and sounds — these come as various and different for every individual, or in other words, they represent psychological and human needs provided by the song itself.

It should also be noted that icons at this stage conformed to modernized stereotypes from the West. Leslie Cheung was involved in movies (*The Erotic Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓春上春 in 1978) and music (為你鍾情 1985, *Virgin Snow* 1988) alike as he claimed fame that extended outside Hong Kong. According to a CNN survey released on 27 August 2010, Cheung was voted third of the "top five most iconic musicians of all time," just behind Michael Jackson and The Beatles. This proves that the engineering of Hong Kong icons at this point had reached another level, marketing and branding was not only directed at the local market, but exportation to foreign markets had become another alternative.

The 1980s would be concluded by two other events of great significance: first, the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989 and on November, the opening of the Cultural Centre in Hong Kong. The Cultural Centre failed to live up to its ideals but the shock of the Tiananmen incident led Hong Kong artists and critics to grasp the political dimensions of expressions of local culture. Before the event, attempts were seen to reclaim Chineseness — dramatists, painters and designers increasingly articulated their rediscovery of Chinese heritage, fashion designers rushed to incorporate elements of being Chinese into their crafts. After "6/4," expressions of cultural identity retreated. Hong Kong had gone back to square one, confused, ambiguous as it was in the past two decades. Rather, a diffused, modernistic Chineseness or orientalism emerged that reverberated strongly the schizophrenic personality of *heung-gong yan* as witnessed in the post-war years. What differed was the growing consciousness of the need of a political identity for the Hong Kong people — this consciousness was far from shared, reserved only amongst scholars and critics.
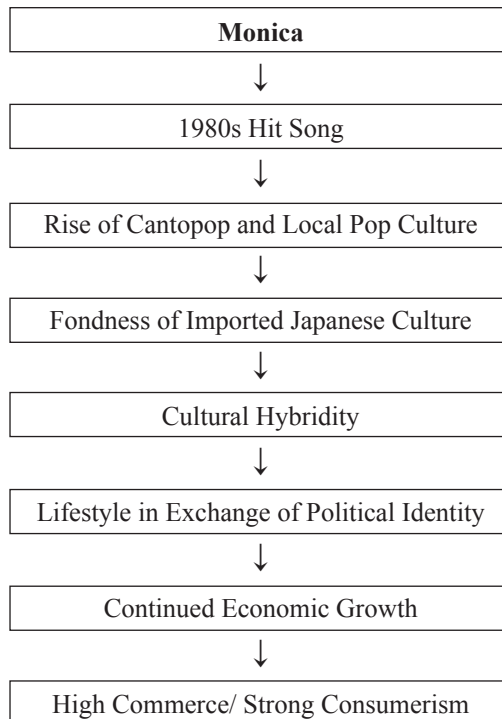
6. The 1990s: Non Show-down of the Handover Mania

The handover of 1997 is no doubt considered as the highlight of the decade. China provided Hong Kong with a national identity that obviously did not go hand-in-hand with the cultural identity that Hong Kong people had established and claimed for the past few decades. The

question of existence and of identity has since become much more complex as *heung-gong yan* now came across values, features and identities simultaneously overlapping and diverging. Surveys in 1995 and 1996 subsequently reflected this division: in 1995, 35 percent of Hong Kong residents considered themselves Hong Kong people, 8 percent Hong Kong Chinese and 30 percent Chinese in 1996, 49 percent identified themselves as "Hongkongese" and 36 percent as Chinese (Mathews, 2003). Just ten years earlier in 1986, a similar survey revealed a higher statistic where 59 percent of respondents thought of themselves as "HongKongese" and 36 percent as Chinese (Lau & Kuan, 1988). Hong Kong sentiments of local pride entailed to an extent, mocking of the mainland Chinese for their lack of sophistication, as David Ho commented in his column: "If you see women in the streets wearing Chanel from head to toe, chances are they're from the mainland… They know the brands, but do not have real taste or style" (Cheung, 1996, p. 42). Other claims attributed to wealth, cosmopolitanism, capitalism, freedom of consumption and linguistic difference (Mathews, 1996; Mathews, 2003). There seemed to be so many differences that a return to the original was no longer possible — the long-established schizophrenic split of Hong Kong mentality, once in a confusing rupture between East and West, is here intensified and utilized as a tool of identity — creation in a struggle against the absolute colonization of race and nationality.

Politics, if only in thought and ideal, served as another mark of Hong Kong identity — democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. These are, in one way or another, immeasurable treasures cultivated, though partly, under the British rule. Thanks to the handover, the nineties, as an extension of the initiations of the eighties, was a rush to embracing the political liberties that the once apolitical Hong Kong never realized to possess. This, of course, excludes universal suffrage and a chief executive that would go against Communist China. Putting forth such political agenda may not be necessary as Hong Kong was not to enjoy political autonomy.

The nineties, in general, was a return, not only to the motherland, but to the paradoxes relating to Hong Kong identity that has been under scrutiny from the sixties onwards. On the one hand, the Hong Kong people struggled to strongly distinguish themselves from the mainland through local pride, political claims and mockery of the Communists. A wave of uncertainty shook Hong Kong society and exposed the vulnerabilities of *heung-gong yan* on the other. All these would be awkwardly shrugged off in consumerism as the following icon of the nineties shows:

| **Monica** |
| ↓ |
| 1980s Hit Song |
| ↓ |
| Rise of Cantopop and Local Pop Culture |
| ↓ |
| Fondness of Imported Japanese Culture |
| ↓ |
| Cultural Hybridity |
| ↓ |
| Lifestyle in Exchange of Political Identity |
| ↓ |
| Continued Economic Growth |
| ↓ |
| High Commerce/ Strong Consumerism |

表姐你好嘢 [Her Fatal Ways] (last modified 27 November 2012). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Her_Fatal_Ways_poster.jpg
http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Her_Fatal_Ways_4_VHS_cover.jpg

Explaining the diagram, the movie, *Her Fatal Ways* is a series of block-busters that at first look, is a typical Hong Kong widescreen production. Basically, the movie satirizes mainland Chinese bureaucrats, featuring a mainland policewoman, played by Dodo Cheng who decides to settle in Hong Kong and become an "authentic" Hong Konger. This can be interpreted as a joining of the Hong Kong and mainland people *a la* handover style, but realizing that a huge portion of the movie works to humiliate the protagonist — this further reveals Hong Kong's cultural superiority as Cheng struggles, not-so-elegantly, to become a true Hong Kong person. Above all else, such humor was built on a climate of uncertainty and anxiety over the future of Hong Kong in light of the nearing handover, injecting the confidence that local mentality had become barren and in need of at that stage. *Her Fatal Ways* thus serves as a collective feeling of fear

in Hong Kong society and that lighter, bubblier way of approaching the potential, imaginable nightmare of 1997. Again, personal possession of the icon in, say, psychological calls for comedy and relaxation or a simplistic representation of consumption and further economic implications can be detected from the icon.

7. Conclusion: Post-1997 Role of Hong Kong

By the end of the day, Hong Kong subjectivity always seems to be shifting back, forth, back and forth between the large but often alien nationalism and the local, vicarious nationalism that comes from lifestyle and collective memories. These displacements have led some to claim that Hong Kong as a "subject" often "threatens to get easily lost again" (Abbas, 1997, p. 25). The handover itself was an axis for change, retreat, collapse; but it should be made a point to say that the challenges Hong Kong continues to come to terms with, now and in the future, may serve to mess everything up on any given day. Since the handover, Hong Kong has been perceived as a unique stepping stone to and for the outside world — the world's interest in China as a market subsequently became a lifeline for a post-industrial Hong Kong, fuelling China's re-entry into a world community (Siu, 1996). With this in mind, Elizabeth Sinn realizes the complications: "Hong Kong culture grew in a unique environment full of historical contradictions. Hong Kong is a window to the world for China, as well as one for the world to look into China. In Hong Kong, the Chinese, the foreign, the new, the old, the "'orthodox', 'unorthodox' are mixed in a melting pot with various contradictions as catalysts, out of which arises a pluralistic, fluid, exuberant cultural uniqueness" (Sinn, 1995, p. 4).

Due to the role that Hong Kong has been propelled to play in this world of complexity, the temptations of globalization, internationalization and a transnational culture could not have been resisted. In the entertainment industry alone, Chow Yun Fat, Jackie Chan, Ronny Yu and John Woo have all gone Hollywood and local movies slowly deviated from local situations to more androgynous, Western themes. Wong Kar-wai went from *Tears Go By (Mongkok Carmen)* in 1988 to *Days of Being Wild* to *In the Mood for Love* to *Chungking Express* to sojourning in 2004's *2046*. So to say, Hong Kong's transnational culture is so fluid and malleable, perfectly suited to contribute significantly to the creation of a global culture. This explains why Helen Siu hopes that Hong Kong should take pride and insist on the social institutions it has built, whilst taking on the historical role of engaging China positively with the outside world in the nexus — Hong Kong will no doubt be politically linked to the PRC for as long as imaginable and a convenient purpose must be realized to confirm its worth (Siu, 2003).

Perhaps this is a viable road, for if the Hong Kong identity is to be strengthened and affirmed, if at least for now, it faces partial or absolute dissipation in tomorrow's flexibility and doom. However, the anxiety of the Hong Kong people remains. Secured in the uniqueness of their own culture and lifestyle, Hong Kong people sometimes prefer to keep mainland China at arm's length. What Hong Kong legislator Margaret Ng once said reflects their hidden feelings: "We are Chinese without being only Chinese. We can accept Western civilization without identifying with the West. We observe universal values without losing our own cultural identity." (England, 2012). However, growing cultural antagonism with mainlanders over these years has led quite a number of them to reimagine the pre-1997 era as good old days. It partly

explains why the number of Hong Kongers who identify themselves as "Chinese citizens" has continued to drop since 2008 (HKU, POP site) and why British colonial-era flags have become standard props of recent demonstrations against Mr. C. Y. Leung, the unpopular Chief Executive of the HKSAR, who was hand-picked by the Chinese government.

Icons — like *heung-gong yan* — interpret, live, re-live and blend in the history of Hong Kong, saying more than human minds will ever do because collective unconsciousness, is after all, not conscious but revealing.

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