

Spectralizing Southeast Asia: Hong Kong Cinema of Black Magic

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Abstract

Popular culture in Hong Kong has long been perceived as a pivot in the fostering of an identity for this former British colony and current Chinese Special Administrative Region. From the production of horror spanning across the period of the 60s to the recent decade, especially along the fantastical invention and stereotypical representation of a spectralized Southeast Asian cinema, this particular geopolitical imagination of Hong Kong is projected through an otherworldly phantasmagoria of black magic, curses and spells, eerie happenings and, often, pornographic images. While delineating the border between the city of Hong Kong and its Southeast Asian neighbors, such imaginaries are perceived as compensation for Hong Kong's national ambiguity, which originates from a filtering of nationality in colonial governance and an obsession with ethnic revival in the post-colonial era. Hauntings as such illustrate a process of un-imagining the nation in Hong Kong's popular culture: although the former Southeast Asian colonies have all become independent sovereign states since decolonization, they have yet to be fully grounded in secular modernity, capitalistic progression and ethical abstinence. As a form of inter-Asian Orientalism which dictates Hong Kong geopolitical imaginary of Southeast Asia, the cinema of black magic is a collective defensive mechanism against the intrusion of the eerie and, most essentially, against the normalcy of nationality.

Introduction

Despite different political and historical contexts that resulted in their colonization, the regions of Southeast Asia and Hong Kong appear to share similar experiences with their struggles with coloniality, sovereignty and identity. Although such experiences would have been manifested and essentialized in the same line of thought as in the "West and the Rest," the practice and institutionalization of capitalism and the resistance against communism helped build a certain connection between Hong Kong and many Southeast Asian countries. After Communist China was established in 1949, Hong Kong exemplified the advantages of capitalism and played the role of unifying overseas Chinese especially those originating from Southeast Asia (Hamilton 25–30). Though diverse in languages, cultural practices, demographics and ethnicities, this particular capitalistic front in the Asian region may seem to have forged against the rise and expansion of communism in the 1950s and 60s. Despite this ostensible connection between Hong

Kong and Southeast Asia, there existed a distinctive symbolic hierarchy among these capitalistic Asian locations, determined by their respective economic strength, mass cultural productions and transnational representations. Within an inter-Asian context, this hierarchy of transnational imaginations, as projected and circulated through popular cultural productions, sheds light on Hong Kong's entanglements with its geopolitical status in the region, its identity formation, as well as its struggles with nationality from the colonial to postcolonial eras. Along this line of inquiry, the current article explores how Hong Kong, through its cinema of black magic (i.e. films that portray elements of dark magic), spectralizes the region of Southeast Asia via the interplay of evil sorcery, eerie happenings and racial prejudices within and beyond the city.

Hong Kong Cinema of Black Magic

As a form of inter-Asian Orientalism in Hong Kong popular culture, the cinema of black magic are films that adopt black magic, eerie happenings and otherworldly intrusions to Orientalize Southeast Asia. By doing so, this genre of films is a cinematic platform whereby film directors valorize Hong Kong's capitalistic accomplishments, economic progress and institutional advantage over other sovereign, independent and postcolonial states in the Southeast Asian region. Catering mainly for Hong Kong viewers, the cinema of black magic foregrounds the city's affiliation with Westernization and modernity, both attained historically through colonization. Moreover, the same formula of emplotment, characterization and mise-en-scène is often replicated and reproduced in this genre from the colonial to the postcolonial period with little change. Given that Hong Kong experiences a sense of ambiguity towards national identification (because during colonial times nationality issues are filtered away and in the postcolonial era the narrative becomes one of redemption for the Chinese nation), I argue that this cinema's fantastical (and often prejudicial) portrayal of Southeast Asia—orchestrated through affective productions of fear, tenseness and, at times, laughter and awkwardness—illustrates a kind of ghostly geopolitics that is immune to Hong Kong's own transition from a colonial city to a national territory.

The list here does not aim to be exhaustive, but from the 1960s to the 2010s there were a good number of black magic titles produced and circulated in local cinema chains, including Chan Wan's (陳雲) *The Witchery, Kongtau* (毒降頭) in 1965, Ho Meng-hua's (何夢華) *Black Magic* (降頭), *Oily Maniac* (油鬼子) & *Black Magic Part II* (勾魂降頭) in 1975 and 1976, Kuei Chih Hung's (桂治洪) *Bewitched* (蠱) in 1980, *Boxer's Omen* (魔) in 1983, Fong Yeh (方野) & Ho Ting-shing's (何天誠) *Witchcraft vs Curse* (色降) in 1991, Cheung Shek-lung's (蔣碩龍) *Fatal Seduction* (艷降) in 1993, Chin Man-ki's (錢文錡) *The Eternal Evil of*

Asia (南洋十大邪術) in 1995, Chan Huk-yan's (陳學人) *Devil's Woman* (南洋第一邪降) in 1996 and Herman Yau's (邱禮濤) *Gong Tau: An Original Black Magic* (降頭) in 2007. These titles evidenced a continuous trend in Hong Kong cinema to appropriate Southeast Asia through black magic films from the colonial to the postcolonial eras.

Though diverse in casts, emplotment and production periods, this particular generic evolution in cinema manifests Hong Kong's geopolitical perception of nationality and transnationality: First, despite its economic achievements and unlike other postcolonial Asian neighbors, Hong Kong has never been and will never be a sovereign state on its own. As a form of cultural and political empowerment, the imagination of Hong Kong as a community has been desperately in need of an "Other," and spectralizing Southeast Asia is one of the means in local popular culture to satiate this particular craving. In the process, Hong Kong inevitably embarks on the path of "the West and the Rest." For Stuart Hall, being "Western" is a label for "a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern" (277), and to Hong Kong this ties in clearly well with the city's own imaginary in economic and geopolitical terms. The four functions of "the West," namely classificatory, representational, comparative and evaluative (Hall 277), are also embedded in Hong Kong cinema of black magic to rationalize the city's superiority over its Southeast Asian neighbors. Whether it serves as a form of representation or a mechanism of imagination, the cinema of black magic valorizes a distorted and prejudicial perception of the region:

What is more, the idea of "the West," once produced, became productive in its turn. It had real effects: it enabled people to know or speak of certain things in certain ways. It produced knowledge. It became both the organizing factor in a system of global power relations and the organizing concept or term in a whole way of thinking and speaking. (Hall 278)

Through identifying with and ideologically re-imagining itself to be "the West," Hong Kong therefore gains imaginary and discursive advantages over other nation-states, especially those in Southeast Asia.

At the same time, the city's deep-seated national ambiguity is another factor that helps sustain this trend of black magic films. Throughout the development of citizenship in this former crown colony and current Special Administrative Region of China, it is ethnicity, instead of nationality, that articulates the difference between local and foreign populations. During the colonial period, the British had no plans to turn Hong Kong people into British citizens; ever since the return of sovereignty to China, the implementation of One Country, Two Systems also designates Hong Kong citizenship as different from that in the Mainland. Nationality aside, the so-called Chineseness of

Hong Kong may often hinge upon its geographical proximity, cultural practices, language as well as ethnicity, as Wang Gungwu observes:

Its [Hong Kong's] many kinds of Chinese were able to dispense products that were commercial and industrial, political and ideological, and also communal and spiritual, cultural, artistic, and intellectual. In so doing, the city was actually encouraging a strong sense of commonality of being Chinese without identifying with the Chinese nation [...] the sense of ethnic consciousness unburdened by national loyalties, either to the governments of China or to the countries of which they were nationals, enabled a global persona that attracted attention among Chinese everywhere, including those on the mainland. (8)

To the historian, it is perhaps a strong sense of national ambiguity that truly marks the difference between Hong Kong and other Chinese communities. In this context, it is not difficult to perceive that national consciousness, whether originating from colonial British or communist China, is arbitrary and, at times, transitive and unstable throughout the colonial and postcolonial stages of Hong Kong.

English dictionaries often see nationality synonymous with sovereignty, empowerment, protection and security, yet this equation has no footing in Hong Kong, as captured in Rey Chow's idea of "compensatory logic":

[I]t is because the people in Hong Kong are lacking in something essential—political power—that they have to turn their energies elsewhere, economics. And yet this elsewhere, this other development, which is assumed in an a priori manner as compensatory in function, is then judged to be superficial, excessive, and pathological. (171)

Between political determination and economic progress, the city of Hong Kong has long been steered towards the latter. No matter which nation it belongs to, this particular tradeoff is still in effect as a form of political governance and communal imagination. If capitalistic pursuits overwhelm and singularize other myriad dimensions of a city, as sanctioned by both British and Chinese administrations in Hong Kong, then what nationality inculcates is a sense of abstraction rather than solidarity or uniformity for the community. In brief, to imagine the concept of nationality, Hong Kong has to look elsewhere for guidance and inspiration, even if such attempts are often full of biases and prejudices and ultimately add up to Hong Kong's self-cultivated Orientalism in its pop culture industry. After all, economic progress, national awareness and citizenship are not necessarily developed in tandem with one another, and before the social upheavals and riots in the late 1960s, "the absence of citizenship" in the community of Hong

Kong “did not at all attenuate the contradictions that permeate a capitalist economy” (Ku 127). Seen in this light, Hong Kong cinema of black magic is a local popular cultural compensation, though “pathological,” for its national ambiguity by emphasizing the city’s secular capitalistic preeminence over other Southeast Asian postcolonial nation–states, while interrogating the normalcy of nationality and inventing a geopolitical-cum-temporal polarity between modernity and primitivism.

Spectralizing Southeast Asia is also a self-reflection, and such cinematic endeavors intersect with the city’s coloniality and postcoloniality. Imagining Southeast Asia in terms of black magic, evil sorcery and pornographic representations is a chronic compensation for Hong Kong’s national ambiguity: On the one hand, these former colonies had all become sovereign independent states long before Hong Kong concluded the negotiation of its future between the British and Chinese authorities (which resulted in the Sino–British Joint Declaration of 1984). On the other hand, to sustain its own imagination and, more often, its cultural and institutional supremacy over other Asian counterparts, Hong Kong turned to its own capitalistic achievement, market economy and civil service efficiency. In short, although Hong Kong has never been and will never be a nation on its own, its high degree of Westernization and economic accomplishment over other decolonized Asian countries have strengthened its transnational imaginaries and defined its geopolitical status, even if such imaginaries are full of racial and sexual prejudices in the names of black magic and evil sorcery.

Spectralization, Otherness and Inter-Asian Orientalism

I use the concept of spectrality to understand the relationship between the cinema of black magic and inter-Asian Orientalism. Spectralization always entails a questioning of time that may usurp the ordering of the past and the present as well as the distinction between reality and fantasy. As Derrida argues:

If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. (48)

Indeed, temporal disjuncture, or any forms of belief as such, opens up the possibility and urgency of spectral imaginations. From ghosts to spirits, phantoms to apparitions, or in our case, black magic, any allusion to the supernatural dimension originates from a disbelief in the

time of modernity, especially its innate mechanism in producing, reproducing and disseminating an idea of the present, as elaborated by Avery Gordon:

The ghost is not other or alterity as such, ever. It is pregnant with unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding. This something to be done is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had. (183)

In the case of Hong Kong cinema of black magic, to integrate the eerie into geopolitical imaginations is to re-imagine the status quo of the city beyond the normalcy of nationalization in postcolonial Asia. To imagine a haunted community is to uproot its temporal formation and to scramble its temporal components into scattered and unparalleled occurrences.

The yearning for the eerie is motivated by an excavation of the past initialized by a form of cultural craving for temporality. If time is not necessarily given or endowed by the nation, one should not rule out the possibility of otherworldliness as a means for imagining time, as ghostliness

is an interminable process that necessarily follows from our radical finitude as beings in time. [...] For time is what we do not have. It is not something we can possess and, therefore, something we can give to or receive from another, whether this is someone else, ourselves, or a higher being. (Cheah 386)

What is highlighted here is indeed a sense of loss resulting from an inquiry of time and ordering beyond the nation. For Hong Kong, with national ambiguity offsetting the nation as a time-telling platform, black magic from Southeast Asia may amass imaginary momentum for the city to reconfigure its status quo and geopolitical positioning through the imagination of primitive and backward-looking Others. Seen in this light, more than half a century's history of Hong Kong cinema of black magic manifests a distinctive tendency in local popular culture production to essentialize and stereotype Southeast Asia; the fantasies of "Nanyang" (a term often used to refer to Southeast Asian regions) have yet to be fully exhausted. The cinema of black magic not only valorizes what Edward Said terms the "positional superiority" of Hong Kong (*Orientalism* 7), but also serves as a good example of inter-Asian Orientalism that transcends the conventional and geographical East-West polarity. Orientalism, as summarized by Said, is essentially a politics of invention and representation:

The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, “different”; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, “normal.” [...] Yet what gave the Oriental’s world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West. (*Orientalism* 40)

Reading *Orientalism* in a flexible positioning of “East” and “West” not in terms of geography but in terms of power of representation, Hong Kong’s embrace of capitalist Westernization as a colonial city puts itself closer to an imagined “West” against the “primitive” and “backward-looking” Southeast Asian nations.

Thus, in the genre of Hong Kong cinema of black magic, we find a similar mechanism of differences invention and temporal imaginations, adopted to balance the city’s national ambiguity. The mechanism refers to a recurring formula in the narration and characterization of these films: A Hong Kong male character invariably visits Southeast Asia for business errands, sightseeing or pleasure seeking, and for some reason he is often sexually or emotionally engaged with an exotic local female character. Before his return to Hong Kong, this male character will often make a promise he cannot keep, like marriage or reunion. For revenge, the female Southeast Asian will patronize, somewhat handily, a shaman or sorcerer to cast an evil spell on the Hong Kong male who will afterwards suffer from excruciating pain, bloody mutilation or grotesque transformation. After repeated failures in seeking medical or scientific assistances, the solution comes ultimately from another good and virtuous shaman or sorcerer, and the spell cast upon the male character is neutralized as evil is defeated.

As can be seen in this common plotline, Hong Kong cinema of black magic perceives Southeast Asia as an alterity of nationalism—amid that these are all independent states, they are all backward looking, superstitious and, above all, enmeshed in fatal traditions incompatible with modernity and capitalistic progress; as for Hong Kong, though vulnerable to otherworldly intrusions, is emblematic of Westernization, progress and affluence. This perspective is identical to what Johannes Fabian calls a denial of coevalness:

As long as anthropology presents its object primarily as seen, as long as ethnographic knowledge is conceived primarily as observation and/or representation (in terms of models, symbol systems, and so forth) it is likely to persist in denying coevalness to its Other. (Fabian 151–52)

By imagining Southeast Asia as desecrated regions of evil sorcery, these films not only foreground Hong Kong’s supremacy in economic, civil and ethical terms, but also confines Southeast Asia to a temporal

imaginary of backwardness, anachronism and primitivism. This situation also echoes one of the pop cultural linkages between Japan and other Asian states. As a major popular cultural hub in the area, Japan is characterized for its “refusal to accept that it shares the same temporality as other Asian nations” (Iwabuchi 159). In the same manner, Hong Kong’s denial of coevalness with Southeast Asia is generated from a form of spatial and geographical distortion. Essential to inter-Asian Orientalism, Hong Kong’s imagination of Southeast Asia as “the land of barbarians” (Said, *Orientalism* 54) not only justifies geopolitical imbalances and symbolic representations, but also encompasses a violent invention of ethnic and cultural hierarchies:

In other words, this universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” is a way of making geographical distinctions that *can be* entirely arbitrary. I use the word “arbitrary” here because imaginative geography of the “our land–barbarian land” variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for “us” to set up these boundaries in our own minds; “they” become “they” accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from “ours.” (Said, *Orientalism* 54)

To summarize, the power of geographical arbitrariness comes from its elusiveness and transformations, and, in the context of Hong Kong cinema of black magic, the geographical construct of Southeast Asia is translated into cultural inferiority, moral degradation and sexual promiscuity. This particular form of spatial–temporal distortion is coterminous with what Said conceptualizes as “the struggle over geography” (Said, *Culture & Imperialism* 6), and during the heyday of Hong Kong popular culture, such stereotypical imaginaries are even further adopted to offset a sense of national ambiguity for the audience of Hong Kong, albeit through Orientalist imagination and invention of otherness.

Black Magic Cinema of the Hong Kong 80s: Kuei Chih Hung’s *Bewitched* and *Boxer’s Omen*

In this section I examine Kuei Chih Hung’s (桂治洪) black magic films, in particular *Bewitched* (蠱) and *Boxer’s Omen* (魔), in order to identify the 1980s as an important period in Hong Kong’s Orientalism of Southeast Asia. This is not to say that there was no production of black magic films before and after the 80s, but to highlight the growth of Hong Kong’s subjectivity against eerie representations of Southeast Asia, amid the Sino–British negotiations on Hong Kong’s fate. The 70s has been generally perceived to be crucial in the formation of Hong

Kong's subjectivity through especially the burgeoning channels and platforms of popular culture.¹ Accompanying the initiation of an identity built from economic progress, social stability and mass cultural production was the hesitation and, at times, frustration with the "future" of this crown colony. The process, which directed local and international spotlights to Hong Kong's status after 1997, began with former Governor MacLehose's visit to Beijing in 1979 for potential renewal of the land lease of the New Territories, followed by former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1982. During one of Hong Kong's most uncertain periods, the cinema of black magic might seem to have allayed the fears of a community torn apart by (post)coloniality and nationality.

Seen in this context, Kuei's black magic films were then catering for an emerging Hong Kong subjectivity which could have been drained by uncertainty and anxiety about its post-colonial future. Black magic films a decade earlier, such as Ho Meng-hua's (何夢華) *Black Magic* (降頭, 1975), *Oily Maniac* (油鬼子, 1976) and *Black Magic Part II* (勾魂降頭, 1976), showed an eerie Southeast Asia or strange happenings *outside* the border of Hong Kong. This, as explained, differs from Kuei's black magic films in the 80s: titles such as *Bewitched* and *Boxer's Omen* show otherworldly intrusions being experienced, confronted and finally dissolved in a local Hong Kong context. In short, if Ho's Southeast Asia is presented as a haunted community kept at bay from Hong Kong with a transnational distance, this eerie Southeast Asia crosses the border in Kuei's films as evil sorcerers and magic spells encroach upon the territory of the city, thus revealing the director's and viewers' Orientalizing imagination of a haunted region.

The films are no doubt embodiment of cultural bias and prejudice of Southeast Asia. In *Bewitched*, the protagonist Bobby Wong King-sun, who is a detective in the film, criticizes his wife Mary of her Southeast Asian origin, saying that only people from her region will either eat raw meat or eat with bare hands simply because they are all uncivilized. On another occasion, when Bobby has to leave Hong Kong for Southeast Asia to conduct a criminal investigation, Mary reminds him that eating casually or accepting food from strangers are dangerous as this will make one vulnerable to being possessed by evil spirits. These remarks express a sense of cultural superiority to Hong Kong viewers through such strong xenophobia against Southeast Asia. The place is full of dangers, and echoing this, the story begins with the criminal

¹ For Hong Kong 70s and popular cultures, see Lui Tai-lok, "自成一體的香港社會" (Hong Kong, a Society of its Own), 閱讀香港普及文化 1970-2000 (*Reading Hong Kong Popular Cultures 1970-2000*), Ed. Ng Chun-hung and Cheung Chi-wai, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2002, 663-70. See also Ng Chun-hung, "尋找香港本土意識" (Searching for Local Hong Kong Subjectivity) in the same publication, 86-95.

investigation of a father Lam Wai who brutally murdered his young daughter. While awaiting death penalty in Hong Kong, the father reveals his story to the detective. A year ago, he embarked on a journey to Nanyang.² As a journey for pleasure and entertainment, Lam met Bon Brown, a local Thai, and through her Lam satiated his sexual curiosity for Southeast Asian women. Before he left for Hong Kong, he received from his casual lover a necklace as a token of love and affection. At this moment, Lam was not aware that the necklace was spellbound by an evil sorcerer with the “Corpse Oil Spell,” and this led eventually to his disfiguration, incompetence and insanity when he failed to abide by his promise of reunion on a specific date.

Bewitched is presented as a showcase of spells and chants, and one marketing feature of the film was the casting of an authentic Malaysian sorcerer called Hussin Bin Abu Hassan, who plays the role of the evil sorcerer Magusu in the story. Not only does he cast the “Coffin Spell” and the “Worms Spell” on his Hong Kong victim, later on in the film the villain is even brought to Hong Kong to plot against the protagonist. When Magusu first sets foot in Hong Kong, the mismatch between his shaman costume and the generally modern attire of Hong Kong people in the film yields a sense of amusement and awkwardness. One of the spells he uses against the detective is termed the “Lemon Spell,” which involves the use of a lemon to initiate a curse. To do so, he has to first bury this enchanted lemon in the soil, so that when a passerby steps on the soil above it, it will cause excruciating pain to the person being cursed. When Magusu puts this into practice on the busy asphalt streets of Hong Kong, he has to double his efforts, and even though the spell works instantaneously, a dug-up area in a busy street of Hong Kong will only draw the attention of many, including that of government authorities. The area is then sealed off quickly and the lemon is found and disposed by maintenance service members. Here, black magic spells from the haunted Southeast Asia may be vicious and penetrating, but they can be effortlessly dissolved by Hong Kong’s modernity and efficiency. In the film, the juxtaposition of a crowded and busy urban landscape of Hong Kong and a quiet and tranquil Southeast Asian countryside further enhances a sense of self-assured security brought along by modernization, and this assurance is achieved outside of nationalism.

Another transformation in geographical imagination demonstrated by Kuei’s works is that this eerie Southeast Asia no longer appears as an obscure totality. Within this imaginary, transnationality begins to loom large through the supernatural, and is further adopted as a means of

² Note also that the term serves as a generalized name for the geographical region, replacing his actual destination of Pattaya, Thailand. National specificity or geographical accuracy is mostly irrelevant in the imaginary landscape of Southeast Asia.

temporalization in the cinema of black magic: Southeast Asia is Orientalized and denied coevalness per Fabian as Hong Kong imagines itself as more superior than those lagging behind in the progression of modern time. The impossibility of sequencing postcolonial temporality, as Gayatri Spivak illustrates, is a dead end for potential resuscitation, given that there is no alternative other than modernity:

If for us the assurance of transference gives way to the possibility of haunting, it is also true that for us the only figure of the unconscious is that of a radical series of discontinuous interruptions. In a mere miming of that figure, one might say that the epistemic story of imperialism is the story of a series of interruptions, a repeated tearing of time that cannot be sutured. (Spivak 208)

Through imperialism, temporality has become the consequence of random, separate insertions for colonial governance and imperialist rationalization. For Hong Kong, this condition is even more complicated, since national identification—albeit being one of the most general ways to sustain imaginaries of progress, advancement and solidarity, is not fully grounded in the community of Hong Kong. As such, through sorcery and possession, Hong Kong cinema of black magic generates a form of temporality that does not require the category of the nation to be its prerequisite, and is thus a form of popular culture that filters modernity from nationality. In *Bewitched*, the imagined Southeast Asia is dissected by a transnational differentiation to counter-balance Hong Kong's national ambiguity. Though Orientalist in essence, these nations are projected with an emphasis on their eerie and spiritual traditions, and nations like Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia are imaginatively affiliated in the film: a Buddhist Thailand, perceived to be virtuous, is set against an Asian “axis of evil” in which countries are all infested with spells and black magic. A Buddhist monk of Chinese descent with good mastery of Mandarin rescues the detective protagonist. In the end, he defeats the Malaysian fiend in an empty Kai Tak International Airport of Hong Kong by dissolving his body through the power of a Buddhist relic. Amid rounds of spiritual bout between the good monk and the evil shaman, otherworldly intrusions from Southeast Asia are neutralized and the evil is eventually dissolved at the aerial border of Hong Kong. The two opposing spiritual forces, one of Thai Buddhism and the other of rural Southeast Asian black magic, are set against an empty, modern airport—a contradiction of ancient versus modern that signals a temporal disjuncture compensating for the national ambiguity of Hong Kong. The battle at the airport serves as a final reminder that the city, by the aid of the virtuous, is well protected by modernity and globality and is therefore above its malevolent Southeast Asian neighbors.

Coevalness is still denied even though the nation is not a valid category for Hong Kong.

The Boxer's Omen echoes a similar formula in Hong Kong's spectralization of Southeast Asia. This film tells a transnational story of evil sorcery with the protagonist Chan Hung, a Hong Kong boxer and trainer, and his strange adventures in Hong Kong and other Southeast Asian destinations. Again, Kuei and the producer of this film replicated the formula of casting real and authentic wizards or sorcerers, and this time it is expanded to five characters, including a Sabah sorcerer Edmund P. Meneses, a Malaysian wizard Major Oponpa, an Indonesian shaman Rolando San Juan, a Thai wizard Victor B. Pumicpic and an abbot from a Thai Buddhist Monastery Som Jai Boon Song. On the surface, their existence in the film creates a sense of authenticity and consolidates the popular cultural marketing of an eerie Southeast Asia. In the story, the protagonist Chan Hung shoulders the responsibility to safeguard the resurrected body of a legendary Thai Buddhist monk, and with the spiritual assistance of the abbot and the monastery, he combats against a legion of evil sorcerers while having to restrain his own sexual desire, since abstinence is portrayed as a crucial determinant in the battle between the good and the evil.

As I have pointed out, in black magic films nations like Thailand and Nepal are often perceived to be virtuous due to their Buddhist connection, while countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, personified respectively by the sorcerers in the film, are evil. While these eerie happenings take place mostly beyond the border of Hong Kong, the city itself is here projected as a territory of carnal temptation: abstinence is violated whenever Chan Hung returns to Hong Kong for sexual intercourse with other female characters. This is further underscored in the climax of the film when the three evil shamans combine their spells and power together to conjure a naked temptress. As Chan Hung successfully wards off evil temptation and defends the Buddhist monk's cadaver, the audience (as well as 1980s Hong Kong viewers at the time of the film's release) is presented with an atlas of imagination through which nations are correlated by black magic and sorcery. In *Boxer's Omen*, although modernity is tied with sexual indulgence, it is obvious that the sovereign status of decolonized nations does not necessarily imply any political or cultural superiority over Hong Kong.

Conclusion

Orientalism is not necessarily a "uniquely Western phenomenon" (Burke III & Prochaska 6) that is rooted only from an East-West geographical and territorial polarity, and Hong Kong cinema of black magic serves as a solid example to illustrate how an inter-Asian Orientalism has been shaping transnational imaginings in Hong Kong

popular culture. While fantasizing the region in terms of otherworldliness, possession, sorcery and sexual promiscuity, Hong Kong cinema of black magic offers an Orientalist perspective to reexamine and realign its status on the global atlas. From a British crown colony to a Chinese Special Administrative Region, the cultivation of national awareness has either been nonexistent or incompatible with Hong Kong's cultural imaginary. National ambiguity, resulting from colonial de-emphasis or postcolonial re-emphasis of nationality, may emit a sense of defectiveness and awkwardness, and I argue that for Hong Kong it is expressed in an imaginary compensation by spectralizing Southeast Asia in the cinema. This particular form of Orientalism intentionally downplays the normalcy and ubiquity of nationalization, and by doing so Hong Kong is shown to be able to sustain its close affinity and identification with global capitalism, Westernization and civil service efficiency from its colonial to postcolonial transition. In Hong Kong's black magic cinema, a spectralized Southeast Asia is one of the most sought-after imaginaries of Otherness for the city to compensate for its national ambiguity.

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