

Stephen Ching-kiu Chan:

From active hybridity to passive negotiation: Artistic Space and Public Culture in Hong Kong since 1997

This paper deals with the question of identity representation by studying the specific articulation of artistic space and public culture in Hong Kong during the critical period before and after the 1997 handover of power (called the Return).

How have the citizens of Hong Kong been projected, received, and tolerated as a people as they witness their community being transformed into a post-colony? 'Identity' flows here, in the changing 'ethnoscape' and 'ideoscape' conditioned by the global economy today. Thus people and their ideas migrate freely and non-conventionally in and out of 'imagined communities,' with this or that manifestation of the ways in which *self* relates to, and recognises itself through relating to the *other*. As opposing versions of Hong Kong subjectivity are projected onto the cultural forms from which the subjects want to distinguish ourselves, different manifestations of otherness are registered, and often dissolved, in the mass-mediated spectacles or other forms of public culture.

And when different processes of identification reveal for us divergent forms of geo-cultural ambivalence, attempts to remember or dismember the past often end up in the active, contentious inscription/ erasure of history. Artistic discourses reclaiming for Hong Kong her 'roots', her cultural tradition, or her heterogeneous cultural memory more often than not betray the hybridity of a *real* community.

On the other hand, seeing that the future of the unproblematic status quo (called 'reality') is being throw back against its received cultural *habitus* as the colonial project, the long-colonized subjects of culture all leap at the promise of a certain 'post'. Before turning a blind eye to the spectacle of Return, they resorted to what Pierre Bourdieu would call „systems of durable, transportable dispositions" acquired during all those years of being colonized, and ask questions, consequently, about the Western hegemony embedded in the current globalisation of values. It is in this context that I propose to study the role of art as the embodiment of cultural space, which is particularly suggestive as it tends to highlight, indeed dramatize, the specific difficulty for the negotiation of ideological differences rooted in radical sources of fanaticism, aggression and taboo.

The drama being represented is often know simply to its audience as „Hong Kong" - situated seductively at the end point of British colonial rule. The Chinese-Hong Kong viewers at issue, however, do not necessarily identify themselves as part of an integral community, whether taken as the once colonized, or as the newly de-colonized. Those adopting the hybrid perspective express themselves through a variety of artistic forms, such a installation, exhibition, happening, etc. At times, they take the stance of an eager patriot (or his/her critic) who would like to have some passionate say on what appears to be a significant part of their long neglected

cultural and historical heritage. Others look at 1997 with more ambivalent anticipation, nationalist pride and understandable anxiety. As they passively awaited Hong Kong's Return to national history, many would perhaps like to be treated with novel sorts of cultural signs and taboos brought home through the 'returnification' (sic) of Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region to PRC.

Taboos are therefore inevitably created, ranging from historical discourses, media-sensitive spectacles, community-oriented public statements of art, to popular events, MTV, and filmic excursions in cultural imagination. With an analysis of selected examples in the spatial practice of art, I propose to suggest how different manifestations of taboo are registered and dissolved in full social visibility via mass-mediated and other forms of public culture.

Stephen Ching-kiu Chan: Educated at the University of Hong Kong (BA, MPhil) and University of California at San Diego (PhD), Associate Professor and Programme Director of Cultural Studies at the School of General Education, Lingnan College, Hong Kong. From 1988 to 1997, he taught English, comparative literature and cultural studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where he was Graduate Coordinator for Literature Programmes for more than 5 years. In 1994-1997 he severed concurrently as Director of the Programme for Hong Kong Cultural Studies at the Research Institute for the Humanities (CUHK), the first research programme of its kind in Hong Kong, coordinating a series of research, conference and publication projects funded by various external grants. He has been Chief Editor of the bilingual journal *Hong Kong Cultural Studies Bulletin* (1994-1998) as well as the book series *Hong Kong Cultural Studies* published jointly by CUHK and Oxford Univ. Press (China). Dr Chan is member of various editorial and advisory boards of journals in cultural studies. He has published internationally on comparative literature, Chinese literature and Hong Kong culture. Among his latest works is a co-authored book titled *Hong Kong Un-Imaged: History, Culture, and the Future* (Rye Field Pr., 1997) and a number of edited volumes on Hong Kong cultural imagination. His current research interests include Hong Kong literature, film and trauma, issues of public culture, culture and education, as well as narrative and identity. Dr Chan is a founding member of the AICA Hong Kong Chapter.