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**“One Movie, Two Versions”:
Post-1997 Hong Kong Cinema in the Mainland**

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“One Movie, Two Versions”: Post-1997 Hong Kong Cinema in the Mainland

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Abstract

Post-1997 the Hong Kong film industry has taken advantage of the reunification with mainland China to access the burgeoning mainland market exempted from the import quota, since technically they belong to “one country” now. However, the fact of being under “two systems” has also caused many unexpected troubles, and “one movie, two versions” is the most obtrusive one. A large number of Hong Kong movies theatrically released in Mainland China are more or less variations of the original Hong Kong edition due to the market entry requirements and the censorship in PRC. This problem cannot be simplified as stemming completely from constraints imposed by a dominating ideology on the less privileged one. As Xu maintained “*In fact, through repairing these Hong Kong movies, the Mainland are also imagining, creating and reconstructing her understanding of Hong Kong identity and the bilateral relations*” (2009). This paper seeks to explore the interrelationship between the “one movie, two versions” phenomenon and the “one country, two systems” policy: to what extent is the long-existing multi-version practice influenced and scaled up by the unprecedented formula? And how does the phenomenon reflect the transitional nature of post-1997 Hong Kong cinema and affect its future direction? Borrowing the concept of “utilitarian nationalization” from Laikwan Pang (2007), I will argue that ‘two-versioned’ Hong Kong films are a result of economic collaboration and the ideological divergence between Hong Kong and PRC, the two ends under “two systems”. Moreover, with the illegal digital dissemination of the original movies by such means as pirate DVDs and Internet downloads, the control in PRC has become a porous bulwark in the digital era which has further complicated the problem of the ideological confrontation of the “two systems”. In light of that, apart from elucidating the context, causes and impacts of the phenomenon, the interlocking relationship between market, censorship and piracy will be explored against the backdrop of the marketization of the movie industry in China.

Introduction

The best thing brought by the reunification with mainland China to the Hong Kong film industry is the access to the burgeoning mainland market exempt from the import quota, since technically, they belong to “one country” now. However, the fact of being under “two systems” has caused a lot of unexpected challenges to the quasi-domestic Hong Kong film industry seeking profit in the Mainland. The “one movie, two versions” syndrome is the most attention-getting phenomenon or problem in Hong Kong cinema’s exploration of the new market. In fact, for the consideration

of either censorship or commercial interests, multiple-versions have long been adapted as a survival tactic by the export-oriented business mechanism of Hong Kong cinema. However, the numerous Mainland-only versions with substantive changes have aroused scholarly interest in the impact of the ‘one country, two systems’ policy being imposed on Hong Kong since 1997.

This paper seeks to explore the interrelationship between the “one movie, two versions” phenomenon and the “one country, two systems” policy with the following questions: To what extent is the long-standing multi-version practice in Hong Kong cinema influenced and scaled upwards by this unprecedented formula; and how does the phenomenon reflect the transitional nature of post-1997 Hong Kong cinema and affect its future direction? I will argue that the two-version phenomenon is a result of the economic collaboration between Hong Kong SAR (Special Administration Region) and the PRC as ‘one country’ and also that it is a reflection of the ideological divergence of the two operating under ‘two systems’. Moreover, facing the challenge of pirated ‘authentic’ versions, the number of Mainland alternative versions is recently decreasing as Hong Kong filmmakers are trying hard to restore the trust of Mainland audience by presenting them with the same version as released in HKSAR through self-censorship. Therefore, this ‘one movie, two versions’ phenomenon as a peculiar means of survival of the Hong Kong cinema in Mainland China is gradually evolving into a permanent inclination of Hong Kong cinema of China.

Literature review

In 2007, the China Film Archive and China Film Research Centre organized a symposium on Hong Kong Cinema themed “Integration and Development” to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Hong Kong’s reunification with PRC. The conference proceedings are published as a book titled *Ten Years of Hong Kong Cinema* (Zhang, 2007b). Among the over 30 papers in the book, a very short paragraph has given a delicate touch to the “two versions” phenomenon as it reduces the complicated problem into a one sentence explanation: “...since the film rating system in PRC is yet to come, some Hong Kong-China co-productions sometimes get stuck in the examination and approval procedures...” and the flexibility of pragmatic Hong Kong filmmakers is highly praised as they creatively adapted this two-version strategy (Zhang, 2007b: 66). The focus of the mainland scholars on post-1997 Hong

Kong cinema has unsurprisingly been on how the Hong Kong film industry is revitalising itself in the newly-claimed motherland/mainland market (Zhang, 2007a; Zhou & Zhao, 2008; He, 2008) but stops short of analyzing this problem as the topic is sensitive and awkward.

Meanwhile, the scholars outside of the Mainland seldom touch on the topic in depth due to a lack of personal experience and access to first-hand materials (the mainland versions are only available in the mainland and dubbed in Mandarin). Some have noticed the two-version phenomenon but stopped at lamenting the fading uniqueness in Hong Kong movies and worrying about the negative impact of the 1997 handover (Chan, 2007; Lie, 2009).

In contrast to the inadequate concern and investigation in academia, there has been a heated debate on the phenomenon among the general populace, in forms of personal blogs, film reviews, and forum discussions. The audience, film fans and film critics have mainly brought up three factors to blame for the dual-version “cultural freak” (Xu, 2009) under “one country, two systems”: the lack of film classification regime in PRC (Martinsen, 2005), the conservativeness and fatuousness of the SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television) of PRC (Gongyuan1874, 2009) and the speculation and opportunism of Hong Kong cinema (Cen, 2009).

Since the mainland alternative versions of many Hong Kong movies are often fragmented in structure, incoherent in plot and farfetched in character development, they have long become the target of public criticism. However, the alternative mainland version should not be disregarded or discarded like “a malformed twin brother” of the authentic Hong Kong movie, as a mainland media practitioner Xu (2009) maintains in his essay “Hong Kong Cinema as Transborder Visuality”,

Some Hong Kong filmmakers ...are persistently exploring the historical and cultural identities of Hong Kong through the images, and questioning the interrelationship between Hong Kong and the Mainland. Though their movies are screened in heavily cut and edited version in the mainland, the distorted versions still contain subversive ‘fissures’ (the author’s emphasis). On the other hand, we can not simplify the problem between mainland censorship and Hong Kong cinema as unilateral castration or rape imposed on the less privileged by the dominating ideology. In fact, through repairing these Hong Kong movies, the Mainland are also imagining, creating and reconstructing her understanding of Hong Kong identity and the bilateral relations.

Xu advocates the contrast and comparison of the two versions so as to “thoroughly understand the complicated operation of power” while he did a brief

textual analysis on two movies *Infernal Affairs* trilogy (2002-2003) and *Election 1 & 2* (2005, 2007) to demonstrate how they serve as political allegories of Hong Kong.

Though not addressing the two-versions phenomenon directly, two articles by Hong Kong-based scholars have provided valuable theoretical and statistical materials on the postcolonial Hong Kong cinema and Mainland film marketisation – the two parties involved of in our research of “one movie, two versions” under “one country, two systems”.

In Laikwan Pang’s “Postcolonial Hong Kong cinema: utilitarianism and (trans)local” (2007), she highlights “a utilitarian form of nationalism” revealed in post-1997 Hong Kong cinema with the tendency of shifting emphasis on the mainland market though it continues to be a foreign one to Hong Kong filmmakers due to “the nation’s geographical and cultural diversity, its volatile censorship, as well as its unpredictable business environment”. Pang argues that “local Hong Kong is most concrete when Hong Kong becomes most transnational and dispersed” and the sense of local can be explored in two layers— “the economic trans-local” and “culturally essentialist local” and the “local is at the core of the transnational” and is “a product of the national/global dispersal of the translocal”.

Pang’s article offers us a different perspective in understanding post-1997 Hong Kong cinema in its relation to PRC while another article “Re-nationalizing China’s film industry: case study on the China Film Group and film marketisation” by Emilie Yeh and Darrell Davis(2008) addresses the tension and dialectics between marketisation and protectionism of Chinese film industry and argues that the film marketisation is “part of a scheme to utilize the market to consolidate state power” and, rather than a economic reform, is more “a political fiat”. On the ground of that argument, along with their analysis of CEPA (Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Agreement) which entitled Hong Kong films freer access to the Mainland market, the authors have shown great concern for Hong Kong cinema being redefined “in a market that dwarfs Hong Kong”.

It is quite true that since the implementation of CEPA in 2004, when most Hong Kong films started to target the lucrative mainland market, the dual-version phenomenon caused by Mainland market entry regulations and censorship is put under the spotlight. The motherland that used to warmly welcome Hong Kong into “one country” has now become overwhelmed by the idea of “two systems” by taking a hard line in the examination and approval of Hong Kong films, officially on the

ground of different “aesthetic needs” of mainland and Hong Kong audiences. The “one movie, two versions” phenomenon thus foregrounds the differences between the newly reunited two “nation/region”, and epitomizes the situation of “one country two systems” in which Hong Kong cinema is navigating itself.

Through an institutional analysis, I will put the dual-version phenomenon under the framework of the unprecedented “one country, two system” formula which is now practiced in Hong Kong. Based on the close examination and comparison of selected films, the media coverage, government reports, film reviews and other literatures, I will demonstrate the general differences between the two versions as the ideological divergence between Hong Kong and PRC, the sides under two systems. Since the heavy censorship has driven the authentic versions out of the theater, the mainland audience turns to alternative viewing platforms such as DVD, and the Internet, basically the pirated copies. The illegal digital dissemination of the original movies further complicates the problem in terms of both the ideological confrontation of the “two systems” and the role of Hong Kong cinema in China’s economic reform in the context of its cultural industry transformation. In this sense, apart from elucidating the context, causes and impacts of the phenomenon, the interlocking relationship between market, censorship and piracy will also be explored against the backdrop of marketisation of movie industry in China.

1. Two-version as a commercial expediency: a result of economic collaboration

It should be remembered that Hong Kong studios have long been producing multiple versions of films to pass censorship in different environments, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan. PRC presents new challenges for the similar dilemma.

(Davis & Yeh, 2008:105)

The multiple versions for different overseas markets have been a long-tested survival tactic in Hong Kong film history. As an export-oriented industry, Hong Kong cinema has gained its fame greatly through its accurate grasp of the target markets and flexibility in catering to the audiences and the censors in various areas. The shrinkage of traditional markets in Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries after the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis has almost broken the industry chain of export-dependent Hong Kong cinema. When exploitation of the new mainland market becomes a matter of life and death, such reluctant compromise with market entry

limitations is totally understandable as a measure of expediency. In this light, since the 1997 reunification, the Hong Kong film industry has begun to shift their attention to the Mainland as their major “overseas” market. Meanwhile, the PRC has also slowly started the marketisation of the once totally state-owned film industry as its commercial value, apart from its propaganda function, has now been realized and acknowledged. The burgeoning mainland market needs more movies to attract the audiences back to the theaters while nearly “laid-off” Hong Kong filmmakers are desperately looking for new markets to keep their cameras rolling.

1.1 Multiple-versions as Survival Tactic of Hong Kong cinema

Multiple-versions are not an unusual practice in film history and it happens throughout the world. Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in America* premiered out of competition at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival in its original running time of 229 minutes but was later commercially released in a version of 129 minutes, cut by the his company against the director’s will. Though Roger Ebert (1984) wrote in his review that the uncut version was "an epic poem of violence and greed" but described the American theatrical version as a "travesty", one movie for the critic and one movie for the crowd is not altogether inexcusable. However, in the case of the export-oriented, entertaining mechanism like Hong Kong cinema, the alternative version is usually made to placate the censors of specific overseas markets.

In early 1990, for sake of international markets like Europe and other Asian countries, the internationally famous mainland actress Gong Li (who came to international prominence through close collaboration with director Zhang Yimou in *Red Sorghum & Raise the Red Lantern*) was chosen to co-star with “Hong Kong Jim Carrey” Stephen Chow in a comedy *God of Gamblers III: Back to Shanghai* directed by Wong Jing. However, according to Taiwan film policies at that moment, PRC citizens were strictly forbidden to appear in Republic of China domestic screens even if the movie was Hong Kong made. Since the Taiwan market was then the biggest overseas market for Hong Kong films from 1984-1995 (Feng, 2003), a special version for the Taiwan market was made replacing the mainland actress with a much less famous Taiwanese singer Fang Jiwei. Within one story, a few extra shots using a Taiwanese local actress to meet the import requirements ensures that the cost-return

ratio is perfectly calculated and maximized. These are typical Hong Kong tactics for surviving between the gaps.

Other major overseas markets such as Southeast Asian countries Singapore and Malaysia are also well-known as being strict and conservative in their film censorship. Taking *Young and Dangerous* (1996) by Andrew Lau for example, the triad leader Chan Ho Nam was changed to be a police undercover in Malaysia version as the regulation there does not allow the criminal character get off freely. Another movie by Andrew Lau, *Infernal Affairs* (2002), which is one of the most influential and well-known post-1997 Hong Kong films which was remade into the Oscar winning *The Departed* (2006) by Martin Scorsese, also has two different endings available in its DVD release. The original ending climaxes with the death of the undercover policeman and his murderer, a police-infiltrated Triad member living as a free man. Artistically, this leaves the audience some room for reflecting upon life and fate which is implied by the Chinese title *Wujian Dao* (literally means “non-stop path”, a reference to a Buddhist term of hell). In contrast, the alternative ending conveys a more cut-clear message with the arrest of the murderer red-handed. “Good” has to be rewarded while “Bad” needs to be punished. Since *Infernal Affairs* was made in the post-1997 era, many had mistakenly blamed the PRC censors for the faulty ending while in fact the film had never been officially screened in the Mainland theaters but only been introduced in the form of DVD. This ending was initially made for Malaysian market and as the head of Media Asia Group John Chong recalled:

In Malaysia they set the rules not allowing criminals to be at large in the movies. In shooting Infernal Affairs, I called Andrew asking him what we should do if Ming ends up a freeman. It turns out our directors are quite experienced with those rules in overseas market and he told me had already prepared an alternative version as Ming steps out of the elevator hands up and arrested. This ending is also used in the Mainland. Some said it was to accommodate to the restrictions in the Mainland. It was not. It is the market. Only this way can it work in the market.

(quoted from Cheuk, 2008)

In fact, *Infernal Affairs* had never be officially screened in the mainland theaters as before 2004 Hong Kong movies were still subject to the 20 per year import quota of PRC and were introduced into mainland market as “foreign cultural products”. The winner of 2004 Hong Kong Film Award, *Running on Karma* (literal Cantonese title *Big Guy*, *dir.* Johnnie To and Wai Ka-Fai, 2003) was so introduced to the Mainland as

an imported film. However, the fifteen minutes cut in its mainland public release has fundamentally degraded the philosophical, thought-provoking movie to a senseless commercial film selling stars and special effects make-up (a prosthetic muscle suit to make the hero look huge, like Schwarzenegger). The story of *Running on Karma* is unfolded around the protagonist Biggie's unusual ability of seeing karma—a Buddhist teaching on the effects of a person's actions that determine one's destiny in one's reincarnation. Being a Buddhist monk, Biggie can see another's previous life and foretell the ending in this life. This ability enables him to help his police friend track down a homicide and arrest the murderer since the victim, the murder and a seemingly irrelevant woman have been long involved since their previous life. With the end of his police friend through beheading, she uses herself as bait to help Biggie find his childhood friend's killer. Biggie's five years meditation in the mountain finally penetrates the profundity of life and are all motivated and guided by the belief in Karma. However, according to the official ideology of the PRC, this religious doctrine is regarded as superstition and should be banned from the silver screen, so all parts conveying or reflecting the idea of karma are cut, totally about 15 minutes from the 98 minute movie. The remaining 83 minute "non-superstitious" story turns out to be superficial, motivated only by an inexplicit secular love between a man and a woman, and an illogically broken plotline leaving the Mainland audience baffled about the story and its successes in both Hong Kong theaters and film festival.

Although stringent film censorship in PRC has caused a greater challenge to the Hong Kong cinema, generally speaking, the ordeal is not comparable to the opportunity to revitalize the industry with its advantage of privileged access to the mainland market which is not enjoyed by their Hollywood counterparts who had already taken the Taiwan market away since the mid-1990s.

In the downturn of Hong Kong film industry that had almost lost all its Southeast Asia market after the 1998 Asia Financial Crisis, the Mainland appeared to lend a hand with CEPA (Closer Economic Partnership Agreement) implemented since January 1, 2004. The concessions are gradually liberalized over the last few years through newly added supplements every year. Before CEPA, Hong Kong films were still regarded as foreign films to the mainland and had to compete with Hollywood and other foreign movies for the twenty profit-sharing import quota every year (the quota used to be ten before 2001 China's accession to WTO) even though since 1997 handover Hong Kong has become a SAR of the PRC. The unification of sovereignties

did not bring the two territories any closer under the two systems, and its influence on Hong Kong film industry seemed not very obvious in the first few years after the handover as Hong Kong films were still categorized as foreign cultural products in the Mainland market. However, though the efforts of the Hong Kong filmmakers after sending delegations to Beijing negotiating for the “national status” of Hong Kong cinema in the PRC, the preferential policies on mainland distribution and exhibition of Hong Kong films are included in CEPA. Hong Kong made Chinese-language films can be imported to mainland China on a profit-sharing basis exempt from the annual 20 foreign film quotas, and co-productions with the mainland can be distributed as domestic films in China. In terms of box office revenue, only 15% goes to profit-sharing imports but 45% goes to the co-productions (Wai, 2007). This was to be a stimulant to the failing Hong Kong film industry.

In fact, just as desperately as Hong Kong film industry needs new market of the Mainland, the Mainland also needs Hong Kong cinema to fuel its marketisation of the moribund state-owned film industry. Under a Leninist structure, the Chinese film industry used to serve only as party-government propaganda in PRC. However, with the adaptation of a market economy since early 1990s, the commercial value of film has been gradually realized and emphasized. Since 1994 PRC started to introduce 10 Hollywood movies on a profit-sharing basis every year, and the quota has been increased to 20 since 2001 entry to WTO. Started in 2002, more efforts are spent in the infrastructure constructions as the “Great Leap Forward”-like establishment of exhibition chain system in which Hong Kong capital and management experiences have taken a leading role. According to CEPA, Hong Kong service suppliers are permitted to construct, renovate and operate cinema theatres in the Mainland on an equity joint venture or contractual joint venture basis (the Hong Kong stakes allowed has gone up from 50% in the beginning to wholly-owned at present). By the end of 2009, China has established altogether 34 theatre chains with nearly 5000 screens, five times increase in eight years. The total box office revenue has augmented from less than 1 billion RMB in 2002 to 6.2 billion RMB (about 0.9 billion USD) in 2009, with an average annual increase rate at about 25 % and the increase rate of the year 2009 is as high as 43% (Xinhua news agency, 2010). The profit-blowouts in Mainland film industry are the result of economic collaboration between Hong Kong and the Mainland which has benefited both. However, the unexpected and still yet-to-be-solved side products are these large numbers of mutated Hong Kong films

screened in the Mainland theatres diminishing the reputation of Hong Kong cinema.

1.2 Mainland Metamorphosis of Hong Kong movies

In 2004, the among those films that first hit the mainland theatres under CEPA, was one entitled *The Inescapable Snare* (from China coproduction website) or *Ensnared*, by Martinsen (2005) (Chinese title: *Tian Luo Di Wang*, literally meaning an escape-proof dragnet). It is a very cost-effective repackaging of a 2003 Hong Kong film *Naked Ambition* (dir. Dante Lam & Chan Hing Kai, 2003). Similar to an American film *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (dir. Miloš Forman, 1996) about a pornographic magazine publisher, the original Hong Kong version tells a story about how two young college graduates overcome bias and prejudice to rise from miserable magazine writers and editors to big shots in the local porn industry. It was rated as Category-III in Hong Kong (equivalent to a NC-17, adult only film) due to the nudity and obscenity. In order to enjoy the preferential treatment brought by CEPA, the pragmatic and adaptable Hong Kong studio cleverly remade it into a normative Mainland-Hong Kong co-production. The “indecent” rag to riches story of “porn kings” was “whitewashed” into an educating morality tale on how Hong Kong police, together with Mainland Public Security Ministry, crack down on pornographic publications and prostitutions. The supporting role of Hong Kong police officer in the original film becomes the leading hero in the mainland version, assisted by a mainland undercover policewoman who never appears in the Hong Kong version. Obviously, this mainland female role was abruptly squeezed in to fulfill the requirement of Hong Kong-mainland crew ratio in co-productions. This opportunistic experiment was criticized by a Hong Kong critic as “the most subversive act” and “complete revision of the original ideology” (Ye, 2009), but more importantly, it reflects the jerry-building attitude in quickly taking advantage of the newly claimed “national status” in the Mainland market.

In fact, since the implementation of CEPA, the mainland market has proven to be a gold mine for Hong Kong cinema. In a public talk on Hong Kong-Mainland co-production and the market situation in 2005, the Chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers See-Yuen Ng greatly emphasized the advantages of co-producing with the Mainland and the importance of the mainland market to Hong Kong cinema by comparing the mainland and Hong Kong box office revenues of two

films : Wong kar-wai's *2046* (2004) and Tsui Hark's *Seven Swords* (2005). Both have gained about seven million HK\$ total box office revenue in Hong Kong, while their mainland box office revenue is 35 million and 80 million respectively (Cheung, 2008). Nansun Shi, senior Hong Kong producer also pointed out in her speech "Hong Kong as an Asian Co-production Centre" at the American Film Market in Los Angeles 2006 that in China "the room for growth and expansion is unimaginable" as China has a population four times of the American market while the number of screens was only 2,700 at that time (almost 5,000 by now) compared to 36,000 in the U.S. (quoted from Pang, 2007).

However, in order to avoid being classified as "spirit pollution" to the supposedly harmonious socialist society, quite a few Hong Kong films had at least some or in other cases, many kinds of "cosmetic surgery" (netease.com) self-consciously and voluntarily so as to pass the strict screening of the SARFT before making their presences at Mainland theaters. Besides changing a more uplifting or blunt title, these surgeries usually include:

1. the overall detoxification of the nudity, sex, violence and politically sensitive topics;
2. minor skin uplifting (the good gets rewarded and the bad never ends up well—all the criminals will turn themselves in if not being arrested);
3. bleaching (characters in the crime movies would unexpectedly reveal their identities as a police undercover in the end, so that all the bad behaviours are covered in the name of "seeking justice");
4. major body treatment like liposuction (cutting out the sensitive contents, be it political, religious, or superstitious) or even
5. bone contouring (repackaging the whole film almost beyond recognition like turning a crime movie into a anti-crime moral story).

In a nutshell, all these efforts are to serve one goal only— to put a potential morally contaminating HKSAR film generally in line with the Central People's Government. As a spokesman for SARFT explains, "Movies are cultural products, and against China's particular national background, under a socialist ideology, we must conscientiously carry out the inspections according to our value system." (Quoted from Martinsen, 2005).

The Best Film of 2005 Hong Kong Film Award, *One Nite in Mongkok* (2004), is a crime thriller about the story of a prostitute and killer struggling for a living in Hong Kong. In order not to antagonize the easily irritated censors, an inter-title was added to indicate that the story happens in 1996, and the two indecent protagonists are from some Southeast Asian countries though everybody knows from the plot they are both from the poverty-stricken areas of Mainland China. The superfluous interference in fact exposes what the censors want to hide or refuse to face. Deliberately setting the time in 1996 in crime movies is to pretend that all things bad happened in the “corrupted” British Hong Kong era. This is an expansion of “new society— old society” dichotomy in PRC to HKSAR. In PRC official historiography, the founding of PRC in 1949 has always been referred to as the watershed between new and old societies, and now in Hong Kong, 1997. Since all the crimes belonging to the “old Hong Kong” in 1996, have nothing to do with the “new” one, the film avoids suspicion of challenging the sustained stability in post-handover Hong Kong as part of “new China”. In the end of the movie, a voiceover by the prostitute says, “The encounter with the killer have changed my whole life. I will never choose to live a life like that again.” This is added as a kind of moral posturing, and bluntly conveys the message that the old being is suddenly wiped out by the new. This self-deceiving trick has become a general practice in Hong Kong cinema no matter how mechanical and illogical it is in the plotline. *Rebellion* (dir. Herman Yau Lai-To, 2009) set in the “inter-titled” 1996 is full of cutting-edge cell phones and the characters even comment on the Iraq War which broke out seven years later. If the film were distributed in the American market, it probably will be criticized for its rejection of the cause-effect relation between the 9/11 Attack and the Iraq War.

In fact, since 1997 reunification, the intertwined interests of Hong Kong and China are not limited to the film industry but in many other aspects as well. As Hong Kong scholar Chan admitted “Hong Kong's growing economic dependence on the Chinese market is a received wisdom” and a strong economic partnership that is mutually beneficial (Chan, 2004: 50). Post-1997 Hong Kong cinema, as Pang (2007) maintained, “is a utilitarian form of nationalism, facilitated less culturally than economically, so that this nationalization is economically driven and therefore compliant with globalization” (p.424).

In the first years after the 1997 handover, with the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, Hong Kong was more economically vexed than politically because of the noninterventionist approach adopted by Beijing. Since Beijing's first task is to keep the stability and prosperity in Hong Kong as promised in promoting the "one country, two systems" formula, its "benevolent stance" towards HKSAR was described as "rather unexpected" by alert Hong Kong scholars (Chan, 2004:36). They concluded that Beijing's attitude in the first years after the handover as "strongly marked by both pragmatism and a keen sense of political prudence" (Ibid: 35) and it is also pragmatism that has propelled Hong Kong to welcome the Mainland on an economic ground though still alienating or feeling alienated culturally and ideologically in the unacquainted motherland. The mutation of dual-versioned Hong Kong films in the Mainland markets is a result of the opportunistic "quick money mentality" in the Mainland-Hong Kong economic collaboration and a reflection of the irreconcilable political divergence in their correlation as well.

2. Two-versions highlights the political divergence: a reflection of HKSAR-PRC correlation

Despite the intertwined interests and mutual financial benefits in the economic collaboration, PRC and Hong Kong are still guarded against each other for political reasons. While PRC is taking a defending or intimidating stance towards the flooding in Hong Kong films, some Hong Kong filmmakers are also intentionally provoking through their social fable or political allegory kind of films. Being a special administration region of PRC, Hong Kong is trying to grasp every opportunity to uphold its subjectivity through its cinema, sometimes intentionally to express their discontentment, defiance, and even to provoke. Due to these divergences, the proposed solution of establishment of film rating regime in PRC seems to be inadequate to the 'two-versions' which, to some extent, serve to be a specimen for studying Hong Kong-PRC correlation under 'one country, two systems'.

2.1 Persecuted or Provoking: ‘Category E’ Hong Kong movies

They start from a non-progressive standpoint, ranging from the frankly reactionary through the conciliatory to the mildly critical; they have been worked upon, and work, in such a real way that there is a noticeable gap, a dislocation, between the starting point and the finished product.

(Comilli & Narboni, 1982: 819)

‘Category E’ movies here have nothing to do with the film rating system which classifies the movies into categories based on contents and age groups. It is a category in ideological criticism proposed in late 1960s by Jean-Luc Z. Comilli and Jean Narboni. Among the ‘A-G taxonomy’ of films in the article ‘Cinema/ Ideology/ Criticism’, Category E films are “films which seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner” (Comilli & Narboni, 1982: 819). Taiwanese scholar Robert Ru-Shou Chen (1994) interpreted it as “the Fifth films” surmounting the interrelated binaries of the first four kinds, namely, A-commercial film, B-reactionary film, C-art film, D-political film. In a word, Category E film is like commercial film inlaid with obscure social satires or political allegories, and only the ‘insiders’ among the audiences will receive the message and nod with a knowing smile. Chen illustrated the subversive political appeals in Category E films with an example from an old Chinese movie *Street Angel* (1937). The movie is packaged as a mix of melodrama and comedy but underneath is the criticism of the flabbiness of the government in face of the Japanese invasion.

Although since as early as 1950s, both the political events and issues are simplified and even amused in Hong Kong cinema under the dual pressure of film censorship and film market (Chan, 2005), the filmmakers have constantly and cleverly expressing themselves by stealth and the focus of their political presentation has mainly been on the complicated relationship between China and Hong Kong. In the 1980s, the stories about Vietnam are well-known metaphor for Chinese Communist regime in commercial hits such as *Boat People* (1982), *A Better Tomorrow 3: Love & Death in Saigon* (1989); Lam Ching Ying’s Qing dynasty zombie series have served as an allusion to the Chinese bureaucrats; and a lot more intentional associations to the image of China are made in early 1990s movies, for instance the Hong Kong Bank of China Tower in the science fiction *Wicked City* (1992). This “political

expediency” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1988: 919) tradition in the Hong Kong cinema has been extended over the watershed 1997: Wong Kar Wai’s 2004 film *2046*, the last year before Hong Kong’s fifty years special self-regulation status expires; the police car plate in Johnnie To’s *Exiled* (2007), a story set in Macao, is ‘MD97-99’, the particular year for Hong Kong and Macao reunited to PRC respectively. Other innuendoes like ‘Mr. Hung’ (literally in Chinese, Mr. Red) in *The Longest Nite* (1998, an old triad leader who comes back to Macau after decades absence); and in *Election* (2005) also an old triad leader ‘Uncle Teng’ (same as late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping who forwarded ‘one country, two systems’ formula) are all easily deciphered. It would be hard to judge the real intentions for all these associations but it is clear that the filmmakers are giving vent to their inextricable tangle of feelings towards the handover, the status of being a SAR of socialist PRC. In this case, the edited mainland version may testify to the ‘persecution’ of these ‘Category E’ Hong Kong films as well as their ‘provocation’ as they “throw up obstacles in the way of the ideology, causing it to swerve and go off course” (Comilli & Narboni, 1982: 819), or in Godard’s frequently cited statement “not making political films, but rather making films politically”.

Johnnie To’s *Election* (2005, Cantonese title: *Hak se wui*, literally ‘Black Society’, a euphemism for Triads society), utilizes the masquerade of triad election to ‘directly mock the lack of democracy in Hong Kong’ (Pang, 2007). The director himself had repeatedly emphasized that this film was made with no intention to entering to mainland market, as it reflects the changes in Hong Kong society and “it’s bound to have a hint of the political environment” (To, 2005), but as a post-CEPA production, it is quite understandably that anyhow a mainland version entitled *Long Cheng Sui Yue* (literally, Times at Dragon Town) was still released simultaneously on October 20, 2005. No matter it is a result of the official censorship by SARFT or the commercial self-censoring by the Hong Kong studios, the obvious elimination or editing in *Long Cheng Sui Yue* has made what concealed in *Election* more conspicuous. In a word, the alterative version unexpectedly serves to highlight the hidden messages in the authentic one.

As its English title *Election* indicates, this crime film has a bigger ambition than a simple portrait of the triad society. The story unfolds around the blood-soaked election of triad chairman (which resulted in a Category III rating in Hong Kong), and struggling for the Dragon Head Baton—the emblem of triad power; but in fact it

embodies the appeal for democracy and universal suffrage in the SAR by using the triad society “as a microcosm of Hong Kong and its particular status as a self-governing city within the Chinese state” (Teo, 2007: 179) and the reflective thinking on the changes in post-1997 Hong Kong in terms of its relation to the Mainland. Despite the different Chinese titles, there are altogether over ten major cuts or changes in the mainland version. Besides those funny and annoying, cliché-like ‘uplifting changes’ of all bad guys being arrested and old people educating the youth not to join the organized crime, some of them have revealed certain aspects about the state quo of Hong Kong under “one country, two systems”. These revelations involving areas from political claims to people’s livelihood all point to the inquiry and negotiation on the identity of being a SAR of the PRC.

First of all, an eliminated line serves as a beacon to bring out the theme or the essence of the original: an anti-triad police officer says, “The Triad started electing their chairman even earlier than we elect our chief executive” as the universal suffrage became the focus of political controversy after 2003 anti-Article 23 Hong Kong 1 July Marches. In an interview, director To put it very clear about his motive of making the film “I feel we lost out after 1997. We should have found our targets after the 2003 demonstration” (To, 2005) and those targets are the universal suffrage and the autonomy of Hong Kong. Towards the end of 2003, after the July 1 marches successfully putting Article 23 which legislating against acts such as treason, subversion, secession and sedition "temporarily suspended", the focal point has shifted to the dispute of how subsequent Chief Executives get elected. Presumably there is some consideration on what impact the universal suffrage in Hong Kong would probably create on the one party rule in Mainland China, so in 2004, the Central Government of PRC had ruled out universal suffrage in the 2007 and finally in Dec 2007 promised to allow universal suffrage in 2017 while the Hong Kong pro-democracy camp is still pushing for this in 2012.

Similarly, a slight change in one not so important dialogue shed light on another noticeable social phenomenon under “one country systems”: the influx of Mainland pregnant women giving birth in HKSAR to evade the one-child policy. In the movie, a triad member reminds a mainland liaison how he has helped the mainlander’s wife to be admitted to hospital in Hong Kong for childbirth so the baby is a Hong Kong permanent resident. However, in the mainland version his words is revised to simply ‘help sending your wife to the hospital’ to sidestep the sensitive topic. According to a

judicial interpretation of the Basic Law made by Hong Kong Supreme Court in July 2001, all children born in Hong Kong are entitled to birthright right of abode (since Hong Kong is not an independent nation, there are no provisions for Hong Kong citizenship). Then the Individual Visit Scheme began in 2003 which allows travelers from Mainland China for brief visits to the SARs on an individual basis intended to boost the local tourism but which actually triggered the “mainland mother rush”. The number of babies born in Hong Kong by mainland mothers surged from 7810 in 2001 to 19538 in 2005 almost 2.5 times (Legislative Council document, 2007).

Most noteworthy, is the omission in an undercover version of the original while adding in another one in the mainland version. In the Mainland-ready ending, as usual the panacea of turning one of the criminals into an undercover policeman to justify all crimes is employed but conspicuously the scene of a Mainland police officer talking to a triad member, revealing that he was sent to Hong Kong to infiltrate the triad before 1997 and now is asking his old acquaintance to cooperate with the Mainland police was removed. In fact this is the most important clue leading to the sequel of the movie, *Election 2: Value Peace Most* (2006) centering on the PRC Central Government coercing the protagonist to be the puppet chairman of the triad society while he himself attempts to go "clean" as a legitimate businessman. “Your leadership will make Hong Kong a safer place”, “You and we live together peacefully” as the PRC Public Security Bureau chief said to their handpicked triad leader in the movie, echoing the real statement “the triads can also be patriotic” made by Tao Si-ju, former Minister of Public Security of PRC in early 1990s. As interpreted in *Election 2: Value Peace Most*, the way for the triads to be patriotic is to be submissive or even servile to the state central powers. This over-obvious metaphor made in the film ‘generates the strongest “political fireworks” in the Hong Kong-China relationship since the reunification’ (Teo, 2007: 182). Of course, as “the most directly political film made in Hong Kong in the post-97 era” (Ibid), *Election 2* was never officially screened in the Mainland while *Election*, the less political or suspicious, but still provoking Category E film was shown with considerable revisions. These revisions were claimed to be made to accommodate the Mainland market which presently lacking a film classification system since *Election* is rated as an adult only movie in Hong Kong due to the violence (Xinhuanet.com, 2005).

2.2 Differences in Film Regulatory Regimes: The Film Rating System vs. Censorship:

Motion picture rating systems are a general international practice for film regulation, be it the “industry self-regulation” as adopted in United States, United Kingdom, or Japan and South Korea; or the “command-and-control regulation” which is a government conduct as in Australia, Canada, France, India, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong (So, 2006). The regulation of film contents is to protect children and young people from exposure to inappropriate materials, but equally (if not more) important, not to ignore the rights of the adult audience as well as the filmmakers. However, so far in PRC, instead of a rating system, the government executes its control on film through a one-size-for-all censorship, which means any film publicly shown in mainland theaters should be appropriate for audience ranging from eight to eighty years old. This difference in film regulatory regimes of Mainland and Hong Kong is mostly being referred to as the reason for “one movie, two versions”, and wishfully a solution to the problem (Martinsen, 2005). But in fact through close examination of some of the cases of two-versioned films, it is self-evident that lack of a film rating system in PRC should not bear all the blames, and definitely not an adequate solution. It is only a pretext for the at will censorship in PRC and behind the difference in film regulation are the differences in governing concepts and practices of ruling by law or by willful individuals.

The motion picture rating system in Hong Kong was established in 1988 and revised in 1995. According to it, any movie shown publicly in Hong Kong theaters is issued a rating among the following four:

CAT I— Suitable For All Ages

CAT IIA— Not Suitable For Children

CAT IIB— Not Suitable for Young Persons and Children

CAT III— Persons Aged 18 and Above Only

It is clear that only Category III forbids a certain portion of the population from watching the film. For sake of the market share, it is a common practice for the film companies to compromise for a IIB rating by some cuts. For example, Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) voluntarily submitted a self-edited, less violent

version for IIB rating and local trademark-like director Johnnie To's *Exiled* (2006) was first awarded a Category III rating, for one scene showing a particular triads gesture but finally theatrically released in Hong Kong in the Category IIB cut version without the scene while the uncut version is available in DVD. Occasionally, a publicly released Category III movie would voluntarily provided a self-edited IIB version for public release later or even simultaneously. For instance, *Rebellion (Tong Men)*, 2009), a 100 minutes Category III film, was screened together with and its 87 minutes IIB version without all the foul language. Since 18+ restricted Category III or NG-17 films will result in the departure of audiences, for mature business mechanisms like Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema, the goal of maximizing financial return have lead to a tendency towards not so exclusive IIB or R rate movies, unless the films are targeting an adult audience only with excessive violence and explicit nudity and sex as their selling points.

Under China's "one movie for ages" regulation, CAT IIB seems to be the upper limit as minors (even children) are admitted to the theater with or without adult company. Many of the recent high-profile Chinese domestic blockbusters by the first class Chinese directors such as Zhang Yimou's *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), *Curse of Golden Flower* (2006); Chen Kaige's *The Promise* (2005), and Feng Xiaogang *Banquet* (2006) all contain substantial sex and violence. All of them are rated as Category IIB in Hong Kong (equivalent to an R rate in U.S) to which parental guidance is required for viewers under 17 years old. But in mainland theaters, these movies are open to anyone without any warning.

In fact, violence scenes inappropriate to the minors can often be found in public released films in the Mainland no matter if it is made in Hong Kong or mainland China. Back in 1988, when British Hong Kong government first introduced the film rating system, the first movie being issued a Cat III rating is *Men Behind the Sun* (1988. Chinese title *Hei Tai Yang 731*, literally meaning "Black Sun: 731") which graphically depicts the secret biological weapons experimentations conducted upon the Chinese and Soviet prisoners by the Unit 731 of Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. Despite the cruel and bloody scenes that shocked the Hong Kong censors, this movie was publicly screened in the mainland and many schools had even organized their pupils and students to watch it as part of their extra-curriculum patriotism education. Another example is a mainland produced propaganda film *The Great Decisive Wars (Da Jue Zhan)*, 1991) trilogy, also rated Cat III in Hong Kong

due to the excessive violent terrifying combat scenes. Produced by the PLA (People's Liberation Army) August First Film Studio, the movie is about the three major campaigns between the Communist Party and KMT party (Republic of China government who then retreated to Taiwan), which had led to the founding of PRC. It has also been used as history and politics education material in all mainland schools from elementary to tertiary institutions in early 1990s (Wei, 2006).

It is self-evident that violence is not the real cultural minefield in PRC film regulation while being politically correct is more overwhelming. Neither is erotica should be the regarded as the real concern. The zigzags of *Lust, Caution* (2007) by Taiwanese director Ang Lee in the mainland had unveiled the truth behind the pretext of a yet-to-come rating system. It is a very controversial movie for its excessive amount of sex scenes has roused nation-wide calling on establishing film classification system in China but only to push the dream further away from being realised. Strictly speaking, *Lust, Caution* is not a Hong Kong movie though Hong Kong is greatly involved from the story, the shooting location to the leading actor (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai), other supporting actors and crew member such as and co-cinematographers. Moreover, since the explicit sex scenes in the movie has created much of a stir, an attempted lawsuit over the cut version in the Mainland has also brought the Hong Kong-Mainland two versions for two systems phenomenon into the spotlight.

Following the successful mode of transnational cooperation in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden dragon* (2000), *Lust, Caution* was also coproduced by companies across PRC, Taiwan and U.S. However, despite the fact that it was mainly filmed in Shanghai, mainland China screened a "clean" version of only 145 minutes without any sex, nudity or violence scenes while the 158 minutes full version was shown in Hong Kong as Category III which means adults only (CSC News, 2007). However, according to the director Ang Lee, the sex scenes are essential to the plot structure of the movie, and he would rather let the movie being rated NC-17 in the United State than compromising to cut those scenes to fit into Class R for better theatrical revenue. A mainland viewer unsatisfied with the cut version thus took a legal action against the SARFT and UME International Cineplex where he went to see the movie (Martinsen 2007). As a PhD student at the China University of Politics and Law, Dong Yanbin sued the theater and SARFT over the cut version on the ground that it infringed on his rights as a consumer and violated the public's interests by failing to set up a film

rating system. “I felt greatly disappointed after seeing the movie,” Dong said, “Compared to Eileen Chang’s original, the incomplete structure of ‘Lust, Caution’ and fragmented portrayal of the female lead’s psyche makes it hard for the audience to appreciate the movie's art” (Quoted from Ransom, 2007) Of course the lawsuit was not filed by the authority on a “Catch-22” reasoning that Dong failed to provide a full version of *Lust, Caution* as evidence.

More ironically, the owner of UME international Cineplex sued by the law student is Ng See-Yuen, a senior Hong Kong film director, producer, and also the Chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers. Ng had played an essential role in gaining the domestic status of Hong Kong films in the mainland and now plays a leading role in calling for a film rating system in China (Martinsen, 2006) to help the Hong Kong filmmakers to some degree out of the heavy censorship of the SARFT.

Early in 1994 before Ng had led a delegation of Hong Kong filmmakers to visit Beijing to discuss the future of Hong Kong cinema after 1997. Lu Ping, the director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council of China then had promised creative freedom by jokingly saying that Hong Kong could keep on making Category III films, even Category IV or V since according to “One Country Two Systems”, you can stick to your own film censor regime” (Hong Kong Xinbao Newspaper 1994, quoted from Antu, 2004). However, when Hong Kong films are heading out of HKSAR to the mainland, the lack of rating system become a pretext for cutting and editing them at will, and an excuse for the inconsistency of administrative censorship.

Ang Lee had openly admitted that besides visually cleaning up the sex and violence in the film, he had to also change the dialogue in the Mainland version for political reasons (Metro, 2007). Set in WWII Hong Kong and Japanese-occupied Shanghai, *Lust, Caution* is about a group of patriotic university students plot to assassinate a high-ranking official in the puppet government. The attractive young woman sent to seduce him ends up falling for the official and reveals the plan when it is about to launch. According to Lee (Metro, 2007) her life-changing instruction “go quickly” was changed into somewhat moderate "let's go", to make her intentions less ambiguous because “Chinese censors were worried about the backlash from the plot

line of a supposedly patriotic activist aiding a Japanese collaborator”.. Lee acknowledged that this was an artistic compromise for the mainland market. “I didn't want to become a martyr,” he said (Ibid).

The censorship of this film did not end with the edited version. Not long after the sensation of *Lust, Caution*, the leading actress Tang Wei who had just won Best New Performer in the Taiwan Golden Horse Awards for her role as the undercover student was stunningly blacklisted by the SARFT without any legal procedures or explicit explanations. Her TV advertisements were withdrawn from all Mainland television stations and she was totally deprived of the right to work as an actress in China. It was reported that the "glorification of traitors and insult to patriots" (Callick, 2008) message in the movie was sensed by a high-ranking veteran Communist Party cadre and as a mainland actress, Tang Wei was banned from working in her own country for “glorifying traitors”(Macartney, 2008). This happened suddenly and immediately steered the policy agenda from the lack of a classification regime to the self-contradictory manner in which SARFT operated within its arbitrary administrative interference without legal grounds: An officially sanctioned movie would still be censured or even banned after its public screening. In the aftermath of *Lust, Caution*, Mainland independent film *Lost in Beijing* was banned in early 2008 after its sanctioned release in November 2007 and the producer was forbidden to work for two years. This film is about the love affair and economic disputes between a couple of poor migrants from a rural area and their Hong Kong boss doing business in Beijing. It was accused for “taking advantage of ideological differences to chase international awards, insulting the Chinese people in the process” (Martinsen, 2007).

From the bitter experiences of the two movies, it becomes obvious that the problem with arbitrary enforcement of the rules is more dangerous than ambiguous legal provisions in film regulation. The less rules are clearly stipulated, the more films are subject to unpredictable censorship. Fundamentally, the difference between the two regulating measures— the film rating system and the censorship adapted respectively in HKSAR and PRC— lies in that the rating system protects the interests of the public as well as the filmmakers, while censorship actually protects the power of the government authority in the name of sustaining a healthy and harmonious society. In light of the possibility of the subjective judgment of “insulting Chinese people” or “glorifying the traitors”, a yet-to-come film rating system seems not completely capable of changing much of the awkward double presentations of Hong

Kong films in the Mainland. Hence at present, the only way for the mainland audience to enjoy the authentic full version is ironically through pirated copies though the double-edged effect of film piracy has shown great impact on both film consumption and production.

3. The Impacts of Two-version on Hong Kong film consumption and production

The aforementioned Ang Lee's film *Lust, Caution* has aroused a country wide urge for the establishment of a film classification regime in PRC, but before the day arrives when Mainland audiences can watch *Lust* at local theaters as their Hong Kong counterparts do, they watch it at home with pirated copies either in form of DVD or downloaded from the Internet. In fact, since the alternative mainland versions of many Hong Kong films have diminished the appeal of cinema-going, the 'illicit' copies of the original are prevalent among mainland viewers which can be favorably interpreted as promoting the dissemination of the authenticity. However, the consumers' choice of the pirated authentic versions outside of the theater has a great negative impact on the filmmakers whose investment return is still dependent on the box office revenue. Therefore, Hong Kong cinema is gradually showing a tendency of self-imposed censorship to avoid revisions after submission for screen permits and the less-profitable alternative versions.

3.1 Polarized consumption: theatrical censored version vs. pirated 'authentic' version

The rise of film 'piracy' can be explained by highlighting a number of socio-economic, cultural, political and technological changes that, in combination, create both the demand for such products and the means by which it can be more readily satisfied.

Yar (2005)

Depicted in the Italian film *Cinema Paradiso* (1988 dir. Giuseppe Tornatore), in a small town in 1950s Italy, there was this priest who previews all the films before their public screening at the local theatre. The priest sits with a bell on his hand while watching the movie. When the bell rings, it means he finds something offensive or and not appropriate for public screening (usually a kiss scene). The projectionist then stops the movie and cuts the footage out. Nowadays in PRC, the SRAFT is playing a

similar role as the priest; however the mainland audiences living in the digital age are much luckier than the Italian townsfolk half a century ago. With the dispersion of various forms of audiovisual technologies, a film is no longer confined to the celluloid in that watching a movie does not necessarily mean going to the theater. Constrained by the strict film regulation in both quantity and content, the mainland audiences are no doubt frustrated. But under the government's connivance of piracy they are able to enjoy almost any movie they want through digital dissemination. In this sense, the frustrated become the privileged.

Early in the 1980s, when film was still deemed a propaganda tool in PRC, entertaining Hong Kong films were mainly introduced to the Mainland through pirated copies, video cassettes to VCDs and DVDs. In contrast to the stagnant state-owned cinemas, the brisk business of the mushrooming video parlors had played an important role in 'remedial film education' of the mainland audience who had been isolated from the outside world for decades until the open door policy adopted in 1978. In a sense, the popularity of these unauthorized Hong Kong films has made an indispensable contribution to the first step of film industry reform through importing ten foreign films per year since 1994 to revive the moribund cinema industry. Due to the limited quota and competition with the Hollywood blockbusters, most Hong Kong movies were imported on the basis of pre print sales rather than box office revenue-sharing basis. Usually there was a 'time lag' between the Mainland screening and Hong Kong release which also provided a niche for piracy profit.

Since the implementation of CEPA in 2004 when Hong Kong films flooded into the Mainland markets as domestic products released almost simultaneously, the 'time lag' is now replaced with the 'content discount' of some censored versions. Scholars have introduced the term 'cultural discount' (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988: 500) to describe the varied reception of media products travelling across different cultures, especially the diminished appeal of foreign media products resulting from the cultural differences between the viewers and the products. However, here in the case of the theatrical consumption of Hong Kong films in the mainland, there emerges this unusual 'content discount' due to the ideological difference under two political systems, in spite of the cultural proximity of being of one nation and country.

As the mainland audiences had learned their lessons from being deceived by the 'discounted' theatrical version, and turned away to only pirated 'authentic' films one after another, the rapidly expanding mainland film market has taken on an unusually

polarized consumption model. On the one hand, a spurt of growth in total box office revenue demonstrating the growing habit of cinema-going as a fashionable urban middle-class life style while on the other, some quite conscious movie fans have developed a habit of waiting for the illicit DVD or Internet downloads of full versioned Hong Kong movies which results in the unaffected proliferation of film piracy. Some research on the piracy epidemic has pointed out that, ‘there is a close correlation between per capita GDP and piracy levels, with the highest piracy rates to be found in those countries with the lowest incomes, and vice versa’ (Choi 1999:2, quoted in Yar 2005). This is also true with China whose per capita GDP ranks behind 100 among the world. However, with an overall GDP ranking No.2 in the world and the rapid expansion of urban middle class and their increasing disposable personal income (DPI), mainland cinema-goers are actually a potential cash cow for the film industry. Their choice of watching pirate copies is a choice of content over price which can even be seen as a consumer revolt against the censored alternative versions screened in the theaters. In light of this background, movie piracy in the Mainland is to a great extent the negative consequence of censorship based on the lingering conception of film as apparatus for ideological control than a problem of the enforcement of copyright law. Though in fact, alleviated by the digital dissemination of ‘illicit’ contents, this control has become a leaky bucket in the digital era. The two-version scenario can serve as an exercise in the psychoanalysis of the SARFT censors on behalf of the ruling party, and the contrastive textual analysis exposes the drawbacks or blind side which the SARFT desperately wants to avert.

For example, as Zhang Hongsen, deputy director of the Administration's Film Bureau under SARFT, had said in his defense of banning *Lost in Beijing*, "Our directors should consciously defend the honor of the motherland" (Martinsen, 2007), it is for the sake of the “honor of the motherland”, that a few minutes of monologue was cut from a costume comedy *The Lion Roars* (2002, dir. Joe Ma Wai-Ho). It was removed from the mainland version because it was regarded as offensive and insulting. The removed speech is: “I know there are places in this country where children are too poor to go to school. Even if some manage to get into school, they are studying in shabby classrooms without any desk. I am singing the song here for these poor children and wish one day they all get to eat a lot of fruits.” And then he starts to sing hilariously the funny Fruit Song adapted from the famous Cancan dance music *Orpheus in the Underworld* with a funny lyric composed of a name list of fruits. The

little speech is important to characterizing the protagonist as a loving person and explains why the picky girl who had rejected so many other admirers would suddenly fall for him in spite of his lousy singing. Later in the movie she refers to him as loving and innocent. Though set in the Sung dynasty which is over a thousand years ago, the short speech was still regarded as referring to present mainland China and was removed from the mainland release.

In the article “The global ‘epidemic’ of movie ‘piracy’: crime-wave or social construction?”, Yar (2005) maintains that piracy can be regarded “as a social construction whose increase can be attributed to shifting legal, political and criminal justice contexts which serve to ‘produce’ the problem of ‘piracy’ in its current scope and scale”. This argument is based on defining piracy as “the unauthorized copying and distribution (often, though not necessarily, for commercial gain) of copyrighted content” based on the intellectual property law (Ibid), but in case of PRC, without any intention to justify or legitimize piracy, we must admit that, as ideological censorship is intensely involved in film production and exhibition, the definition of piracy is problematised as sometimes the officially authorized versions are actually ‘frauds’ of the original; hence the role of piracy as “social construction” becomes more striking.

Although the contradistinction of the two versions simultaneously screened publicly and circulated underground has materialized and visualized this control as self-deceiving hypocrisy on the level of film consumption, it is still annoying hurdles to the film production in not only jeopardizing the box-office revenue but also challenging some filmmakers’ conscience of safeguarding their artistic integrity. *Shinjuku Incident* (2009) starring Jackie Chan and directed by veteran Hong Kong director and producer Derek Yip was withdrawn from the tempting mainland market without even bothering to submit the film for approval. Though initially registered as a Hong Kong-mainland coproduction, and enlisted in the repertoire of China Film Co-production Company website, this movie had ended up with reaching the mainland audiences only through pirated copies. As Derek Yee explained his decision of not releasing the movie in mainland China because China does not have a movie rating system while toning down or cutting the violence would hurt the integrity of the movie (Lee, 2009). However, contrary to his explanation, a cut version about 19 minutes shorter was released in Singapore and Malaysia both places well-known as conservative in their film censorship policies. In addressing the issue, Mainland film

critics pointed out that apart from the concerns of the violence and film rating, the real obstructions for *Shinjuku Incident* to enter the Mainland are the sensitive topic of illegal Chinese immigrants in Japan, and the strident theme of “Chinese don’t fight Chinese” spoken out openly in the movie, both “inviting suspicion of insulting the Chinese people” (Ma, 2009). Quite different from Jackie Chan’s usual trademark action movie, *Shinjuku Incident* is closer to a drama. It realistically portrays the ignominious struggling life of illegal Chinese immigrants in Japan. The direct exposure of the deep-rooted bad demeanors of the Chinese people and cruel reality of the conflicts and discrimination among the Japanese, the established Chinese immigrants, and the illegal, indigent newcomers may all easily antagonize the mainland censors. From previous experience, “Censors have in the past taken offence at such scenes as the killing of Chinese soldiers by Tom Cruise in last year’s *Mission Impossible III* and the portrayal of a Chinese pirate by Hong Kong star Chow Yun-Fat in the opening minutes of *Pirates of the Caribbean III*” (Dikie, 2007).

In fact with the successes of Derek Yee’s other two films in the mainland, *One Nite in Mongkok* (2004) as import, and *Protégé* (2007) as co-production, have made Derek Yee an admirable mainland expert and censorship consultant among Hong Kong filmmakers. His decision of giving up *Shinjuku Incident* is no doubt a difficult one after thorough consideration and careful commercial planning. Not all Hong Kong films are led by a marquee idol like Jackie Chan, and a Japanese partner to secure the overseas markets outside mainland China. Moreover, as Derek was quite clear that the mainland audience would eventually get to watch this movie outside the theaters, he made an advertisement for another movie he produced by calling “those who don’t get to watch *Shinjuku Incident* in the first time, go to watch *Overheard*” (BeijingSina.com, 2009) which had in fact become a hit since it was promoted as “not even one cut” after the scrutiny of SARFT.

3.2 Disappearing ‘two-versions’: an indication of self-censoring of Hong Kong cinema

No matter how “socially constructive” those pirated original versions seem to be to the Mainland film consumption environment, the implications of digital dissemination on Hong Kong filmmakers are double-edged. On the one hand, its contribution in clearing up the misunderstanding and doubts of Hong Kong cinema

caused by its mainland mutations should not be neglected; on the other, these original versions wantonly circulated outside the theater is greatly jeopardizing the box-office revenue which is at cross purposes for Hong Kong films to enter the mainland as 'national products'. Since the audiences had lost faith and trust in the theatrical versions, the Hong Kong filmmakers had to find new ways to entice the mainland audience back into the theaters.

Since 2008, more and more Hong Kong films began to claim themselves to be intact versions after the examination and approval of SARFT. Starting from *Sparrow* (*Wen Que*, dir. Johnnie To, 2008), *Overheard* (*Qie Ting Feng Yun*, 2009), to *Police Tactic Unit II: Comrades In Arms* (2009), 'not even one cut' has become a selling point or promotion strategy of Hong Kong cinema in the mainland market. However, contrary to the advertising message 'not even one cut', there are more than just one cut and edit in all of them. The mainland *Sparrow* is also 14 minutes shorter than its Hong Kong 'old and big' brother released two months earlier in June 2008 and *PTU2*'s mainland version which is 16 minutes shorter than the Hong Kong one released three months earlier in January 2009. Just as the audiences have realized that a couple of months' time-lag had caused quite some shrinkage in the film length, the distributor of *Overheard* cannily changed their tactics. In case of the mainland audiences finding out the difference on the first day of release, *Overheard* was unusually screened in the Mainland one week earlier than in Hong Kong, and this time the Mainland version is longer as it has added in a plot about the self-reproaching character voluntarily cooperating with the Hong Kong ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption) to 'uplift' the story a bit but only crippled the plotline and the original theme of the movie.

Strictly speaking, 'Not even one cut' is not a lie to fool the audience, but only an intentionally vague statement. To be exact, it is in fact 'no even one cut' by the SARFT but 'more than one cut' by Hong Kong producers themselves. As the films had been self-censored and edited before submission, they are almost impeccable to please the censors. This 'improved' tactic was adopted to speed up the examination process and ensure the scheduled releasing time slot. As mentioned earlier, the censorship of SARFT is rather contingent and arbitrary than strictly following a detailed stipulation. Repeated negotiations and reworks to satisfy the censors had cost great trouble and time to the studios but cannot even guarantee the screening permit. In 2004, the beginning year of CEPA, altogether 63 Hong Kong films out of 64

submissions have passed the SARFT to get screening permit in the Mainland. The only one failed after a couple of times revisions and resubmissions is *Blood Brothers* (*Jianghu*) produced by Eric Tsang Chi-wai. Tsang had had great expectations on this film ‘to represent Hong Kong films of 2004’ (Xinhuanet.com, 2004) but only found it ‘outlawed’ in the Mainland due to its ‘dark, choreographed violence and politically ambiguous ending’ (Davis & Yeh, 2008:105). *Rebellion* (*Tong Men*, 2009) by Herman Yau Lai-To had been scheduled to release in October 2008 but was put up for one year to revise for Mainland permit. Having learned their lessons from these arduous and unpleasant encounters with SARFT, the Hong Kong producers began to self-censor the movie and to make ‘necessary’ revisions based on others pitfalls before sending it to SARFT.

In order to increase the safety factor in the examination process, the self-censorship usually tends to be even tougher than necessary. Since the revisions made are based on one-sided conjectures and speculations on PRC mainstream ideology by Hong Kong studios, they are marked strongly with extreme caution and cultural anxiety of watchful outlanders. For example in *PTU II: Comrades in Arms* (2009), the anthem from the Cathedral miraculously becomes “Happy Birthday to You” in the Mainland version. This inconceivable change seems to have learned a lesson from aforementioned *Running on Karma* to avoid the sensitivity of religion matters but is actually overcautious about the religion policy in PRC. In fact the anthem ‘Lord don’t move that mountain’ in mainland-imported Hollywood movie *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) starring Will Smith has inspired a lot of mainland viewers and O. Henry's 1904 short story *The Cop and the Anthem* has been included in the Mainland high school textbook for decades.

However, since no one can be 100% sure about what the SARFT would allow or prohibit, it is better to play it safe by going farther than necessary. In their journey of being ‘integrated with a larger China constituency’ (Davis & Yeh, 2008:47), the self-imposed censorship of Hong Kong cinema hence perfectly illustrated the ‘Not "Chineseness" but learned helplessness’ put forward in Chan’s article “Taking Stock of ‘One Country, Two Systems’” (2004: 52). As Chan (Ibid: 55) notes,

Overall, Hong Kong people have come to realize that the Basic Law, which embodies the "one country, two systems" principle, has nonetheless ensured HKSAR's ultimate subordination to the will of the Central People's Government. There is no question that Beijing will always have the upper hand when it comes to contacts with Hong Kong.

This subordination, as aforementioned, is more economical than political as Chan also admits that in the first years after the handover, marked by 'both pragmatism and a keen sense of political prudence Beijing appears to have adopted a noninterventionist approach' and her 'benevolent stance toward the region was rather unexpected' (2004: 35-36). It is clearly illustrated by the heavy dependence of Hong Kong cinema on the Mainland market and their desperate 'make-up' tactic in entering the ideologically estranged 'domestic' mainland market.

With the 'not even one cut' slogan debunked, the once-effective measure of dual-versioned movie for passing the examination of the SARFT seems no longer profitable and will even damage the market potential for Hong Kong cinema since after all those precedents the audience has learned to wait for the pirated 'genuine version' instead of rushing into the theaters. As the two-version gradually retreats from the mainland screens, Hong Kong films has to choose from either totally abandoning the mainland market (like *Shinjuku Incident* or other low budget production aiming only at Hong Kong local market), and from making movies more consciously catering to the PRC official ideology by staying away from sensitive boundaries in its topic, theme and details. Undoubtedly, most would choose the later for business consideration. Therefore, the pressure of piracy has resulted in the recent tendency of self-censoring of Hong Kong filmmakers as Raymond Wong Bak-Ming, a member of Mainland Market Committee of Hong Kong Film Development Council, advocated in early 2009 that the Hong Kong filmmakers should learn to make their choices, to respect the game rules (in the Mainland), and not to be obstinate (www.stnn.cc, 2009). Mr. Wong is the founder of Cinema City Studios which had produced Hong Kong benchmark action films like *A Better Tomorrow* (dir. John Woo, 1986), *City on Fire* (dir. Ringo Lam, 1987) and successful series of ghost films and urban comedies throughout the golden time of Hong Kong cinema in the 1980s to early 1990s. Now Wong's emphasis on the importance of accommodating the Mainland business environment can be received as a manifestation of Hong Kong cinema accelerating its integration with the Mainland cinema in the post-CEPA era. After four or five years striving against the SARFT and struggling under the

censorship, the two-version phenomenon which used to run rampant around the 2004 CEPA implementation is now gradually fading away, replaced by the more adept co-productions of Chinese-language films handling their subjects and themes with ease to sell across the border but never touch the out-of-bounds areas in contents. The economization of time and effort in film production and maximization of profit is made at the cost of vernacular culture and identity of Hong Kong which manifests the transition of the Hong Kong cinema in mainland China to the Hong Kong cinema of China. The gradual integration of Hong Kong cinema into the PRC cinema is actually speeded up by the vanishing two-version phenomenon in the transitional “one country, two systems” fifty years after 1997 reunification.

Concluding remarks:

Multi-version films are not a new phenomenon taking place in postcolonial Hong Kong cinema, but are scaled up and fore grounded under the unprecedented ‘one country, two systems’ policy adopted in HKSAR since 1997. On the one hand, ‘one movie, two versions’ is a desperate remedy or ‘cultural expediency’ in the industrial downturn of Hong Kong cinema, reflecting the economic collaboration and ideological divergence between free capitalist HKSAR and socialist PRC beginning to adopt a market economy. On the other hand, the contra-comparison of the two versions provides us with a vivid portrait of the situation of ‘one country, two systems’ as well as the intertwined interests and competing powers under it. Since digital technology has changed the movie-viewing ecology, the PRC censorship has thus become powerless in the face of pirate copies and financial losses to the box office revenue as the audience has turned away from the theatrical censored versions to the pirated authentic ones. After the running-in time in the first couple of years after CEPA’s implementation in 2004 when an alternative version was created to avoid the mainland running amuck, we now have this tendency of fewer dual-versioned movies for the ‘two systems’ but more self-censored non-offensive movies made for ‘one country’.

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