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Teaching online on borrowed time: Hong Kong protests, pandemics, and MOOCs

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Pandemics create their own time warps, and science as well as science fiction tell us that our subjective perception of time and our biological rhythms miss their usual beats during outbreaks. Lockdowns disrupt routines, eliminate schedules, and limit interactions with people outside the household. COVID-19 creates its own sense of time at the intersection of pandemic chronology and the digital time that now occupies so much of our lives on screen. Some measure time as the progression of COVID-19 across borders, in their own country, community, family, or their own bodies on Google maps and through social media. Waiting for a future vaccine, others tick off the days it takes to get tested, find out results, remain in quarantine, repeating the process periodically. Screen-time sets the agenda for the socially distant. Plugging into the digital world creates another sense of time in which we become more attuned to the global clock that takes us out of our own time zones more frequently. For teachers and students in many parts of the world, this means online education and a dramatically different pedagogy associated with these pandemic times.

In *Wired*, Arielle Pardes writes this about the elasticity of “coronatime”:

> “The virus has created its own clock, and in coronatime, there is less demarcation between a day and a week, a weekday and a weekend, the morning and night, the present and the recent past. The days blend together, the months lurch ahead. And while so much of the pandemic’s impact has landed unequally across geography, race, and class, these distortions of time feel strangely universal.”[1] [open endnotes in new window]

However, that “strangely universal” feeling is a delusion. Coronatime varies across the demographic spectrum. Sara Lindberg summarizes a survey on perceptions of time during COVID-19 as follows:

> “...higher stress levels, increasing age, reduced task load, and decreasing satisfaction with less socialization is linked to feeling a slower passage of time during the day. While younger, more socially satisfied participants seem more likely to experience time passing more quickly.”[2]

Race and class create their own COVID-19 time. In his *History of Bourgeois Perception*, Donald M. Lowe devotes an entire chapter to temporality (35–58), and anyone who has been on the clock for an hourly wage knows that capitalism insists that time is money. Learning that George Floyd had been infected by the coronavirus when Derek Chauvin used a chokehold for eight minutes and forty-six seconds to asphyxiate him brought home the fact that COVID-19 time overlapped with African American lifespans in particularly tragic ways.

Julia Kristeva certainly was not the first to point out the temporal gender divide in her essay, “Women’s Time.” Emily Apter provides her own feminist take on Kristeva’s chronology:

> “... it is precisely the ‘dated’ character of Kristeva’s *temps des femmes* that matters, for it describes the anachronistic resurgence of ‘seventies theory’ in the guise of feminist theory now, itself focused on time and the politics of periodicity. Women’s time in this iteration is no longer confined to essentialist, universalist formulas of embodied cycle, reproductive measure, maternal history, ‘timeless’ ideals of femininity and feminine beauty, domestic labor, or the evental rupture with patriarchal social and political orders. It is identified instead with rethinking (among other topics) causality and teleology; the geopolitics of periodization; ‘deep’ (transcivilizational) time; epochal historicity versus situational, contingent, or provisional eventuality; prophetic time signatures (familiar in contemporary invocations of a “communism to come”); epistemological break; psychic duration and endurance; pastness and futurity (fossil time to transfinitude); and temporal remainders. A recent collaborative project initiated by Judith Butler and provisionally titled ‘Remainders: Feminist Translations in Geopolitical Time’ indicates how time has become indispensable to feminist theory: a component that helps move fields not marked as ‘feminist’ per se (global geopolitics; translation studies) into position such that they become feminist concerns. There is then a “becoming-feminist” of time theory itself” (17).

Although written a decade ago, Apter’s observations remain timely. Confining her remarks to Kristeva’s essay, Apter, however, does not take note of the role time plays in Kristeva’s *About Chinese Women*. Mythic, dynastic, feudal, republican, socialist, matriarchal and patriarchal times struggle in her portrait of women written after a visit to Mao’s China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).

When the novel coronavirus emerged in Wuhan at the end of 2019, some Chinese women marked time by chronicling the lockdown of their city. Notably, Fang Fang’s *Wuhan Diary* originally appeared online as a *Sina Weibo* blog. However, the impact on women’s time extended far beyond Wuhan, and the United Nations notes that women suffer globally:

> “ ‘The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic,’ stated a UN policy brief published in April 2020.”[3]

Cycles of domestic violence, overtime as essential workers in hospitals or grocery stores, home office time on Zoom or other platforms, study time with children online for school, kitchen duty with limited supplies for the newly unemployed, and the endless "second shift" shouldered by women became part of the gendered dimension of coronatime.[4] Women regress on professional ladders as journal submissions from female researchers drop and women put their careers on hold.[5]

Even though Hong Kong has escaped much of the cruelty of the pandemic, it takes its toll on women's time. Quoted in the South *China Morning Post*, Fiona Nott of Hong Kong's The Women's Foundation (TWF) says:

> "Covid-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities and disproportionately impacted women and girls in disturbing new ways—from extra care work and household duties, to financial instability and a heightened risk of domestic violence…"[6]

Nott could add to this the fact that Hong Kong measures its time differently from other places, and what Richard Hughes called Hong Kong's "borrowed time" in 1968 still makes its own mark on women's lives. The colonial status of much of its territory had 1997 as an end date, and its current existence as a "Special Administrative Region" (SAR) of the People's Republic of China stops in 2047. Always looking to the future as a terminal point, Ackbar Abbas characterizes Hong Kong as "déjà disparu," saying: "It is as if the speed of current events is producing a radical desynchronization (25–26)." In 2020, the *Journal of Future Studies* devoted an entire issue to Hong Kong's prospects.

Before the novel coronavirus appeared in 2019, Hong Kong experienced considerable disruption that year, including university closures, transportation interruptions, and teargas fallout, from the Anti-ELAB (Extradition Law Amendment Bill) protests that roiled the city for months. As activists, politicians, teachers, journalists, and medical workers, women played a key role in the demonstrations. From the initial case of the murder of a Hong Kong woman in Taiwan that inspired Chief Executive Carrie Lam to call for a sweeping extradition bill, gender played a central role in Hong Kong's 2019 protest movement.[7] Instances of police involvement in sexual harassment and excessive force against women protesters partially fueled one of the key demands for an independent investigation of the police, and women's time on the streets played a vital role in the strength of the movement.[8]

Protests, pandemics, and Hong Kong time on screen

Throughout its history, Hong Kong's geopolitical time has been disrupted, too, by pandemic time. As a port city connecting the empires of China and Great Britain, at the crossroads of the world, and as Asia's global city, Hong Kong acts as a conduit of goods, services, capital, ideas and disease.[9] The 1894 bubonic third plague, the 1918-20 flu, the 1938 smallpox pandemic, the 1961 cholera outbreak, and the 1968 Hong Kong flu pandemic, to name just a few diseases that also included other avian and swine influenza strains, malaria, and HIV/AIDS, among other infections, all left their mark on the territory.[10] After the end of the colonial period in 1997, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) became synonymous with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, and, now, COVID-19, which makes Hong Kong a sore point as it intersects with a wave of protests that started in 2019 and the intensification of international tensions because of the Sino-US trade war.

Priscilla Wald notes that pandemics give rise to "outbreak" narratives with their own temporality:

> "The outbreak narrative—in its scientific, journalistic, and fictional incarnations—follows a formulaic plot that begins with the identification of an emerging infection, includes discussion of the global networks throughout which it travels, and chronicles the epidemiological work that ends with its containment" (2).

These tales have their morals as well as their allegorical significations, and Hong Kong stories follow a similar pattern with geopolitical overtones. Three pandemic moments associated with political protests left their indelible mark on Hong Kong screens. The aftermath of the 1967 anti-colonial riots overlaps with the 1968 Hong Kong flu; the 2002-3 SARS pandemic ended as the 2003 anti-Article 23 protests flared; and, the repercussions from the 2019 anti-ELAB movement linger during the COVID-19 crisis. The traumatic moments sent ripples through the cinematic imagination of Hong Kong's filmmakers and left their own marks on the ways in which motion picture time constructs historical time in political terms.

André Bazin noted cinema's ability to capture duration as "change mummified" (15). Drawing on Henri Bergson's musings on time and memory, Gilles Deleuze observes film's ability to capture "crystals of time" as time-images on screen. Ackbar Abbas notes that Hong Kong New Wave cinema constructs its own sense of time because of its unique geopolitical status:

> "There is an important relation, then, between the new Hong Kong cinema and the *déjà disparu*: its main task is to find means of outflanking, or simply keeping pace with, a subject always on the point of disappearing…" (26).

He points to Wong Kar-wai's oeuvre, which includes *Ashes of Time* (1994), as exemplifying this, but he is not the only one. Tony Rayns crowns Wong a "poet of time," Stephen Teo calls him an "auteur of time," and Dennis Lim elevates him to "master of time." Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli see his characters as "trapped in the present." Tiffany Ng considers his style as "a meditation on time."

However, before the advent of Hong Kong's New Wave, Patrick Lung Kong wrote and directed *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (1970), loosely based on Albert Camus' 1947 novel, *The Plague*. The motion picture borrows the section headings from Richard Hughes' book, written in the wake of the 1967 unrest and published during the 1968 flu pandemic, for the title of the film that highlights the centrality of time during a plague as before (yesterday), during (today), and after (tomorrow) the outbreak. The film's plot links the anti-colonial riots of 1967 directly to a fictitious pandemic in much the same way Albert Camus used his plague as an allegory of Nazism. As Tom Cunliffe notes, the film suffered enormously from British colonial censorship because of its direct references to the 1967 unrest; however, even in truncated form, it still stands as an incisive commentary on Hong Kong at the intersection of anti-imperial protests and global opprobrium because of the so-called "Hong Kong flu" pandemic.

As an outbreak narrative that implicitly links protests to a pandemic, *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* resonates with Hong Kong's 2019-20 timeline in several striking ways. Although leftwing critics soundly criticized the film for its ostensible lack of sympathy for protesters, the film does capture in arresting detail the outbreak timeline associated with pandemics. From beginning to end, it hits on all industries, government agencies, and social issues that characterize Hong Kong's "borrowed" time in a pandemic. Images of airplanes and ships, as well as panoramic shots of Victoria harbor, confirm the significance, too, of transportation to the territory's economy. City bus tours bookend the film, showcasing the veneer of urban modernity on display for outsiders shattered by the ensuing epidemic. The tour spotlights consumer displays of global brands such as Max Factor cosmetics. A shot of a reservoir serves as a reminder of the water shortages and measures taken to ensure local supplies at the height of the Cold War. The introduction to the city includes shots of public housing built to accommodate Hong Kong's expanding population of refugees as well as a generation that would mark the first time since the end of World War II that native-born Hong Kong people would outnumber immigrants from the mainland. Not on the tour, squatter housing points to the deep divide between the rich and the poor that plagues the city in more ways than one.

Drawing on Camus' *The Plague*, also set in a colony, Lung Kong includes the Christian church in the narrative. Hong Kong operates on the calendar set by the British government, and the epidemic begins during the Christmas season. However, the Chinese Lunar New Year marks the end of the plague and the conclusion of the film, which perhaps points to a postcolonial tomorrow.

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow shows the epidemic moving through all levels of society. Rats intrude on the factory floor of sweatshops and disease breaks out in the warehouses overflowing with holiday ornaments. Members of the informal economy populated by unlicensed taxi drivers and street vendors play a role in spreading the disease. The government is slow to respond, and the media commercialize the rat infestation. Screens dominate the event, and televisual time determines the pandemic timeline. As conditions worsen, scientists take center stage as authorities. The film highlights contributions by female scientists and other professional women on the frontlines of fighting the disease, and this contributes to an impression of Hong Kong's modernity marked by more progressive roles for women. Men, however, still dominate the process and set the agenda. The colonial police guard the quarantine facility and keep the restless detainees from infecting others. However, the climactic stabbing death of one of the police guards points to the chaotic conditions of the outbreak as well as alluding to the violence associated with 1967.

Left to scramble for basic goods with prices escalating as unscrupulous merchants take advantage of the panic, women see themselves as particularly vulnerable. A nurse becomes the first frontline healthcare worker to fall—quite literally—to the disease. In a shadowy long shot, a lone woman represents the despair before the outbreak comes under control. However, a female doctor administers the first vial of life-saving therapy, and the plague comes to a swift conclusion.

Looking back at *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* from beyond the "tomorrow" referenced in the film, the same issues define the times in 2020. Tensions with mainland China over control of resources, border controls, economic inequality, substandard housing, poor working conditions, under and unemployment, a civil service out of touch with social needs, an undemocratic government slow to respond to public sentiment, and the striking contrast between a veneer of consumer confidence and the enduring legacy of colonial inequality connect the film's "yesterday" with Hong Kong's "today." The scramble for basic goods such as rice resonates with the mask and toilet paper shortages in 2020. In 2020, too, the media and scientific establishment, occasionally at odds with public sentiment, struggle to balance government intervention with the welfare of the population. The film also puts its finger on the gendered nature of the outbreak with infidelity, heterosexual romance, domestic duties, and familial hierarchies playing a role that contrasts with the film's depiction of professional women on the frontlines in healthcare, law enforcement, the civil service, tourism, and behind the scenes in the television industries.

Melodramatic excess structures the plot. However, what the film presents as "irrational" violence and drug-fueled crime can be seen instead as what Martin Luther King, Jr. meant when he said, "a riot is the language of the unheard."[11] The 2019 protests, too, frame the ways in which Hong Kong experiences pandemic time in 2020. While the National Security Law (NSL) enacted on July 1, 2020, and ongoing social distancing regulations make public demonstrations difficult, political tensions simmering from the 2019 protests endure. While Kong's film promises a bright "tomorrow," Hong Kong's future, when its borrowed time finally runs out, remains unclear.

In the year before the 1997 Handover, Herman Yau brought pandemics back into the popular imagination with the horrific *Ebola Syndrome* (1996) in which a maniac, played by Anthony Wong, carries the virus from Africa to Hong Kong. A few years after the Handover, SARS hit Hong Kong particularly hard between March and June 2003, and 286 people died from the virus (299 in total by the end of the pandemic).[12] (In comparison, as of October 31, 2020, 105 Hong Kong people have died from COVID-19.) The global reach of SARS inspired Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion* (2011), and the film picks up on the centrality of gender in the outbreak narrative as seen in *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*. While the men eventually save the day in Soderbergh's film, the adulterous Patient Zero, Beth Emhoff (Gwyneth Paltrow), the martyred frontline healthcare worker, Dr. Erin Mears (Kate Winslet), and the kidnapped WHO representative, Dr. Leonora Orantes (Marion Cotillard), among other supporting female characters, weave women into the violence of the viral plot.

During the 2003 pandemic, the Hong Kong Information Services Department rallied some of the most illustrious directors in the film industry to contribute short pieces to an omnibus production, *1:99 Shorts* (2003). While 1:99 refers to the bleach solution used to kill the virus rather than the time allotted to each short, duration plays a part in many of the films. Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's "A Glorious Future" stands out in this regard, since it uses archival photos to allude to Hong Kong's past disasters; its present celebrities contribute brief statements, including stars such as Eric Tsang, who at the time played a key role in Lau and Mak's *Infernal Affairs* Trilogy (2002-3), which spanned the SARS period; and, the "glorious future," to which the title refers, shines throughout.[13] Subsequent films and television shows processed Hong Kong's SARS trauma in various ways, including *Golden Chicken 2* (Samson Chiu, 2003), starring Sandra Ng as the titular prostitute, and *City of SARS* (Steve Cheng, 2003), featuring Eric Tsang, among other popular celebrities.

Massive demonstrations against the implementation of Article 23, a part of the Basic Law that calls for Hong Kong to legislate against crimes of subversion and sedition, came immediately in the wake of the SARS outbreak, reaching a crescendo on July 1, 2003. Documentary filmmaker, Tammy Cheung, chronicles the protest in her film, *July* (2004).[14] These demonstrations, which successfully stopped the implementation of Article 23, set the stage for the 2012 Scholarism Movement against national education, the 2014 Umbrella Movement, in support of universal suffrage and against attempts to limit participation in the election of the Chief Executive, and the 2019 Anti-ELAB Movement, against the proposed extradition bill. July 1, the date of the Handover, remains significant, and Beijing's choice to impose the National Security Law on Hong Kong on July 1, 2020, carries symbolic significance.

Although political protests remain out of the picture, Bo Wang and Pan Lu's *Many Undulating Things* (2019) devotes a section of their essay film to Hong Kong's history of disease. This section revolves around a montage of archival images that exhibits a particular sense of time when seen in relation to the HKSAR in 2020. The film does an outstanding job of linking Hong Kong's colonial history of pandemics to the flow of people and goods between the empires of Great Britain and Imperial China. The story of British explorer and botanist, Joseph Banks, becomes part of the narrative of tropical maladies and racist imagery associated with colonial expansion as seen in the establishment of Kew Gardens, which pays tribute to the power of imperial science to uproot and exhibit horticultural bounty from across the continents.

In another scene, the filmmakers reflect on their own production of cinematic images about Orientalism and biological science. The camera operator and gaffer set up a shot of a bust of Carl von Linné (Carl Linnaeus). This brings the pandemic past into the same frame with the cinematic present and makes an implicit connection between Linnaeus' racial taxonomy of human beings (" melancholic yellow Asiatics" as one of his four groups of humans) and his work on plant and human diseases. [Figure 25] Although not mentioned in the film, Linnaeus' scientific research extended into the question of time. Fascinated by the rhythms of plants, he created a floral clock that bloomed to mark the time of day and night. Of course, time has a racial dimension as well with the "primitive" trapped in the past and the "civilized" at the top of the colonial hierarchy marking progress based on the science of chronology.

The pseudo-science behind many of these theories of race and disease becomes a key theme in this section of the film. In the 19th century, for example, the germ theory competed with the notion of miasma as an explanatory model. This science leads to colonial practices that discipline the local populations. Moving into the twentieth century and the Cold War, the film cites a Hollywood production, *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* (Henry King, 1955), which likely inspired the title for *Many Undulating Things*. In my book on the depiction of interracial romance in American cinema, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction*, I analyze the Henry King film, based on Han Suyin's 1952 semi-autobiographical account of her life as a Eurasian medical doctor in Hong Kong. It chronicles life in the colony in the wake of China's civil war between the Communist and Nationalist forces and the buildup to the Korean War as refugees pour across the porous border between Hong Kong and mainland China. In the film, Jennifer Jones plays Dr. Han and William Holden portrays her married lover, Mark Elliot, an American journalist based in Asia.

Bo Wang and Pan Lu cite this romantic melodrama in order to support their argument linking racism, medical science, and disease in the Euro-American popular imagination. In order to presage the tragic end to their illicit love affair, *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*, as Bo Wang and Pan Lu point out, goes to great pains to create the impression of oppressive humidity, implying unhygienic conditions. The Hollywood film technicians used lighting techniques to imitate shadows cast by overhead mechanical fans and key lights to indicate sweat in the dry heat of the Southern Californian studio in which much of the film was shot. Moreover, both *Contagion* and *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* set parts of their stories in Portuguese Macau, associated with even less hygienic and more "primitive" relationships to death and disease than British Hong Kong.

Many Undulating Things quotes the conclusion of *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* in which Elliott bids farewell to Han, cutting between a view of Hong Kong's cityscape and a small hillock in California, the couple's favorite trysting spot. In his discussion of Hong Kong temporality, Ackbar Abbas talks about Hong Kong in late colonial times as "love at last sight," (23) and this Hollywood image of the barren tree and tiny figure of a woman seen from a distance encapsulates that sentiment.

In 1968, Richard Hughes poses this concluding question in *Hong Kong: Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time*:

> "The real, final question is: how much is Hong Kong worth? And to whom? It is a good question, especially about a borrowed place still living on borrowed time…Whatever happens, it is a question which the Chinese will answer in their own time and in their own way" (171).

Hughes does not mention that the answer had been coming for decades: the 1967 riots synchronized with the Cultural Revolution; the 1968 flu spread with US troops fighting in Vietnam; the 2002–3 SARS epidemic coming from Guangdong animal markets across the border; Article 23 an unfinished part of the Basic Law negotiated as part of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration; the 2019 protests opposed to sending Hong Kong residents to the PRC to face trial; the 2020 novel coronavirus first isolated in Wuhan; and, the National Security Law (NSL) imposed on Hong Kong without consultation on July 1, 2020. Article 9 of the NSL mentions strengthening "regulation" of universities among other institutions with regards to national security, and Article 10 directs universities to "raise awareness" about the law, placing college instructors on a new timeline in relation to the law's enactment.

Teaching online on Hong Kong time

Because of the 2019 protests, the universities in Hong Kong went online for several weeks before the novel coronavirus swept across the border and put classes back online after the Lunar New Year in

2020.[15] Teachers in Hong Kong, therefore, were veterans of remote instruction months before the world embraced distance learning because of COVID-19. Higher education instructors mark their time in academic years, semesters, trimesters, and quarters, reading weeks, spring breaks, office hours, credit hours, classroom timetables, course schedules, due dates of assessments, examination periods, and the cutoff for final grades. While the protests threw Hong Kong teachers off schedule, COVID-19 put us all on a completely new timetable to accommodate students in different time zones, working under challenging conditions at all hours, trying to keep track of learning outcomes in order to ensure the credit hours tallied up. Teaching changed from classroom instruction to live streaming, video capture, webinars, learning management systems, online forums, social media posts, and the inevitable and endless emails.

Offering a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens,* our teaching team, including my fellow instructors Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park and Staci Ford, have been following our own remote teaching schedules since February 2017 when we launched the MOOC on the non-profit edX platform.[16] Staci Ford and I also contribute to another University of Hong Kong MOOC, *Doing Gender and Why It Matters*, also on edX.[17] We routinely use our MOOCs in our face-to-face classes to expand online discussion beyond Hong Kong by including the MOOC learners from other parts of the world[18] as well as by using our pre-recorded lectures and digital quizzes to "flip" our classrooms so that lecture time on campus can be kept to a minimum.

Originally designed to push back against elitism in higher education somewhat ironically inaugurated by professors working at Ivy League institutions, MOOCs have fallen short of much of their initial promise. For example, the lack of access to reliable Internet connections and physical computers maintains a digital wall that keeps many potential learners from taking advantage of MOOCs. Given they are, by definition, not credit-bearing also makes them unattractive to students who need meaningful credentials to further their careers. Institutions, such as the University of Hong Kong, provide content with a small percentage of the revenue going back to the college (not the instructor, who may be compensated in other ways such as a reduced teaching load). Partnerships with MOOC providers help these universities expand into online education globally without justifying the costs to the state and national governments that fund them to provide research and teaching primarily for local students. While many institutions such as the University of Maryland have run robust remote degree programs for decades, most institutions have little incentive to move their programs online. Arizona State University, under the leadership of Michael Crow, has been an exception, and the trend may shift.[19]

However, the MOOC model differs, since its course design favors "stackable" units of six weeks or less, mechanized quizzes, and peer assessments rather than more conventional assignments and direct involvement of instructors with evaluation of student progress. Even though the content comes at no direct cost to the MOOC platform companies, they do not have a steady revenue stream guaranteed by tuition, endowments, or state funding. Because of their parasitic relationship to private and public higher education, most MOOC providers, such as the for-profit Coursera and the non-profit edX, have modified their initial mission and moved into more traditional models for online degree programs. These companies now provide "micro" degrees that can be parlayed into college credit. So, these platform providers move into the territory previously occupied by "open" colleges and universities, providing remote education to students outside of traditional admissions systems for a reduced fee rather than offering completely free and open access to higher education.

Seeing *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* as a course "taster," I had high hopes for using the MOOC to attract great students to HKU, assisting other teachers with their Hong Kong film offerings by providing content based on our research, and using it as a short course to help train graduate students new to the field. Looking at it as a digital textbook, in many ways, I, of course, also wanted to attract undergraduate students in need of inspiration and Hong Kong film fans. My grand plans extended to creating teams of colleagues bringing their students to the MOOC to enrich my own students' education, and, in some rhizomatic fashion, cultivating a collective of film teachers picking lectures, readings, quizzes, and related course materials from a cornucopia of MOOC offerings. Most MOOC learners, in fact, are not students enrolled in degree programs. Rather, other teachers and "lifelong" learners, many with postgraduate degrees, form the bulk of the MOOC virtual student body.

Teaching on MOOC time also brings to the surface the question of gender in relation to time and education. Men dominate the MOOC universe and set its chronology through short courses with six weekly topics, ten-minute mini-lectures, and roughly an hour in total of instructional time for each unit. Originally designed by educators working in STEM, the fact that men set the MOOC clock comes as no surprise when these fields continue to struggle with enormous gender imbalances. One article, in fact, calls MOOCs "masculine open online courses."[20] Given that most people who even know about the existence of MOOCs work in STEM fields, it did come as a bit of surprise when *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* attracted an evenly divided initial cohort of women and men. Although Hong Kong cinema, particularly outside of Asia, conjures up images of "fan boys" and macho-martial arts aficionados as its principal viewers, most researchers know that Hong Kong film has always had a broad appeal. Given all three of the key teachers of *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens* work on gender issues, the consistently gender-balanced composition of learners seemed to reflect the course's pedagogical emphasis on questions of masculinity, women filmmakers, gender identity in diaspora, and related issues. In Fall 2020, this changed, and the course attracted substantially more female than male learners. When thinking about women's time during the pandemic, the flexibility of the asynchronous MOOC may alleviate some of the stress associated with the second and third shifts female students routinely encounter with being at home with children and/or parents, jobs outside the home, moves between campus dorms and other living arrangements, and/or the pressures of being alone and isolated during a major health crisis. Pushed to use the MOOC by the rapid move online seemed to be in synch with the needs of these female learners.

Although not as "open" to nontraditional students as I would prefer, MOOCs fulfill a function and still have the potential to increase access to higher education to underserved groups at no cost to learners. Universities expand their reputations, and students get a free "trial run" of a variety of disciplines across institutions. MOOCs can expand interest in subjects unavailable at some colleges

as well as help students navigate higher education remotely before committing to a degree program. However, while they can supplement degree programs, they are not designed to replace online for-credit programs or remote credit-bearing courses.

The rapid change to remote teaching and learning put MOOCs in the spotlight because of COVID-19.[21] In pandemic times, higher education commentators see MOOCs as having their moment.[22] Many platform providers, including Coursera and edX, opened up courses that had been placed behind paywalls, but with certain conditions. In the case of *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*, edX opened elements of the course that had been limited to learners working for a verified certificate requiring a fee. Our team also agreed to switch gears and, after our regular instructor-led offering finished, keep the course open as learner-paced. This transformed the scheduling of the course. Normally, we open each unit up once a week for a total of six weeks with some additional time given for students to finish up assessments. We cap each week with a round-up video that addresses student comments from the online forum as well as any updates on course topics. However, switching over to learner-pacing meant that all units remained open, no weekly videos were provided, and students navigated the course without a set schedule. As with many forms of remote learning, the added convenience given to the students meant less engagement with the teaching team and a weaker sense of having a cohort of peers engaged with the same material at the same time. As we all know, time and pedagogy are intimately connected, and the pandemic makes this crystal clear to all teachers scrambling to structure the time spent with their students.

In the Spring 2020 term, we highlighted Hong Kong's screen connection to outbreak films such as *Contagion* in our round-up videos. Given the University of Hong Kong boasts key researchers in medical humanities, I turned immediately to my colleagues for support, and, luckily, Ria Sinha, who specializes in epidemics (principally, malaria), agreed to make two appearances to discuss media depictions of the novel coronavirus. We also took on board a local secondary school, Li Po Chun United World College, which includes film studies as part of its International Baccalaureate (IB) program. One Li Po Chun teacher, Linda Olson, who had studied in the Master of Arts in Literary and Cultural Studies (MALCS) program at HKU and written a thesis on Bruce Lee, invited MOOC learners to share their personal experiences watching martial arts films with her on the forum. In Fall 2020, Frances Gateward, California State University Northridge, who had participated in the MOOC previously, joined us with her students. Cindy Wong, College of Staten Island/CUNY, also joined us with students from her Global Media course.[23] In fact, Cindy Wong appeared in our round-up video on Mabel Cheung's *An Autumn's Tale*. The film's New York City setting gave us an opportunity to talk about Hong Kong-New York connections and changing perceptions of the city's Chinatown in light of the pandemic crisis and an increase in incidents of racial violence because of the putative origin of the virus in China. Zoom brought us together across time zones to talk about the past of Hong Kong cinema in the present crisis.

Punctuated by these moments of teaching collaboration across continents and institutional divides, the MOOC came to life in profoundly unanticipated ways when we completely switched to online teaching. Having the MOOC in place with all the bugs worked out long before the crisis meant more time to devote to restructuring synchronous activities (e.g., Zoom sessions). In fact, merging the asynchronous MOOC forum with synchronous Zoom interactions that allowed for students to express themselves visually (on camera/shared screen), verbally (microphone on), in smaller groups (breakout rooms), and in written form (private and public chat function) opened up possibilities for students previously reluctant to participate. For example, Staci Ford observes: "…in the history and film course I do think that students were more inclined to speak up in Zoom chats because they'd been sharing insights on the MOOC forum chat."[24]

Linda Olson notices some striking features involving MOOC and Zoom time for her secondary school students. For example, going online changed the nature of class discussion:

> "Shyer students who would not normally speak in class [were] able to 'take time' to form their words without having to compete with 'quick responders'—[which] allowed their classmates to see their value as resources within the classroom in a way that may not have happened, or would have taken longer to happen, or would have taken more socio-engineering to happen in a f2f format… The confidence built from this meant that during Zoom lesson follow ups / round ups—they were more likely to speak—so *synchronous* discussions were bettered."

Linda Olson kindly shared some thoughts from her students as well, including this example:

> "Being someone who values and loves class discussions, I was not completely sure if I would find an online course engaging and interesting. To my surprise, I did not only find it extremely engaging due to the interviews and 'food for thought' discussions where I could read the opinions of my peers and contribute my own perspective but I also learnt many things regarding Hong Kong Cinema."

Olson also notes that the MOOC provided practice opportunities for students who needed additional support. The quizzes built confidence, but the peer-assessed short essays did more, since they provided: "…motivation to do well, because not only writing for peers, but also for others (unknown) within the MOOC." Using a rubric to evaluate essays written by their MOOC peers opened their eyes to how they could improve their own film analyses. Olson goes on to note:

> "Having gained a theoretical framework for discussion of film as texts—several students have chosen to do their coursework (a 1500 word essay) on one of the films featured in the MOOC (or another film). Others have decided they will write an Extended Essay (4000) words on a film(s). I feel so happy about this."

While students at HKU and Li Po Chun can thrive online, many students struggle with online learning. Cellphones are poor substitutes for desktop computers with decent cameras and microphones. Finding any time in a pandemic to concentrate on new educational technologies can be beyond the reach of students juggling childcare, eldercare, jobs, and the added time needed simply to buy necessities during lockdowns. Time does not stand still even when asynchronous options make virtually attending a lecture possible at any time. Even before the pandemic, my favorite MOOC

moments came when I could interact with my students in class using the MOOC platform to help them engage with international peers. The asynchronous/synchronous teaching rhythm helped me as a teacher face the challenges of pandemic time, and adjusting to a completely asynchronous mode for remote campus courses would have been difficult.

Beyond the virtual classroom, Hong Kong's borrowed time created its own anxieties and obstacles. As the National Security Law came into play, the academic freedom of teachers and students emerged as a salient issue. Digital platforms provide little security for academic conversations that may push the boundaries of what can and cannot be uttered.[25] Students want recordings for review, but they are reluctant to engage in conversations that may drift into politics. Teachers find cameras intrusive, and some fear their videos may be used to terminate their employment. Others insist students turn on their cameras and show their faces with little regard for their privacy or the feelings of others who may share their domestic space. Hong Kong takes its culture out into the world through online courses such as *Hong Kong Cinema through a Global Lens*, but it also opens itself up to possible censure for hosting conversations that may violate the new NSL law.

Conclusion: turning back the corona clock

In the wake of the pandemic, the debate between temporary and more lasting changes to our sense of time rages across fields. Students face a different digital future, and film teachers must acclimate. Cinematic time bends to conform to streaming services and online film festivals. Televisual temporality expands to accommodate the webinar and the Zoom room in its news and entertainment cycles. Teaching face-to-face encompasses flipped, hybrid, and hyflex modes with their own synchronous and asynchronous components, and fully online divides its time into zones of activities and different senses of temporality linked to various software options. New pedagogies follow the times and may offer different ways to assess the pace of learning, progress in an academic program, and intellectual growth. The relative value of these changes in time has yet to be determined. Whether the transformation will take us away from neoliberal privatization and expand on free and open access to higher education remains to be seen. Felix Ringel talks about pausing the "clock of capitalism" as follows:

> "Because the corona crisis has allowed us to experience a very different time, it will be interesting to see whether parts of this new normality, such as home offices and reduced mobility, will remain. But even if it is just an involuntary pause from capitalist times, we should reconsider neoliberalism's temporal regimes of growth, decline and acceleration that have shaped life on Earth."

Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine*, of course, tells a different story of crises leading to increased privatization of public resources, authoritarianism, and less robust democratic institutions. Coronatime pauses the clock for some, but accelerates decline for many others facing unemployment, violence, and greater inequality.

MOOCs stand at this crossroads. They can maintain a vision of open and inclusive education or opt for the monetization of micro-degrees, skills-based certifications, and parasitic relationships with established universities. The digital past, present, and future contains contradictions, and it is up to us to grasp all the progressive possibilities that we can. Hong Kong and its cinema balance, too, on these shifting sands, continuing on borrowed time to stimulate the global imagination of "tomorrow" at the end of coronatime.

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