

PANEL 2 – REPRESENTATIONS

In Face of Globalization, Neoliberalization, Mainlandization: Shifts in Libidinal-Political Economy and Changing Plural Masculinities in Post-1997 Hong Kong

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Before the Asian economic crisis of 1997, the inferiority complex of the colonized Hong Kong male imagined a compensatory reverse colonial desire towards more impoverished regions in China and the West, which found relief through a blown-up sense of economic superiority and male chauvinism. This mainstream myth expressed in terms of capitalism and sexism boasted of out-doing the West and the Chinese colonizers in the capitalist game. These cultural politics were best exemplified by the kind of mainstream Hong Kong masculinity embodied by Stephen Chow and Mr. Smart.

Since the return to Chinese sovereignty, Hong Kong has experienced repeated financial crises and intensified neoliberalization of the market due to globalization. It is losing out against competition from Chinese cities and other emerging Asian economies on major fronts. Democratization of governance is constantly frustrated by Beijing and the local corporate class. Political and socio-economic reforms failed repeatedly in the hands of Hong Kong's default operational logic. Structural injustices remain unresolved and monopolization of wealth and power is increasing. Hong Kong's rich-poor gap is widest among all OECD countries since 2010. Mainstream Hong Kong cultural myths and values have been shaken to the core, which is tellingly illustrated in the changing representations of mainstream Hong Kong masculinities in the media.

Recently released popular Hong Kong films seem to converge in collective soul searching through shifts in the representations of mainstream masculinities and local identity politics. The gender and cultural sensitivity of the generation coming of age in this millennium are represented as different. Cocky boastfulness gives way to the recognition of internal inadequacies and injustices and the respect for hard-earned wisdom and mastery of traditional cultural strengths. Transcultural consumption (Sun Jung, *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption*, 2011), the widened rich-poor gap, and the rise of the transnational corporate class also created new forms of hegemonic masculinities (Michael Kimmel, *The Gender of Desire*, 2005), resulting in plural strategies of redefining quotidian local masculinities in complicit or resistant forms (Sofia Aboim, *Plural Masculinities: the remaking of the Self in Private Life*, 2010). The rise of women's powers, the increasing clout of LGBTQ culture, and the loss of the material base for hegemonic masculinity in the lives of most men, also produced more relaxed and tolerant forms of hybrid, plural masculinities, however grudgingly.

All these shifts in the libidinal-political economy of male desires and body politics and the resulting changing forms of masculinities are reflected in the overturning of film genres representative of the heyday of Hong Kong. *Once a Gangster* is an anti-gangster gangster film. *La Comédie Humaine* is an anti-heroic killer film. *Gallants* is a tribute to unsung kungfu masters past their prime and *Break Up Club* is about a very different kind of mainstream boyfriend.

What can these shifts in representations of masculinities tell us about Hong Kong men's new sense of themselves in the world?