

Documind

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Abstract

This paper uses a series of photographs taken during the historical handover of Hong Kong in 1997 to suggest an alternate concept and approach in photography. Born and brought up as a Hongkongese and now working in a Western country, my passion about the handover is intricate and ineffable. The paper positions the writer as an academic reflecting upon my practice as a photographic artist. It suggests the re-consideration of the documentary approach to the 'urban real'. It is intended to contribute to the ongoing dialogues of the authenticity of representation of documentary photography in a technologically driven environment.

Through a series of eleven 'paired photographs' that includes both 'straight' and digitally edited photographs and adapts a Chinese philosophical idea of 'continuity and mutation' [通變] by Liu Hsieh's [劉勰] classical treatise in literature 'Wen-hsin tiao-lung' [文心雕龍], I suggest the idea of 'Documind' as an approach in documentary photography. The Documind approach transcends documentary and allows the photographer as the creator of the work to document the intrinsic passion from an insider's point of view and express the primitive sentimental relationship between the photographer and the city. This approach is not new. However, through the interweaving dialogues between the concepts behind the practice and their influences in the contemporary context of documenting the urban real, I address the flux of the role and representation of documentary photography.

Keywords: Hong Kong cultural identity, urbanscape and city, 1997 handover, Hongkongese, documentary photography, digital imaging technology, historical photograph.

Introduction

Much has been discussed about the mutability of the advancement of technology and its influence to the drifting identity of photography in what is called the post-photography or the digital era in a Western dominating context. Amongst the pioneer contributors are Pedro Meyer, William Mitchell and Geoffrey Batchen. This paper positions the writer, as an academic reflecting upon my practice as a photographic artist to explore the 'urban real' in the post-photography era. Through a series of eleven paired photographs that includes both 'straight' and digitally edited photographs, I suggest the idea of 'Documind' as an approach in documentary photography. The Documind approach transcends documentary and allows the photographer as the creator of the work to document the intrinsic passion from an insider's point of view and express the primitive sentimental relationship between the photographer and the city. A series of photographs taken during the historical handover¹ of Hong Kong in 1997 by myself as a Hongkongese, is the core of this paper. Through the crossover discussions between the concepts and ideas behind the work, I explore the drifting identity of both the Hongkongese and photography. It is intended to contribute to the ongoing dialogues of the authenticity of representation of documentary photography in a technologically driven environment.

Massive artworks were produced by artists for the handover, however, a large proportion of artworks produced had departed from having a focus on a political position. This paper purports to offer a cultural disposition rather than a political one through the urbanscape² of Hong Kong. Inevitably, the underpinned political initiatives will be discussed. As a Hongkongese, I pursued a career in the commercial photography of the creative industry and now working in a Western country, my passion about the cultural and historical aspects of the handover is intricate and ineffable. I consider Hongkongese as including those Chinese migrated from mainland China after 1940s as well as those born, brought up and educated under the hybrid³ cultural influences of a British colonized system. Thus, the cultural identities of a Hongkongese are not indigenous in nature.

Batchen⁴ (1997: p.178-9) discusses the mutable representation of photography by referring to Derrida's idea of difference and identity and

¹ The handover ceremony is a formal transition of the British sovereignty of Hong Kong to China on June 30, 1997.

² I prefer to use this word 'urbanscape' instead of 'urban landscape' to address the focus of this paper on the emotions and identities of the people living in the urban landscape and in this case the Hongkongese.

³ This paper merely acknowledges the hybrid nature of Hongkongese and does not attempt to theorise it. For further discussion on hybridity, refer to scholars' literature like Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Jacques Derrida.

⁴ Batchen (p.178-179) refers to Derrida: "No wonder that Jacques Derrida describes all such moments as moment, as a dynamic that inevitably turns in, on and around its own fulcrum. As he [Derrida] points out, there is always difference at the origin – even at the origin of difference itself: "In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split *in itself* and not only as an addition to itself or its image.

suggests that there already have differences in the origin. However, I suggest that in a culturally specified context such as Hong Kong, Derrida's Western metaphysical hierarchy of dichotomies might not necessarily apply to my series of work and its representations. Though I agree that there is no longer a single and possibly ungraspable origin, I would suggest that the origin is traceable. This is a consequence of the difference in cultural and philosophical thoughts between nations.

According to Robins (1996: p.150): "underneath the logic of rationality and control that informs the development of technology, there are 'powerful expressions of fantasy and desire' which reveal the presence of the subject behind the rhetoric of objectivity". In this sense my work simply reveals the poetic fantasy of my identity as a Hongkongese. My subjectivity behind the objectivity has also questioned the illusive urbanscape of Hong Kong during the 1997 handover that was created by the collaborative efforts of the British and Chinese governments, conspired by the news media.⁵

The Paired Image Approach

Sontag (1973: p. 92) suggests "The painter constructs, the photographer discloses. That is the identification of the subject of a photograph always dominates our perception of it – as it does not, necessarily, in a painting." However in a digital context, I suggest that photography is having both the essence of 'continuity and mutation'. It continues to function to disclose and extends to constructing through the mutable digital capabilities. These paired concepts of 'continuity and mutation' (t'ung-pien) [通變] are inspired by Liu Hsieh's [劉勰] 'Wen-hsin tiao-lung' [文心雕龍], a classic Chinese treatise on literature. Owen, when discussing Liu's ideas, suggests that the relation between continuity and mutation is fluid: "At times they are antithetical; at times, complementary; at times, identified..." Owen (1992: p.224) quotes Hsi-tz'u chuan [系辭傳]: to transform and to interrupt [a process] are what we mean by 'mutation'; to push forward and carry it out is what we mean by 'continuity'. Also when it is exhausted, it mutates; by mutation it achieves continuity; by continuity it endures long. And Liu Hsieh: at times we have "continuity versus mutation"; at times we have "achieving continuity by mutation"; at times we have "carrying through mutation"

The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference."

Batchen further elaborates: "...Indeed, photography is consistently positioned by its commentators within some sort of play between activity and passivity, presence and absence, time and space, fixity and transiency, observer and observed, real and representation, original and imitation, identity and difference – and the list could go on. Derrida's critique of this last opposition is one of his most famous and has often been elucidated in introductions to his work. Arguing that all identity is always already divided by differences (for nothing is ever simply present, referring only to itself), he introduces a silent but visible change in the word difference itself..."

⁵ Knight and Nakano (1999: p. 28) suggest that: "The Hong Kong government designed the Ceremony to be photographed, and assigned camera positions to photograph it. Robertson [an Australian documentary film maker] was caged up during the Ceremony, and was not allowed to wander down to film faces in the crowd..." and Nakano (p. 64-5): "Political media strategists were not the only ones who were spinning the events. *Newsweek* used a clever marketing strategy for the pre-handover special: it gave two entirely different portrayals to its Asian and American audiences..."



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

I have chosen to present the work with a collection of 'paired photographs' to explore the 'continuity and mutation' identities and representations of both photography and Hongkongese (Fig.1 & 2). It is intended to use the 'paired photograph' approach to accentuate the Hongkongese' philosophical thought and identity of 'continuity and mutation'. Thus the concepts of this series of paired photographs might, at times, be antithetical, complementary or identified. And their representations might be interpreted through continuity versus mutation, continuity by mutation, or carry through mutation.

The sweet-bitter of British

The British formally proposed to discuss with the Chinese the future of Hong Kong after 1997 through Margaret Thatcher's visit to China in 1982. Her feelings expressed when falling over outside the Great Hall of the People after meeting with Deng were rarely mentioned in publications of the 1997 talks. However, this did not conceal the disappointment of Thatcher's loss of hope for the continuation of the administrating role of British over Hong Kong after 1997. Subsequently, in December 1984, Thatcher and Deng signed the Joint Declaration relating to the British's termination of administration over Hong Kong after 1997. A 'one country two systems' policy was introduced and would remain unchanged for fifty years after the handover (Patten, 1998: p. 51).

Although Thatcher continued to predict the breakdown of the Communist (ibid., p.121) - in Peking she said 'I do not believe that in the long term [China] will be immune from the same processes which have affected its neighbors.' (1996). Rising living standards, to borrow from Mr. Zhao, will strengthen 'the people's sense of democracy'. But until now China remains as it is: the last communist country in the world. And to Thatcher's dismay, the British had to handover their colony (Fig. 3).

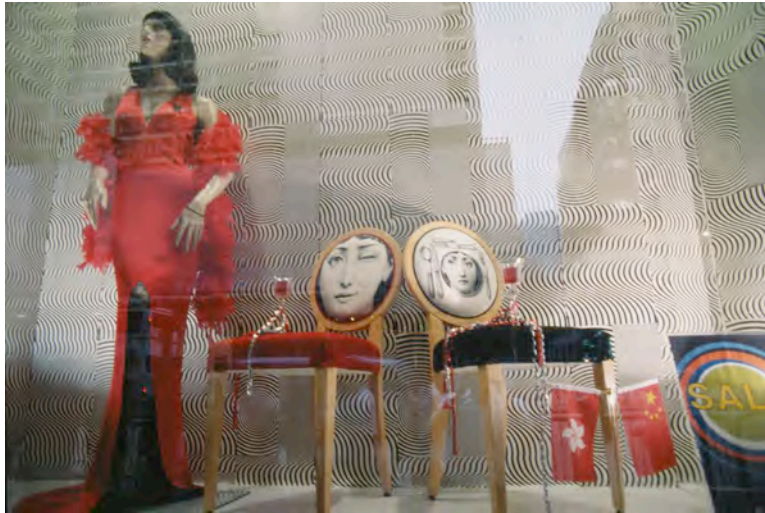


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong, also expressed Britain's unwillingness to end their empire in disgrace⁶ – handing over their last colony to the last communist country, an indelible disgrace for a nation of democracy (Fig. 4).

The British's initial uncompromised strategy of negotiation was possibly the reason leading to the loss of administration over Hong Kong after 1997. On

⁶ Patten (1998) in his book *East and West: China, power, and the future of Asia* says: "Hong Kong is where the story of [British] Empire really ended, but it was a curious footnote to a tale already largely told. I was the Last Governor (a title invariably given capital letters to denote, I suppose, its historic significance) of what was one of Britain's greatest colonies and certainly its richest. But my job was different from that of all those governors who had lowered the Union flag elsewhere. They had been charged with the duty of preparing their communities for independence. Coming from what Nelson Mandela among many others has called "the home of parliamentary democracy," British governors were required to provide those they ruled with the means, intellectual and institutional, to take their destiny in their own hands. Empire was to be dissolved from the top down....Colonial rule in Hong Kong was to end differently.....It was to hand a free Chinese city back to a totalitarian Chinese state. This was inevitably a rip-roaring story for the global media – the last British colony was to be surrendered to the last Communist tyranny (p.4-5)".

the other hand, the Chinese policy mutates to establish a 'guaranteed' political and economical stability after reunifying Hong Kong in 1997.

The sweet-bitter of Hongkongese

For most Hongkongese, the period between 1982 and 84 was daunting – from the fell over of Margaret Thatcher outside the Great Hall of the People after meeting Deng Xiaping in Sept 1982, to the official signing ceremony of Sino-British Joint Declaration of the 'One Country, Two Systems' policy for fifty years in 1984. Hongkongese, after several decades of prosperous life, felt the foreseeable change of political system. This image (Fig. 5A) of a signage that



Fig. 5A



Fig. 5B (digitally edited image)

indicates the 'go straight upward and turn RIGHT' location of a butcher shop might have stirred Hongkongese. Hong Kong will be governed by a LEFT communist country in less than two decades. I had changed the sign to read 'turn LEFT to celebrate the reunification (Fig. 5B). The future is nebulous after 1997! Hongkongese have to adapt to the change of political policy.



Fig. 6A



Fig. 6B (digitally edited image)

Those were the days of our annual family trip to the botanic garden next to the Governor House. There was a prestigious colonized style short-cut path that brought us up to the garden. It is now shabby (Fig. 6A). In my memory, my father would usually dress up in Chinese outfit for the fun day with us. These sweet anachronistic memories, in contrary to those of the Sino-British negotiation, were so near and yet so far (Fig. 6B).

During the negotiation, what stimulated Hongkongese was our identity. Both the British and Chinese claimed unabashedly that they would negotiate for the

best solution for us, ironically, under the three-legged stool policy⁷, Hongkongese were excluded from deciding their own future (Fig. 7). This political episode of 'three-legged stool policy' was initiated by the British to suggest the inclusion of Hong Kong member in the negotiating committee and this was disputed by the Chinese that Hongkongese had no sovereign power. The negotiation was a two-legged one between two nations only (Fig. 8). Both nations claimed their attempt to resolve the best solution for their 'baby'. It would be seemly for Hongkongese 'to shut up and be a sweetie child.'



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

The 'third leg' Hongkongese was gravitated to shut up. The best that both British and Chinese could offer is the freedom of expressing individual opinions. This commitment was included in the Basic Law.⁸ At the least, the

⁷ Patten comments: "The first Chinese assault was on what was quaintly called 'the three-legged stool': They [China] furiously contested the notion that there was a political entity called Hong Kong that could be represented in any official way in the discussions with the two sovereign powers about its future. For the Chinese, it was a question of two legs good, three legs unacceptable..." (p.23-24)
 "...But they [China] clung insistently to their other demand – that there should be no Hong Kong members of our team. This took us right back to the "three-legged stool" rows...the Chinese were soon back in contact and substantive talks began in April 1993 on acceptable terms, with Hong Kong officials as full members of our negotiating team..." (p.61)

⁸ "...the People's Republic of China has decided that upon China's resumption of the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong, a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region will be established in accordance with the provisions of Article 31 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, and that under the principle of "one country, two systems", the socialist system and policies will not be practised in Hong Kong. The basic policies of the People's Republic of China regarding Hong Kong have been elaborated by the Chinese Government in the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

In accordance with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the National People's Congress hereby enacts the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, prescribing the systems to be practised in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, in order to ensure the implementation of the basic policies of the People's Republic of China regarding Hong Kong." (International Constitutional Law Project Information: 2006)

baby was able to shout soberly to the first chief administrator of Hong Kong after 1997, Tung Chee Wah (Fig. 9A). Here a giant advertisement of a broadcaster defying simperingly to the sanguine Tung not to play fool with him (Fig. 9B). Yes, at the least, Hongkongese have the right for free speech, irrespective of being negligent - a most tellingly mediated fantasy.



Fig. 9A



Fig 9B (digitally edited image)



Fig. 10

Under the 'one country, two systems' policy, a slogan of 'Hongkongese rules Hong Kong' [港人治港] emerged, meaning that Hong Kong will follow and self-administrate the existing capitalist system with minimum interruption from China. However, the Cantonese punning connotates Hongkongese soliloquize themselves. And who cares (Fig. 10)?

Without priggishness and with no regret, Hongkongese's desire to make more money before the handover in order to secure a better unforeseeable future, by and large, was a 1997 syndrome. Those memories of 12-hour daily work, six days (or even seven days) a week had drifted the majorities of Hongkongese into a grueling workaholic state (Fig. 11) – a state of self-contained that deteriorates our sense of life. For the minority 'fortunate ones' who fled with their fortunes to enjoy a retiring life in another place, the torture had already been paid off. For the majority of 'unfortunate ones', life goes on, and the workaholic syndrome continues. In a way, this is a common syndrome in all urban cities. Why would we blame this on the handover? For those in-between fortunate and unfortunate, who had fled and having no luxury of retiring, the 'new life' is challenging and daunting. Starting another career in an unfamiliar place at an in-between junior and senior age is

frustrating and genuflectory. Some succeeded but many reluctantly have to return. This 'returning' phenomenon long existed pre to the handover. Hong Kong is described by Natalia Chan (2002) as having a historical nature of being a 'borrowed space' [借來的空間] – a space for transition, for making



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

fortune, for temporary shelter etc (p. 158-9). The 'mobility' nature of this space has contributed to a prosperous, grandiose, vigorous and diversified urbanscape that sustains those stagnant majorities who have no options but continue to hold on to this space – borrowed and yet permanent (Fig. 12). The identity of this urban space seems drifting and yet agglomerate; despite the nebulous future, Hongkongese succumbed to the belief that life is always as usual – work hard and play hard.

The sweet-bitter of China

For Hongkongese, the bold vision of Deng Xiaoping's 'one country, two systems'⁹ is a creative one. His promise to execute this notion was evidential in his famous pledge (Theroux, p.5) 'The horses will go on running.

⁹ Patten (1998: p.20): 'In return for an unambiguous transfer of sovereignty from Britain to China, Hong Kong was offered the guarantees of a protocol probably devised even more with Taiwan in mind. There would be one country, he [Deng] said: China, but two systems – China's and Hong Kong's. Some, like Milton Friedman, shook their heads in disbelief; others pored over the history books to try to find examples of this formula ever working

The dancing will continue' [馬照跑、舞照跳] in Cantonese to the Hongkongese connotes the continuity of the prosperity of Hongkong after 1997. The communist openly admitted to accept a capitalist system.

For most Hongkongese, the bronze lion sculpture outside the main branch of Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation is a prosperous emblem of the colonised capitalistic urbanscape. Taking a snap shot with the lion sculpture has been and will continue to be part of our family life. From penniless migrants to a fairly rich community, the Hongkong Bank is one of the ten largest banks worldwide and is a symbol of our success. The capitalistic system will continue (Fig. 13 A & 13B).

Will prosperity continue under such bold system?



Fig. 13A



Fig. 13B (digitally edited image)



Fig. 14

The street name 'Wing Wah Lane' of Fig. 14 literally refers to the Lane of Prosperity. This is in proximity to the famous Lan Kwai Fong, the So-ho of Hong Kong – a landmark of the grandiose urbanscape. The cluttering

before. They did not find them, yet here it was: "one country, two systems." The diplomats of both sides set out to put flesh on its bones...

At the end of the day, they resulted in the Joint Declaration of 1984, a detailed treaty that sought to guarantee in every whit and particular that the way of life enjoyed by Hong Kong would survive for fifty years after China's five-starred flag was first raised over the territory. China promised to retain not only Hong Kong's capitalist system and its autonomy to run its own affairs but also its rule of law and the freedoms associated with it – of speech, assembly, religious practice, and belief...

handover posters; the leftover after the revelry; the crappy road sign and the shabby wall; does the communist have faith in the Deng's notion of a capitalist system in Hong Kong? Does Hongkongese trust the Chinese vision? Is this another epitome of the prosperous urbanscape? Or a pretence? Or a defiant emblem of fiasco? Or a realpolitik? Or simply a *déjà vu*?

Is it a photographic illusion? Or an illusion of reality?

The sweet-bitter of Tung Chee Wah

Ever since the handshake with the then communist leader, Zemin Jiang [江澤民], Tung Chee Wah was stamped as the loyal soldier of the communist sovereignty. In serving the country, Tung is considered having a stout belief of Confucius thinking. This staged reality of his political position as the first chief administrator of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is disentangled. He is even profiled by Dimbleby (1997: p.431) as 'a good man forced to do evil' and 'a sheltered man' by Margaret Ng (*ibid.*, p.433). His impartiality and integrity to serve Hong Kong was overshadowed by his patriotic loyalty towards China.

This image (Fig. 15), taken in the New Territory, of a classic advertising 'floral signboard' for the celebration of the opening of a business and in this situation a Chinese restaurant, could represent how I, as Hongkongese, felt about Tung. I altered the name of the restaurant to become 'The Loyalty Shop' [忠記]. In the Chinese tradition, this classic opening signboard is a sign of solemnity, of respect, of dignity: a wry profile of his reticent subservience and reverential espouse to the communist China.



Fig. 15 (digitally edited image)

To the contrary, before the handover, it was not uncommon for public figures to shift in political stance. Those 'declaring loyalty' sometimes had become



Fig.16 Man, P. (1997). *Reunification with China, I am happy*. In Clarke D. *Hong Kong Art*. HK: Hong Kong University Press: p. 54



Fig. 17

the entertaining talk of the town. Interesting though, behind these patriotic gestures, were we all feeling comfortable about the future? In the worst event, we could get a second passport and walk away. This 'second passport' phenomenon had accentuated Hongkongese's allusion of discomfort and was considered as a peaceful emergency exit. Having a second passport was once a tacit status; however, it was also a disgrace for the 'declared patriotic loyalty' circle. Artist Phoebe Man's mixed-media installation 'Reunification with China, (Fig. 16) I am happy', exhibited in the Hong Kong Arts Centre's handover show was commented by Clarke¹⁰ (2001: p.55) as discussing and

¹⁰ David Clarke in his book 'Hong Kong Art' says: 'At the time of the handover the facades of many waterfront buildings in Hong Kong were covered in illuminated messages celebrating reunification. Even Jardine House, headquarters of the trading company most reviled by the Chinese government on account of its links to the opium trade, was a participant in the politic display of enthusiasm by the business community. Naturally such unnuanced optimism about the future was a target of those whose own response was more mixed, and Phoebe Man adopted the strategy of mimicry in an installation included in the Hong Kong Art Centre's handover show (*Museum 97: History, Community, Individual*, 23 June-12 July). All the local artists so far discussed perhaps envisioned the approaching handover in

envisioning the approaching handover in a positive way and ‘an obvious insincerity works to question the supposed sincerity of other patriotic and celebratory signs we may encounter’ (ibid., p. 55).

For me, the apocalyptic disposition of our feelings through Man’s work was the deliberate uncovered¹¹ emergency ‘exit’ sign within her installation (Fig. 17). On one hand, Hongkongese celebrated and expressed our happiness about the handover; on the other hand, it would be better if we had a second passport for emergency exit. There are always discernible traces of our conflicting emotions. Should we have shown more respect towards Tung’s dignity?

This contrasting emotional feeling is a unique essence of the 1997 urbanscape.

The sweet-bitter of Chris Patten

As a Chinese, I tend to prefer a stable, gradual and non-violent transition towards democracy for my country. Until now, Deng’s ‘open door’ policy of modernisation since 1978 has given evidence that it is effective, despite the tension of uneven distribution of economic growth.

During the Sino-British negotiation, Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong was once name-tagged by the Chinese as a ‘sinful person for a thousand generations’ [千古罪人]. It was initiated by Patten’s intention to expedite the path towards the democracy for Hong Kong and by doing so, had been claimed to breach the past Sino-British understandings.¹² From a cultural perspective, Patten had condemned and challenged the Chinese ethics and thinking. His stalwart disposition in pursuing a democratic structure for the post-handover and his strident political stance had once made him repudiated by the Chinese. However, it was not detrimental to his popularity in Hong Kong as a governor and his international fame as a ‘fighter’ against the communists.

a somewhat negative way – Man by contrast pretended to be looking forward to it happily. She filled the entire wall-space – and even the ceiling – of a small gallery room with large-scale Chinese characters repeating over and over again the message ‘*Wo hen gaoping jiuqi huigui*’ (I am very happy about the ’97 return [of Hong Kong to China]). Repetition, together with the over-exaggerated parody of enthusiasm displayed in covering every inch of available surface, works against the meaning conveyed by the words themselves. The title has some of the same qualities: Reunification with China, I am happy. Reunification with China, I am happy. Reunification with China, I am happy. Reunification with China, I am happy... An obvious insincerity works to question the supposed sincerity of other patriotic and celebratory signs we may encounter.” (p.54-5).

¹¹ By regulation, for safety sake, Phoebe was not allowed to cover up any ‘exit’ signs of the gallery.

¹² Dimpleby (p.140-1): “...The ‘past understandings’ to which Lu Ping referred were the outcome of the secret visits made by Sir Percy Cradock to Beijing after Tiananmen Square, the subsequent negotiations and an ‘exchange of letters’ between the foreign secretary and the Chinese foreign minister in January and February 1990. The specific thrust of Lu Ping’s case was that Patten’s proposals for the Election Committee, which he’d announced in his speech to LegCo, breached these ‘understandings’, which Douglas Hurd, as foreign secretary, had reached with the Chinese Government...”

Was Patten simply portentous for the sake of his future political career? Was Patten a royal soldier of the British? Was Patten beleaguered to safeguard the already toppled decency of the British or Thatcher?

This image (Fig. 18A & 18B) of the hanging salty fish outside a rundown shop was taken in Cheung Chau. To the Hongkongese, there are multiple layers of metaphoric representations. First, salty fish, which is processed by using salt to prolong the preservative life, is a kind of servile food for the peasant and it also connotes death (body). Secondly, Cheung Chau was a small island and a popular inhabitant for the poor foreigners, in addition to the indigenous. Thirdly, under the coldness of the dilapidated canopy, the celebrating flags of the handover stagnated over the salty fish, illuminated by the stereotyped lamp and imbued with reddish warmth, gave the connotation of Chinese condemnation over Patten. Fourthly, I had added the Chinese name-tag of 'sinful person for a thousand generations' to the body of a salty fish. This discernible tag signified the indelible sin and the disentangled fate, once tagged.

Was Patten's political stance a rigged hype, or simply ethereal? Was the illusive wavering and scattering light effect an apocalyptic revealing?



Fig. 18A



Fig. 18B (digitally edited image)



Fig. 19

And the last moment is impending. Patten had to go. Here was an atypical scene of the central financial centre (Fig. 19). In daytime, you would only have to shoulder through the crowd of dressed up ebullient professionals and executives. Now it was so lonely, tranquil and empty. A peasant was leaning against the other side of an advertising light box and reading the last day's local newspaper under the faint light ray. The heading said: The last day of the colonised Hong Kong. Was the man in vigil for the impending historical moment? Was he numbed? Did Hong Kong have democracy under the British Sovereignty?

This did not stop the already embedded influence of China over Hong Kong. Gongli, the first generation of Chinese international celebrities, was familiar to and loved by Hongkongese. Her benign posture for the advertisement was another looming signification of the flourishing prosperity of China as a nation. For Hongkongese, this might also be another sign of the extreme disparity between the rich and poor of an affluent urbanscape.

For Patten, the food of Hong Kong might be reminiscent to his memories, apart from his heroic tag of disgrace.

In this borrowed space, does the temporal nature of our identities continue to carry through mutation?

The last and first days

We should miss out; we must queue for the last chance (Fig 20A & 20B). And we must never be late for the next show, or we might regret it. Are we mercurial, or resilient?

With all respect, we are Hongkongese.



Fig. 20A



Fig. 20B (digitally edited image)



Fig. 21A



Fig. 21B (digitally edited image)

The show was nearly over, better took the last chance to reminisce the gripping moment of the colonisation (Fig. 21A & 21B). The British enduring legacy had ended solemnly and unwillingly. The British flag was lowered forever (Fig. 22). The red flag had been waving over Hong Kong and it will continue. Whoever you are and no matter how many passports you have, the borrowed space has been given another fifty years of enduring lease. For the eight-millionth Hongkongese, the vendor might have changed, for good? And yet this is our home. Deng had made his promised: 'The horses will go on running. The dancing will continue'. We are not to worry, Hongkongese; life is as usual.



Fig. 22 (digitally edited image)



Fig. 23 (digitally edited image)

The day finally came (Fig. 23). We were very happy! We returned to our parents!

Behind the malaise fantasies and the shrouded elation, was it a grandiose pretense? Was it just another veneer of a celebrating urbanscape? Was it a constructed identity?

Anson Chan¹³ [陳方安生] (Clarke: p.223 note 24) said: 'The real transition is about identity, not sovereignty'

Salute! Salute! We are Hongkongese!

The sweet-bitter of photography

After almost a decade I revisit my own photographic works that were created for the historical handover in the hope to investigate the aspects of documentary approach of photography. I would suggest the re-positioning of documentary photography as the 'borrowed space' in a transient moment that records the transitory intrinsic emotions of the urbanscape. My title, Documind, has metaphorically reflected the flux in a linguistic content.

This series across nine years unearthed 'time-capsule' images, and fragments of each of them constitutes a wholeness that echoes my contemplation of the transition of my own thoughts and identities. It is also reference to the transformation of urbanscape and in itself witnesses the moment of transition.¹⁴ It is also my first digital work and thus signifies the continuity

¹³ 'Anson Chan Fang On Sang GBM GCMG CBE JP [陳方安生](born January 17, 1940) was head of Hong Kong's civil service before and after the territory's handover to the People's Republic of China from British colonial rule. She is the first woman and the first Chinese to hold the second-highest governmental position in Hong Kong. She is seen to be a pro-democracy politician by Hong Kong people since November 2005.' (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: 2006)

¹⁴ When discussing installation art, David Clarke in his Hong Kong Art suggests: "Both the Honk Kong and Beijing work [artwork] can be read as critical of the modernization process and its erasure of the past, but the way references to urban transformation become elevated into symbols for Hong Kong itself as a moment of transition, is particular to the territory's art" (p. 216: note 6).

through mutation of my thoughts and practices as a photographic artist in the post-photographic era. I take the stance of how I felt as a Hongkongese, not a photographer, and not how I feel now. Inevitably and admittedly, this stance will be shadowed by how I feel when recollecting my memory. In this sense, this stance also reveals the flux of representation of photography. My photography practice of straight documental photography intermingled with digitally edited imaging transcends the communication in a different level and thus challenges the traditional dignity of the representation of documentary approach in photography. In this paper, I also do not intend to defend this approach through analytical dialogues of documentary photography¹⁵. Unearthing this series of 'time-capsule' works, in itself, already has posed the rethinking of the fluidity nature of both photography and the cultural identity of urbanscape.

Conclusion

In this paper I have suggested a Documind approach to explore the flux of representations of photography through documenting the urbanscape of the 1997 handover of Hong Kong. I have adapted the Chinese philosophical thoughts of continuity and mutation as the key concept of exploration. I also have designed a 'paired photographs' approach to establish dialectic discussions to respond to the concept of continuity and mutation. The relations of these paired photographs are fluid. They might be antithetical, complementary and identified. And their visual representations are constructed to respond to the three main conceptual approaches of continuity and mutation. They are continuity versus mutation, achieving continuity by mutation and carry through mutation. Thus address the intricate emotional thoughts and the mutative identities of Hongkongese and the illusive urbanscape of Hong Kong during the handover.

The use of sweet-bitter in the chapter titles is central to reflect the lingering emotions and poetic fantasy of the Hongkongese. It is parallel to the Chinese philosophical thoughts that sweet and bitter complement each other.

The challenge of this paper is the communication of the unfamiliar philosophical thought and cultural content of Hongkongese (insider) in a globalised context (outsider). In addition is the complexity of the emotions and identities of the Hongkongese, and as such that my discourse on the photographs might have been overly elaborate. Though taking the stance of an insider's position, I have no intention to categorise between insider and outsider as this will contradict with the established Chinese thoughts and concepts of this paper. However, in a global context, it is inevitable that the ideas and concepts of these photographs are interpreted indifferently and the accessibility of their representations is questioned. This again reflects the already existed predicament of documentary photography.

As a Hongkongese, I do have faith in the 'one country, two systems' policy. I am optimistic that after fifty years, whilst returning to 'one system' policy,

¹⁵ For further discussion on the representation of photography, refer to my masters thesis 'The Representation of Photography in the Emerging Digital Era' (2000) published in www.zonezero.com

through the process of continuity and mutation, it is a system that I would expect – a capitalist one. In another aspect, why bother? Most of my generation would have died by then.

So does photography, its drifting nature of representations will continue to be questioned. The anachronic belief that the advancement of technology has caused such predicament of its representations might never be disputable. Again, in another aspect, why bother? Those newer generations would never care about the drifting nature of photography in the ever-ending temporal moments of continuity and mutation. For them, the mutability is already a given one.

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