

# Representing Crisis and Crisis of Representation: Screening Postcolonial Hong Kong in *Ten Years* (2015)

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## **Abstract**

This article negotiates the art of representing crisis and the crisis of representation as evinced in the critical and overdetermined relationship between the visual and discursive regimes of representation in particular political contexts. “Crisis” may be interpreted as a socio-political reality that is not morally acceptable. Yet, the management of a crisis, and opposition and resistance to forces causing it becomes important when this crisis is brought on by a repressive state. Through a closer look at *Ten Years* (2015), which was made at the end of the months-long peaceful sit-in street protests in late 2014, often called the “Umbrella Movement” or “Umbrella Revolution,” this study argues that the present landscape of Hong Kong cinema is not only intellectually challenging, but also reframes longstanding political, social and cultural norms in historical contexts and bends genres in aesthetic terms. *Ten Years* is a film about the political present aimed at the political future; it reconfigures communal relationship and turns around the despair and anxiety brought about by the bio-political apparatus of Chinese authoritarianism. The producers highlight the idea of moral politics as a feasible resistance against all forms of state violence and urge the audiences to fight for democracy.

## **Keywords**

Cantonese, democratic localism, Hong Kongers, state of exception, *Ten Years*, Umbrella Movement

### Introduction

In April 2016, China barred CCTV (China Central Television) and Tencent from broadcasting the Hong Kong Film Awards after the local independent film *Ten Years* (十年) was nominated for best picture. A production with a total budget of US\$64,029, *Ten Years* is comprised of five short films, resonating with the post-Umbrella public sentiment and presenting a dystopian view of the city's future in 2025. The movie expressed a unique Hong Kong Cantonese identity on screen and departed from the trend of cinematic escapism that once characterized the local film industry. The Chinese media boycott of *Ten Years* was part of a larger strategy of intimidation and repression against dissenting cinematic voices that refused to kowtow to the Communist dictatorship. The ban placed the Chinese Communist Party's ideology above arts and violated the public's right to freedom of artistic expression, the rights of Hong Kong filmmakers to share their creations, and the rights of Chinese citizens to enjoy films and participate in cultural dialogue.

This article negotiates the art of representing crisis and the crisis of representation as evinced in the critical and overdetermined relationship between the visual and discursive regimes of representation in particular political contexts. In this inaugural issue, "crisis" may be interpreted as a socio-political reality that is not morally acceptable. Yet, the management of a crisis, and opposition and resistance to forces causing it becomes important when this crisis is brought on by a repressive state. How does one address and manage a society in crisis through film?

*Ten Years*, which was made at the end of the months-long peaceful sit-in street protests in late 2014, often called the "Umbrella Movement" or "Umbrella Revolution," offers a living illustration of George Orwell's 1984 in an imagined Hong Kong. Through a closer look at its narrative structure and content, this study argues that the present landscape of Hong Kong cinema is not only intellectually challenging, but also reframes longstanding political, social and cultural norms in historical contexts and bends genres in aesthetic terms. The development of colonial and postcolonial Hong Kong cinema, other than a handful of canonical directors such as John Wu, Johnnie To and Wong Kar-Wai, has not attracted much scholarly attention in the fields of Asian and world cinemas. Even though Wong Kar-Wai's *2046* reads into the political possibilities of a postcolonial Hong Kong in a not too distant future, Wong's cinematic critique is still couched in nostalgia of the 1960s (Betinson, 2016). Unlike *2046* which revisits the colonial era, *Ten Years* is a film about the political present aimed at the political future. It rejects a subservient mentality in the local film industry where directors dismiss the sensitivities of their home audiences in order to satisfy the censorship requirements and ideological demands of the Chinese

Communist regime (Yam, 2017). This film reconfigures communal relationship and local identity, and turns around the despair and anxiety brought about by the bio-political apparatus of the Chinese authoritarian rule. Hong Kong's evolving revolution in cinematic norms directly challenges the Han Chinese nationalism and Beijing-imposed neoliberal hegemony. Evidently, the young producers of *Ten Years* appropriate cinematic expressions as the weapons of the weak. In doing so, they highlight the idea of moral politics as a feasible resistance against all forms of state violence and urge the audiences to put aside their differences and fight for human rights.

### **An Overview of *Ten Years***

The immediate aftermath of the transfer of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China on July 1, 1997 has been marked by countless governance crises and escalating popular discontents, most of which arose from the suspension of democratic rights under the Chinese model of one country, two systems (Dapiran, 2017). Many Hong Kong filmmakers have accepted the Chinese authoritarian rule as a precondition for entering the fast-growing Mainland market. A handful of conscientious directors, however, choose to produce political cinema under the shadow of a wealthy and descendant local film industry, expressing the popular desire for freedom and democracy, and critiquing institutional inequality and injustice. These independent directors are determined to address local political controversies, articulate a unique Hong Kong cinematic identity, and embrace civic engagement through films. Asserting the right to dissent and producing films from the margins, the producers of *Ten Years* typifies the trend of what Mirana M. Szeto and Yun-Chung Chen call the "Hong Kong SAR New Wave," in which postcolonial filmmakers respond to the challenges of Mainlandization by taking on localist subjects with a keen awareness of intra- and inter-cultural flows within the city. Beyond rejecting the "chauvinist and xenophobic petit-grandoise Hong Kongism typical of pre-1997 Hong Kong colonial inferiority complex," they construct a cinematic critique of biopolitical power under the Chinese rule and champion a vision of grassroots activism that is thought to provide people with hope and resources for transformative change (Szeto and Chen, 2012: 122; Szeto, 2014). Their cinematic initiatives offer a contextual perspective on the growth of political awakening among postcolonial youths.

Conceptually, *Ten Years* interrogates the crisis of representation and the representation of crisis in unique historical settings. The first of the five stories, *Extras* (dir. Zune Kwok), is a short political thriller that critiques China's frequent interference with Hong Kong's domestic affairs. During the May 1<sup>st</sup> Labor Day

celebration, local politicians attend a community event. Hong Kong and Chinese government officials stage an assassination to provoke mass panic in order to rally support for the legislation of the controversial national security law. They recruit two triad members to carry out the assassination. Hairy is a middle-aged, unemployed, low-skilled worker from China and Peter comes from a South Asian migrant family, and both join the gang as a strategy for economic survival. When they debate who would shoot the politician, the representative of Beijing's liaison office decides that the leaders of both parties should be wounded in order to provoke greater fear among the public. Assuming that they could get away after the plot, Hairy and Peter are sadly killed by the police. The Hong Kong Police immediately condemn the assassins as terrorists and call for the passing of the national security law. By blurring the boundary between triad organizations and government authorities, *Extras* reveals the widespread use of fear and intimidation as a ruling strategy to keep people subservient to the political establishment.

The second segment, *Season of the End* (dir. Fei-Pang Wong), is the most aesthetic work that explores the feeling of obsession with a vanishing world. A young couple makes specimens of items taken from buildings and neighborhoods destroyed by bulldozers by day, and they dream of a vast urban wasteland at night. They eventually lose the resolve to carry on, and the film ends with the husband turning himself into the last specimen.

The third segment, *Dialect* (dir. Jevons Au), touches on the sensitive subject of the rapid decline and eventual extinction of Cantonese as a living language in Hong Kong. It addresses the trend of linguistic colonialism, or linguistic genocide, in which Mandarin Chinese replaces Cantonese as the official spoken language, and Hong Kong's majority Cantonese population become completely marginalized in their native city. A local Cantonese taxi driver is about to lose his livelihood because of his inability to speak Mandarin fluently. His wife scolds him for talking to his son in their mother tongue while the son only communicates in Mandarin. Worse still, the Hong Kong government requires all Cantonese taxi drivers to acquire Mandarin proficiency as a precondition of keeping their licenses. One can see a two-tier taxi licensing system that discriminates against non-Mandarin-speakers. Mandarin-speaking drivers are permitted to pick up wealthy passengers from the airport, cruise terminal, train station and financial downtown, whereas non-Mandarin speakers are prohibited from doing so. The segment ends with a middle-class female passenger who is fired for being incapable of communicating to a Mandarin client. The final scene hints at the silent solidarity of the oppressed Cantonese people in a Mandarin-controlled society.

The fourth segment, *Self-immolator* (dir. Kwun-Wai Chow), is the most timely mockumentary that refers to the extraordinary months during the Umbrella protests. It begins with a young activist who adheres to the Gandhian principles of truth and nonviolence, and who becomes Hong Kong's first political prisoner and dies during a hunger strike in jail. This young activist, along with his university peers, including a Cantonese-speaking girl of South Asian descent, pursues civil disobedience, campaigns for Hong Kong's independence, and appeals to Britain to uphold the Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984) over the unfulfilled promise of autonomous governance. Another group of student activists, who feel disheartened by the police oppression, resort to violence and set fire to Beijing's liaison office. The fire gives the Communist leaders a pretext to send in the People's Liberation Army to oppress peaceful protestors. In a flashback that reminds the viewers of the Umbrella Movement, a granny witnesses peaceful protestors being tear-gassed and assaulted by the riot police. Representing the silent majority, the granny never utters a word in the film. But her deep gaze reveals hope and faith as well as empathy toward fellow citizens. The story concludes with this elderly woman walking with an umbrella to immolate herself outside the British Consulate-General. Inspired by the image of self-immolation, a widespread strategy of protest among Tibetans, this cinematic segment draws a clear parallel between these two colonized territories in China.

The final segment, *Local Egg* (dir. Ka-Leung Ng), shifts the focus of attention from courageous protestors to shopkeepers in a working-class neighborhood. A grocer and a bookseller confront groups of indoctrinated school children called Young Pioneers, a local equivalent of Mao Zedong's Red Guards or Hitler's Brown Shirts, who police the neighborhood stores for banned words and books in favor of democratic localism. On one occasion, the Young Pioneers throw eggs at a bookstore that sells politically incorrect materials. The grocer later learns that his teenage son is a mole in the Young Pioneers, and as an act of resistance, helps the bookstore owner to remove all censored titles before the inspection. As this boy and the bookstore owner develop a subtle form of resistance, their efforts represent the weapons of the weak in a politicized environment. The whole film concludes with a biblical verse: "It is an evil time. Seek good, and not evil, that you may live" (Amos 5: 13-14).

These five short films can only be produced by activist filmmakers who choose to pursue universal values rather than seek business opportunities in China. Seeing that fear, terror and violence are the ingredients of China's one country, two systems formula, the filmmakers argue that Hong Kongers live in a vanishing universe and confront the threat of violence as a daily reality. Injustice and discrimination are normalized in the status quo. Systematic violence ranges from Chinese nationalistic

rhetoric to violations of personal freedoms, daily assaults and forceful kidnappings. The excessive use of violence reflects the authoritarian leaders' obsession with fear and control. *Extras*, *Dialect* and *Self-Immolator* present a gloomy picture of human inviolability because most Hong Kongers could never change this violent system and the whole society would eventually move toward an apocalyptic destruction. Searching for local sensitivities, the producers of *Season of the End* and *Local Egg* strive to construct a cinematic vision of grassroots resistance against capitulating to Chinese dominance (Chu, 2015).

Carving out their niche audiences at major film festivals, the *Ten Years* directors employ filmmaking as a powerful tool of artistic and political critique (Wong, 2011). They reposition their creative enterprise as a crisis cinema by considering the various political and socio-economic mutations that the postcolonial city is caught up with (Cheung and Chu, eds., 2004). This development resonates with Paul Willemen's characterization of non-Western filmmakers' determination to "stage" historical conditions as a key to exploring fissures and antagonisms that structure their own societies. In this perspective, Hong Kong cinema operates as "a cinema without a nation, a local cinema with transnational appeal" (Fu and Desser, eds., 2002: 5). After all, Hong Kong was always, and is still, a first-world metropolis in Asia, being a preeminent financial hub second only to Tokyo, even though the city is closely linked to the formation of two rival Chinese polities—Beijing and Taipei—during the Cold War (Mark 2017).

### **Ten Years as a Critique of Postcolonial Hong Kong**

*Ten Years* reveals three worrying trends about the deterioration of public governance in contemporary Hong Kong. First, there is a total distrust of the government authorities. The previous Chief Executive Chun-Ying Leung, who was in office from 2012 to 2017, mismanaged so many crises that completely tarnished his self-constructed image as a populist, fighting for the little guy against the Mainlandization of Hong Kong and the negative spillover effects of China's economic slowdown. The majority of Hong Kongers have realized that the constitutional framework of "one country, two systems" is degenerating into that of "one Hong Kong, two societies." The privileged classes like the Chief Executive, lawmakers and their cronies are inviolable and immune from any legal process, whereas ordinary people are brought under as much scrutiny as criminal suspects.

The cinematic portrayals of Hong Kong as a vanishing landscape in *Season of the End*, a Mandarin-speaking colony in *Dialect*, a turbulent city in *Extras* and *Self-Immolator*, and a reincarnated Maoist regime in *Local Egg* resonate with the

critiques of fascist potentialities by German political thinker Carl Schmitt (1922/1985) and Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998). With reference to the permanent crisis of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), Schmitt claimed that democracy and dictatorship were by no means exclusive. He considered state sovereignty to be the absolute power of the rulers to impose a state of exception that suspended civil rights in a crisis situation, and he favored the rise of Nazism (Ong, 2006: 18–19). Equally important are the notion of extra-territorialization (i.e., the volatile geographies produced through geopolitics and international law) and the apparatus of violence as a mode of governance. The different cinematic subtexts challenge China's ostracization of Hong Kong from its larger national and juridical formation, depriving the local residents of their civil rights. Giorgio Agamben theorizes this mode of governance as the pornography of horror beyond any ethical comprehension, and the key to his concept is the ancient Roman idea of a *homo sacer*—people who would be killed but not sacrificed—as both an ostracized (bare) life stripped of social meaning and a condition upon which the ruling authority asserts its absolute power. Acknowledging these analytical insights in the context of contemporary Hong Kong suggests that the postcolonial state is determined to look powerful and dominant when met with resistance from the civil society. The state of exception and “ostracized (bare) life” have become the norm, not the exception, and the postcolonial regime has utilized all forms of political, judicial and symbolic violence against dissenters.

Today's Hong Kong witnesses a process of re-colonialization, with the Chinese Communist dictatorship replacing the British autocratic rule. Whether in a colony or a dictatorship, the authoritarian state often marginalizes one group of people as noncitizens and deprives them of all protection. In Tibet, Inner Mongolia and the Muslim-majority Xinjiang region, Han Chinese rulers dehumanize Tibetans, Mongols and Uyghurs as fugitives in their ancestral homelands. The ethnic minorities submit themselves to the rule of Han colonialists, who in turn, blame the recalcitrant subjects for their own misery (Caprioni, 2012). If the state-imposed dispossession constitutes a mode of governance, terror is its ruling tool. In Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Maoist China and North Korea, state terrorism entailed more than physical intimidation. The state institutionalized a culture of fear to the extent that ordinary people would not dare to rebel because they had no one to trust. Regulatory restrictions along with a high level of oppression have undermined social bonds and precluded any possibility of collective action (Gregory and Pred, eds., 2007: 22). The directors of *Ten Years* purposefully dramatize the wretched experiences of various characters to display the intimacy of terror, fear and violence in an imagined Hong Kong.

Mutual distrust always prohibits solidarity among the subaltern people. Terror, fear, and violence are the most effective weapons of mass distraction that fortify a porous community, legitimate the oppressive rule, and deflect the public's attention from escalating internal crises. Living in fear, the subalterns internalize the reign of terror as normal and desirable. This gloomy feeling of the state of exception underlines the five filmic segments. Once the state of emergence prevails, terror and violence easily force the people to submission. The deaths in *Self-Immolators* symbolize a perpetual state of terror that Hong Kongers witnessed during the Communists' crackdown on pro-democracy activists in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, the Hong Kong police's brutal attacks on Umbrella protestors in late 2014, and the violent confrontations during the "Fishball Revolution" on Lunar New Year's Day in February 2016 (Chow and Lee, 2016; Lagerkvist, 2016).

While *Extras*, *Season of the End*, *Dialect* and *Self-Immolator* dramatize a feeling of powerlessness and vulnerability, *Local Egg* draws on Haruki Murakami's characterization of a fragile egg against the high wall to inspire the audiences to see both colonial legacies and contemporary inequalities as two sides of the same coin. A combination of hegemonic deterrence and antidemocratic elites, a weak culture of civic engagement, and political pressures from Beijing have slowed down the pace of democratization (Horlemann, 2003: 21–23). Only when people recognize their sufferings and know right from wrong, would they stand up to the status quo.

A sense of collective vulnerability can be discerned in the filmic critique of Hong Kong's lack of democracy. A democratic election should be fair and transparent, exhibiting the element of surprise and unpredictability. This component of an unexpected outcome excites citizens and makes electoral campaigns so appealing. In postcolonial Hong Kong, democratization refers to the implementation of universal suffrage for the election of the Chief Executive and legislators as guaranteed in the Basic Law. Adhering to a longstanding policy of denying full democracy to Hong Kong, China preempted significant electoral reforms in 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2014, and its handpicked political agents never gained much legitimacy in the eyes of the public. For example, Hong Kong's chief executive election is nothing more than a "bird-cage democracy." Without a legitimate election that allows everyone to choose their leader, the Chief Executive has to kowtow to Beijing and her/his political loyalty is much more important than the will of Hong Kongers. The real authority for handling major constitutional and public affairs in Hong Kong rests with Beijing's liaison office, which is widely seen as a "second government" with immense power to dictate all levels of decision-making.

Hong Kong's pro-democracy heavyweight Martin Lee in the 1990s said that China



deliberately excluded liberal democrats such as him and Szeto Wah from the executive leadership after 1997, but still permitted them to serve as a permanent opposition within the Legislative Council. This strategy worked well for China throughout the 2000s. By coopting a handful of pro-democracy politicians, Beijing claimed the role of a benevolent sovereign over Hong Kongers, thereby improving its international image and gaining some legitimacy for the one country, two systems policy. Faced with immense pressure to submit to Chinese authoritarianism, Hong Kong's political opposition is far from united. Many pro-democracy and pro-independence parties opt for attitude over substance, ideology over politics. Beijing and its agents in Hong Kong manipulate these rivalries to play one group against another.

The second trend of authoritarian politics is a convergence of interests between the Hong Kong local state and the Chinese Communist leadership. Both sides maximize their political options and strengthen an authoritarian tyranny, using any means to remain in power. They also launch a systematic smear campaign against pro-democracy groups. The imprisonment of the three well-known Umbrella protestors, Joshua Wong, Nathan Law and Alex Chow, in August 2017, and the frequent disqualifications of popularly elected lawmakers and activist candidates sparked a new wave of political witch hunt. This trend of fear and persecution has its doctrinal anchoring in the Chinese Communist Party's hostility toward dissidents. Beijing views autonomous opposition as subversive, and the judiciary and police serve as institutional tools to bolster the party-state's control over society. Those who speak their mind against the state are punished partly because their actions threaten the regime and partly because the rulers find it politically expedient to do so. The Hong Kong government's arrogance and insensitivity assumes that only a handful of charismatic leaders can formulate a big idea and mastermind a movement and that the masses will passively follow. Because of the mounting distrust of civil society, Hong Kong's new Chief Executive Carrie Lam incarcerated the political activists and dismissed the legitimate grievances of ordinary residents. By disqualifying democratically elected lawmakers and jailing young activists, the Hong Kong state completely destroyed the integrity of a semi-democratic parliamentary system and denied local citizens the right to express their discontent peacefully. This shows the postcolonial elites' resolve to seek justifications within domestic laws to intimidate civil society and to launch a crackdown on dissent prior to large-scale protests.

Worse still, policing in Hong Kong has been intertwined with the autocratic rule. The police has abandoned the tradition of neutrality in politics and transformed itself from a law enforcement agency into an instrument of oppression, ensuring the survival of the Chief Executive. In any crisis where a Manichean mindset prevails, all involved

parties tend to be on edge. Frontline police officers and demonstrators are more willing to fight each other in a public square. This explains why the government spent millions on water cannon tanks and anti-riot gears for police officers. Without militarizing the police, the rulers cannot put the frustrating public at bay.

Against this incomplete political transformation, *Ten Years* expresses a glimpse of hope in the self-mobilization of society. This hope is the rebuilding of mutual bonds among citizens of all ethnic, class and age backgrounds. The best way to fight an unjust system is to isolate the status quo from civil society so that citizens can search for an alternative mode of governance. Given the exploitative nature of globalizing Chinese capital, the struggle of young professionals and university activists alone would not be enough as a form of resistance. It is important for the suffering masses in Hong Kong and China to overcome their ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences and to develop cross-border networks of popular activism. When the subalterns engage in what Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello (1998) called “globalization from below,” this transnational collectivism from bottom up will bypass the surveillance of nation-states and ensure the victory of subaltern struggles.

The third trend of authoritarian governance concerns the growing anxiety over an uncertain future in 2047. Faced with a futureless society that they see around them, the young directors portray the postcolonial city as a unique cinematic entity that speaks for and by itself, and that reassesses its historical relationship with the British colonizer and resists pressures for further integration into the Chinese motherland. The filmic segments, especially *Self-Immolator* and *Local Egg*, characterize Hong Kong as an autonomous city-state with its sense of historical, political, and socio-cultural consciousness. Such collective awareness is deeply reflexive, inspiring the people to stand up to the hegemony under the most oppressive circumstances. This cinematic subtext captures a significant transition from vertical to horizontal leadership in Hong Kong’s recent political mobilization. After the end of the peaceful Umbrella protests, the demonstrators were no longer driven by the moral leadership of a few influential activists. Instead, they initiated their own protest tactics, gaining a new sense of freedom and autonomy. People marched because the government crossed the line of basic decency and took the lead to undermine Hong Kong’s intrinsic core values, such as the rule of law, a rule-based market economy and independent media. The demonstrators registered their personal objection to oppressive policies, which they might not see any hope of changing immediately. Hong Kongers are now moving beyond the outdated framework of one country, two systems to imagine an alternative vision for themselves. Shattering illusions of peace and stability under the Communist rule, Hong Kongers refuse to embrace a Han Chinese identity. Worrying about the

territory's marginalization by China, they protect Cantonese cultural heritage, defend human rights, and oppose ideological indoctrination in the local film industry and mass media.

In a nutshell, *Ten Years* manifests popular uncertainty over the fate of Hong Kong. These short films push the envelope in representing postcolonial politics, and reveal ways in which crises are navigated, negotiated and resisted by the protagonists, who struggle to liberate themselves from fear. The independent filmmakers are honest about the utter failure of China's one country, two systems, and display a city fraught with severe tensions and conflicts, which the elites have tried to contain and cover up through appeals to economic growth. Yet Hong Kong still faces the problem of governance, for coinciding with its steady growth through integration with China is the awakening of its citizens, and with it the rise of organized activism on an unprecedented level. By rejecting authoritarianism and excessive capitalism as solutions to these crises, *Ten Years* urges the public to defend the civil society through grassroots mobilization.

### **Conclusion**

When cultural appropriation is being denounced in this age of extreme nationalism, a new cinematic trend of identity formation in Hong Kong reveals the confluence of concerns about distinct cultural and religious expressions, political identification and collective survival. By asserting their agency to reinvent a new sense of belonging to their respective groupings, these Hong Kong directors have taken efforts to transmit their socio-cultural and political concerns to young audiences. It is in this dynamic process that the cosmopolitan Hong Kong identities have emerged, juxtaposing tradition and modernity, local and global forces, religious heritage and secular lifestyle.

With the Chinese power growing and Western support fading, there has been little media attention to the wellbeing of marginalized groups in Hong Kong (Kolluri and Lee, 2016). The cinematic realism embraced by *Ten Years* represents a conscientious attempt to enmesh moral politics in a discourse of cultural and linguistic preservation. Despite their dissatisfaction with the contentious politics in their native city, the producers see cinematic expression as a form of political engagement. This is particularly important because of the inseparable ties between Cantonese identity and democratic localism on screen. Behind these endeavors is a hope for shifting the old socio-cultural and political boundaries and facilitating changes in the future. Against this backdrop, *Ten Years* has crossed cultural borders to become a cinematic metaphor that has inspired filmmakers worldwide to address a variety of global, regional, and

domestic crises. Several up-and-coming independent filmmakers in Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan are utilizing similar narrative forms to comment on structural changes facing their respective societies in ten years' time.

If cinematic innovations entail the embodiment of independent personhood, the filmmakers' determination to imagine new alternatives different from the socio-political norms reveals the possibilities for selfhood. The most effective way to exercise individual agency is to carve out their little cinematic space without subverting the hegemonic regimes. While the multiple layers of cinematic politics intersect in a display of new opportunities for these directors and their audiences, the harsh realities can still trouble them. Nevertheless, cinematic innovations in any crisis situation always instill some elements of dissent. The scope of agency for Hong Kong filmmakers may be restricted because of the unfavorable set of circumstances, and their efforts to reinvent themselves and rework their situations reveal limited agency in challenging the hegemon, but it still entails an ambiguous sense of consciousness even as they envision and seek better cinematic futures for empowerment.

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