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Magic, Medicine, Cannibalism: the China Demon in Hong Kong Horror

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in Hong Kong Horror**

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Magic, Medicine, Cannibalism: the China Demon in Hong Kong Horror

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Abstract

Horror, or ghost film, has had a long tradition in Hong Kong film. Zombie pictures (*jiangzhi pian*) once took the center stage during the boom days of Hong Kong cinema in the 1980s. In early 2000, with Applause Pictures taking the lead to capitalize on the phenomenal success of J-horror, ghost films re-emerged as a highly marketable genre. But this horror resurrection has less to do with recycling previous narrative or stylistic formula than an urge to remake horror relevant to contemporary Hong Kong psyche.

Inspired by the critical work on Hong Kong's identity politics produced in the late 1990s, this paper examines two signature films from Applause Pictures—Three: Going Home (2002) and Three Extremes: Dumplings (2004), with respect to their new treatment of ghosts and ghostly body as latent representations of Hong Kong's desire for and fear of China.

The mythical and ghostly presence of Chinese migrants is central to the narrative of the two horror films but China is not at all negative when it comes to problems of survival, competition and ambition. Here China re-surfaces as a desirable alternative to overcome aging, illness and mortality. But this gift from China (traditional Chinese medical practices) is quickly dissolved and transformed into a monstrous invasion and occupation. Horror, in this regard, displaces the backlash against overindulgence with youth, beauty and fitness, often regarded as excessive trivia in capitalist culture.

In addition the paper investigates stylistic particulars of Hong Kong horror. It is hoped that through thematic and stylistic analyses this paper will cover a wide range of cinematic and cultural aspects of contemporary Hong Kong horror.

Introduction

Horror, or ghost film, has a long standing in Hong Kong cinema. Since the 1970s, the film industry in Hong Kong has steadily churned out horror/ghost films for audiences in the region and horror has become a staple in Hong Kong cinema.ⁱ We can identify at least two narrative prototypes in Hong Kong horror. The first is called the ghost erotica, referring to romances between female spirits and male scholars. Based on the well-known Chinese classic *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (Liaozhai zhiyi) written by Pu Songling in the 17th century, this type of story delineates the return of female spirits to repay their debts to men who have lent a helping hand. It touches on the liminality between the spiritual and the human world and the ambiguity between life and afterlife. Because of its classical setting and humanist treatment of the interplay between the libidinal and the moral, Pu Songling's ghost erotica has inspired such film classics as *The Enchanting Shadow* (Li Hanxiang, 1960), *A Touch of Zen* (King Hu, 1972) and *Chinese Ghost Stories I, II, III* (Tsui Hark, 1987, 1990, 1991).

Vampire takes center stage in the second prototype of Hong Kong horror/ghost films. Based on folklores from the provinces, this type of narrative is characterized by religious rituals and customs. It features spirits as lethal vampires or *jiangzhi* (literarily stiff corpses), whose long-lasting grudge has turned them into monsters. To suppress them, one must use either martial arts or kung fu, or evoke supernatural force such as exorcism. Religious mysticism and martial arts are hence added to enrich the dramatic effects and action of the horror pictures. As noted by Stephen Teo, "For a genre so rooted in traditional motifs, indeed in ethnological matter, the kung fu horror movie depends on surface glitz, action and slapstick humour to succeed."ⁱⁱ With these additional ingredients, the vampire pictures became

immensely popular during the boom days of Hong Kong cinema. For example, *Mr Vampire* (Ricky Lau, 1985) was ranked the fifth in the Hong Kong top-ten list and topped Taiwan's list.ⁱⁱⁱ 'The kung fu horror' nexus shows the cross-fertilization and free mixing of two distinct genres, further exemplifying the malleability of Hong Kong popular genres.

In the late 1990s although the number of horror films drastically declined, the genre as a whole did not entirely vanish. Video film was a new shell for the genre to extend its life. Between 1997 and 2003, 19 instalments of a horror series called *Troublesome Night* were released when Hong Kong film industry was in a rapid decline. Shot on video, the series proliferated due to their low budgets. Nevertheless, the industry's overall interest in horror was not significantly advanced until local filmmakers began to remake horror based on a trendy Japanese genre--J-horror—a new horror characterized by its urban milieu, familial relations and communication technology. In early 2000, with the independent Applause Pictures taking the lead to capitalize on the phenomenal success of J-horror, horror/ghost re-emerged as a marketable genre. Following Applause, renowned directors produced *My Left Eye Sees the Ghost* (Johnnie To, 2002), *Visible Secret* and *Visible Secret II* (Ann Hui, 2001, 2002). With these various inputs, it appeared horror regained its popularity in the local cinema. But this resurrection has less to do with either recycling previous narrative or copying Japanese stylistic formula. Rather, the new Hong Kong horror is distinct in its impulse to render a deep political anxiety and identity crisis.

What anxiety and what crisis? Identity politics has occupied the centre of Hong Kong film studies since the 1990s.^{iv} It peaked around 1997 when Hong Kong's sovereignty returned to China. The return in this context meant repatriation, 'going home.' While officials from both sides celebrated the return in grand style, critics

within and outside of Hong Kong expressed different views toward the 1997 event. With respect to Hong Kong's new identity, Rey Chow remarks that the new era could bring more intense cultural struggles as "Hong Kong's cultural productions are often characterized by a particular kind of negotiation. This is a negotiation in which it must play two aggressors, Britain and China, against each other."^v Ackbar Abbas suggested that the return might carry Hong Kong's second colonization: "When sovereignty reverts to China, we may expect to find another colonial situation, but with an important historical twist."^{vi} The two critics implied that resistance or ambivalence toward a new 'Chinese' identity might underlie Hong Kong's cultural production before and after her formal entry into its postcolonial stage. For instance, Hong Kong action classics *A Better Tomorrow* and its sequel (John Woo, 1986, 1987) deal with the reunion with China in subtle ironies. As Tony Williams suggests, "Woo's spectacular violent confrontations depict the end of history for this former colony. But within the very nature of the struggles, he contrasts desolate worlds of present and future with visions of China's heroic past as a means for survival."^{vii} The uncertainty intensified as 1997 approached, and the independent *Made in Hong Kong* (Fruit Chan, 1997) was praised for its allegorical response to China's takeover. The film illustrates the urban angst of working class youth to insinuate the political impotence felt by Hong Kong's majorities, as they had no role to play in the making of the historical decision.^{viii}

While pessimism reigned in the general views toward Hong Kong's 'going home,' there was another, different voice. Some pointed out that Hong Kong's historical role as an intermediary would find her new place in China's rise as an economic superpower. With China's shift from planned to market economy, Hong Kong's return, as some argued, would not necessarily lead to China's colonization,

but allows the former British colony to profit from the many assets China could provide. Kung Ho-fung and Law Wing Sang described this reversal as ‘northbound colonization,’ referring to Hong Kong’s taking advantage of mainland’s rich resources, cheap labor and lack of knowledge. This ‘northbound colonization’ was best exemplified in the weekend exodus of Hong Kong residents to the mainland for cheap consumption. Kung also added that apart from consumption, Hong Kong businessmen regularly paid visits to China for new opportunities and resources not available at home.^{ix}

These contrary views indicate two important symptoms of Hong Kong’s return: not only Hong Kong’s ambivalence and uncertainty of going home but her difficulty in coming to terms with the idea of ‘home.’ To return to a home that is 150 years old is to re-encounter an alien “origin,” both strange and familiar, powerful yet vulnerable. Films made in the postcolonial Hong Kong were preoccupied with this concern. Fruit Chan’s so-called “China Trilogy”--*Little Cheung* (1999), *Durian, Durian* (2000) and *Hollywood Hong Kong* (2001)--are notable examples. The trilogy features Chinese sex migrants as enigmatic, yet nourishing, goddess for deprived men living at the margins of the Hong Kong society. By doing so, Chan “attempts to bring the Other to the forefront, giving her a voice and enabling her to construct her subjectivity and to challenge stereotypes.”^x Chan’s treatment of the Chinese women adds a twist to the ‘northbound colonization’ idea: that the north may well be at home instead of some anonymous Chinese geographies afar. When one looks closely at the underground economy of sex and menial labor, the boundary between China and Hong Kong may not be as distinct as perceived. *Durian, Durian* and *Hollywood Hong Kong* present confident Chinese sex workers traveling across various borders of neighborhoods, cities, and regions. Their mobility and penetration deep inside Hong Kong locality

indicates that they too obtain similar cosmopolitan attributes—flexible and savvy, much like most permanent Hong Kong residents.

While Chan's films envisage Chinese women within the Madonna/Whore prototype, other films, including Chan's recent *Dumplings*, take the same imagery into a deeper, darker terrain of the political psychosis. By the interpellation of the 'motherland,' Hong Kong's return has also been framed as a long lost child's homecoming, a 'natural' and emotional reflex, adding complexities to an already entangled political integration. Some even argues that the 'mother-child' relations could be seen as "the sources and origins of horror." When a child creates boundaries between himself and his mother, "the mother is 'horrific' in the sense of being all-engulfing, primitive..."^{xi} As the integration between capitalist Hong Kong and socialist China has deepened and accelerated in the past decade, Hong Kong's identity crisis seems to acquire a more insidious, twisted expression with respect to its relations to the 'mother.' This is especially evident in the changing imageries of China in horror that extends political and cultural anxieties outside the usual bounds. This article focuses on two signature horror films from Applause Pictures—*Three: Going Home* (Peter Chan Ho-sun, 2002) and *Three Extremes: Dumplings* (Fruit Chan, 2004) to analyze the new treatments of the transgressive ghosts and ghostly bodies. By employing the literature on Hong Kong identity and its changing relations to China, we argue that these new treatments are latent representations of Hong Kong's increasing desire for a 'home' and 'mother' previously feared.

Going Home and Dumplings

Applause Pictures was established in 2000 by director-producer Peter Chan Ho-sun, writer-director Teddy Chan and distributor Allen Fung. At this time the Hong

Kong film industry was experiencing a steady decline in production numbers and a precipitous drop in market share of Southeast Asian markets. The company's plan was to initiate flexible production packages in order to recover markets lost to Hollywood pictures. According to Davis and Yeh in their recent studies on East-Asian screen industries, the initial strategy was to invest in local Asian movies and directors capable of making low-budget films that are commercially competitive. Korean, Chinese, Thai, all these areas were carefully researched and underwritten by Applause.^{xii} Another strategy was to repackage genre pictures to stimulate new interest in popular forms. In the first slate of Applause's pan-Asian projects, these two strategies were integrated.

Horror stands out in the Applause slate, a response to J-horror's huge success. Low-budget J-horror was a gem in the sleepy Japanese film market in the late 1990s and spawned an international horror trend.^{xiii} Seeing the surprising payoffs of Japanese horror, Applause seized the chance to rework traditional Chinese materials into a new type of "C-horror" for Chinese speaking audiences. The result was *The Eye* (Oxide and Danny Pang, 2002, Hong Kong/Singapore/Thai co-production) and the omnibus *Three* (Nonzee Nimibutr, Kim Kee-woon, Peter Chan, 2003, Thai/South Korea/Hong Kong co-production) and sequel *Three...Extremes* (Miike Takashi, Kim Kee-woon, Fruit Chan, 2004). *The Eye* remains by far Applause's most commercially successful film while *Three* and *Three...Extremes* were critically acclaimed.^{xiv} *Going Home* is the Chinese segment from *Three* and *Dumplings* from *Three...Extremes*. Both were spun off into feature length horror films of their own and received several film awards from Hong Kong and Taiwan for their new treatments of horror.

Three's Chinese title, *san geng* (three bells, 11:00 pm), is a specific time of night. As a stock phrase in many Chinese ghost films, 'three bells' conjures

supernatural visitations, nocturnal chills and the uncanny. *Going Home* tells a horror story about bodily resurrection and Chinese herbal medicine. The plot revolves around two families living in an abandoned public housing estate--a policeman Wai (Eric Tsang) with his son and a mysterious medicine doctor from China named Yu (Leon Lai). After breaking into Yu's home to search for his missing son, Wai discovers the secret that Yu has been living with the corpse of his dead wife (Eugenia Yuan). Yu is awaiting his wife's resurrection so that they can go home together. But the policeman's unexpected visit ruins Yu's plan.

Dumplings is a gruesome story about a rich, former TV idol named Ching (Miriam Yeung) desperately seeking remedies in order to save her failing marriage. Ching's wealthy husband Lee (Tony Leung Ka-fei) has an insatiable appetite for youth, so she needs a quick fix for her ageing looks. Ching seeks help from a woman from China, Auntie Mei (Bai Ling), known among the local socialites for her dumplings that have an unbelievable regenerating power. The sixty-year old Mei has a body and look thirty years younger than her age. Sexy and energetic, her fitness secret is kept inside her magical dumplings—fresh fetus. The thought of cannibalism does not prevent Ching from tasting Mei's dumplings which prove to be amazingly effective. Addicted to the dumplings and believing in beauty as the only solution to her unhappy life, Ching turns herself into a cannibal.

Human or demon? Chinese medicine doctors in Hong Kong

Chinese medicine doctors are featured prominently in both *Going Home* and *Dumplings*. Yu is a trained, certified Chinese herbalist and Mei was formerly a gynecologist known for her surgical dexterity and precision. Their professional credentials become invalid once they cross the border to Hong Kong, a Chinese city

predominantly organized by capitalist, western institutions, including its medicine. Denied their professional identity, Chinese medicine doctors make a pitiful living from their former training. To remain in Hong Kong they have to descend from the 'legitimate' medical sphere to the underworld of ancient Chinese medicine. This world is depicted by two devices—the doctors' exterior traits and their surroundings.

Going Home introduces Yu, the mainland doctor, as a mysterious and menacing immigrant. His first encounter with his new neighbors occurs when he is seen dragging garbage out from his apartment. With the scene's background completely opaque, Yu seems to have just stepped out from the underworld. His simple, grey jacket--recalling the old communist day--adds to the otherworldliness of his presence and his impassive expression portrays him as a lingering soul in a forsaken land.

Yu is not alone. He has a family living with him--the ghost of his aborted baby girl and the diseased body of his wife Hai'er. Dressed in red, the girl's uncanny presence is clearly depicted as the supernatural other. She never speaks a word and is invisible to most human beings except Wai's little boy, who then follows her and disappears from the intelligible human world. But the visual contrast between her red dress and the greyish, icy surroundings of the empty housing estate loudly announces her existence, pointing to the feeble threshold between life and death, consciousness and unconscious. Yu's wife Hai'er appears in an even more grotesque aspect. Hai'er "lives" inside a bathtub full of water and herbs. Although she has been dead for three years, she is hibernating into recovery from a fatal disease. In order to prepare for her awakening, Yu bathes Hai'er daily, talking to her and preparing meals for her. One wonders whether Yu is human at all? Could he too be a ghost? A zombie awakening to complete unfinished business?

While Yu keeps Wai under house arrest to protect his private undertaking, Yu behaves nothing like his frigid and ghostly appearance when he is first introduced. He treats Wai kindly, like a caring nurse towards a handicapped patient. To Wai, if Yu is a demon, he is a most unlikely kind. Wai almost wants to identify with Yu's (in)sanity but he doesn't quite believe Yu's explanation. Years ago Yu was diagnosed with cancer and told by a Hong Kong (western) doctor that his days were numbered. So the couple decided to use their Chinese training to save his life. It requires a total change of the constitution to rid the disease. So Yu killed himself and under Hai'er's care, he came to life again. Soon after that, Hai'er was struck down with the same disease.

But just when Hai'er is about to wake up, Wai's police colleagues break into Yu's apartment, arresting Yu and confiscating Hai'er's body. Seeing the ambulance taking Hai'er and her nascent new life away, Yu runs after her, only to be hit by a car. Finally, the coroner confirms that Hai'er's life is indeed continuing even after her death. The testimony from the doctor who treated the couple years ago supports Yu's story. At this point Wai realises the truth of Yu's story. This understanding further calls the initial perception of the Chinese doctors into question. Are they human or demon? Or something in between?

Compared to the subdued images of Yu and Hai'er overshadowed by values like reason and science, Auntie Mei represents a captivating, sexualized demon from China, destabilizing the affluent but instrumental Hong Kong way of life. Contrary to the grey, cool undertone of the ghost world inhibited by Yu and his family, Auntie Mei's lair is enchanting and mesmerising, like an antique emporium attended by a voluptuous shaman.

Dumplings opens as Mei crosses the China/Hong Kong border to return to her home in Hong Kong. Mei, like many mainland immigrants, crosses the border daily to

make a living (northbound colonization). But Mei is a good-looking woman. With trendy attire revealing her curvaceous body, heavy makeup, high heel shoes, Mei's image fits the stereotype of Chinese sex workers as depicted in Fruit Chan's "China Trilogy." But she is not. She tells the customs officer that she is on her way to carry lunch to her children in Hong Kong schools. She's right; inside her old-fashioned lunch box is homemade eggs and ham. The old red Chinese lunch box helps dissolve the usual suspicion for a woman with her appearance. But the ordinary lunch is just a decoy; underneath it is the precious raw material for her flourishing health management business in Hong Kong.

Indeed Mei is not into the typical trades that most young Chinese women are resorted to when they cross the border to Hong Kong, even though her appearance might have hinted that. As Barbara Creed suggests: "The concept of border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film; that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is abject."^{xv} And "abject," according to Julia Kristeva in her book on the powers of horror, is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules."^{xvi} Though Mei does not sell her own body, she purveys those of anonymous Chinese peasant women forced to abort their baby girls under the one-child policy and the persistent patriarchal ideology that writes off female newborns. Instead of casting Mei as a compassionate goddess like the previous mainland characters in his films, Fruit Chan portrays Mei as a vamp, a go-between who exploits the vulnerability of women from both sides of the border. Mei knows that to survive in Hong Kong, she must do something out of the ordinary, something disturbing to the order and class system of an advanced society like Hong Kong. She ingeniously makes use of the 'waste' of the Communist Party's population control policy into an antidote for Hong Kong women's body management. On the other hand,

in order to obtain the so-called 'top quality' infantile flesh, she performs an abortion for a local teenage girl raped by her father. While Mei is happily showing off her product to the customer, the girl is dying from excessive bleeding. By manipulating other women's bodies that "bear the inscription of social, political, economic, cultural and legal pressures,"^{xvii} Mei embarks on a demonic enterprise. Is this beautiful vamp from China less than human? Can she be a modern demon in a globalized culture worshipping excessive, insatiable consumption?

China as the haunted past

Mei's body management business is tucked away inside a small flat located in a decrepit public housing estate. Mei's flat is the key space where the major action takes place, including dumpling offerings, singing revolutionary songs, fornicating with her patron in the post-cannibalistic climax, and operating on a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl. In all of these deeds, Mei performs and perseveres, from a dubious chef and a throwback of the 1960s to a calm midwife and an irresistible nymph.

The interior décor in Mei's tiny 'office' adds to the eeriness of her routines. In the center of her office sits a shrine stuffed with startlingly promiscuous kitsch, ranging from Mao figurine, Daoist goddess of nativity and mercy, revolutionary peasants, *maneki neko* (Japanese lucky beckoning cat), Virgin Mary sitting alongside Hello Kitty. Inside her emporium of kitsch are two old black and white photos of herself taken in the old country. When were these pictures taken? The answer is nowhere to be found until a point of view shot from Ching's husband Lee reveals their (and Mei's) age. As Lee is fornicating with Mei on her table after eating her dumplings, a photo on the shrine catches his attention. And once he looks at it closely, he sees that the photo of Mei in her twenties taken in 1960. Mei is in fact in her 60s.

Lee stops, wondering whom he is having sex with—the irresistible Chinese nymph or an old hag in a fake body? Knowing his fear, Mei convinces him that age is just a number and her body, though an unbelievable one, is what matters. Then they continue with their unfinished business. But the revelation brings a chill. Next to a photo from the past exposes a different truth: Mei is a ghost in a gorgeous shell.

Photos, in print or electronic format, are images of the past. They are used in *Going Home* and *Dumplings* as crucial narrative links to the past (in China). For Chinese immigrants who are treated as ghosts in Hong Kong, photos from the past help maintaining their present lives in the affluent but alienated Hong Kong. Inside Yu's home, a TV monitor constantly plays a home video of Hai'er talking as if Yu was listening behind the camera. Here memories of the past turn into moving pictures, bringing the ambiguity of Hai'er's living death to the fore. Mei proudly puts her decades-old photos up on her emporium of international kitsch, showing the little difference between the look of her past and present and the 'magic' of her everlasting youth, much like those 'immortal' statues.

Going Home begins and ends with an old-fashioned studio where a photographer is seen taking a formal family photograph. The studio here is the locus of the uncanny, a memory bank of the repressed and aborted, where dead family members unite to take a picture. Being together is a wish denied to Yu and his family while they are alive. Now they are dead they are able to be together as a family. At the beginning of *Going Home* when Wai and his son are taken to their apartment by a grumpy guard, they go through one empty room after another. The abandoned family photos on the walls communicate the previous lives and histories of these forsaken spaces. Forever hidden, old lives and histories must rely on photos and images to show the proof of life. The liminality between the past and the present thus forms the

narrative of the haunted, channeled by chilling *mise-en-scene* and unsettling sound effects.

If Chinese from the mainland are portrayed as ghosts from the past, Chinese in Hong Kong are depicted as the mainlanders' evil twins in their disavowal of the past. To Wai, Yu's obsession with the past is pathetic and futile, if not insane. In a capitalist society that emphasizes efficiency and pragmatism, it is the future that leads the way, not the past. Unlike Yu, Wai tries to bury his past. He is reluctant to talk about the loss of his wife and his descent from a comfortable middle class life to a semi-homeless state. Moreover, like many Chinese in Hong Kong, Wai believes little in traditional Chinese medicine, not to mention Yu's radical experiment. Only when a local doctor presents him with evidence about the mainland couple is Wai willing to accept a different reality from his own experience. Perhaps for the first time in his life, he sees the present in a different light, by way of the prism of the past. As if to echo Wai's new insight on life, the film closes with the same antiquated photo studio introduced at the very beginning. Inside the studio, Yu takes his little red girl to join her mother and together, they have their family portrait taken. The camera tracks into their family photograph and remains there, until the film fades to black. This closure suggests the final reunion of the ghost family, a dream impossible to realize in the human world. Meanwhile, Wai is still waiting for his son to come 'home' in the abject public housing estate. The Chinese demon and his cohorts have gone home but the Hong Kong character remains dejected and alone.

Cannibalism: magic horror

Contrary to the abandoned public housing estate and its dejected residents, *Dumplings* presents an affluent Hong Kong of comfort, confidence and wealth. A

former TV idol and the wife of a real estate tycoon, Ching has all the money she needs to buy happiness. But she is miserable because her husband has long lost interest in her. Time has taken Ching's beauty away and the last thing Ching would like to be reminded of is her past. Nevertheless, it does not prevent Auntie Mei, the inscrutable doctor from the past, to taunt Ching when they first meet: "Ah, Mrs. Lee, I remember you, from those old TV drama series, you were very popular, very pretty." Despite Mei's sarcasm, Mei has to rely on the doctor from the mainland to reverse the hereditary predestination of lifelong aging.

Consuming a fetus, the unborn human flesh, is the narrative highlight, and horror, of *Dumplings*. To illustrate the horrific cannibalism--an inhuman act--visually arresting shots are presented to show the ingredients of the magical dumplings--close-ups of the little curly human in bright orange shade and the juicy orange delicacy nicely laced inside each dumpling. As if these visual details were inadequate to demonstrate the characters' appetite for human flesh, the film goes on to show Mei slurping down a fresh fetus as if it were a piece of sashimi. Her unbridled excitement toward a 5 month-old male fetus is illustrated in her sales pitch to Ching: "It is covered by a layer of creamy fat. The colors are defined and you can even see the cranium. The tiny limbs will still be moving around. It is so cute, like a kitten." Mesmerized by this euphoric image of cannibalism, Ching can't wait: "don't you waste any more time, get it done quickly!" [ILLUSTRATION 4]

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud claims that cannibalistic urges prevail at the oral stage because "sexual activity has not yet been separated from the ingestion of food." Though aiming at the incorporation of the object, this urge is not simply destructive in nature. It is also an attempt to incorporate the maternal figure as part of self in order to gain possession and control over the external world

and to make up for the inevitable loss of the comforting object.^{xviii} The act of eating/consuming embodies an intrinsic contradiction, a dialectic of the subject and the other. It is a way not only to contain the other but also to destroy it. Caleb Crain suggests love and cannibalism can be confused because “cannibals and lovers both pay exceptional attention to the body of the desired.”^{xix} Orality hence is both affectionate and hostile. As Melanie Klein remarks, “In the very first months of the baby’s existence it has sadistic impulses directed not only against its mother’s breasts, but also against the inside of her body: scooping it out, devouring the contents, destroying it by every means which sadism can suggest.”^{xx} The infant indulges in the fantasy of total sadistic control when it fails to master its love object.

The ambivalent feeling of love and hatred behind the cannibalistic urge seems to mirror Hong Kong’s difficult return to China. As China’s child, Hong Kong has ‘mixed feelings’ towards the mother. By consuming human flesh (fetus) as a symbolic act of integrating with the maternal object, the child rejuvenates herself, prolonging her youthfulness. Furthermore, cannibalism can be seen as a syndrome of late capitalist, postmodern consumer society. The perpetual pursuit of and craving for new stimuli and sensation is what supports the persistent growth in consumer economy. But as the speed of developing new technologies in health and body management can never surpass the growing demand for control over one’s body and youth, the long-dead past must be evoked. The past also must return with a new face, in new packaging. Once linked with medicinal therapy, cannibalism is no longer horrific; or inhuman. Instead, it re-emerges as alternative and magical treatment for those who are desperate, and those who can pay. As Mei proclaims, her cannibalistic dumplings, are a “legacy” of Chinese culture, “treasure” from the ancestors. She even quotes from a classical Chinese medical dictionary to lend authority to her argument. She astutely

recounts the long history of cannibalism in China to reassure her clients that eating human flesh is but an observance of tradition, just like the practice of Chinese medicine in modern time. Here the undesirable and primitive China turns out to be the savior of privileged Hong Kong women defeated by age and patriarchal control.

Conclusion: United in horror

Going Home and *Dumplings* both employ class difference to define Hong Kong and China as two distinct entities. “Primitive China/Mother” is the other that keeps the modern, westernized Hong Kong intact. However, as both films demonstrate, Hong Kong and China might not be as separate as perceived at the time of the handover. According to Ackbar Abbas, “The colonized state, while politically subordinate, is in many crucial respects not in a dependent subaltern position, but is in fact more advanced – in terms of education, technology, access to international networks and so forth – than the colonizing state.”^{xxi} This statement needs to be re-examined with regard to the rapidly changing relationship between Hong Kong and China. Each day, 150 immigrants from China are allowed to enter Hong Kong as permanent residents. The number is dwarfed by the number of Hong Kong people traveling to China for work, affordable housing and cheap leisure. Knowingly or unknowingly, Hong Kong is integrating into a rising China, a process that is happening much faster than expected. The heavy traffic between China and Hong Kong implies that the border might only be “administrative” in nature.

The relationship between mother and child and the distinction between “subject” and “object” blurs as they become mutually dependent on each other. In a new relationship formed by consumption, both parties engage in empathetic subjectivity.^{xxii} The fetus colonizes the maternal body, which in turn nourishes her

colonizer. “Horror is fundamentally about boundaries – about the threat of transgressing them, and about the need to do so,” says Freeland.^{xxiii} And precisely because of the need, horror/cannibalism is both repulsive and attractive. This dialectical relationship of mother and fetus is analogous to Hong Kong’s postcolonial ambivalence toward China. The grand design of “one country, two systems” has proved to be only an administrative device. Hong Kong and China are getting closer and more like one another as no separate, self-contained self can be found in their mutual affinity. To rejuvenate, Hong Kong scavenges on the unwanted lives from China. Yet the rejuvenation in turn takes over the scavenger and colonizes her body. Like a venomous antidote, dumplings made of human flesh rejuvenate the aging Hong Kong woman but they are also capable of turning her beauty into disease. Ching uses her economic power to consume and possess resources from China but in the end, her addiction turns her into a cannibal. Desperately in need of a male fetus to rejuvenate, Ching pays her husband’s Chinese mistress for an abortion. In turn, Ching gets to keep the aborted ‘treasure.’ A scene towards the end depicts Ching wiping her shiny knife, getting ready to cut open a small orange human being. A low-angle medium close-up shows her close examination of her trophy; meanwhile, the soundtrack begins to play Mei’s old revolutionary song. Enchanted by the song, Ching cuts downward and blood splashes onto her face. Cut to black. With this closing shot, a new vamp is born.

Both *Going Home* and *Dumplings* represent the past (China) with an eerie nostalgia. *Going Home* concludes with a regretful Hong Kong policeman who is moved by an old-fashioned love entwined with Chinese medicine. In *Dumplings*, the borders between China and Hong Kong prove to be elusive, administrative barriers only. As Mei is chased out of Hong Kong for causing the young girl’s death, Ching

assumes Mei's role as the new agent of cannibalism in the city of profane consumption. In this switch, Hong Kong and China are united in horror by their mutual affinity with cannibalism.

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