

Hong Kong Youth Cinema: Sexual Openness

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Accepted: March 04, 2013 Published: April 25, 2013

Doi:10.5296/jsr.v4i1.3585

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jsr.v4i1.3585>

Abstract

This paper will examine the depiction of Hong Kong youth in terms of sexual responsibilities. The authors argues if sexual openness truly exists in the Hong Kong community, to some extent it does not bring any severe consequence for the characters in the film *A.V.* (directed by Ho-cheung Pang in 2005). At the end, the discussion extends to the issue of the local film rating system since the bare-breast images take a considerable part of the entire film.

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Keywords: representation of sexuality, sexual openness, comedy, youth film, cinema of

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Hong Kong, Hong Kong**The Synopsis: A.V. (directed by Ho-cheung Pang, 2005)**

It is a story of four university students who ask for government funding to direct their own adult film, to satisfy their desire for a Japanese porn star. The film starts with a conversation among three boys in a café. *Band-aid* (played by Derek Tsang) shares with two friends — *Fatty* (played by Jeffery Chou) and *Leung Chi On* (played by Lawrence Chou) — his sexual experience when he is dating a cyber friend. But when their girlfriends return to the table, the boys change the topic of conversation at once. The girls start to talk about another girl named *Yo Yo*, as they know the boys' friend *Kar Loh* (played by Tien You Chui) wants her to be the heroine of his graduation film. While they continue the discussion, *Jason* (played by You-Nam Wong) walks into the café. When *Jason* joins them, he begins another conversation piece. *Jason* tells them that *Kar Loh* was expelled from the film school because he took advantage of his graduation film to chase after a girl (*Yo Yo*). The four boys try to comfort *Kar Loh* at his hostel, but they watch the film without *Kar Loh*'s permission when he is already drunk, which portrays *Kar Loh* and *Yo Yo* kissing in the lift.

The film inspires the four boys. When the boys sit idle all day at a square, *Leung Chi On* proposes to do something great — shoot their own adult film. The other three boys support this idea. They search ideas from their film collections, as well as a porn store run by *Leung Chi On*'s uncle. Accidentally, in the porn store, they target Ms. *Manani*, a 20-year-old Japanese adult-video actress, as the heroine of their project. However, they discover that Ms. *Manani*'s remuneration is two hundred thousand Hong Kong dollars (approximately twenty-five thousand US dollars). The four university students have little savings, but *Jason* suggests that they should apply for government funding specifically for young residents. The government officer rejects *Fatty*, *Band-aid*, and *Jason*. However, *Leung Chi On*'s project, "egg puff," is accepted and he receives a cheque for two hundred thousand dollars. The four boys try to approach their dream star with their scheme. Ms. *Manani*'s agent (Mr. *Teruoka*) requests a meeting at their office, so they use *Fatty*'s father's office. But Mr. *Teruoka* informs them Ms. *Manani*'s remuneration has increased to three hundred thousand dollars. *Leung Chi On* organizes a meeting at his university and his speech instills the male university mates with enthusiasm. The meeting collects eight thousand, eight hundred dollars per person after his speech, and to acknowledge them for their kindness they are allowed to witness the porn-making process. Now, they have sufficient funding to have their favorite porn star.

Ms. *Manani* arrives in Hong Kong from Japan, and the four boys invite *Kar Loh* to join this project as a film director. The four boys ultimately make their dream come true. Interestingly, they all become pornographic film actors. They shoot at the spare office space and *Kar Loh*'s former film school's professional studio. *Jason* falls in love with Ms. *Manani*, and he receives a special gift from her after their sex in the hotel. *Jason* tries to persuade Ms. *Manani* to quit the business on the last day of shooting, but she just considers this to be her job. They finish their adult-video project and Ms. *Manani* leaves Hong Kong. The film ends with

three interesting sequences: (1) *Jason* goes to a Japanese language school, but he meets the other three boys by the school entrance, and he also notices that each one of them has the same gift given by Ms. *Manani*; (2) Ms. *Manani*'s video accompanied by her narration: "*one of my friends said: when I believe I am so important to the world, in fact, the world just forgives my silliness* (from film subtitle)"; (3) *Leung Chi On* goes for a job interview and he is more confident when answering the question by the interviewee — "*can you tell me why our company needs you?*"

Film Analysis: A.V.

A.V. posits in the most graphic terms that young adults are not concerned with the responsibilities of sex, and in that way it is not a conservative parable. At the same time, with much archness and humour this film examines the inexplicable and unpredictable nature of young adults' behaviours and sex urges. Up to this point the film showcases several portraits of hormonal urban boys, but at the end of the story, their longing for more sex experiences with the porn star does not carry any severe consequence. The four boys — *Leung Chi On*, *Band-aid*, *Jason* and *Fatty* — reach a consensus on targeting a Japanese porn actress, who is much different from their friend *Kar Loh*'s target, a local female university friend. A possible profile for the puzzle of why they target a porn actress may be captured in the traditional principle that they should do no harm. On the one hand, the consequence of being expelled from the university that happened to *Kar Loh* shows them the possible harm to themselves. On the other hand, the ways they choose to act are limited in their negative effects on others, since it is just 'a job' for the 'professional adult-video actress', and they pay for her services. In Hong Kong, this civilised society, it is easy to find complex legal and moral analyses of the meaning of harm and principles of harm. The traditional Chinese philosophy *Tao Te Ching* (Lau Tzu) proverbially enlightens on contemporary practical wisdom. For example, "*Tian Zhi Dao, Li Er Bu Hai*" suggests that with all the sharpness of the way of heaven, it harms nothing to get them. A western scholar, Michael F. Duffy (2011) argues "in our political traditions, not harming others without providing convincing reason is considered a fundamental principle of a civilized society." In Hong Kong, there are also some non-governmental organizations focusing on virtue ethics and moral education, such as the Hong Kong Society for the Promotion of Virtue. This society commits itself to social charities. And, definitely, it involves the matters of funding and donations across the region. Nancy Furstinger (2005) comments "Hong Kong balances old and new, East and West." Therefore, the definition of 'harm' and 'no harm' in this region is the mixture of tradition and modernity that this city offers.

Interestingly, in the film A.V., 'something great' was produced together through their aim to enrich their confidence as a matter of making porn, and the four Hong Kong youngsters' decision on 'engaging' a Japanese porn actress on the surface does not bring any harm. However, they indeed discover the representations of the responsibilities of sex, as John Bancroft (1989) had concluded that 'using sex to bolster self-esteem is potentially problematic'. Seen from this perspective, the authors believe that sexual responsibility has to be considered at two levels: the individual and the community. John (1989) also stated that,

‘It is appropriate to expect the individual to take responsibility as long as the community does as well’. Then, does this film stimulate respectful, thoughtful, and mature discussion regarding sexual responsibility in our communities?

As portrayed in this film, the two plots may illustrate this answer: (1) *Fatty* wins the lucky draw to be the first actor to have sex with the Japanese porn actress but he stops doing it while she moves her head to his lower body as he thinks he is still a virgin and this sexual behaviour is unacceptable; (2) *Fatty* and his girlfriend chit-chat in a fashion shop, and *Fatty* is told by his girlfriend — with whom he has had no sexual relationship — that she is pregnant because of another male. The interesting point is, his girlfriend cheerfully and sincerely shares this pregnancy with him. Their conversation has been translated into text as below (see *Dialogue 1*). The form of sexual constraint is represented through *Fatty*’s refusal and conversation such as, ‘*you thought I don’t want to*’, but at the same time, both *Fatty* and his girlfriend are unable to avoid much of the distress and bitterness that accompanies the breakdown of their relationships. Again, a responsible attitude to parenthood by both partners definitely has not been illustrated, since the girlfriend mentions she has aborted twice and *Fatty* even wants to have sex with this pregnant girlfriend. The two young people’s conversation humorously depicts their personalities and also casual lives, but actual indication shows the real situation of the community, since the Agence France Press (AFP) (2004) reported that Hong Kong holds the ‘highest abortion rate in the developed world’ -- 29.2%.

Dialogue 1

<i>Ah Chi</i> (<i>Fatty</i> ’s girlfriend):	Do you love me?
<i>Fatty</i> :	(With a nod of his head, he smiles)
<i>Ah Chi</i> :	Rather we should break up!
<i>Fatty</i> :	Ah? Why break up? Did I do anything wrong?
<i>Ah Chi</i> :	You have done nothing wrong.
<i>Fatty</i> :	What’s wrong?
<i>Ah Chi</i> :	Actually I don’t want to have this baby. But the doctor advised me that I could not have an abortion since I did twice before. <i>Fatty</i> , you won’t be angry with me, will you!
<i>Fatty</i> :	Who is the baby’s father?

<i>Ah Chi:</i>	Johny.
<i>Fatty:</i>	You mean, Johny, whom I play Mahjong with.
<i>Ah Chi:</i>	No. This time, it's not his. It's Johny who last time repairs the car at the auto repair shop.
<i>Fatty:</i>	Bullshit Johny.
<i>Ah Chi:</i>	Don't get angry. It's not his fault.
<i>Fatty:</i>	It's not his fault, and then it's my fault?
<i>Ah Chi:</i>	(With a slow nod of her head) We're in the relationship for a long time, but it seems that you don't have the desire to have sex with me.
<i>Fatty:</i>	You thought I don't want to? But I feel that you are restrained. That's why I don't request it.

These two plots also indicate non-reproductive benefits of being sexual, some distinction of this film essentially picked up where the *Goo Waak Chai* films left off, with an emphasis on humorous portrait and the opportunities for more sexual stimulation. The Chinese television programme *Entertainment Express* (December 2012) describes the young adults' behaviours depicted in *Goo Waak Chai* films represent the irresponsible nature.

Also, A.V. embraces a considerable number of events and plots which convey the inexplicable and unpredictable nature of young adults' behaviours and sex urges. For instance, *Leung Chi On* spends a little money to bribe a security guard to obtain a place to shoot, and according to the story, each of them is excited to be a porn actor. *Band-aid* suggests not wearing condoms since they have spent so much money for having the Japanese porn actress, as well as, for more sexual stimulation. This is actually highlighted in his conversation time and time again. The four youngsters wear four different coloured bathrobes, and every one of them practices making love. *Fatty* asks whether to wear condoms or not, but the other two youngsters echo *Band-aid*'s hush reply: "*of course, do not wear (a condom)... it was so difficult to get this porn actress... it will be wasted by wearing a condom.*" His expressions indicate sexual urges. The authors believe that this small discussion about 'not using a condom' also embraces the desired arousal-fulfillment pattern. The table (see *Table 1*) below illustrates the detailed linkage between this pattern and the film.

TABLE 1: the desire arousal-fulfillment pattern represented in the film

	Plots/events
Situation ↓	<i>No clear</i>
Objective of desire ↓	They want to do something great together which may symbolise their social values and capacities, and ironically, they may practise irresponsible sexual intimacy.
Desire arousal ↓	Their friend <i>Kar Loh</i> takes advantage of his graduation film assignment to experience real intimacy with a girl whom he likes, and the four youngsters watched the film assignment. After that, these four youngsters want to imitate this practice.
Attempt at desire fulfillment ↓	(1) They accidentally target a Japanese porn actress at <i>Leung Chi On</i> 's uncle's shop; (2) They apply for the specific funds targeting local youngsters from the local government; (3) They search for funds from their university mates, as well as the places for film shooting; (4) They discuss how to perform well in the porn making, and one of the approaches they talk about is to masturbate before going to shoot the porn; etc.
Positive or negative result	For these four youngsters, the result depicted in the film shows no straight negative as they have achieved the dream of porn making and importantly, they have sex with the Japanese porn star eventually; for the leading character <i>Leung Chi On</i> , he shows confidence in a job interview.

Furthermore, the ending interestingly embodies this: their longings for more sexual experiences with the porn star won't carry any severe consequence. The authors believe that: (1) this is because the comedy genre humorously reduces the pathos, reversal of circumstances, and fear, and on the contrary, the punishment for improper behaviour is illuminated with humorous plots where small corrections are made; and (2) also because the value system in Hong Kong does not suggest any severe consequence given to sexual openness.

The film director Pang Ho-Cheung mentioned, in an interview (2007), that it is a comedy for the Easter season. Upon its release, *A.V.* was described as a 'teen sex comedy film' (*Qing Chun Xing Xi Ju*) by some local media (i.e. Mtime). According to Barry Keith Grant (2007), comedy is 'defined or conceived around the intended emotional effect of the

film upon the viewer'. The category might be said to include a wide range of forms: screwball comedy, romantic comedy, slapstick, black comedy, and parody. Then, the term 'teen sex comedy' may be defined or conceived around youngsters' sexual under- and overtones. Jody W. Pennington (2007) argues that 'sexual awakening would remain common in teen films over the next two decades', and Pennington also concludes that a variety of sex-related themes were pursued in teen films through the 1980s and beyond. Over the last two decades, one of the most popular American teen sex comedies in Chinese communities was *American Pie* (directed by Paul and Chris Weitz in 1999). This film concentrates on five boys (Jim, Stifler, Oz, Kevin, and Finch) who attend East Great Falls High. With the exception of Stifler, the friends make a pact to lose their virginity before their high school graduation. The title actually is borrowed from the folk song of the same name and refers to a scene in the film, in which the lead character is caught masturbating with a pie after being told that third base feels like a warm apple pie. Though this film received negative reviews by some of authority media (i.e. the New York Times and the Boston Globe), the authors still consider that this film demonstrates teenagers' perpetration and victimization at the same time in terms of the teens' sex, and a lot of characters are more casual about it than real teenagers might be. Roger Ebert (1999) also pointed out that, in this film, 'humor happens when characters are victims, not when they are perpetrators', and he says 'it observes the rules of comedy'.

Similarly, in the film *A.V.*, the punishment for improper behaviour is illuminated with humorous plots where small corrections are made. The authors argue that this is because the comedy genre humorously reduces pathos, reversal of circumstances, and fear.

Some scholars consider that comedy can figure as a minor element in otherwise more serious materials. Geoff King (2002) states that:

To be clearly defined as a comedy, a film should be dominated to a substantial extent by the comic dimension - and this will be the main basis for inclusion in this study of film comedy - but the exact balance varies considerably from one example to another (King 2002:2).

Gerald Mast (1979) states that 'the comedy either (a) upholds the values and assumptions of society, urging the comic character to reform his ways and conform to the societal expectations; or (b) maintains that the antisocial behaviour of the comic character is superior to society's norms'.

A.V. might well be more banal, less complex, and less serious than a totally wacky film that goes about its silly business without a conscious idea in its head, or in its character's dialogue. The depiction of the characters does not explicitly exhibit 'reforming their ways and societal expectations', but the side effects caused by their behaviors (i.e. purporting to be a pornographic film studio to cheat the Japanese porn actress and her agent, then performing sexual acts with the Japanese porn actress) are represented subtly.

For example, *Leung Chi On* is the specific character that drives the dream of making such a pornographic film from beginning to the end. A few events in which this character is involved throw questions above the viewers' heads. (1) Among the four youngsters, he is the only one whose business plan is funded by the government, but a lack of follow-up action by the government provides the possibility for the youngsters to approach their dream of porn making; why does a comedian act the role of government officer? What is the reason for the invisible 'follow-up action'? *Leung Chi On*'s business plan is to do egg puff, but his presentation becomes a young nationalist's speech as he talks about social anxiety, the local younger generations' unawareness of social orientation, and their despair. It communicates serious values through the comedy itself. His presentation presents a picture of a particular social condition without tacking on a simplistic moral solution to the comic problem, and without telling the viewers to apply the solution to the 'return fund'. So, the authors consider that this is the reason why there is no plot to explain the 'return fund' which is approved for the 'egg puff' project, and then, there is no correction for this cheat. (2) For cheating Mr. *Teruoka* of his porn actress, the four youngsters expect *Leung Chi On*'s uncle to pretend to be the boss of the simulated pornography production house, but *Leung Chi On* pretends to be the head after his uncle has been caught by police for selling illegal pornographic films publicly; can the youngster cheat the Japanese porn star agent? Why is *Leung Chi On* acting as the head? According to the story, Mr. *Teruoka*, even though he knows they are cheating on him, still pretends to agree to give them his porn actress when remuneration is increased. The peripeteia occurs at the same moment when they cheat on him. Indeed, this is the punishment for improper behavior, as the Song Dynasty Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (1313-1905) had pointed out that "*Yi Qi Ren Zhi Dao Huan Zhi Qi Ren Zhi Shen*" (literal meaning: to pay a man back in his own coin; to deal with a man as he deals with you). (3) In the ending sequence, although it is not shown whether *Leung Chi On* gets the job or not, he shows dramatic confidence in answering the question — '*can you tell me why our company needs you*' — in front of the interviewer, and naturally, the experience of porn making boosts his confidence; Does *Leung Chi On* describe his experience in porn making to persuade the interviewer to employ him? The authors agree with this open-ended plot, as there is no point showing whether he gets the job or not. As far as we can see, this film does not aim to demonstrate and guide viewers to apply a similar approach of enriching experiences for passing job interviews. It is a comedy, after all. 'As a result, the most effective film comedies — as well as the most thought-provoking ones — are mimetic rather didactic, descriptive rather than prescriptive' (Mast 1979:23).

This paragraph won't give a direct answer for each of the questions, but the effect of his being on those around him is incalculably diffusive. The growing good of their own world is partly owing to dependence on persistent acts. That things are not so rebellious for viewers as they might have thought is half owing to the sexual openness the characters hold. The authors would like to broaden this argument: the value system in Hong Kong does not suggest any severe consequence given for sexual openness.

According to Donald H. McMillen and Man Si Wai (1994), "... like sexual behaviour, the sexual attitudes of Hong Kong youths are also not as open or liberal as many people might

think ... although an overall picture which finds the Hong Kong youths increasingly open and permissive in sexual attitudes can be drawn, there are items which show that in some aspects they still subscribe to sexual repression and conservatism”. But they also reveal that Hong Kong youngsters are increasingly open and permissive in sexual behavior, and this is an illustration of a universal trend in the modern city. In the space of less than two decades, the ‘truths’ illustrated by them become the historical facts.

The authors conducted survey interviews (see *Table 2*) of 200 Hong Kong young people from 2012 to 2013. This survey targeted young adults aged between 18 and 25 years old in these regions of Hong Kong: Yi Tei (The Landmark), Tai Gu (Pacific Place), Kai Hin (The Galleria) and Tung Lo Wan (Causeway Bay). Zhang Meiyan (2009), in her report, recommended these four commercial areas because of numerous trendy shops, which mainly attract young people. The Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong stated in the late 1980s that ‘care and protection orders’ cease at the age of eighteen years. So, Hong Kong young people attain adulthood at eighteen. This survey attempts to discover how much sexual repression and sexual openness exists among these young adults.

TABLE 2: survey interviews of 200 Hong Kong young people in 2012-2013

region	gender		Subscribe to sexual repression	Agree there is an openness among youngsters about sexual matters
	male (%)	female (%)		
The Landmark	50	50	56%	79%
Pacific Place	50	50	54%	80%
The Galleria	50	50	62%	76%
Tung Lo Wan	50	50	61%	79%

According to the survey (margin of error: $1/\sqrt{200}=0.071$) of Hong Kong young adults, Hong Kong youngsters display their openness on sexual matters. As the data shows, of Hong Kong respondents, 78.5% believe there is an openness among youngsters (themselves) about sexual matters in Hong Kong; at the same time, 58.25% of them admit that they are sexually repressed. These two figures dramatically indicate sexual openness, although sexual repression actually exists in the current context.

The authors attempt to discover the cause of this contradiction. Some of the interviewees’ responses have assumed a range of reasons. Rory Leung (age: 18 years old, region: Tuen Mun), who subscribes to sexual repression, says: “somehow owing to religious reasons — I am a Buddhist, but I will strike a balance, of course”. Another young adult whose

signature is ‘Sky Blue’ (age: 18 years old, region: Tsuen Wan) says: “I am looking for a lover, not sex partner; I mean, love is more important than sex”.

Moreover, the bare-breast images take a considerable part of the plot in *A.V.*, and yet the film is not classified as *San Ji Pian/III-rated film* (persons aged 18 and above only); in fact, *A.V.* is rated as “*IIB*” by the domestic censors. The Film Censorship Ordinance (30 June 1997) defines “*IIB*” as not suitable for young persons and children. Sexual activity may be portrayed, without strong detail. There may be strong verbal references to sexual behaviour, but the strongest references are unlikely to be acceptable unless justified by context. Works whose primary purpose is sexual arousal or stimulate are unlikely to be acceptable. Strong language is not acceptable in a *IIB*-rated film, but some words such “*Diu* (fuck)” are still heard without any subtitles, as the characters on purpose use another similar slang “*Hiu* (noisy)”, instead.

Note

1. Retrieved from <http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/n620941.htm>.
2. Retrieved from <http://hm.people.com.cn/GB/86508/86510/9209039.html>.
3. Interviewed by Fredrric Ambroisine in the documentary ‘Interview De Pang Ho Cheung’ produced in 2007.

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