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Xuelin ZHOU
University of Auckland

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University of Auckland

ABSTRACT

Researchers of contemporary Hong Kong cinema have tended to concentrate on the monumental, metropolitan and/or historical works of such esteemed directors as Wong Kar-Wai, John Woo and Tsui Hark. This paper focuses instead on a number of low-budget films that circulated below the radar of Chinese as well as Western film scholars but were important to local young viewers, i.e. a cluster of films that feature deviant and marginalized youth as protagonists. They are very interesting as evidence of perceived social problems in contemporary Hong Kong. The paper aims to outline some main features of these marginalized youth films produced since the mid-1990s.

Keywords: Hong Kong, cinema, youth culture, youth film, marginalized youth

On the Rooftop

A scene set on the rooftop of a skyscraper in central Hong Kong appears in *New Police Story* (2004), or *Xin jingcha gushi*, by the Hong Kong director Benny Chan, an action drama that features an aged local police officer struggling to fight a group of trouble-making, tech-savvy teenagers.² The young people are using the rooftop for an “X-party,” an occasion for showing off their skills of skateboarding and cycling, by doing daredevil stunts along the edge of the building. A crane shot presents the rooftop as a separate world existing between water and sky. This rooftop scene is as symbolically rich as it is visually striking. The teenagers have found a space in the city that is free of rules – an escape from school, family, and the law. Its openness and danger allow them to feel fully alive, indulging in hedonism and heroics which are all they care about. The camera emphasizes the fact that they can almost feel they are flying far above the mundane adult world many stories below.

This paper looks at the representation of marginalized youth in Hong Kong films since the mid-1990s. The rooftop in *New Police Story* serves as a symbol of the world of these street kids – a deliberate antithesis to normal society, a place of adventure and excitement, and also of danger and death. Such a space is reminiscent of the scenes of risk-defying youthful behavior evoked in many western films about teenage culture, starting in 1955 with *Rebel Without a Cause* by Nicholas Ray.

In Hong Kong, the production of marginalized or rebellious youth films as a separate genre can be traced back to the 1960s following the city’s increasing urbanization, localization and Westernization.³ In 1969, two years after a citywide

riot in which youngsters stood at the vanguard, Lung Kong directed *The Teddy Girls* or *Feiniu zhengzhuan*, a social melodrama that records the rebellion of a teenage schoolgirl from a wealthy family, and this became a commercial and critical hit.⁴ In the 1970s, Bruce Lee's portrayal of angry and alienated young men generated a phenomenon not just at home but also internationally – though Lee's films were able to appeal not only to young viewers. By the 1980s, more films featuring marginalized youth had come to local screens, ranging from Tsui Hark's graphic *Dangerous Encounter – The First Kind* (1980), or *Diyi leixing weixian*, to Wong Kar-Wai's nostalgic *As Tears Go By* (1988), or *Wangjiao kamen*. The trickle became a flood in the 1990s. The appearance of Andrew Lau's *Young and Dangerous* series and a multitude of other motion pictures about alienated young people by local directors such as Fruit Chan and Herman Yau had such impact that they even received academic attention though it is still rare to see them studied directly in terms of the theme of marginalized youth.

This paper chooses to focus not on well-known films from established filmmakers, such as *Made in Hong Kong* (1997), or *Xianggang zhizao*, by Fruit Chan or *Happy Together* (2000), or *Chunguang zhaxie*, by Wong Kar-Wai,⁵ but on a number of marginalized youth films that circulated below the radar of film scholars. These films about the life and death of urban youths of poor education, low socio-economic status, and deep involvement in triad activities are important because they highlight a spectrum of significant issues in contemporary Hong Kong society. It is also interesting to see how youth perspectives are realized in filmic terms. The films discussed here are limited to those produced and set in modern Hong Kong and featuring young characters who were born and came of age there (not migrant characters from other areas such as the Mainland). Some of these films are accessible (more often in the form of VCD rather than DVD) only in some video shops in the areas of Jordan, or Zuodun, and Yau Ma Tei, or Youmadi, of Hong Kong, though the Hong Kong Film Archive is an ideal place to view and study them. Since the literature about these films is extremely scarce, the present paper is little more than a close reading of films as “texts”, although it also relates them to relevant social, cultural and industrial contexts. A central method of the study is to discuss these films in the light of film studies, and not to reduce them to raw sociological data though it is acknowledged that films can be sophisticated constructions, mediations,

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² The paper uses the *Hanyu Pinyin* system to romanize the Chinese titles of the films.

³ The genre here is not merely “films targeted at youth” but “films about rebellious and/or marginalized youth.”

⁴ For an insightful analysis of the film and its relation to an emergent youth culture in Hong Kong, see Fu 2000: particularly 81-86.

⁵ There has been a rich scholarship on these works both in Chinese and in English. For example, the New Hong Kong Cinema Series from Hong Kong University Press includes titles on Wong Kar-Wai's *Happy Together* (2003) and Fruit Chan's *Made in Hong Kong* (forthcoming).

and representations.

This paper will look particularly closely at Cha Chuan Yee's *Once Upon a Time in Triad Society 2* (1996), or *Quba, zha fitren bingtuan*, Pan Jiafu's *The Boss Up There* (1999), *Shengming zha fitren*, Wellson Chin's *Street Kids Violence* (1999), or *Sanwu chengqun*, and Lawrence Ah Mon's *Spacked Out* (2000), or *Wuren jiashi*. The appearance of this wave of films about street youth can be seen as a reaction to an intensely commercialized society and to issues revolving around the 1997 sovereignty handover.⁶ From an industrial perspective, some of these films can also be seen as partly a response to the market success of Andrew Lau's *Young and Dangerous* series. It has been a common practice in Hong Kong cinema that when a film becomes a hit, other producers swarm in to make variations.⁷ The challenge to the makers of such films is to present the living state of marginalized youth in a way that is exciting and authentic, yet still finds some way to add a pro-social, moral perspective. One of the interesting results is the way they subvert some of the conventional codes in Hong Kong action films.

“No Man Driving”

In many respects, the meanings of the rooftop scene described at the beginning of this paper are echoed in the title of the film, *Spacked Out*. (A more literal translation of its Chinese title is “no man driving.”) The film focuses on the deviant behavior of four 13 or 14-year-old schoolgirls, who play truant and explore the darker corners of their society. Presented from the perspective of Cookie, a teenage underachiever, the film's narrative records the colorful (after-)school life of Cookie, Sissy, Banana and Beancurd in Tuen Mum, an outer township of Hong Kong. Refusing to follow the rules they have been taught, they live lives revolving around convenience stores (for shoplifting), karaoke bars (for dating), drugs, the smuggling of goods, street fighting, one-night stands, and abortions. Their life is like a fast car with “no man driving.” The coming of age journey of these teenage girls holds plenty of excitement but also great danger.

Both *Street Kids Violence* and *The Boss Up There* are based on true events that once touched a raw nerve in the local community. The former film follows the activities of the teenage gang Dynasty in Sau Mou Ping, or Xiumaoping, a new town

⁶ One recurring theme of Hong Kong cinema since the mid-1980s revolves around issues caused by the 1997 sovereignty transfer. Local filmmakers have produced works “infused with allegorical treatments of 1997 and were obsessed with themes of destiny and fate.” (Li 1990:9) For example, in Andrew Lau's *Young and Dangerous 3*, this new era is alluded in a most pessimistic way through the film's final shot of a local graveyard. The shot starts with a close-up presentation of well-arranged tombstones. The camera then zooms out to give an aerial view of the overall graveyard. Against the grey sky, an ascending aeroplane is leaving this haunted territory. Although this historical event is rarely touched directly in these marginalized youth films, the lack of destination and direction among members of a young generation can easily be associated to the “identity crisis” caused by the change in Hong Kong's status.

⁷ Andrew Lau made series of films since *Young and Dangerous 1* (1995) or *Guhuoelai zhi ren zai jianghu*, see Selected Filmography. In fact, quite a few of the marginalized youth films are spin-offs of the *Young and Dangerous* series which inserted Lau's screen characters' names into their Chinese titles, such as the *Legendary “Tai Fei”* (1999), or *Guhuoelai jiqingpian zhi hongxing dafei*, by Kant Leung and *Those Were the Days* (2000), or *Youqing sui Yue Shanji gushi*, by Yip Wai Man. Some, by twisting Andrew Lau's titles, feature street girls as protagonists, i.e. *Sexy and Dangerous* (1996), or *Guhuonü zhi jue zhan jianghu*, by Billy Hin-Sing Tang and *Sexy and Dangerous 2* (2000), or *Guhuonü 2* by Kant Leung.

in Hong Kong consisting of public housing estates. The gang members, led by Emperor and Dumbass, hang out, in threes and fours, and get themselves involved in all types of small-time crime, sometimes becoming more serious. Uncle San is a retarded garbage collector, living in a small unit of a public housing estate. He has been requested by Dumbass' parents to look after their son. The gang, having no place of its own, seizes Uncle San's home as their meeting place. Chicken, a member of the gang, is known for gossiping and telling lies. Seeing that Uncle San is repeatedly bullied and beaten, Chicken becomes sympathetic towards him. One day, Uncle San is beaten again to an unconscious state. Chicken is so troubled that he reports this to the police. Out of revenge, the gang tortures him to death, and then, to destroy the evidence, they burn his body. The film ends with the Dynasty gang being caught and sentenced.

The Boss Up There traces the misguided life of two youngsters in modern Hong Kong. Tung is a streetwise schoolgirl who shows no interest in school life and falls for the street youth, Fung. She leaves home to move in with him. Tung's life starts to veer out of control as she becomes addicted to drugs. Fung, driven by lack of money, joins a local triad. He is later caught by the police and locked up in jail, leaving behind a pregnant Tung who has been forced into prostitution to finance her habit. Although she is cleaned up with the help of a local Christian community, Fung, after release, becomes paralyzed as a result of drug abuse.

Set in contemporary Hong Kong, these films about young people living and dying on the margins of society are based on a fascination for what happens when the usual process of socialization fails. Young people in these films tend to come from a broken and/or dysfunctional family and do not have a clear sense of direction in life. The protagonist of *The Boss Up There* laments: "We really do not know how to continue with our life."⁸ Life to him, as to many other young people in these films, is a state of boredom, and so they turn to hedonism and risk-taking. Many become habitués of the discos, nightclubs and small restaurants (*dapaidang*) in Kowloon, or Jiulong, especially in the streets of Tsim Sha Tsui, or Jianshazui, Yau Ma Tei or Mongkok. The film's narrative is driven by their conflicts with parents, school teachers, and the adult world in general. In order to reflect the fast life these teenagers lead, and to add a sense of authenticity, the films turn to semi-documentary styles, on-site (rather than studio) locations, filming at night, mobile camera work, and unknown amateur actors.

Much of the action in *Once Upon a Time in Triad Society 2* happens at night. The film opens with a night sequence at Mongkok which is composed of exterior shots of neon signs and interior shots of nightclubs and disco bars where young adults are drinking heavily while watching strip shows. A number of close-up shots of money and a machine counting money pinpoint this "night-less" city as a site of consumption. Nightclubs and disco bars began to appear in Hong Kong only in the late 1970s partly as a result of a new emphasis on consumerism, particularly

⁸ A literal translation of the Chinese title of the film *The Boss Up There* is "Those who are the boss of their lives." Given that the film is on how a section of the young generation has been deprived of motivation, destination, and meaning of life, this title, as such, is ironical.

among youths, whose attitude had been much influenced by imported films such as *Saturday Night Fever*(1977) by John Badham and *Grease*(1978) by Randal Kleiser.⁹ Following in the footsteps of their Western counterparts of the period, young people in Hong Kong found locations where they could hang out and assert a collective identity. Laurence Grossberg has commented:

If society located the body of youth in the spaces of domesticity, consumption and education (with any transgressions resulting in specific sites of incarceration for the youthful offender), then youth could construct its own places in the space of transition between these institutions: in the street, around the jukebox, at the hop and later, at the mall.¹⁰

Through dancing, taking drugs, having sex or fighting, young adults declared their “rejection of the boredom, surveillance, control and normalcy of the straight world as their own imagined future.”¹¹ Unlike many other action/gangster films made in Hong Kong, these marginalized youth films linger over these “spaces of transition,” offering a more candid picture of the life and death of street youths on the periphery of society. The attitude is not to romanticize youth culture, but the immersion is so thorough that viewers may identify with some aspects, and this gives the social ambience a distinctively different feel from the more conventional man-to-man and man-to-woman relationships portrayed in Hong Kong cinema.

Unheroic Heroes

Despite having been a British colony for over 150 years, Hong Kong remains a predominantly Chinese society. Among other aspects, Chinese society has been characterized by a patriarchal system, and what shapes man-and-man and man-and-woman relations is “righteousness” [*yiqi*], a code of honor and brotherhood, along with the subordinate (social and domestic) position of women. Hong Kong films, particularly action ones, are known for a subtle and dynamic representation of these idealized or biased versions of gender relations.¹² As far as the male relationship is concerned, characters in the majority of Hong Kong action films are divided between those who believe in and live up to this code and those who betray it. The central character tends to be depicted as a modern chivalric figure who treasures friendship,

⁹ For a more detailed account of the consuming behaviour and pattern of Hong Kong youth in the 1970s, see Zhang Yueai and Zhang Jiawen 2002:esp.490-496.

¹⁰ Grossberg 1992:179.

¹¹ Grossberg 1992:180.

¹² The action genre here does not include the martial arts/*kungfu* genre, referring exclusively to films with a contemporary urban setting. The Hong Kong action genre had never enjoyed the equal popularity to that of its sibling, the *kungfu*[martial arts] movie. The film that almost single-handedly changed the situation and successfully updated the display of martial feats with the spectacle of gunfights is John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow*(1986), or *Yingxiong bense*. Following the film's phenomenal success, the spectacular concrete jungle of modern Hong Kong is at least equally appealing to audiences as the mythical *jianghu* of a remote and vaguely identified old China. At the risk of generalization, the treatment of gender in martial arts i.e. *kungfu* films in Hong Kong may be divided in two broad trends as represented in the works of King Hu(1932-1997) and those of Chang Cheh(1924-2002).

duty, and honour although some protagonists seek to balance these demands with realism. As for the status of women, this has remained largely unchanged despite the tremendous social and economic transformations in Hong Kong.

A representative filmmaker in portraying the romantic sentiment between and among men, and the marginalization of woman, is John Woo. In his Hong Kong-produced action classics such as *A Better Tomorrow*(1986), or *Yingxiong bense*, and *The Killer*(1989), or *Dixue shuangxiong*, a clear division exists between the sexes. On the one hand, male heroes are depicted as contemptuous of fame and wealth, valuing honour and friendship more than (heterosexual) love, or even life. On the other hand, a female character is often a hopelessly ineffective “troublemaker,” triggering conflicts between men. In terms of his cinematic treatment of men and women, Woo inherits some of the legacy of veteran director Chang Cheh, to whom he served as an assistant for two years. During his 47-year creative career(1947-1993), Chang devoted a lengthy period to making “masculinity” films.¹³ In his perception, the key to the success of an action film is to set up a solemn and stirring atmosphere, and, to achieve this, a director should focus on male charisma.¹⁴ Femininity can also generate emotion, but the atmosphere in that scenario is sentimental. The beauty of femininity does not lie in a fierce fight on a battlefield but in tearful scenes such as a young woman throwing the drafts of a poem into a stove on a snowy night or burying fallen blossoms on an autumn afternoon against the setting sun. Chang’s proposal to make “masculinity” films was warmly received by the local film industry. In the following years, many Hong Kong action films concentrated on a world dominated by male bonds. Narratives were driven by the conflicts associated with loyalty, trust and brotherhood among men, no matter what their professions were—hit men, triad muscle, undercover cops or detectives.

The roles of women in Hong Kong action films were awkward even in youth-oriented films such as the *Young and Dangerous* series which still embodied a male code of honor. Woman characters lived in the shadow of this code, being killed or seriously injured just before they were to acquire the happiness they had longed for (such as marriage). The death of a woman served merely to reinforce the male bonds that had been weakened due to her arrival. Triad member Chicken in *Young and Dangerous 2*(1996) did not hesitate to kill his lover for her betrayal of his friend and gang despite her being “the only woman he loves wholeheartedly.” Afterwards, there was a shower scene for him to wash away the remaining memories of her and to become reconciled with his old buddies.

The youth films discussed in this paper challenge these norms. Many woman characters are independent of men (either mentally or financially, or both) and they do not feel bound by the constraints of traditional gender roles. Like men, young women in these films pursue hedonism and feel bored with normal life. In no case

¹³ Some of Chang Cheh’s “masculinity” films include *One-Armed Swordsman*(1967), or *Dubeidao*, *The Heroic Ones*(1970), or *Shisan taibao* and *Blood Brothers*(1973), or *Cima*. *Blood Brothers* was recently remade by Hong Kong director Peter Chan. This remake (i.e. *The Warlords* or *Toumingzhuang*) was one of the biggest critical and commercial successes of Chinese-language films in 2007.

¹⁴ See Zhang Che c1997:51-59.

do they allow themselves to become fixtures to men. In *Spacked Out*, the teenager protagonists share their sexual and abortion experiences in a public swimming pool. To them, losing virginity at the age of 12 or 13 means nothing and having an abortion only makes them have “bigger breasts, thinner waistline and a shapelier body.” As the film’s narrative unfolds, Cookie finds herself pregnant. After a futile attempt to obtain psychological help from her boyfriend, she has an abortion, sustained emotionally only by her girlfriends. A central subject of the film is “sisterhood,” in contrast to the deep-rooted ideology of brotherhood.

Other youth films similarly challenge the code of brotherhood. For example, *Street Kids Violence* is a film that deconstructs many aspects of male mythology with its characters constantly uttering ironic comments to suggest that brotherhood is an illusion. *Once Upon a Time in Triad Society 2* similarly delineates the triad world from an alternative perspective. The narrative of the film covers one night in Mongkok, when two gangs have an argument over territory. Hundreds of gang members assemble, and a fight is likely to break out at any time. Dagger and Dinosaur, two childhood friends, now work for the two opposing groups. Dinosaur, through watching martial arts and gangster movies, wants to become a great blade warrior and to offer his fighting service to different “big brothers.” His life-long dream is to die a warrior’s death with his funeral attended by hundreds and thousands of admirers who “all wear black suits and white gloves.”¹⁵ Ironically he is stabbed during the night, and later dies a lonely death in Dagger’s deserted flat. By contrast, Dagger continues to make a living as a gambler and a pimp. He says: “Every corner in Mongkok is my home. If I like, I can stay one night here, and one night there.” Dagger’s survival philosophy is “A rascal should know how and when to escape. That is the top technique a rascal should learn.” In this ironic view of the triad world, both death and life are totally lacking in romanticism.

Dagger’s cynical sense of realism is put to the test when he is forced by his gang to avenge the death of their boss. When he goes out to fulfil his mission in a small restaurant, his slow-motion movement parodies some classic scenes in Hong Kong action films, such as Mark avenging the betrayal of his “big brother” in a restaurant in Taipei in *A Better Tomorrow*, or Leon Lai’s assassination attempt in Wong Kar-Wai’s *Fallen Angels* (1995), or *Duoluo tianshi*. In Dagger’s case, he is only acting because he has no alternative. He is far from being portrayed as a chivalric figure as he is drunk (or pretending to be so), and he has just walked out of a toilet, as he tumbles towards his assassination target. He “uses his brain” and plays smart by missing the target deliberately.

Rebels with Causes

In subverting the established tradition of portraying heroes in Hong Kong cinema while addressing issues such as assault, theft, gang warfare, drug abuse, prostitution, pregnancy and abortion, these films attempt to cast light on the phenomenon of alienated youth. In general, they suggest that adolescent anomie arises from family and school problems which, in turn, are related to the changing social environment,

¹⁵ A scene like this is often woven into the narrative of a Hong Kong-made action/gangster movie.

the family situation, and an inadequate educational system.

The demographic and geographical makeup of Hong Kong is rather unbalanced. That over six million people reside in a total area of about 1,042 square kilometers (approximately 70% of which is urban and residential) makes the city one of the most densely populated places in the world. In handling this volatile situation, the local government continued to follow a laissez-faire policy until a big fire in Shek Kip Mei, or Shixiawei, in 1953 triggered substantial changes in housing policy.¹⁶ The fire left more than 50,000 people homeless and forced the government to reverse its existing house policy. Many re-settlement (or public housing) estates were subsequently built to provide cheap lodgings for those of the underclass.¹⁷ Since both parents had to work full time to support the family, their coming-of-age children were often left to their own devices. The crowded and depressed environment of the public housing estates, with few recreational or entertainment facilities, proved to be a breeding ground for gangs and crime. Surveys showed that “a higher proportion of juveniles from public housing estates had been prosecuted for more serious offences like robbery, serious assault, fighting in a public place, and for triad related offences or for repeated offences.”¹⁸ Many protagonists of the marginalized youth films in this study have a background of public housing estates, often presented as a background that casts shadows on young people and their coming-of-age experiences. Quite a few of these films open or close with an overall shot of a public housing estate. The often lower than eye-level camera angle for these shots gives a very oppressive feel to the apartment buildings.

Another factor is the inflexible and uncreative (secondary) school education system. School films are “the most definable subgenre of youth films,”¹⁹ and identities of adolescents are best articulated through the school (and the family). Hong Kong schools are seen as failing to communicate with young people. Many of the youth films weave classroom scenes into their narrative structures, showing students paying little attention. In a particularly telling scene from *Spacked Out*, a teacher is giving a lecture on the origin of the Opium War, a historical event closely connected to the colonial history of Hong Kong.²⁰ A shrewdly-designed panning shot shows that the class has absolutely no interest while all are engaged in their own concerns, such as playing chess, reading newspapers, or fighting with paper balls. Banana, one of the film’s protagonists, is using her mobile phone to arrange dates with men.

The film then cuts to the school sports ground where an instructor is trying (in vain) to discipline Cookie and another female student for breaking school rules

¹⁶ The impact of the fire of Shixiawei on the shaping of marginalized youth culture in Hong Kong was narrated by the pre-title verbal interpolation of Andrew Lau’s *Young and Dangerous 1*.

¹⁷ See Zhang Yuehua, Zhu Yaoguang and Zheng Huiting 2002:438.

¹⁸ Quoted in Ng 1994:397.

¹⁹ Shary 2002:26.

²⁰ The “Island” and the “Kowloon Peninsula” parts of Hong Kong were ceded to Britain following China’s defeat in the Opium War of the 1840s. This classroom scene may be read as showing a young generation’s indifference to the city’s colonial history and the 1997 sovereignty transfer though reference, explicit or implicit, to this event is sparse compared with most other local films produced over the same period of time.

(by wearing ear-rings and the wrong shoes). Seeing the futility of his efforts, the instructor fetches a piece of rope and forces the students to run around the sports ground holding each end of the rope led by himself. Sports grounds (used here for punishment) are a significant location in youth films as they are among the few open meeting-places for young people. As explained at the beginning of *Young and Dangerous*, the basketball court tends to be the only recreational facility in a public housing estate, and therefore it is a place where many youngsters get involved with gangs.

The family is meant to play a key role in assisting the healthy growth of the new generation, but the increasing industrialization and commercialization have transformed the domestic situation, breaking up extended families and rendering nuclear families dysfunctional. It has also led to the differentiation of tastes and lifestyles between generations. The pressures of living in a place where reverence is given to those with the capacity to make money (by whatever means) leave parents, particularly those of low socio-economic status, limited time and energy for their children. Many of these youth films put this issue in the spotlight by focusing on the effects of inadequate parenting.

Banana in *Spacked Out* is from a one-parent family. Her father has run away with another woman. The deserted mother does not bother to give her daughter maternal love and is busy with pursuing her own pleasures. On one occasion, Banana takes a teenage boy she just became acquainted with via the telephone-dating game to her cramped room. The room is separated by a cloth curtain from the lounge where the mother is making herself up. Banana and the youngster tease and flirt with each other before they start to have sex. The camera then pans from Banana's confined room to the lounge where her mother is still engrossed in her reflected image in the mirror. Like Banana in *Spacked Out*, the female protagonist in *The Boss Up There* also comes from a dysfunctional, one-parent family. We see her argue with her mother about her absenteeism. The girl then goes out to find food and consolation which proves to be a decisive step for her to become involved in triad affairs. Another dramatic example is a scene from *Street Kids Violence* in which the police charge a teenage boy with handling stolen goods. His divorced parents are called to the police station to sign the paper to bail him out. They argue in front of their son as each tries to avoid the responsibility of guiding and supervising him. Once the required paper work is completed, the mother rushes back to a casino at Macao while the father hurries from the police station to meet up with his "fox spirit" in mainland China.

Numerous scenes of this kind in the films seem to suggest that lack of family warmth is a major factor in young people developing negative attitudes. The result is a culture of self-hatred as well as violence to others. In *Spacked Out*, a female student is humiliated by a male acquaintance who breaks into the classroom in the middle of a lecture. During break time, she uses a knife to cut herself repeatedly on the wrist. Seeing drops of blood run down her finger tips, Beancurd simply belittles her as an "idiot" for not cutting harder and deeper. The camera tilts up to reveal the schoolgirl's irritated face and ferociously glaring eyes. At that moment, one thinks of the scenes of violence in the Japanese teen movie *Battle Royale*(2000) by director Kinji Fukasaku.

In an essay on the effect of family, school, peer and media domains on adolescent deviant behaviour in Hong Kong, Yuet W. Cheung asks, “How much influence do the family and school, which were powerful agents of socialization and informal social control in the past, still have today on the adolescents in Hong Kong?”²¹ His negative conclusion matches the portrayal of those relationships in contemporary youth films.²²

An Adult Perspective

Films about youth rebellion must always perform a balancing act since they can not ultimately condone delinquent behavior even though it is the energy of that behavior that has provided the driving force of the films and constitutes their main source of fascination. The ending of a film is a particularly important moment for orthodox morality to re-assert itself. In *Once Upon a Time in Triad Society 2*, audiences are informed that, after being released from jail, Dagger “manages to get rid of the fetters of the triad world and live together with his parents. Although he continues to play mah-jong, occasionally cheating, he takes up a new profession, writing.” Similarly, Tung and Fung in *The Boss Up There*, after being “baptized respectively in 1996 and 1998,” are reported to now live a happy life with their six-year-old child in Tung Meng. In the case of *Street Kids Violence*, after the proclamation of the sentence given to each of the youngsters involved in the murder, the film, from the point of view of the authority, makes a plea to society and mass media “to be more attentive to the education of the new generation, but parents should take the most important role in this process.” The message did not finish there. This film was specially made to provide young friends the advice of “Everyone is equal in front of the law. Being an under-aged criminal does not mean that you are privileged. Don’t commit crimes; otherwise you’ll pay for it...”

The somber and moralistic tone of such endings serves multiple functions in films. It makes the films acceptable to adult society (and to censorship). It allows the film to be read from the (adult) point of view of a “moral panic” about teenage behavior, and it avoids sounding too pessimistic about the breakdown of society. Of course, there is also an element of “covering one’s back” in this moralizing, because the film has already allowed young adult audiences to relish some of the rebellious behavior presented in the film.

Although no such comments appear at the end of *Spaccked Out*, the director sets up a role model for Cookie and her peers to emulate. Lai Yee, a Form 5 student, is portrayed in the film as a representative of Hong Kong mainstream youth. One scene shows her going to hear about a Hong Kong-Japan Student Exchange Program, accompanied by a curious Cookie. Some questions addressed to Lai Yee and overheard by Cookie generate different responses which, in turn, indicate how different their world views are:

²¹ Cheung 1997:438.

²² For a detailed account of Cheung’s findings, see Cheung 1997:580-585.

How would you introduce yourself once in Japan?

Lai Yee: I'll tell them, my name is Lai Yee. I'm 17 years old. I just graduated from Form 5.

Cookie: My name is Cookie. I'm 13 years old. I'm in Form 2. I don't like books and sports. I've never travelled.

Were you involved in any school activities? Any accolades?

Lai Yee: I was the secretary of the (School) Student Union. I used to represent my school in swimming competitions. I was the gold medal winner for the 200 meter free style.

Cookie: I'm the chairman of the School Nap Club. I can't swim, and I come last in running. I'm good at nothing.

Do you have any plans for the future?

Lai Yee: I hope I can go overseas for further study...

Cookie: (What is) my future...?

An optimistic end is abruptly and unconvincingly inserted to show Cookie and Banana having some happy times with Lai Yee. The final shot of the film presents Lai Yee, Cookie and Banana playing and having fun in the water while Cookie's voice-over plea is heard again: "Mum, when will you come home?"

The marginalized youth films produced in Hong Kong since the mid-1990s oscillate between projecting youth culture onto the big screen in a most candid way and presenting it from an adult perspective. The young heroes and heroines are portrayed in these films as victims and villains alike. They are the victims of a confined environment, an unyielding education system, a fast-paced lifestyle, and a pragmatic and materialistic mentality. The dilemma confronted by members of different generations is highlighted in the climactic scene of Benny Chan's *New Police Story*. On the rooftop of the spectacular Hong Kong Exhibition Center in Wan Chai, or Wanzai, the young protagonist, after having lost his buddies in an earlier gun fight with the police and then beaten by the Jackie Chan character in a pistol game, finally breaks down and bursts into tears. At this moment, his father, a high profile police officer, who has been exposed in the film as someone who has abused his son since childhood, enters onto the scene with his squad. The father's flustered and exasperated shouts and humiliating put-downs are the last straw for the young man. In a gesture reminiscent of Michel in *Breathless* (1959), by Jean-Luc Godard, he raises an unloaded pistol to attract volleys of bullets from the police. Nearly half a century has passed since Michel spoke his famous (or notorious) last words: "I'm tired. I want to sleep" to the police. Fifty years later, some young characters in Hong Kong films continue (consciously or not) to follow in the footsteps of Godard's doomed protagonist.

Conclusion

In an age when films and other forms of youth culture are available internationally, it is not surprising that the content and characterization of these films of deviant youth

and teenage rebellion are hardly unique to Hong Kong. While acknowledging the complex relationship that always exists between films and the society they mediate, it seems likely that some of the same social forces are at work in Hong Kong today as in western societies where the themes of family breakdown, absentee parents, and a high level of youth alienation, crime, and drug consumption have for some years been featured regularly in the news media. An analysis of sociological changes lies beyond the scope of this paper, but what can be said is that these marginalized youth films provide vivid evidence that such problems are now perceived as relevant to Hong Kong. In so far as films perform the function of articulating current social concerns, then this area of popular culture is very revealing in what it tells us about the generational tensions that have arisen in the transition to a modern society. What is especially interesting is the extent to which the details of these films reflect the particular family and gender traditions of Chinese society and imply that they are under threat from the pressures of modernization and consumer capitalism.

From a western perspective, there are some positive features to the modernization represented in the films, such as increased independence for young women (or for young people generally), but such features are portrayed here in a very ambivalent way. The conclusions of these marginalized youth films serve as a reassertion of traditional values, although that victory is seldom convincing. It would be useful to know more about the reception of these films, but in terms of reviewing and commercial information, these films are as “underground” and marginal as the characters they describe. What we can deduce, however, is that they have attracted enough interest to encourage the continued production of such films.

Overseas, the Hong Kong film industry tends to be associated with big-budget costume dramas or gangster films, such genres whose attractiveness to western audiences lies partly in their exotic foreign flavor. In contrast, the marginalized youth films, which are much less well known, talk about themes of youthful rebellion and family breakdown that may seem uncomfortably familiar to western viewers. In some respects, these films are among the most interesting in their expression of perceived social tension and a generation gap in contemporary Hong Kong.

GLOSSARY

Andrew Lau(Liu Weiqiang)	劉偉強	dapaidang	大排檔
Benny Chan(Chen Musheng)	陳木勝	<i>Dixue shuangxiong</i>	喋血雙雄
Billy Hin-Sing Tang(Deng Xiancheng)	鄧銜成	<i>Diyi leixing weixian</i>	第一類型危險
Cha Chuan Yee(Zha Chuanyi)	查傳誼	<i>Dubeidao</i>	獨臂刀
Chang Cheh(Zhang Che)	張徹	<i>Duoluo tianshi</i>	墮落天使
Chunguang zhaxie	春光乍瀉(洩)	<i>Feinü zhengzhuàn</i>	飛女正傳
Cima	刺馬	Fruit Chan(Chen Guo)	陳果
		<i>Guhuonü</i>	古惑女
		<i>Guhuonü zhi juezhan jianghu</i>	古惑女之決戰江湖

<i>Guhuozei jiqingpian zhi hongxing dafei</i> 古惑仔激情篇之洪興大飛哥	<i>Quba, zha fitren bingtuan</i> 去吧, 搵FIT人兵團
<i>Guhuozei zhi longzheng hudou</i> 古惑仔之龍爭虎鬪	<i>Sanwu chengqun</i> 三五成群
<i>Guhuozei zhi menglong guojiang</i> 古惑仔之猛龍過江	<i>Sau Mou Ping (Xiumaoping)</i> 秀茂坪
<i>Guhuozei zhi ren zai jianghu</i> 古惑仔之人在江湖	<i>Shek Kip Mei (Shixiawei)</i> 石峽尾
<i>Guhuozei zhi zhishou zhetian</i> 古惑仔之支手遮天	<i>Shengming zha fitren</i> 生命搵FIT人
Herman Yau (Qiu Litao) 丘禮濤	<i>Shisan taibao</i> 十三太保
Jackie Chan (Cheng Long) 成龍	<i>Taipei (Taipei)</i> 臺北
jianghu 江湖	<i>Toumingzhuang</i> 投名壯
<i>Jiuqi guhuozai zhi zhanwu busheng</i> 97古惑仔之戰無不勝	<i>Tsim Sha Tsui (Jianshazui)</i> 尖沙嘴
John Woo (Wu Yusen) 吳宇森	<i>Tsui Hark (Xu Ke)</i> 徐克
Jordan (Zuodun) 佐敦	<i>Wan Chai (Wanzai)</i> 灣仔
Kant Leung (Liang Hongfa) 梁宏發	<i>Wangjiao kamen</i> 旺角卡門
King Hu (Hu Jinquan) 胡金銓	<i>Wellson Chin (Qian Shengwei)</i> 錢昇瑋
Kowloon (Jiulong) 九龍	<i>Wong Kar-wai (Wang Jiawei)</i> 王家衛
Lawrence Ah Mon (Liu Guochang) 劉國昌	<i>Wuren jiashi</i> 無人駕駛
Lung Kong (Long Gang) 龍剛	<i>Xianggang zhizao</i> 香港製造
mah-jong 麻雀	<i>Xin guhuozai zhi shaonian jidou pian</i> 新古惑仔之少年激鬪篇
Mongkok (Wangjiao) 旺角	<i>Xin jingcha gushi</i> 新警察故事
Pan Jiafu 潘家富	<i>Yau Ma Tei (Youmadi)</i> 油麻地
Peter Chan (Chen Kexin) 陳可辛	<i>Yingxiong bense</i> 英雄本色
	<i>Yip Wai Man (Ye Weiming)</i> 葉偉民
	<i>yiqi</i> 義氣
	<i>Youqing suiyue Shanji gushi</i> 友情歲月山雞故事

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