Psychogeographical Remapping of Hong Kong between Being and Non-being in Liu Yichang's *Intersection*

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Abstract

Much has been done on positioning Hong Kong's cultural impasse in the confrontation between the recent rise of Hong Kong nativism laced with lingering nostalgia for colonial times and the increasing force of nationalism from the mainland since its 1997 handover. However, overemphasis on the in-betweenness might incite a defensive mechanism for over-reactive self-justification and lead to the trap of radical nativism and intra-racial rivalry. Under this circumstance, this paper, inspired by the framework of psychogeography and Chinese Zen Daoism, proposes an innovative model that critically integrates dérive with being and non-being. This synergistic paradigm offers an alternative way to harness ambivalence and rootlessness as a tactical breakthrough in rereading Hong Kong's hybridity in Liu Yichang's Intersection as an imaginary space of multi-directional self-articulation. In addition, it contributes to actualising a creative praxis of strategic intervention to disrupt the vicious circle of identity wrestling and anticipate a dialectical re-entry into the Hong Kong-Mainland identity landscape as a divergent yet interwoven duet.

Keywords: In-betweenness; Dérive; Being and non-being; Intersection; Multi-directional self-articulation; Dialectical re-entry

Introduction

Most postcolonial countries in the contemporary world would, in general, have already embarked on nation-building and gradually forged their national identities after gaining independence. But this is not the case for Hong Kong, originally a small fishing village on the

southern coastline of the People's Republic of China (PRC) but later becoming a British colony as a result of the Sino-British Opium War in 1842. On the threshold of 1997, what awaited Hong Kong, after over 150 years of colonisation, was to be taken over by its motherland, the PRC. Unlike its postcolonial counterparts, Hong Kong was once again thrown into the circle of "postcoloniality that precedes decolonisation" (Abbas 1997: 6). Stranded in "a postcolonial state of exception", Hong Kong people constantly grappled with their self-positioning, even though they are demographically part and parcel of the PRC (Choi 2007: 391). Since the post-1997 handover, they have been forced to live in a state of duality, attached to yet in many ways detached from the PRC. This in-between-ness has gone on to sow seeds of political resistance and activism as well as intra-racial fracture safter the 2000s.

Much scholarship, in tandem with major social movements that happened in 2014 and 2019, has foregrounded the identity dichotomy between Hong Kong and mainland China with only a few trying to evaluate the multilayered and fluid formation of Hong Kong identity. This identity tug-of-war has resulted in driving the current discussion into a politically charged battleground fueling locally based activism and outright resistance. Under such circumstances, this paper analyses Liu Yichang's *Intersection* using a syncretic framework combining *dérive* with the dialectics of being and non-being to provide a relatively objective and critical lens to reveal the real interactions between Hong Kong and the mainland. Consisting of forty-two scenes, *Intersection* tells a story about a middle-aged mainland immigrant, Chun Yubai from Shanghai, and a young local girl, Ah Xing, who as two strangers wander aimlessly through the urban landmarks of Hong Kong and stumble upon each other at a local cinema. They casually roam the city, which Liu uses as an ironic and reflective gesture to deconstruct the reified and alienated Hong Kong and rebuild their inner map of Hong Kong. The narratives most of the time follow a parallel pattern with occasional overlap, subtly refracting the silhouette of Hong Kong-Mainland dynamic relations. Before unravelling how the key terms embedded in the proposed integrative framework can be applied to the selected text to mediate Hong Kong-Mainland antagonism, it is imperative to first examine Hong Kong identity and its connection to its unique historical settings.

Literature review on the terrain of Hong Kong identity

Given the complex fabric of Hong Kong's identity landscape ranging from British colonisation in 1842 to its handover to China in 1997, scholars in general approach its hybridised

identification from particular angles. Some resorted to external factors like socioeconomic and political variables that forge the evolution of Hong Kong identity, while others dug deeper into the psychic realm to decode how cognitive awakening affects Hong Kong identity today. Before delving into details of what constitutes the Hong Kong identity, it is imperative to define what identity is. According to Stets and Burke (2000), identity refers to an individual's perceived ability to categorise himself or herself into a particular social group. The process of identification is not solely context-conditioned, and people can act agentially by reacting to, internalising, and imagining their surroundings for self-positioning (Anderson 1983; Castells 1997). Because of the erratic and idiosyncratic nature of human cognition, interpretations of self-identity may not always reach a consensus but could engender intergroup clashes which could fan political events and escalate into mass protests (Kalin and Sambanis 2018). Based on the aforementioned identity theories, critics and scholars conceptualise Hong Kong identity from different angles. Helena Wu (2020) drew on the signature of a local drink called milk tea as a metaphor of Hong Kong identity as a "contact zone" where East and West encounter each other in a fluid way (Pratt 1991: 34). Shi Shu-mei (2011), rather than highlighting Hong Kong identity's translocal openness, used the concept of the Sinophone to view Hong Kong identity as a "place-based practice" that celebrates its own situated cultural and geopolitical contingency (717). Brian C. H. Fong (2017), considering the unique positioning of Hong Kong people as a subgroup embedded within the rim of China, saw Hong Kong identity as "peripheral nationalism", an oppositional gesture towards the monolith of nationalism, and then aligned their discrepancies in approaching nationalism with the anarchic social turbulence in 2014 and 2019 (524). Siu-yau Lee (2019) pointed out the lack of a psychological approach in previous studies and called for accessing Hong Kong identity as an uncanny alterity hinged upon the parameter of "group malleability" (1).Gemma Sykes (2020) revised McAdam's political process paradigm by synthesising subnational identity with "insurgent consciousness" to evaluate Hong Kong identity as a politically active signifier, which uncovers the root of the recent social movements that happened in Hong Kong (1999, 40).

After theorising Hong Kong identity, this paper, to better examine the complicated topology of Hong Kong identity as "a particular kind of passageway", finds it necessary to make a concise allusion to Hong Kong history that mirrors the ongoing process of Hong Kong identity formation (Chow 1993: 179). Mathews (1997) provided a panoramic view of how Hong Kong identity is specifically defined as "Chinese plus" which innately differentiates itself from the mainland via historical, political and socioeconomic lenses (9). He saw the Cultural

Revolution (political persecution launched by Chairman Mao to purge the dissidents within the communist party from 1966 to 1976 in mainland China) and its concomitant social issues like famine and corruption as a key watershed moment in accelerating the rise of Hong Kong's local identity. The stark contrast between the mainland's ten years of economic stagnation and political tumult and Hong Kong's rise as a member of the world's developed economies, together with the increasing political demand for civic enfranchisement from the 1980s onward, and the colonial education purposely promoted by the British to weaken China's presence, turned the people of Hong Kongs mode of self-articulation from the monolith of the mainland, which upholds "state-led nationalism" (Tilly 1994: 113). Mathews (2007) then averred that "the absence of a state" and the laissez-faire economic policy that the British governor espoused pushed Hong Kong people to create a cosmopolitan identity "unbounded by national ideology" and anticipated a separate route they would embark on for reframing their own identities (13).

Upon the 1997 handover, the fear of communist China still plagued Hong Kong. And later, numerous scholars, observed the constant social movements which departed from interpretations of Hong Kong identity as juggling between the mainland and Hong Kong, and instead adopted a radical nativism that suggested a staunch refusal of the pull of mainland nationalism. Actually, central-local relations experienced a short-term "honeymoon", peaking in 2008 when the Olympic Games were successfully held on the mainland (Fung 2017: 5). However, a series of new policies, such as Article 23 and the National Education Curriculum, sought to tighten the leash on Hong Kong and deviate from the Sino-British Joint Declaration that grants Hong Kong political and judiciary autonomy as a 'Special Administrative Region' (SAR), accordingly bringing to the fore the looming Hong Kong-Mainland ideological divide. Cheng (2016) viewed the later 2014 Umbrella movement (public outrage over the demise of the universal suffrage once promised by the mainland central government) as a milestone to advance Hong Kong identity as "bottom-up activism" (384). Sebastian Veg (2017) read Hong Kong identity as a narration of civic enfranchisement accompanied by the emergence of political factions based on "self-determination" such as "Hong Kong Indigenous (Bentu qianxian), and Civic Passion (Rexue gongmin)" (328-330). The ferment of activist awareness was manipulated by Right-Wing extreme politicians to weaponise Hong Kong identity as full-fledged anti-China rhetoric and flagrant "identity war" based on "fundamentalist, ethnocentric

essentialism", foreshadowing the 2019 anti-extradition bill-related social unrest (Ip 2015; Chan 2015: 337).

In hindsight, the previous studies showed historical amnesia gradually chipping away at the complicated socioeconomic baggage embedded in Hong Kong identity so that political enfranchisement of democracy became its sole benchmark. In other words, the discussions of Hong Kong identity seemed to narrow its articulation to a political outcry for freedoms like universal suffrage and legislation autonomy, underscoring its innate distance from the mainland, and thus pushing itself further into a self-enclosure. Although the identity landscape of Hong Kong is politically ridden, the de facto situation of post-handover cultural and economic entanglement with the mainland evidenced by the Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and the Individual Visit Scheme should not be neglected (Fung 2017). Thus, the aforementioned studies with their focus on politicised tropes to valorise Hong Kong's local distinctiveness and their advocating for disassociation from the mainland cannot fully explicate the dynamics of the Hong Kong identity spectrum. Overgeneralisation of Hong Kong identity to political clashes between Hong Kong and the mainland by augmenting its subnational identity undermines the very core of Hong Kong identity as multilayered and fluid and perpetuates dead-end discussions of Hong Kong identity. Although Ma and Fung (2007) opposed the "single anchoring" of Hong Kong identity in a binary model and opted for a flexible rereading of Hong Kong identity, they still lack a sufficient and effective framework to cement their hypothesis (179). Echoing Chen and Szeto's (2015) warning that Hong Kong's politically-ridden identity would slide into xenophobic parochialism, this study aims to redress the morbid obsession with anti-mainland rhetoric that causes polarised identity politics by experimenting with a novel matrix integrating the dialectics of being and non-being and *dérive* to welcome an objective and multidirectional grasp of Hong Kong identity as a process of fluid (re)production. The following sections will step-by-step unpack key terms in the proposed paradigm to show how they are applicable to tackle the existing research problem.

Dialectics of being and non-being: the dynamics of Hong Kong identity in literature

As mentioned above, the Hong Kong-Mainland relations are not always pitted against each other but are mutually tied together culturally and economically. If entangled interconnectedness between Hong Kong and the mainland complicates the simplified identity

dichotomy, is dialectical interpretation a possible way out? Following up on this question, this paper, based upon the hybridity of Hong Kong's ethnography, calls for a reflective lens by reconceptualising Hong Kong identity as an intermediate sphere where English, mainland Chinese, and local entities compete and blend with each other like a melting pot. In this situation, this paper invites a new rubric called dialectics of being and non-being in the beginning to shed light on how competing forces subtly interact to form the typical pluralistic representations of Hong Kong ethnography. The concept draws inspiration from two key terms in Chinese Zen Daoism, namely *Yin* and *Yang*. Originating in *the Book of Change, Yin* refers to passive and feminine force whereas *Yang* refers to active and masculine force. Two opposite forces alternate in a harmonious way to "form world-institutions in which we find ourselves" (Cheng 2008: 72). This paper links being and non-being to two facets of identification as self and the other, and argues that the dialectical juxtaposition of being and non-being, resembling *yin* and *yang*, functions interdependently to offer a dynamic and resilient interpenetration for evaluating Hong Kong-Mainland identity contestation in a wholesome and dialogic way and open up the possibility of revisiting Hong Kong's ethnographic site as a kaleidoscopic wholeness alongside the binary trap of nationalism versus localism as a zero-sum game. Before directly moving onto the targeted literary corpus, this paper finds the development of Hong Kong literature is "on-site cultural expressions" of Hong Kong-Mainland's identity contestation across colonial times and post-1997 handover, which sets a basis for better understanding Liu's work (Yeung 2021: 1848). Thus, it is necessary to have a rough picture of literature that centralises (re)writing Hong Kong identity building, and most importantly, to uncover how the dialectics of being and non-being transposes elastically in different phases of Hong Kong literature to index Hong Kong's identity construction as a constant negotiation.

Hong Kong literature, in line with several waves of immigration, can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, which lasted from its cession to the British to the 1950s, Hong

Kong remained, at that time, a small fishing village on the tip of Southern China. As a result, there barely existed any sense of self-presence in Hong Kong, and accordingly, its literary landscape was largely shaped by the early influx of mainland immigrants who escaped from social unrest and political turmoil, for example, the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War (1937-1945). The refugee mentality dictated that they only used Hong Kong as a temporary outlet to release nostalgic sentiment. Since Hong Kong's very being as its core identity did not take shape, it was likely to be unsettled by any form of non-being, either for the British or the mainland refugees.

The second phase of Hong Kong literature came with the introduction of "green back culture" promoting American modern literature and anti-communist discourse, together with the non-intervention policy from the 1960s onward, providing an open and free space for Hong Kong literature to flourish (Shen 2015: 139). The blossoming period was also accompanied by the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which tons of literati flooded to Hong Kong to avoid political persecution and gradually took root in this soil. The literary landscape of Hong Kong at this stage welcomed a drastic turn, with writing Hong Kong's local identity gaining momentum in the 1970s. At this moment, non-being, after decades of contestation and negotiation, gradually intermingled with Hong Kong's very being to herald a new being which

later reached its peak to usher in the foundation of *Xianggang wenxue* (Hong Kong Literature) in the 1980s. Central to the trope of this newly-bred local literature was no longer the strong attachment to the mainland as a spiritual homeland, but the alienation of Hong Kong people in this overwhelmingly commercialised modern metropolis. For example, in the novel *My City* (1979), Xi Xi adopted a close-up and sardonic tone to examine the quotidian lives of Hong Kong people and their everyday struggle for self-positioning amidst rapid modernisation. Likewise, in *Loving in Blooming Times* (1986), Wong Bik Wan's portrayal of a young woman's inconsolable loneliness and her impotence to deal with her failed marriage and love

affair typified many Hong Kong people's estrangement facing Hong Kong's transformation from a port to a metropolis (Gänssbauer and Yip 2017).

The third phase of Hong Kong literature was marked by the imminence of returning to the mainland in 1997. Hong Kong people became anxious about their lives under the red communist governance, and their uncertainty over their post-handover identity caused a population exodus. The new being, which was already on the edge of a precipice, began to split into the rivalry of being versus non-being and later escalated into political activism. At the heart of the literature at this stage was a steady transition from disillusionment and rootlessness to politically active nativism. In Wong Bik Wan's *The Losing City* (1998), the protagonist's deep loss after his relocation from America and Canada to the brand-new Hong Kong can be read as an elegy to the disappearance of good old Hong Kong after 1997. Similarly, Dung Kai Cheung, in his novel *Atlas: The Archaeology of an Imaginary City (1997),* reminisced about the "long-lost City of Victoria" while reimagining Hong Kong (2012: 158). From 2000 onward, the political encroachment from the mainland irritated local writers, and they turned literature into their battleground for articulating "a space of disobedience" (Lee 2015: 367). For example, Wong (2018), by analysing Chan Koonchung's *Hong Kong Trilogy*, argued how the author draws on "the gendered geopolitics" to feminise the mainland and aggrandise the masculinity of Hong Kong localism to project a reverse dominance (1). In Wong Bik Wan's *Loveless*, Tse Hiu-hung's *Owlish*, and Wong Leung Wo's *Curse of the Fish,* Hong Kong's localised expressions became more rebellious and unruly, full of bizarre, pathological, and macabre plots, insinuating distinctive new millennium counter-narratives.

Liu Yichang's Intersection: a possible way out for Hong Kong identity dilemma

This paper identifies that *Intersection*, as its title implies, precisely provides a kaleidoscope of Hong Kong-Mainland identity dynamics, which could be seen as a remedy for the Hong Kong

identity predicament for three main reasons. The first rationale lies in the right timing and person. As mentioned earlier, Hong Kong literature consists of three phases. The first and third phases both go to extremes, either representing the mainland complex or identity politics. Only the second phase centers on identity issues in materialised Hong Kong without falling into any of the two radical discourses. And Liu's *Intersection* just fits into the second phase. His literary production in the 1970s stands at a relatively neutral point, avoiding both absolute mainland obsession and local activism. Often acclaimed as the forefather of Hong Kong modern literature, Liu is representative among Hong Kong literati to offer insights into the topology of Hong Kong's hybrid identity. Second, the discursive yet overlapping storyline weaved by Chun Yubai and Ah Xing coincides with the dynamics of Hong Kong's self-identification and its entanglement with the mainland. Third, *Intersection*, despite being written in 1972, is prophetic. Their final parting, interspersed with a few transitory rendezvous in the middle, foreshadows the present-day identity climate in Hong Kong.

The main feature of this novel is that Liu uses a parallel-intertwined-parallel (PIP) narrative loop to interpret the detached yet somewhat interconnected relationship between the two protagonists. To better examine the sophisticated narrative structure, this paper divides the whole story, which contains a total of forty-two scenes, into three parts. Part one covers the first twenty-three scenes; their narratives alternate, with Chun Yubai in the front and Ah Xing in the back, reinventing their own versions of Hong Kong. They are like two parallel lines, living in the same city but separated from each other by the sea of people. There are only two moments where these two lines cross, namely, in the second scene ("She walked out of the building at exactly the same time when Chun Yubai's bus entered the Cross Harbour Tunnel") and in the twenty-first scene ("While Chun Yubai was queuing up to buy a ticket, Ah Xing walked into the cinema") (Liu 1988: 84, 96). These two brief intersecting scenes give the encounter between the two strangers a fatalistic hue. Part two starts at scene twenty-four and

ends at scene thirty-one. The parallel narratives begin to overlap and thread chronologically when the eyes of the two characters lock at a local cinema. Part three runs from scene thirty-two to forty-two. The intertwined narratives revert back to parallel narratives at the end. The PIP narrative pattern alludes to Hong Kong people's oscillating status of self-identification, travelling back and forth between the mainland and Hong Kong.

The parallel narratives with intertwined narratives inserted on and off vividly capture the aloofness and subtle connection between Chun Yubai and Ah Xing. To unpack this multilayered narrative structure in the following analysis, the paper first argues that dialectics of being and non-being, which helps comb out Hong Kong's flexible self-articulation in different phases of literature, can also be leveraged here to shed light on how a local girl (self) and a mainland immigrant (the other) live near yet are distanced from each other. However, this paper notices that two-thirds of the parallel narratives contain numerous literary techniques such as flashback, interpolation, and projection, and these devices play a key role in showing how characters traverse spatiotemporal limits and reimagine their placement in Hong Kong. Obviously, the dialectics of being and non-being, although applicable for explicating the sporadically-intertwined narratives, here fail to unlock how these devices are employed. Thus, this paper puts forward a syncretic model that combines the dialectics of being and non-being with *dérive*. *Dérive* is a technique of aimless drift that neo-Dada bohemians in Paris, called Situationist International, spearheaded to rethink the effects of geographical surroundings upon individuals' emotions and behaviour in a "playful-constructive" way (Debord 1958: 77). The underlying logic of *dérive* is a satire to lay bare the spiritual barrenness caused by commercialisation and dehumanised capitalistic exploitation. It advances a strategic trope to awaken their numbed consciousness and problematise the ossified social structure and the "banalisation of every life" that plagues modern people (Coverley 2006: 84). *Dérive*, as a literary trope of urban drift, can well elucidate that the two protagonists, while randomly

wandering in Hong Kong, celebrate an individually immersed praxis by transforming Hong Kong's reified cityscape into an open laboratory where they can harness their actual lived experiences to reconfigure the key urban signs such as the Cross-Harbour Tunnel, the Star Ferry, Nathan Road, and Mongkok, etc. via darting back to the past or towards the future. Thus, Hong Kong is de-familiarised as an imaginary site where "past, present, and the future of Hong Kong coexist between imagination and reality" (Huang 2019: 146). Moreover, the atemporal space ruptures the mandated social norm, granting them autonomy to refashion themselves and enact social caricatures to criticise looming issues such as alienation and over-commercialisation in Hong Kong. All in all, this innovative framework that incorporates *dérive* into the dialectics of being and non-being not only helps reveal a heterogeneous site that resembles Hong Kong as a space of "impossible simultaneity" but also actualises a tangible means for excavating the multiplicity of Hong Kong's identity landscape critically and objectively to address the Hong Kong-Mainland identity fracture (151).

Parallel narratives: remapping Hong Kong from local and non-local lenses

The multilayered narrative structure determines that the literary analysis of the target novel will be a complex affair. As noted above, the novel comprises two distinctive types of narratives, with part one and part three being dominated by parallel narratives and only part two by intertwined narratives. Thus, this paper divides the ensuing textual analysis into two separate sections, and the syncretic model is implemented in two steps accordingly. This section begins with *dérive*, which covers most of the parallel narratives, to explore how the two protagonists from the island and the mainland utilise urban drift to grapple with alienation and reframe their self-positioning in Hong Kong respectively. In the next section, the dialectics of being and non-being, which aligns with the intermittently intertwined narratives, helps to illuminate how the two strangers come across each other at a cinema unexpectedly and to orchestrate their Hong Kong stories together in a transient manner. *Dérive* and the dialectics of being and non-being

function step by step to reveal the true site of the Hong Kong identity landscape as a distinctive yet intersecting constellation.

The way Chun Yubai negotiates his self-identity before he meets Ah Xing is to mentally re-align the present urban icons of Hong Kong with his past. For example, Chun Yubai uses the key city elements, the 102 bus and the cross-harbour tunnel, to kick-start his journey of psychogeographical remapping. The paragraph below vividly shows how the flashing scenes outside the bus window trigger memories of the days when he arrived in Hong Kong. At the same time, it situates the setting of the story in the 1970s, when Hong Kong's economy took off with the population boom. Tons of new buildings sprung up at that time and satellite towns started to sprawl into suburban areas.

> When the number 102 bus entered the cross-harbor tunnel, Chun Yubai thought about what it was like more than twenty years ago. He had been living in this big city for over twenty years now. Twenty years ago, Hong Kong's population was only about 800,00;
>
> now, it was nearly four million. Many of the remote districts had become bustling resettlement areas. Old buildings had turned into skyscrapers. (84)

It is noteworthy that the 102 bus, the signature modern tool for daily commuters in Hong Kong, here serves as an expressive space for Chun Yubai to contemplate the vicissitudes of life he went through. When the bus moves, his mind roams either backward or forward in time, and the outward scenes are simultaneously reorganised beyond the chronological sequence. Bus 102 as it moves forwards, jibing with the scenes that slide backward, like a cinematic montage, disrupts the linear sequence by offering a buffer zone for Chun Yubai to temporarily retrieve his early days in Hong Kong and reflect on the changes over the decades. Thus, Chun Yubai's urban drifting via the bus tour is imbued with his desire to transform public transport into "a mobile zone" for creative self-engagement, championing a dynamic urban experiment for reassessing his identity in Hong Kong (Walters 2015: 478).

The second scene unfolds when the bus turns onto Nathan Road, the artery of Kowloon that holds indelible memories not only for Chun Yubai himself but also for generations of local Hong Kong residents. This road teems with a barrage of urban elements such as dance halls, restaurants, gold shops, cinemas, and shopping malls. All of these urban signs can be figuratively seen as pigments for Chun Yubai to sketch his own short modern love story on the palette of Hong Kong's urban landscape. The small dance hall and the Kowloon restaurant witnessed his tryst with a dancing girl called Pretty. Later, Chun Yubai stops seeing her for he still struggles for a living and thus cannot promise her anything. Eventually, they meet again near the Star Pier. The cross-harbour ferry, one of the most popular vehicles linking the locals between Kowloon Peninsula and Hong Kong Island for over a hundred years, here marks a symbolic meaning for their unexpected reunion.

Needless to say, these city icons are chosen in such a subtle way that they can easily resonate with not only Chun Yubai but also local readers because those well-known landmarks are overloaded with cultural meanings deep within their muscle memories. The purpose of the author here is to invite readers, like Chun Yubai, to implement "conscious remodelling" of external city forms to relate to and rethink their relationships with the city in which they habitually reside (Lynch 1960: 12). That is to say, we as living human subjects can meddle with spatial structure by mentally reconfiguring urban cues into "a succession of tactful kinesthetic patterns" imbued with personalised interpretations and experiences (70). This avant-garde act of urban drifting as *dérive* strengthens reciprocal self-involvement by allowing citizens to tap into the pleasure of interpreting these urban landmarks as their own cultural references.

When the bus keeps pulling alongside Nathan Road, Chun Yubai's eyes are riveted on a weather-beaten old gold shop. The worn-out façade reminds him of the financial fluctuation in pre-war Shanghai, as it was enshrouded in the fear of the impending Sino-Japanese War. As

Stedman (2003) posited, certain urban sites evoke place affinity through physical characteristics and symbolic representations. That is, sites "endowed with more historical traces" will form a more intense attachment than those new ones (Lewicka 2008: 211). Thus, the rickety building here contains a sensory hint that arouses his hardest time. Another example is his pausing at an old clothing shop and staring at a mirror hanging on the wall. The uneven wrinkles reflected in the mirror deeply touch him as a sign of how time has flown in the course of his life. Again, the old memories are awakened and the city landmarks back in Shanghai dovetail with the present Hong Kong. The Huangpu River and Victoria Harbour, Nathan Road and Nanjing Road, the ship Chuyun and the Star Ferry, are all intermeshed, as if performing a duet, to facilitate Chun Yubai's self-remaking.

Interaction with those old sites indicates his approach to self-negotiation through the constant process of tracing the present "urban reminders" to his past experiences (211). In other words, the old urban signs he comes across should not be merely understood as objects but already reproduced as a space infused with his concentration of embedded thoughts and feelings. More than that, *dérive* as an experiential act enables Chun Yubai to invite spatial criticism to interfere with the rapid pace of Hong Kong, which reinvents a "dual process of place-making and discourse formation" (Ku 2012: 5). A typical example is the scene when he alights from the 102 bus and walks to Mongkok, one of the densest urban areas in the world. In this scene, the author, through Chun Yubai's perspective, depicts in a sardonic tone how people are alienated by industrialisation and commodification.

> This was Mongkok. In the past, he had walked along this road innumerable times. There were too many people here. There were too many cars. Mongkok was always so crowded. Everybody seemed to have some urgent business on hand; the rushing, sweaty people were not necessarily all bent on striking it rich…Chun Yubai walked on. There were too many people on the pavement; there were always too many people in Mongkok. Some idiot was wriggling through the crowd like he was doing a dragon dance…(87-88)

From the above paragraph, the author, by giving readers a rough picture of Mongkok, reveals a miniature of Hong Kong's social contours. Hong Kong is an overpopulated city, and the land shortages accordingly become the trickiest issue in modern Hong Kong. Till now, many ordinary Hong Kong citizens have been squeezed into cage-like apartments. The scarcity of land resources also explains why Hong Kong's identification is inextricably tied to space. And people always rushing for something suggests how they subconsciously internalise the logic of capitalism. The consequence is that people are always in a state of restlessness. For example, in a scene, a thin man in the restaurant loses his temper and yells at a little boy just because he asks for ice cream and cold milk. When the boy cries hard, he brutally drags him out of the restaurant. *Mad World* (2016), a film by young local director Wong Chun, uncovers how a man from the grassroots suffers from bipolar disorder while fighting for his life in the packed space of Hong Kong.

In addition, comparing the ordinary person to some stupid individual "wriggling through the crowd" trenchantly deciphers how the masses are internally deprived as living zombies (88). People without substance are denied the ability to engage in profound contemplation, and all they have left is chasing vanity. A pertinent illustration can be observed in the scenario where Chun Yubai comes across four women all discussing how to make more money by speculating on properties. Even Chun Yubai himself resorts to speculating on gold as a means of securing his survival during his early days in Hong Kong. The recurring presence of gold and jewellery shops throughout the text also insinuates how the Hong Kong people are devoured by the flood of capitalism.

Dérive again is manifested here by Chun Yubai's use of his retrospective gaze during his urban drift to chastise Hong Kong's over-commercialisation and bring out a big concern that hits the nerves of current local Hongkongers, the land economy. The government-led rapid urban renewal, complicit with property tycoons, gradually wreaks havoc on cultural legacies

and collective memories of Hong Kong, for example through the demolition of Queen's Pier, Edinburgh Place Ferry Pier, and the old General Post Office building. This lucrative land sale policy, carried out without sufficient public consultation, has already bred grudges among the people of Hong Kong. In this case, the urban landscape of Hong Kong witnesses an "erasure of cultural memories" due to these profit-driven commercial projects (Abbas 1997: 81). The proliferation of urban redevelopment and land reclamation projects has given rise to the simultaneious emergence of preservation activists who advocate "culture-based or identity-based actions" to rupture the profit-driven developmental pattern (8). Chun Yubai's nostalgic gaze echoes those preservation groups and anticipates a new agenda for the local people to reconstitute a narrative of civic self-engagement for saving Hong Kong's historical sites. To summarise, *dérive*, which advocates social satire and atemporality through an art of urban drift, is reflected in Chun Yubai's strategic mental remapping of Hong Kong by freely crisscrossing the past and present to create his distinctive mode of expression. Rather than being caught up in split consciousness, Chun Yubai re-conceptualises his marginal otherness as a reflective lens to problematise Hong Kong's hyper-commercialisation. In this way, Chun Yubai's translocal mobility activated by his creative city roaming advances a new route for his repositioning in a newly imagined Hong Kong.

If Chun Yubai represents 'non-being' in Hong Kong's ethnographic mapping, Ah Xing stands for 'being' through a local female gaze. Besides, instead of Chun Yubai's always rewinding back to the past, she leverages urban drift to transcend the current reality and pursue her dream. Her story begins with a pre-war building she often went to, where her aunt had lived for over twenty years. When she walks out of this old building, she sees the stinking public toilets in the back alley and the whole scene disgusts her and makes her wonder if one day she could climb the social ladder to buy a fancy flat. As "the built environment clarifies social roles and relations", this is especially applied in Hong Kong (Tuan 1977: 102). The spatial

distribution of residential areas strongly reflects the growing class divide in Hong Kong society. While the rich live in luxurious villas at the peak of Hong Kong Island, the underprivileged are forced to squeeze into the lower areas of the Kowloon district, like Sham Shui Po, stuffed into cramped and shabby flats. Thus, for ordinary Hongkongers, low and high are both culturally charged words, indexing an unequal social hierarchy. Ah Xing's quest to move upward through fantasising about a spacious and cosy flat dovetails with *dérive* which calls for spatial criticism to destabilise the reified social classification.

The easiest way for her to instantly move upward is marriage. Thus, her urban drift starts with her daydreaming of herself wearing a wedding gown when she passes by a photographer's studio. Here, the mirror again appears, but different from Chun Yubai's nostalgic gaze, it projects her desire to be a bride wearing chic attire. In the subsequent scenes, the outfit printed with two hearts and "I LOVE YOU" in the clothing shop and the words "double happiness" on the window of the gold and jewellery shop fuel her longing for an ideal wedding ceremony in a well-decorated restaurant where she, dressed in a white gown, will take an oath with her good-looking groom in front of a long rosewood table (87). The surreal wedding ceremony she imagines expounds how Ah Xing utilises her in-built "intellectual construct" as a conduit to fill in a psychological lack the ordinary people in Hong Kong all share, that is, the urgent quest for a wider space (99).

Upon bumping into a young and handsome man on the street, instead of behaving like a shy maiden, she comes close to him and looks directly into his eyes. Unlike Chun Yubai's retrospective contemplation, she, as a local Hong Kong girl, takes an aggressive step by reversing the dominant gaze and unleashing erotic desire for her beloved man. When he does not return the same gaze, instead just throwing a casual look at her and walking away, suddenly, her fondness for him switches to loathing. Bruised and furious inside, she curses him to be hit

by a car. Liu's gothic depiction of her destructive love-hate encounter demonstrates her destructive self-esteem, insinuating a feminist discourse to overthrow the mandated social structure.

Her desire augments bit by bit into libido when she finds a lewd photograph on the grimy side street. Again, breaking from the traditional image of Chinese women, Liu's amorous bathroom scene goes further to reveal how Ah Xing, as a modern woman, is desperate to redress her self-positionality through the intentional aggrandisation of her female awareness. Rather than throwing that photo away, she brings it back home. Locking herself inside the bathroom, she studies that photo closely and feels flustered inside. While she observes herself in the mirror, fully naked, a flush of crimson secretly crawls on her cheek. Scrubbing her body in the bathtub, she imagines herself being touched by her imagined perfect lover.

> Her face grew as red as the rising sun and she felt a prickling sensation all over her skin; her heart began to pound; it was on fire. A look into the mirror gave her a sudden boost of confidence. Losing all rational control, she did something totally inexplicable- she pressed her lips to the mirror and kissed her own image there. This was a new thrill for her. For the first time, she had a lover; that lover was herself. (90)

As seen in the preceding paragraph, her ego grows more unbridled and even pathological when she herself becomes her lover. Then, she continues to drown in her hallucinations when she passes by a record shop, and the dazzling album covers with singers she admires appeal to her. She imagines herself as one of them singing *The Moon is like a Lemon*. This delusional state empowers her to dream of herself collaborating with her male idols like Bruce Lee, Di Long, and Ke Junxiong. Unable to tell the real from the unreal, she sees a hundred of her smiling faces permeating everywhere in the whole city, and she feels herself standing in the spotlight with everybody's attention on her.

> She saw ten of herself. She saw a hundred of herself. The ceiling became a screen. She was smiling sweetly on the screen. Her smile appeared in ten districts at the same time; it appeared on the screens of a hundred cinemas at the same time. Eyes. Eyes. Eyes. Eyes. Innumerable

eyes were gazing at her smile. (94)

Here, *dérive* as a trope of social caricature functions again to unpack how Ah Xing combines her female gaze with spatial criticism to dismantle the imposed social order. As Tuan (1977) put it, "identity of place is achieved by dramatising the aspirations", and she, through bold and untraditional female libido, formulates a fictional space to enact her self-refashioning (178). Ah Xing's exaggerated self-indulgence during urban drift can be interpreted as "romantic geography", driven by her want for "what is out of reach or even beyond reach" (Tuan 2013: 4). Filling the inner lack of coveting more spacious environs and a perfect relationship is, indeed, a "transcendence of everyday life and a faith in human perfectibility" (5). Just as Barzun (1961) opined that geographic narratives carry a sense of moral criticism, she deliberately lets her mind run wild by conjuring up a persona that deviates from social norms.

Hong Kong as a cinema: Being and non-being in play

In hindsight, by lining up their own situated experiences of Hong Kong, each of them curates their idiosyncratic routes of self-positioning. After reviewing how parallel narratives are enacted in tandem with their distinctive feelings about the urban signs, this section will focus on how the two characters as being and non-being in one way or another are simultaneously connected through a shared string of urban cues to form the hybrid landscape of Hong Kong.

Their first synchronisation takes place when Ah Xing and Chun Yubai both pass by a gold shop. The gold shop later re-appears many times in both of their narratives, which underscores how Hong Kong's urban landscape is eroded by commercialisation. The second synchronisation happens when they both enter a local clothing shop. While Chun Yubai ponders his wrinkled face in the mirror and recalls his puberty, Ah Xing starts to imagine her romantic encounter when she could wear the stylish blouse with two hearts and the English words "I LOVE YOU" embroidered on it (87). The third synchronisation comes as they either

recall or imagine their lovers, as they stand on the pavement of Nathan Road. Chun Yubai reminisces about his short romantic relationship with the dance hall girl called Pretty, while Ah Xing stumbles upon a charming young man for whom she falls at first sight. The next connecting scene happens at a local record shop, where they listen to the songs of a famous local singer, Yao Surong. Their dissenting views on Yao's singing indicate the confrontation between local and non-local voices, one often falling back on the past and another extending ahead of the present. Before the movie starts, they both bump into a boy crying for ice cream in a local restaurant. When queueing outside of the cinema, they both project their inner desires onto the leading actors on the posters. Finally, it is the ambulance siren that drags both of them back to reality.

The alternating, synchronised narratives represent Liu's careful examination of Hong Kong's identification as a checkerboard. Each player has his or her position, but as pieces start to move, they may meet and miss at certain points. In scenes twenty-four and five, they sit side by side in a local cinema. Cinema, a metaphorical venue, becomes a nexus for bringing the two characters together, resembling the miniature of Hong Kong's intricate cartography as a melting pot. However, as analysed in the above paragraph, even though they converge through the shared urban signs, the meaning of these signs remains highly personal. As their seat numbers G46 and G48 imply, there is always a blank space between them. For example, the first impressions left for each other are also divergent; in Chun Yubai's eyes, Ah Xing's presence reminds him of his schoolmate back in Shanghai, but for Ah, his presence sickens her just because he cannot live up to her imagined lover. Another example is their reaction to the wedding scene in the movie. For Chun Yubai, it is a stored memory of his wedding. For Ah Xing, it is a fantasy of her future wedding. After finishing the movie, they head off in opposite directions, vanishing in the crowd like the dust in the universe, which represents the kaleidoscope of Hong Kong, where people's comings and goings in this concrete jungle are

the norm. Like the birds flying in opposite directions in the last scene, they may look at each other for a while, but in the end, they have to separate and live their own lives.

However, the author here never tends to end the whole story with a sense of anticlimax; he, once again, resorts to imagination to create a space for their union. This argument can be supported by the scene when they react to the actors in the Mandarin movie. They continue to imagine their lovers, but this time, Chun Yubai's imagined lover is Ah Xing. His bold fantasy of sexual intercourse with Ah Xing at the end of the whole text can be read as an epiphany for his upcoming self-positionality in Hong Kong. The intimacy with the local girl, Ah Xing, signifies that he is ready to say farewell to the past and embrace the new life ahead. This key point is evidenced by his sudden feeling of going back to his early twenties while lying naked with Ah Xing. As discussed before, Chun Yubai's blossoming is always associated with his hometown, Shanghai. Here, for the first time, he no longer needs to feel rejuvenated by burying himself in the past. Ah Xing's presence, as a young local girl, becomes a beacon for his future. Moreover, this scene foreshadows the destiny of not only Chun Yubai but all the immigrants, for how to reconcile non-being with being is a pivotal lesson that each of them has to learn in Hong Kong.

> In his beautiful dream, the bench on which Chun Yubai and Ah Xing were sitting suddenly turned into a bed, but the trees were still there. There were flowers on the trees and the flowers were very fragrant. The fragrance that Chun Yubai smelt could possibly have come from Ah Xing's body. A moment ago, Ah Xing had her clothes on; but now she was naked. Nothing was more seductive than a young girl's breasts. Chun Yubai became very young; his thoughts, his feelings and his energy were those of a young man of twenty. When he was twenty years old, Chun Yubai often did this kind of thing. Now, in his dream, he was young again. (101)

In hindsight, the approaches they use to negotiate their identities are distinctive yet overlapping. The difference lies in their own cultural embeddedness which shapes their divergent approaches to remapping Hong Kong. The similarity lies in their joint attempt at resorting to urban drift as an alterity to reflect on the tricky socioeconomic issues and reframe their self-

repositioning. In their imagined Hong Kong, the normalised spatiotemporal logic is upended so that the protagonists can travel back and forth timelessly out of their own free will. Like the ending scene, it is Chun Yubai's dream that breaks down his ideological fences with Ah Xing and finally unites them together. Ah Xing, as a 'being' rooted in Hong Kong, serves at this moment as a way out for Chun Yubai as a 'non-being' to accomplish his self-repositioning. This is what this study intends to reveal: 'being' and 'non-being' retain their specificity yet at the same time loosely intersect to shape the motley composition of Hong Kong.

Conclusion

Considerable attention has been devoted to examining Hong Kong's cultural dilemma within the context of the clash between the recent surge in Hong Kong nativism and the growing presence of mainland grand nationalism since the 1997 return. Admittedly, in contrast to other pre-colonial counterparts that underwent a process of decolonisation and post-independence, Hong Kong has been perpetually locked into a quandary in grappling with a post-colonial identity under mainland China's thumb. However, excessive attention to this state of in-betweenness led to defensive overreactions and ultimately resulted in the pitfalls of extreme nativism and intra-racial animosity. The situation took a more alarming turn when the rising self-awareness was appropriated by right-wing extremists, resulting in full-blown anti-China resentment.

As much as there are a host of arguments that accentuate such radical uprisings in Hong Kong and the attendant hotbed of politicised agendas, this paper advocates an alternative vision by inviting an integrative model known as *dérive* plus being and non-being to critically evaluate how a local girl Ah Xing and a mainland Chun Yubai in Liu's *Intersection* either use nostalgic memories or daydreaming to psychogeographically remap Hong Kong as a space of diverse self-representations. The very core of this paradigm lies in a mythology of transcendental

crossing for viewing the opposite in Oneness. To put it another way, this syncretic paradigm necessitates a critical perspective that reconciles the binary opposition in the existing studies, recognising that the seemingly disparate local and non-local voices are not inherently separate but rather confronted and interconnected in a relational manner. It provides a novel rubric for exploring the multiple layers of self-articulation in Hong Kong, adding holistic and objective renditions to unpacking the Hong Kong-Mainland relationship, thereby overcoming the aporia of identity politics.

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