

# Translocal Imagination of Hong Kong

## Connections: The Shifting of Chow Yun-fat's Star Image Since 1997

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Anyone who is interested in Hong Kong cinema must be familiar with one name: Chow Yun-fat (b. 1955). He rose to film stardom in the 1980s when Hong Kong cinema started to attract global attention beyond East Asia. During his early screen career, Chow established a star image as an urban citizen of modern Hong Kong through films such as *A Better Tomorrow/Yingxiong bense* (John Woo, 1986), *City on Fire/Longhu fengyun* (Ringo Lam, 1987), *All About Ah-Long/A Lang de gushi* (Johnnie To, 1989), *God of Gamblers/Du shen* (Wong Jing, 1989), and *Hard Boiled/Lashou shentan* (John Woo, 1992). Many Hong Kong film critics claim that Chow's popularity among local audiences is deeply tied to the rising awareness of Hong Kong's local identity under the context that the city was undergoing transition from being a British colonial city to becoming the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) in 1997 (Sek Kei et al. 2000).

However, after over a decade of prosperity in the 1980s and early 1990s, Hong Kong cinema has been in a long period of recession. Mo Jianwei (2008) notes that the local film industry's annual production dropped by nearly 40 per cent, from 242 films in 1993 to 150 in 2000. The decline of Hong Kong cinema saw a number of local

stars and film-makers migrating overseas. Following his friends and long-time collaborators John Woo, Ringo Lam and Terence Cheung, who moved to America in the early 1990s, Chow also announced his decision to continue his career in Hollywood in 1995. However, Chow's Hollywood career was not very successful. His capacity as a refined drama actor was severely restricted due to Hollywood studios' typecasting and his lack of English language skills acting as a barrier (Ho 2012, 32; Fore 2004, 97). Although Chow's third American film, *Anna and the King* (Andy Tennant, 1999), made him the first male Chinese actor to lead in a major Hollywood romantic drama, it remains to this day the only Hollywood-produced blockbuster to cast a male East Asian actor as a romantic lead.

In the meantime, the production of Hong Kong films continued to drop. In 2011, the Hong Kong film industry only produced 56 films (Zhong 2012, 2). In contrast to this, commercial cinema in Mainland China was expanding on an unprecedented scale. Annual production increased from 38 films in 2002 to 456 in 2009 (Entgroup, 2010). The fast growth of the Chinese film market and the development of transnational Chinese cinema are demanding a large number of film talents, either in front of, or behind, the camera. Subsequently, many Hong Kong stars and film-makers, regardless of whether they remained in Hong Kong or left in the 1990s, have started to work in Mainland China since the early 2000s.

With his Hollywood experience, Chow became a highly valued global star in the eyes of Chinese film producers, and since the mid-2000s he gradually returned to East Asia and joined others in transnational Chinese cinema. Among those film stars who migrated to Hollywood in the 1990s, Chow is the one whose star persona has a particular connection to the average Hong Kong citizen's self-identification. This is

not only because of his early screen persona, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, but also because of his off-screen life and career path. Unlike Mainland China-born Jet Li and Malaysia-born Michelle Yeoh, who adopted Hong Kong citizenship in their adulthood, Chow is a local-born Hong Kong citizen. Also different from Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung, who received their martial arts training at a Peking opera school, Chow began his acting career on TVB, the prime commercial terrestrial channel in Hong Kong in the mid-1970s. While Chan and Hung reached their initial fame in martial arts films set in a Chinese agricultural society, such as *The Iron-fisted Monk/San De Huo Shang yu Chong Mi Liu* (Sammo Hung, 1977) and *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow/Shexing diaoshou* (Yuen Woo-ping, 1978), Chow gained his fame by playing a number of urban young men in television dramas set in modern Hong Kong, such as *Man in the Net/Wang zhong ren* (TVB, 1979) and *Family Feelings/Qingqing* (TVB, 1980). Chow's connection with Hong Kong and local citizens is well illustrated by local film critic Shu Kei's comments:

The strongest attraction about Chow is that he belongs totally to Hong Kong [...] The closeness we feel about him comes in part from his television career and in part from his total accessibility. We know about his history [...] He started from the lowest rung in the ladder (TVB actors training class), and as he worked his way up step by step we were there to witness the process. Although Jackie Chan is also a box-office guarantee, we cannot feel the same intimacy about him. Firstly, we know little about his history, and secondly, he rose to fame overseas and not in Hong Kong, returning home to develop his career only after achieving success in Japan. (cited in Sek Kei et al. 2000, 108–09)

Signifying Hong Kong pride, Chow was awarded an honorary doctorate by the City University of Hong Kong in 2001. In 2003, Chow also became the first and only contemporary celebrity to have his life story been published in a school textbook in Hong Kong. In a sense, Chow established a star persona as a Hong Konger *per se*. In this chapter, I will continue to examine Chow's connection with Hong Kong's identity by focusing on his post-1997 stardom. Through the discursive discussion of his career moves and star image in Hollywood and Chinese films, I will illustrate how expatriate Hong Kong stardom is deployed as a site where a Hong Konger's local identity is imagined and interrogated beyond the city's territory after the handover in 1997.

## **From an expatriate Hong Kong star to a Hollywood star**

Introduced in the United States as a cult action hero and veteran superstar from Hong Kong (Schwarz 2001; Rance 1999; Coker 1997, 8), Chow started his Hollywood career as a leading man in action B movies. *The Replacement Killers* (Antoine Fuqua, 1998) and *The Corruptor* (James Foley, 1999) are two star vehicles that were intended to mimic the star's earlier Hong Kong action films. In his Hollywood debut, *The Replacement Killers*, Chow plays John Lee, a hit man who saves an innocent boy whom he is ordered to kill. Chow's second Hollywood character, Nick Chen, is a crooked police officer. Similarly to Lee, Chen also saves a young man who he is instructed to corrupt and kill. As with many of Chow's Hong Kong action heroes, Lee and Chen are two men who walk between goodness and badness.

However, as migrants, both of Chow's characters are trapped in notorious Chinatown, a self-contained entity that is separate from the rest of America in the films. Controlled by an underworld organization, Chen and Lee thus encounter a dilemma of whether to carry out the gang lord's order or follow their own sense of social justice and moral standards. The ultimate battle between the hero and the gang lord accordingly reveals that the real conflict comes from within, rather than beyond, the (overseas) Chinese community. This arrangement to some degree confirms Norman K. Denzin's argument that contemporary Hollywood frequently complicates its cinematic portrayals of the racial subject by its tendency to place good and bad dark-skinned people together (2002, 15).

To develop Denzin's argument further, I would like to note here that Hollywood's racial representation of the Asian image is often integrated with America's political perception of international affairs. In this case, Lee and Chen's attitude to Chinatown and the Chinese gang lord reveals America's perception of Hong Kong's post-1997 relationship with China. As the United States-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992 and CRS Report for Congress (Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division 2007) clearly state, the United States regards Hong Kong as a separate entity from the rest of China and would therefore continue to treat the city differently after 1997. Meanwhile, both the Act and the Report urge the US government to be aware that Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and democracy would be challenged by China's administration after the handover. In parallel to the content of the Act and Report, is the American mainstream media's discourse surrounding Hong Kong stars and film-makers' career moves. For instance, in an interview with Chow, the *Los Angeles Times* (Smith 1995, 10) repeatedly used the words 'end of something', 'repressed' and 'dying' of Hong Kong cinema, which delivers a

suggestive message that China's administration would threaten HKSAR's future autonomous role and its freedom. Under this presumption, the *Los Angeles Times* (Smith 1995, 10) asserts that many Hong Kong stars, directors and producers, including Chow, had acquired a foreign passport as an insurance policy.

As a Hong Kong superstar moving to America two years before the handover, Chow thus became an impersonator of America's imagination of Hong Kong's transition to HKSAR both on and off the big screen. While his career move was presented to the American public as a Hong Kong citizen's refusal of the new post-1997 identity, his Hollywood action heroes reinforce America's sceptical view towards China's administration, thereby underlining the imagination of Hong Kong citizens' post-1997 identity crisis. In *The Replacement Killers* and *The Corruptor*, both of Chow's characters demonstrate a desire to distance themselves from China (town). While Lee fights to get his whole family out of China, Chen, a second-generation Hong Kong migrant, is lured to stay in Chinatown because he believes the inside information from a crime organization known as the Tongs will offer him a means of entering into the American mainstream society. In both films, the transformation of Chow's character into an action hero involves his fight against an autocratic force from Mainland China, respectively represented by the angry gang lord Terence Wei (Kenneth Tsang), who seeks revenge for his dead son in *The Replacement Killers* and cunning Henry Lee (Ric Young) – the second-in-command of the Tongs – in *The Corruptor* who launches a takeover battle in Chinatown in collaboration with Bobby Vu (Byron Mann), the leader of a new gang, the Fukienese Dragons, whose members are new migrants from Mainland China.

*The Replacement Killers'* director Antoine Fuqua (2002) revealed that an important scene was deleted from the film's theatrical version due to the studio's market consideration. In this deleted scene, Chow's character Lee tells audiences that his whole family was tortured and humiliated in China because his father disagreed with Chairman Mao during the Cultural Revolution. To fulfil his father's death wish, Lee goes to Wei for help to get his whole family out of China. While Lee's own situation in Chinatown replicates his father's in Mainland China, his battle against Wei is therefore charged with Hollywood's imagination of China's political system as a Communist country. According to Fuqua (2002), as a precaution, the studio decided to sacrifice the film's storyline by removing the scene from the film's theatrical version. In doing so, Columbia Pictures avoided the possibility that the film would be banned from commercial release in the by then-China-controlled Hong Kong, which was one of the major film markets where the studio intended to capitalize on Chow's fandom. This deleted scene and Fuqua's comment not only reveals Hollywood's perception of Hong Kong as a different entity from Mainland China, it also confirms the studio's imagination of China as a Communist country that has a low tolerance for free speech.

Hollywood's perception of China's threat to Hong Kong is more explicitly manifested in *The Corruptor's* director James Foley's comment on the gang battle in the film. As the film tells audiences, Uncle Benny Wong (Kim Chan), the boss of the Tongs, was originally from Hong Kong. Although his business is illegal, Tongs has its own bottom line of violence. However, the arrival of the mainland Chinese gang, as Foley (1999) claims, poses a threat to the Tongs, as well as to the existing order in Chinatown because they are more violent and have lower moral standards. To reflect upon Foley's comments, both Wong and Chow's Chen are killed by the Fukienese

Dragon. In this regard, the film also suggests that mainland Chinese's takeover would threaten Hong Kong's existence.

However, neither *The Replacement Killers* nor *The Corruptor* did well at the box office. Many film scholars regard them as further examples of Hollywood's clichéd racial representation of subordinate Chinese people (Marchetti 2001, 37; Lo 2004, 69). Although *The Replacement Killers* and *The Corruptor*, as I demonstrated earlier, did differentiate the representation of Hong Kongers and mainland Chinese, those film scholars believe that Chow and his screen persona were sacrificed by Hollywood as a way to cater to America's imagination of the oriental object. This, to some degree complicates the perception of expatriate Hong Kong stardom. Whilst Hollywood and the American mass media used Chow's career move to suggest the different political identification between Hong Kongers and mainland Chinese, those scholars' argument emphasized the fact that the audiences' perception of the overseas Hong Kong star's screen image is often associated with their Chinese ethnic background. Therefore, it raises a question about how expatriate Hong Kong stars negotiated their post-1997 political identity through, rather than against, their ethnic identity.

## **From a Hollywood star to a global star**

Soon after *The Corruptor*, Chow seized an opportunity to lead 20th Century Fox's *Anna and the King*, a romantic epic targeting the global film market. In the film, Chow plays King Mongkut of Siam (Thailand), a well-known Asian man whose image has been fictionalized on Hollywood's big screen several times, including in *The King and I* (1956) which saw its star Yul Brynner, playing the King Mongkut in yellowface, win an Academy Award for Best Actor. Released in 1999 during



Christmas season, *Anna and the King* distinguishes itself from previous versions by casting a large number of Asian actors. In terms of Chow's cast, director Andy Tennant (Short 1999) states,

[F]rom a purely heterosexual point of view, [...Chow] is a really cool, sexy, strong, charming, funny guy. The other thing about Yun-fat was that when I learned King Mongkut had spent many years as a monk, there's a certain stillness and gentleness in Yun-fat that really captures the essence of that.

Tennant's comment on Chow's sexual appeal as a funny, cool guy and spiritual calmness indeed underlines the flexibility inscribed in Chow's star image. More importantly, Tennant's remark suggests that Chow's star persona reconciles different characteristics, even though they appear to be conflicting with each other.

During the next five years or so, many of Chow's films feature the star in roles whose hybrid identity signifies a status of transition, such as his martial artist Li Mubai in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon/Wohu canglong* (Ang Lee, 2000) and as a nameless Tibetan monk in *Bulletproof Monk* (Paul Hunter, 2003, I will come back to this point later). The production of these films often shared a similar feature, that is, involving strong input from Asia, whether with the script consultancy in *Anna and the King*, the funding for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* or the action choreography in *Bulletproof Monk*. In addition to recruiting expatriate Asian film-makers and stars, these films were either filmed in Asia or (at least partially) set the story against an Asia background. Accordingly, Chow's star image started to change on the big screen. Unlike his Hollywood action heroes, who directly collide with the (mainland) Chinese power, Chow's screen roles during this period often demonstrate an awareness of compromise and understanding. For instance, rather than drastically

changing the institutional rules, Chow's King Mongkut adopts reformist tactics, recognizing the importance of protecting Siam's old customs and the country's independence, as well as the needs of social reform. However, Chow's King Mongkut is, after all, not a rebellious man. Although he is committed to social reform, he does not directly defy the established social system. Taking gradual and mild steps to avoid conflict with aristocrats, he believes 'everything has its own time' and social change will not happen overnight (Tennant 1999). Yet the king's vision of the country's modernization would pave a solid ground for his son Prince Chulalongkom (Keith Chin) to continue the social reform, a message clearly stated at the end of the film through Prince Chulalongkom's voice over.

Chow's screen image as a compromiser and reformer continued after *Anna and the King*. In 2000, Chow played martial arts master Li Mubai in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, an acclaimed international co-production. The success of this Chinese language film soon saw Chow being cast as a nameless monk in Hollywood martial arts film *Bulletproof Monk*. Unlike Chow's previous Hollywood action films, which had tried to capture the star's charisma as a modern action hero, *Bulletproof Monk* was Hollywood's attempt to replicate Chow's screen image as a pre-modern martial arts master. Similar to his King Mongkut, Chow's Li and the nameless monk are two men on the fringes of society. In both films, Chow's screen roles are as martial arts masters who carry out the duty of passing down martial arts skills to the younger generation, not only physical battle skills but also the philosophy of martial arts.

In the meantime, Li and the nameless monk set themselves apart from the older generation of martial artist by adapting the rules. For instance, in *Crouching*

*Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Li's decision to teach Jen (Zhang Ziyi) the orthodox *Wudang* martial arts challenges his own master, Southern Crane's, attitude to Jade Fox (Cheng Pei-pei), as well as the patriarchal *jianghu*'s discrimination against woman. In *Bulletproof Monk*, Chow's nameless monk is a guardian of an Asian secret scroll of ultimate power that could either make the world a 'paradise' or a 'living hell' (Hunter 2003). To prove his worth and take on the duty, he had transformed himself from 'the most undisciplined youth' to a responsible monk who sacrifices his own name (Hunter 2003). Although the scroll was kept in Asia for generations, he travels globally to seek the next generation guardian. More interestingly, rather than passing the scroll to a single guardian, Tibetan or Buddhist, the nameless monk chooses an American street boy named Kar (Sean William Scott) and a Russian mafia member's daughter Jade (Jaime King) as his successors. In this respect he bonds two youngsters together who are from democratic America and Russia, a former Communist country. In these three films, Chow's characters adapt the old rules to suit the new social context, while at the same time upholding the cultural tradition that they believe in. Being a reformist, Chow's screen image therefore incorporates two identities together as a submissive and yet open-minded man. It is through the hybridity that Chow's screen images, particularly during this period, serve as a link between tradition and modernity, past and future, liberal and conservative, and institute and individual.

In comparison to Chow's Hong Kong screen image, his post-1997 screen image up to the mid-2000s is very versatile in terms of the characters' ethnicities and national background. He is a mainland Chinese hit man in *The Replacement Killers*, a second-generation Hong Kong migrant in *The Corruptor*, a Siamese king in *Anna and the King*, a Han-ethnic martial artist in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and a Tibetan monk in *Bulletproof Monk*. Chow's screen roles of different Asian ethnicities

are criticized by Julian Stringer (2003, 233) as a signifier of an arbitrary otherness, with little distinction between the subtle differences in Asian ethnicities. However, there is another voice from the film industry. Director John Woo and producer Terence Chang, both from Hong Kong and working for Hollywood since the mid-1990s, claim that Chow belongs to the category of actors whose 'face [...] transcends [...] race and nationality' (Coker 1997, 8). Being a professional actor whose job is to act, impersonate and to become someone else on the big screen, Chow proves to both sides that he embodies the flexibility and adaptability of expatriate Hong Kong stardom, professionally, ethnically and culturally.

The shifting of Chow's post-1997 screen image up to this point must be considered in the social context that China has increasingly become an important player in international affairs. Beijing was shortlisted for the 2008 Summer Olympics Games in 2000, which it was subsequently awarded in 2001. Also in 2001, China closed a deal after nearly 15 years of negotiations and entered the World Trade Organization (WTO). As part of the agreement with the WTO, the Chinese government doubled the annual number of foreign films that were allowed theatrical release in Mainland China under the revenue-share scheme from ten to 20 (Cheung et al. 2002). While the Chinese model that combines political Communism and economic capitalism also started to catch global attention, the deepening trade relationship between Mainland China and Hong Kong also lifted the city out of a prolonged recession caused by the Asian Financial Crisis and the outbreak of SARS. All of those high-profile occurrences have gradually reshaped China's image from a mythical Communist country to an emerging power that actively participates in international affairs on the global stage.

China's increasing influence inside and outside Asia not only encourages film-makers to reconsider the relationship between the East and the West, but also the influences on Hong Kong citizens' perception of self-identification. According to surveys (University of Hong Kong 1997, 2005), the percentage of Hong Kong citizens who identify themselves as Chinese citizens has increased from 18 per cent after the handover to 30.8 per cent in 2005. It is in this social context that Chow's on-screen image shifts away from the cinematic depiction of conflict to reconciliation. While the hybridity and adaptability of Chow's on- and off-screen image allows the star to link and move across various ethnic, national, regional and cultural borders, they also suggest that a Hong Kong citizen could simultaneously hold multiple identities as a Hong Konger, HKSARer, Chinese, overseas Hong Konger, diasporic Chinese, Asian, global citizen and so on.

## **From a global star to a returning HKSAR star**

Along with the increasing investment in the Chinese film industry, rapidly growing numbers of film-goers in China's domestic market and the emerging trend of the pan-East Asia film production, Chinese language cinema has attracted many diasporic Hong Kong film-makers and stars to Mainland China since the mid-2000s. Although Chow has only appeared in a small number of Hollywood films, his experiences of leading Hollywood films has seen him being presented in China as an eminent star. In comparison with Chow's screen image as a modern urban citizen in Hong Kong cinema, his recent screen image is increasingly sinicized. The majority of Chow's recent films are set against the background of pre-modern China; and his roles, such as Emperor Ping in *Curse of the Golden Flower/Mancheng jindai huangjinjia* (Yimou Zhang, 2006), Confucius in *Confucius/Kong Zi* (Mei Hu, 2010), Cao Cao in *The*

*Assassins/Tong que tai* (Linshan Zhao, 2012) and Jade Emperor in *The Monkey King/Danao tiangong* (Pou-Soi Cheang, 2014), often act as a spokesman of Confucian codes of filial piety and loyalty. However, Chow's recent screen roles rarely show interest in reform or reconciliation. Instead, they defend the legitimacy of the ruling class under the name of maintaining social stability and harmony.

In 2006, Chow played Emperor Ping in *Curse of the Golden Flower*, which marks the star's collaboration with a director from Mainland China for the first time. Emperor Ping is a power-hungry man who employs any means, including poisoning his wife and beating his youngest son to death, to ensure his possession of power and authority. Whereas the image of Emperor Ping suggests that paternal power is too strong to be challenged (Lin 2010, 11–12), Chow's other recent characters more subtly articulate the narrative of power with respectability. For instance, Chow was chosen to play the title character in *Confucius*, a biography of the Chinese philosopher, scholar and educator. Confucianism's ideas of loyalty and endurance have a great influence on the Chinese cultural code and social customs within the patriarchal society, and were adapted by the ruling class in Imperial China.

It is not only *Confucius*, but also *The Assassins* and *Monkey King*, which manifest the transformation of the star's post-1997 screen image. In the former, Chow played Cao Cao, a historical figure who is often depicted as a cruel and suspicious tyrant in Chinese literature and theatrical drama, such as *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. In *Monkey King*, Chow played Jade Emperor, a mythical ruler of Heaven, Earth and Hell, who represents authority and power in Taoism, as well as in the well-known Chinese classical novel *Journey to the West*. Written in the sixteenth and fourteenth centuries, respectively, *Romance of Three Kingdoms* and *Journey to the*

*West* are acclaimed as two of the four great classical novels in Chinese literature. Despite the long-lasting fictional images of Cao Cao and Jade Emperor, Chow's performance of the two characters is presented to the public as an entirely new interpretation. For instance, his Cao Cao becomes a man who pursues love, peace and unity, and he is said to be a hero who seeks to stop the war between different states in China, according to the film's director Zhao Linshan (Gao 2011). Similarly, the media publicity of *Monkey King* emphasizes that Chow's Jade Emperor is a tolerant and wise God who only imposes his omnipotent power on others when the worlds' peace and social harmony are under anarchistic threat (Danao Tiangong 2011; dianying 'Danao Tiangong' 2010).

In the meantime, Chow is presented as a highly influential and respectful veteran star whose industrial experiences, professional reputation and perceived global fame have young actors and film-makers in awe ('Huangjinjia' 2006; Sun 2009a; Danao Tiangong 2011; Zhu 2011). On the other hand, Chow's star persona as a friendly and easy-going man is also highlighted in the media publicity of Chow's latest films (Li 2009; Sun 2009b; Danao Tiangong 2011), which have contributed to Chow's public image, strongly corresponding with the Confucian codes traditionally appreciated in Chinese society.

The refocused cinematic and media construction of Chow's star image since the mid-2000s, to some degree shows China's intention to promote the country as a peaceful, rising, global superpower. As Xiaoqin Guo (2003) and Yongnian Zheng (2010) point out, one of the primary concerns of the Chinese central government today is to keep the unity and stability in China and reinforce the one party policy during a period when the country has undergone rapid economic growth. Whilst

Confucianism served the ruling society well for over 2000 years of Chinese history, the Chinese government has also started to re-imbibe and re-promote Confucianism in recent years. Defending authority and institutional power, Chow's recent roles on the Chinese big screen seem to have a particular and timely conformance with the resurgent fear of Mainland China's threat to Hong Kong's local identity along with China's continuous growing power.

According to a survey (University of Hong Kong, 2012), Hong Kong citizen's confidence in the city's future grew from 65.2 per cent in 1999 to 80.2 per cent in 2008. However, this figure gradually dropped to 53.7 per cent in 2012, nearly 11.5 per cent lower than the figure in 1999. Those figures reflect the complex relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China after the city's return to China. The deepening economic ties and relaxed border control, such as the Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and Individual Visit Scheme, has benefited Hong Kong's recovery from recession and economy development significantly. However, there is also a growing concern for preserving Hong Kong's local culture, under the context that the relaxed border control has seen a large influx of mainland Chinese people into Hong Kong as tourists, migrants, highly skilled workers, investors and students. Accompanied with these concerns are worries that high purchase demand from mainlanders overstretch local resources, as shown in a number of occurrences, including, but not limited to, the lowered quality of maternal care at local hospitals due to a large number of mainland pregnant women entering Hong Kong to give birth in order to get their new-born babies Hong Kong citizenship; Hong Kong parents' frustration at the shortage of baby milk supplies because of mainland parents' panic buying since tainted milk was found in China; and continuously rising house prices pushed up by mainland Chinese investor' demand for local housing.



The dispute between Hong Kong citizens and mainlanders was further escalated by two incidents. The first was the provoking remarks made by Kong Qingxiang, a Peking University professor who called Hong Kong citizens a ‘running dog’ of British imperialists (Watts 2012), and the second was the Hong Kong Education Bureau’s proposal of replacing Moral and Civic Education with Moral and National Education, a school curriculum aimed at strengthening national education. All of these incidents sparked a number of anti-Mainland China protests in Hong Kong during 2012. Nevertheless, the large scale of Hong Kong citizens’ protests, together with publicised full-page advertisements that labelled mainlanders as ‘locusts’ along with some Hong Kong citizens’ action of waving UK Union Flags in protest marches has also angered many mainlanders. Lu Ping, the former director of the State Council’s Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office openly commented that the anti-mainland sentiments in Hong Kong were caused by some arrogant Hong Kongers who were fearful for the loss of their superiority over mainlanders (Cheung and Lau 2012). The conflict between Hong Kong citizens and mainlanders are putting the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ idea into doubt on both sides.

Under this context, Chow’s recent sinicized screen image discloses Chinese commercial cinema’s embracing of the government’s promotion of the ideas of social stability, unity, harmony and loyalty to the ruling party. As Yu (2012, 234–35) notes, in the post-socialist period ‘patriotism’ has become ‘a basic criterion Chinese actors have to meet if they want to establish their stardom in the PRC [...] For Hong Kong and Taiwan stars, it is even more important to package themselves as patriotic stars in order to consolidate their star status and expand their fan base in the mainland.’ Under the context that many of Chow’s recent films were produced by the studios owned by the state, the star’s latest screen image not only embodies China’s effort of shaping

the way the country and its ruling party is perceived domestically and globally, but also illustrates Hong Kong's dependent status as a Chinese special region on the big screen.

Since Chow has transformed himself from a Hong Kong megastar to a transnational Chinese icon, his star image and career trajectory provide a flexible site that contests Hong Kong and Hong Kong citizens' post-1997 identity. Behind Chow's shifting screen image, however, is the complex and constant negotiation between the resistance and embracing of China's growing power across borders. Through Chow and his screen images, Hollywood and Chinese cinemas express their own imagination in relation to Hong Kong's transition from a British colonial city to a Chinese special administrative region.

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