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**The Most Romantic Relationship between Hong
Konger and Their City: Propp's Morphology
and the Postmodern Feature in pre-1997 Hong
Kong in Chungking Express (1995)**

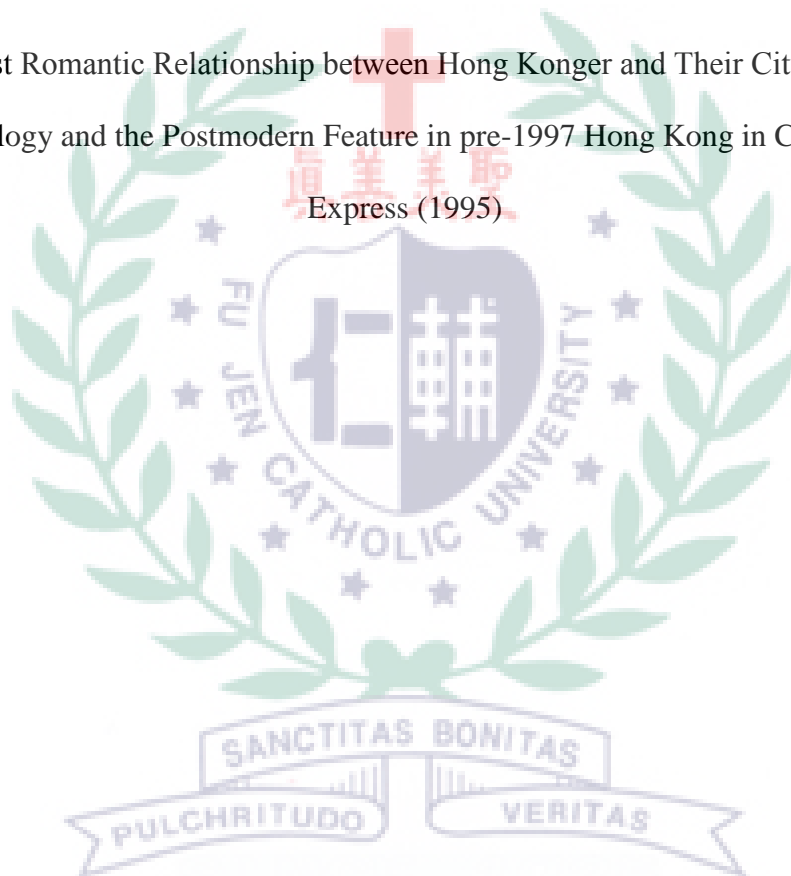
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The Most Romantic Relationship between Hong Kong and Their City: Propp's
Morphology and the Postmodern Feature in pre-1997 Hong Kong in Chungking
Express (1995)



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Abstract

Wong Kar-Wai's films are known for performing the states of modern people in the post-modern aura cities. One of his films, *Chungking Express* (1995), takes place in Hong Kong and depicts two separate stories with four distinctive characters involved, a woman in a blond wig, Cop 223 (He Zhiwu), Cop 633, and Faye. By examining the design of the four characters with Propp's Morphology of characters function and sphere of action, this paper aims to demonstrate the post-modern features in both *Chungking Express's* characters and Hong Kong and their lukewarm relationship before 1997.



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Introduction

Wong's *Chungking Express* is renowned for not only Wong's noticeable cinematic style with unconventional narrative and dynamic cinematography, but also people's struggles within postmodern context. By capturing the image of Hong Kong before 1997, the Handover of Hong Kong, the postmodern features in the film can also mirror the situation of both Hong Kong and Hong Kongers. Therefore, this paper aims to compare the postmodern features of *Chungking Express* and Hong Kong by discussing the narrative design of the protagonists and the historical background of the city's population. Hence, *Chungking Express* reflects on Hong Kong and Hong Kongers before 1997 by the mixture of film noir and romance, the characters with the sense of aspiration and alienation, the anxiety of identity, the fragmented experiences, and the repetitive struggle in the unwillingness of confronting of the irrevocable fact.

Introduction and Summary of *Chungking Express*

Chungking Express is filmed in the year of 1995 and surrounds two spaces in Hong Kong, Chungking Building and Midnight Express. The former one is a place with various foreign cultures and full of disorder, and the latter one is a fast-food stand in Central district.

Chungking Express combines two stories. The protagonists in the first story are He Zhiwu (Cop 223) and the woman in a blonde wig, and they will be mentioned in the abbreviation "Wu" and "the blonde" in this research paper. Wu is a plainclothes police officer, and he firstly shows up and chases after escaping criminal. Accidentally, he passes by the blonde, and he claims that it is the shortest distance that he has ever been with this woman and he would fall in love with her after 57 hours. Afterwards, at the fast-food stand, Wu's life goes on with his loss of his girlfriend, A-May. During this time, he not only makes several phone calls to reach her girl friend's family

members, but also calls for several unfamiliar friends to seek someone to be his companion. After many useless efforts, he decides to buy canned pineapple continuously until his birthday, May 1st, and seeing the date as an expiry date of this love relationship. Simultaneously, the blonde, a drug peddler, works for bar owner and hires several Indians in Chungking Building to help her smuggle drugs. However, after they go through the preparation process and finally get to the airport, the Indians suddenly disappear when the blonde checks in. She turns back to Chungking Building for an endless search, which is in vain. In this isolated and helpless situation, she turns out to become a fugitive due to the failure of the mission, and is chased by a large group of Indians. Finally, Wu and the blonde meet at a bar, and he accosts her. After several drinks, the blonde is taken to a hotel out of her request and to have a rest, and Wu just watches movies and eats salads until the sun rises. As the sun rises, it comes the day, May 1st. In this day, the blonde goes to gun down the bar owner and throw her blonde wig away, and Wu receives her blessing message to his birthday through his pager. The first story ends here.

The second story is about other two protagonists, Cop 633 and Faye. The story begins with Wu's appearance at a fast-food stand. He passes by Faye with his voice-over saying that it is the shortest distance that he has ever been with this woman who will fall in love with Cop 633 after 6 hours. Cop 633 comes to the fast-food stand to buy salads after he finishes his patrol. Faye is working at the fast-food stand, observing Cop 633 as he daily comes to the stand to buy salads. Through the conversation between Cop 633 and the stand owner, Faye gets to know that Cop 633 breaks up with his girlfriend, a flight attendant, who also comes to the stand afterwards and leaves a letter to Cop 633. However, Cop 633 refuses to get the letter back for himself and then transfers to another patrol zone. Faye consequently gets the chance to have the key of Cop 633's house and successfully intrudes his house as she

gets the address. Afterwards, Faye replaces many stuff in Cop 633's house, exploring the house like her secret playground; meanwhile, Cop 633 has conversations with the replaced stuff in his house without being aware of the real changes, expecting the return of his girl friend. One day, Cop 633 accidentally discovers Faye as an intruder of his house, and he turns out to become interested in her and further invites her for a date at California Restaurant. However, Cop 633 does not meet Faye and is informed by the stand owner that Faye has already gone to California and left a letter for him. Cop 633 is again in the struggle to read the letter, and he later finds the letter is a handwritten flight ticket on which the place is blurred because of the rain. After several years, Faye comes back and becomes a flight attendant. Faye unexpectedly meets Cop 633 in the fast-food stand and knows that the original stand owner has handed over this stand to Cop 633. Cop 633 asks Faye if she knows the actual place of the flight ticket, then Faye decides to draw another flight ticket for him. The second story ends here, and it is also the end of the film.

Methodology: Vladimir Propp's Morphology

Russian folklorist and scholar Vladimir Propp analyzes Russian folk tales in order to assure the regularity of tale's narrative form, and he finally makes up a narrative form of tale's dramatis personae. There are 31 functions of dramatis personae in which every incident is related to each other by having causal relationship. In the "31 functions of dramatis personae", there are 7 types of characters whose appearances are corresponding to the functions, and they are the hero, the villain, the donor, the magical helper, the dispatcher, the princess (and her father), and the false hero. The hero is assumed the protagonist, male or female, which the audience will pay much attention to throughout the whole story. As in the opposite of the hero, the villain is the one who intends to defeat the hero; as a result, the villain's obstruct often

makes the hero struggle. As to the roles of the donor and the helper, they function in the similar way to help the hero; the former one presents the hero the magical item that may be helpful, and the latter one serves as a guidance in the hero's journey. As for the dispatcher, it is the one who is responsible to help the hero depart from hometown and start the journey. As for the false hero, this role is the one who secretly imitates the hero and occupy the hero's position. Finally, the princess is whom the hero may fall in love with.; sometime, the hero's pursuit toward the princess may involve the intervention and test from the princess's father. To see how one of the seven roles function in the whole story (see appendix A), the functions of the helper occurs the 15th function "Guidance" which is to help the hero to reach the place, the 22nd function "Rescue" which is to rescue the hero in the chase, and so on. Each function has a clear purpose and involves different characters. Propp provides a formula to analyze the stories and his morphology is henceforth widely used, especially to analyze the Hollywood's narrative formula to distinguish different genres.

Accordingly, Propp's morphology is a stable structure to analyze stories and discuss the relationship between characters. As Wong's film is commonly deconstructed through elements and fragmentation, this paper aims to discover the possible narrative formula and use *Chungking Express* as a context to analyze its potential structure; in the mean time, it is important to discuss the feature of the plot rather than only focusing on the purpose of the Propp's functions.

By concerning the unusual and unconventional narrative of *Chungking Express* and the equal importance of the four protagonists, Wu, the blonde, Cop 633, and Faye, *Chungking Express* will be seen as four stories respectively surrounding the four protagonists. After defining each protagonists' 31 functions of dramatis personae, the characters in the film will be classified into 7 dramatis personae in each hero/heroine

story . These analysis results will be compared to find the similar postmodern features, which become the supporting points of the connection between *Chungking Express* and Hong Kong postmodern aura.

After the analysis on each protagonists, (see Appendix D, table 7) each story can not fulfill 31 functions in dramatis personae, and the analyzed dramatis personae has functions of the 1st functions “Absentation” in the 1st sphere, 3 functions in the 2nd sphere (the 9th “Mediation,” 10th “Counteraction,” and 11th “Departure”), 6 functions in the 3rd sphere (the 14th “Acquisition,” 15th “Guidance,” 16th “Struggle,” 18th “Victory,” 19th “Resolution,” and 20th “Return”), and 2 functions in the 4th sphere (the 29th “Transfiguration” and 31st “Wedding”). As a consequence, the protagonists’ image building and background will be discussed in the 1st and 9th functions, defining their lack and the reasons for pursuing, such as love. The process of the protagonists’ pursuits will be revealed in the 14th and 15th functions, discussing the magical item they get from the donor and the guidance from the helper. The protagonists’ struggle will be analyzed both within the story and under the environmental context. Along with the protagonists’ identities, pursuits, and struggles, these three perspectives reveal the postmodern features in *Chungking Express*, and these features can be connected to the real situation in Hong Kong before 1997.

Except for the dramatis personae analysis, the discussion on the genres in *Chungking Express* will be added as the one of the influential references to form the postmodern aura of the film. Afterwards, the literature reviews of *Chungking Express* will be put together with the analysis of dramatis personae, to see the second-hand data and the first hand data as mutual proof. Finally, the postmodern features will be summed up and compared to the Hong Kongers’ actual situation before 1997.

Analysis on the Implication between *Chungking Express* and Contemporary

Aura in pre-1997 Hong Kong: Mixture of Film Noir and Romance

Wong's *Chungking Express* represents the mixture of film noir and romance to form the unique style by adjusting similar elements in film noir and romance, strong visual style and music, and furthermore depicts the romance in an intangible aura of aspiration and alienation in pre-1997 Hong Kong.

In terms of the conventional and code of film noir and romance, both genres include plots such as the first meeting between the male and female protagonists and the sexual intercourse afterwards, which are adapted in *Chungking Express* the other way round. As to the first meeting between Wu and the blonde, it takes place in a bar where Wu decides to pursue the blonde when the blonde just comes in. However, this first meeting under Wong's portrait is neither romantic as romance nor mysterious as film noir; rather, this scene shows Wu's unilateral willingness to pursue a random stranger and the blonde's internal thoughts through her voice-over. Additionally, voice-over is a common feature in film noir when the two protagonists confront with each other, showing the aura of danger and tenseness; nevertheless, the blonde's voice-over is harmless, non-conjectural, and simply an expression of her emotion. After that, they go to the hotel in which a sexual intercourse is assumed to happen in terms of film noir or romance. Yet, under Wong's depiction, there is no romantic and intimate interaction or sexual intercourse that occurs in the hotel, and what does happen is that Wu eats salad and watch films all night long when the blonde sleeps aside. The aura of aspiration is presented in Wu's eagerness for a love relationship, and alienation is shown in this strange relationship without any progress. Therefore, the mixture of plots under Wong's depiction represents a unique relationship and aura of aspiration and alienation at the same time.

Besides, there are several noticeable elements of film noir included in *Chungking Express*, such as the image of femme fatale and people of color. As for the image of

femme fatale, the blonde is designed with classical blonde hair style and hidden background, and she is also equipped with a gun and shuttle in the space of crime. As for the people of color, the Indians laborer is in contrast to the white boss to construct the conflict between races and economic dominance in globalization context. These two features are commonly seen in film noir as the representatives of the image of dangerous women and racial conflict between different groups.

Regarding to the visual expression and music, *Chungking Express* develops a unique style due to not only the combination of romance and film noir but also Wong's own style. As to visual expression, the blonde is depicted within a series of jump cut, low-key lighting, tense music as she is quickly shuttling in Chungking Building. In contrast to the blonde, Faye is shown in bright light and romantic music as she plays in Cop 633's house. The two contradictory styles are combined in Wong's *Chungking Express* to form a unique aura of aspiration and alienation between the protagonists in the film.

Consequently, the combination of film noir and romance shows the unstable relationship in which the protagonists aspire to love, but alienate it at the same time; however, this unique combination of genres draws the overall picture of the postmodern feature of uncertainty with aspiration and alienation.

The Protagonists and Their City: Marginalized People and Their Anxiety of Identity

In this part of literature review and analysis, the protagonists are depicted as marginalized people constantly with anxiety toward their identity and future.

In a paper on movie analysis, "Postmodern and Wong Kar-wai Film Narrative Strategy," Huang points out the crucial elements in Wong's character building, such as marginal features and the application of voice-over monologue. Firstly, as to the sense

of being marginalized, Wong's characters share three features in common, insecure job, informal or unknown name, and a free state. Taking insecure job as an example, characters are police officer, small shopkeeper, killer, and so on. As to the name, characters are always being referred to as in the contracted name like A-May or A-Wu, or even called by a number like Cop 223 and Cop 633. The abbreviation and ignorance of the name aim to generalize the characters as a certain group in the modern city, to eliminate the specialty of the characters. For the characters' free states, the characters' identities seem to be ambiguous because of the lack of conventional background and wondering from society. Secondly, the application of voice-over invites audience to explore the characters' inner emotional world, focusing on the characters' self-confession and discourse desire in modern cities. Hence, the features of the character building and the use of voice-over strengthen the characters' edge feature and loneliness in the city.

As to the analysis part, the anxiety of identity is presented in *Chungking Express* through the narrative design, such as loss of background and unknown future.

The narrative design, loss of background and unknown future, causes protagonists' anxiety in their sense of belonging. By applying Propp's morphology (see Appendix B, from table 2 to table 5), the protagonists' backgrounds are absent due to the lack of 2nd to 8th functions in the 1st sphere, which is an important part for the audience to be acquainted with the protagonists. Hence, the four protagonists, He Zhiwu, the woman in blonde wig, Cop 633, and Faye, their backgrounds remain unclear to the audience. The characters' building lacks further explanation of their background, such as family, birthplace, education, or even age. For example, the only background information provided by Wu himself is within his voice-over: "I am a cop, and my name is He Zhiwu and coded as 233." The background information about the protagonists is insufficient for both the audience and the protagonists themselves to

identify in detail, and we have no idea where the protagonists may come from.

As to the protagonists' unknown future (see Appendix B, from table 2 to 5), their unfulfilled desire and the possibility of leaving remain uncertain due to almost missing functions in the 4th sphere, which provide a possible direction of the protagonist's future. As a consequence, the future and possible decision remain uncertain. For instance, after the blonde guns down the bar owner, she leaves without saying where she might go. Wu's ending scene becomes the introduction of Faye. Faye and Cop 633's scene ends at the unknown development. As for the end of the stories, the protagonists' stories end abruptly and their futures are all uncertain; simultaneously, the possible future also leaves the sense of the hope and anxiety to both the protagonists and the audience.

The image building and narrative design form the protagonists' marginalized images with anxiety toward their identities and future. In the film, the protagonists can only be recognized as two police officers, a stand clerk, and a mysterious female drug peddler through their dress and workplace. They are floaters, who rarely have full names, and it indicates that their endless wander in Hong Kong city.

The protagonists' Pursuit in the City: Fragmentation and ineffective pursuit

In both the literature review and analysis, the protagonists' pursuits are often depicted in incomplete stories and result in as the ineffective approaches when the magical items and the helpers are unhelpful.

According to a master's dissertation entitled "The Study on Narrative Strategy in Wong Kar-wai's Postmodern Film," Chang reaches a conclusion that Wong's postmodern aura is composed of fragmented life experience and incomplete story. Compare to traditional narration in which the story goes on with multiple dramatic events, Wong aims to compose a kind of aura of the city where loose and fragmented

events are put together in a collage. Hence, Wong's narrative form is like a platter dish and an inserted page, depicting the romance in the city after industrialization.

As to the analysis part, in the film, the protagonists' pursuits are depicted in fragmented life experiences and their effort is ineffective to fulfill their desire.

The protagonists' pursuits, the lost love, are depicted in fragmented life experience due to the lack of complete explanation in the 1st sphere in the introduction part. Regarding the lost love of Wu and Cop 633 (see Appendix B, table 2 and 4), Wu loses his love, A-May, without the explanation of possible reasons for breaking up, and A-May herself does not even appear in the film; as to Cop 633, his love, the flight attendant, leaves and breaks up with him without any sign. Therefore, what the audience can know is fragmented and incomplete story with their first love, and there is no clear explanation about their leaving.

As to the ineffective pursuits, the magical item, the helper, and the unpredictable appearance of the 2nd princess which are normally regarded helpful are somehow insufficient and useless to the protagonists' pursuits of love. The magical items that the protagonists get in the 14th function "Acquisition" in the 3rd sphere seem to be useless and unhelpful for the protagonist to pursue their goals (see Appendix B, from table 2 to table 5). For example (see Appendix B, table 2), as to Wu's magical item, the communication apparatuses such as phone and pager do not help Wu to reach his first girl friend A-May, and the ones he can reach is A-May's family members, an irritating call from his friend, and old and unfamiliar classmates. As for another example of the blonde's magical item (see Appendix B, table 3), she receives the magical item, money, from her bar owner boss and uses it to exchange for the Indian laborers to smuggle drugs; however, those Indian laborers disappear right at the airport and this accident turns out to be the failure of the blonde's mission. Consequently, the magical items that the protagonists gain eventually lose their

function and become ineffective to the pursuits.

Compare to the magical item, the helper in the film also performs poorly and fail to provide any effective assistance to the protagonists. For example (see Appendix C), the stand owner becomes the helper in both Wu's and Cop 633's story, and he always provides several suggestions about their choices. As for Wu, the stand owner recommends the clerk girl as Wu's possible pursuing goal when Wu is in despair of losing his original love (see Appendix B, table 2). Surprisingly, when Wu finally comes to invite the clerk girl to watch a movie, that clerk girl has already dated out with another person, and the stand owner just randomly recommends Faye. The stand owner provides suggestions without specific concern and seems ineffective to fulfill the protagonist's lack of love. For Cop 633, what happens to him is quite similar to Wu, the stand owner here gives suggestion about both food choice and girlfriend choice (see Appendix B, table 4), and the stand owner is also ineffective to satisfy the lack of love of Cop 633. Hence, in the process of pursuing, the helper (the stand owner) fails to fulfill the protagonists' needs or assist the protagonists to reach their goal.

Except for the ineffective item and helper, the unpredictable appearance of the 2nd princess features uncertainty in the protagonist's pursuit. For instance (see Appendix C, table 6), the blonde who is regarded as the 2nd princess later becomes Wu's pursuing goal since the 1st princess is his original girlfriend, A-May. Wu struggles with the loss of A-May and he decides to pursue the blonde when they are unexpectedly in the same bar (see Appendix B, table 2). However, although they finally get to the hotel, Wu finally leaves the hotel without any sexual intercourse with the blonde. Whether they will get in touch again or not and further development remains unknown to the audience, and their final interaction ends at the scene when Wu receives the birthday blessing from the blonde through his pager. As for Cop 633

(see Appendix C), his 2nd princess is Faye, who works in the food stand since the 1st princess is his original love, the flight attendant. Cop 633 becomes interested in Faye after he finds Faye as an intruder of his house, and he decides to invite Faye for dinner in the California Restaurant. However, Faye does not show up and leave a letter carried by the stand owner, and this disappointment becomes Cop 633's 2nd struggle function (see Appendix B, table 4). Both the blonde and Faye present as uncertain pursuing goals in Wu's and Cop 633's lives, and they cannot be understood easily when they appear but later alienate from Wu and Cop 633. It shows that their pursuing goals are changeable yet uncertain toward the protagonists.

Accordingly, the protagonists' pursuits of their goal are presented in fragmentation of lives to quickly assemble the similar experiences of different people; moreover, there is no guarantee toward their success, and their goal seems to be intangible because of the ineffectiveness of the magical item and the helper and the uncertainty of the pursuing goal.

The protagonists' Struggle in the City: Time-space Compression, Confidence in Commercializing Space, and Unwillingness of Confrontation

In this part of literature review and analysis, the protagonists' struggles present in the environment of time-space compression, in their confidence in commercializing space, in their unwillingness of confrontation of irrevocable fact.

As for literature review, regarding a book "The Great Change of East-Asian Landscape: Self-Identity in Metropolis," Huang regards Hong Kong as a city which is highly compressed due to the development of globalization. In globalized Hong Kong, 4 floaters (Wu, the blonde, Cop 633, and Faye) are wandering in the city of capitalism, which is assumed to be the space without limitation and people can succeed with diverse cultures and potential chances. However, the failure makes people struggle

without clearly understanding the limitation. For example, in the film, the blonde's failure of smuggling drug exposes the unpractical fantasy that dream can easily come true in the city of globalization. She has gone through three places: bar, Chungking Building, and airport; however, these places finally disappoint her as she could not totally control every condition and exclude the risk. Except for her, other characters wander in other globalized space, such as convenience stores and fast-food stands, respectively struggling on their own.

In terms of the analysis part, the protagonists' struggles in the city are presented in their confidence in commercializing space and unwillingness of confrontation, however, their uneasiness of struggle can hardly be solved or relieved with the environment of the city.

As to the protagonists in *Chungking Express*, the blonde, Wu, Cop 633, and Faye, although lots of functions of dramatis personae are missing, the function "struggle" is encountered by all of them within their stories. Specially, confidence in commercializing space is the unique one showed in both Wu's and Cop 633's stories. As to Wu's struggle (see Appendix B, table 2), the canned pineapple becomes the important object to which Wu can confide his heart. Canned pineapple means a lot to Wu in his struggle, such as his girl friend's favorite food and Wu's own promise to keep buying and give up until the date, May 1st. Wu unilaterally relies his hope and faith on the canned pineapple and wishes the love between A-May and him will not expire like those dates posted on the canned pineapple. As for Cop 633 (see Appendix B, table 4), except for that he confides his thought to the various things in his house, such as soap, clothes, dolls, and towel, he also relies his faith to Cook Salad which he buys from the fast-food stand. Cook Salad functions in a similar way as canned pineapple does. Cook Salad is the food that Cop 633 always buys for his girlfriend; however, when he buys other flavors by adopting the stand owner's suggestion, his

girlfriend's love also changes to another person instead of Cop 633. With the sudden leave of his girlfriend, Cop 633 buys no more salad and just asks for a cup of coffee for him to ponder on. Both canned pineapple and Cook Salad become representatives of their girlfriend and their faith in love; however, life eventually disappoints them when these commodities in the city seem to be unreliable as their relationship.

As to the protagonists' unwillingness of confrontation, the irrevocable fact is shown in the narrative design of canned pineapple's expiry date and Cop 633's unwillingness to open the letter. In Wu's story, Wu determines to collect canned pineapple until May 1st. He sees the date, also his birthday, as the expiry date of this love relationship between A-May and him. However, it is only a promise that was made by himself without any negotiation with A-May, and anyhow A-May has actually broken up with him. It is a date used to comfort him and postpone the time for him to face the truth. Compare to Wu, Cop 633 deals with the similar unwillingness to confront the fact of breaking up when he is reluctant to open the letter. The letters appear in his two different stages of struggle (see Appendix B, table 4); the former one as a breaking up message is left by his first girlfriend (the flight attendant), and the second one is left by Faye. When Cop 633 gets the letters in two different scenes, he purposely waits quietly and slowly in a long shot, and his reaction shows his reluctance to face the truth that is later revealed in the letters. However, both Wu's and Cop 633's struggle to postpone the time for their confrontation is in vain and unhelpful to turn back the truth of breaking up.

Hence, the commercializing space due to time-space compression cannot easily satisfy the protagonists' lacking love and disappointment in struggles, and their struggle can only occur repeatedly when they are difficult to confront and accept the irrevocable truth.

Literature Review about Hong Konger's Self-Identity and Anxiety before 1997

In terms of the definition of Hong Konger, in a journal article “The Hong Kong Chinese's identity: Transformed Attitude before and after 1997” Zheng and Huang elaborates the definition of Hong Konger from Hong Kong's historical and colonial background. Hong Kongers are the mixture of refugees from China from the 1940s to 1980s and new generation born in the 1960s and 1970s. As to the former, the refugees flee to Hong Kong due to famine and persecution caused by endless wars and multiple political revolutions. They question their identity and nationality because of having been in Hong Kong for a long time and colonial government's de-ethnicization to weaken China's influence through the arrangement of education, policy, and promotion. Compare to the refugees, new generation lives in an environment with new education and colonial policy. Because of regional limitation and vulgar impression on people in China, the new generation identifies themselves as Hong Konger rather than Chinese in China.

According to the master's dissertation “The Study on Narrative Strategy in Wong Kar-wai's Postmodern Film,” Chang explains the anxiety of Hong Kongers' identity before 1997. Hong Kongers start to be proud of being Hong Konger due to significant economic growth in 1980s. However, as the Handover date of July 1st in 1997 is set up in the negotiation between China and the UK in 1984, Hong Konger again question their identity because of its colonial history, and the rupture and isolation from traditional culture make Hong Konger be short of national identity and the sense of belonging. Simultaneously, capitalistic Hong Konger has the fear toward the communist political power and the uncertain future development from both politics and economics aspects. The anxiety of identity becomes more complex and confusing to Hong Konger before 1997.

Due to the influence of their historical background, Hong Kongers are anxious

toward their self-identities, and they lead fragmented lives and cultural experiences with indecisive mental state towards the unknown future after 1997.

The Similar Postmodern Features of the Protagonists in *Chungking Express* and Hong Kongers Before 1997

From the finding features in the analysis of genre, character, pursuit, and struggle, *Chungking Express* reveals the mixture of aspiration and alienation, the marginalization and anxiety toward self-identity, the fragmentation and ineffective pursuits, and the repetitive struggles and unwillingness of confrontation in commercializing space. These features are corresponding to the situation of Hong Kongers before 1997.

Firstly, the sense of aspiration and alienation can reflect Hong Kongers' mental states toward the Handover of Hong Kong. This unique combination of genres draws the overall picture of Hong Kongers' complex living environment and indecisive mental states when confronting the uncertain future after the Handover.

Secondly, the marginalization and anxiety toward self-identity presented through the narrative design are consistent with the anxiety of Hong Konger before 1997. Because of its colonial history, the rupture and isolation from traditional culture make Hong Konger be short of national identity and sense of belonging (Chang 6).

Comparing to Hong Kongers, everything in film related to the protagonists' identities are ambiguous, and the protagonists live out the unusual lives without conventional background (Huang). Therefore, in response to the upcoming future of the Handover in 1997, even though they are afraid of Handover because of uncertain political state, they still expect the date due to the eagerness to fulfill the sense of identity and belonging.

Thirdly, the fragmentation and ineffective pursuits are corresponding to the

livelihood with fragmented cultural experience and the indecisive mental state of Hong Kongers before 1997. Because of the policy, Hong Kongers from China live in an environment where Chinese traditional culture is intentionally weakened. Hence, they live the life with fragmented culture, such as conventional Chinese culture before leaving the motherland, the Western culture from British government, and Hong Kong culture with policy of de-ethnicization of decreasing influence of China. Furthermore, as the immigrants move from China to Hong Kong, they regard Hong Kong as a temporary shelter rather than permanent domicile. However, the havoc of Cultural Revolution from 1967 to 1977 makes the immigrant Hong Kongers hesitate and wonder the eagerness of returning to China. As the date of the Handover of Hong Kong is approaching, some of Hong Kongers have hopes but simultaneously the fear of the political and economic prospect after politically regressing to China. Overall, the fragmentation and ineffective pursuits in film reflect the Hong Kongers' fragmented culture experience and indecisive mental state before 1997.

Last, the repetitive struggles and unwillingness of confrontation in commercializing space are accordant to the situation of Hong Kongers before 1997. In this commercializing city, canned pineapple represents as a classical commodity of commercializing city that it can be preserved in a can and transported from country to country; at the same time, Cook Salad features a kind of fast food, which can be taken out in an instance. Therefore, the protagonists' struggles on these commodities in commercializing Hong Kong reveal the fast and quick fluidity of relationship in which the protagonists cannot fully rely on. To see the situation of Hong Kongers before 1997, the allotted date is a sensitive term before 1997, which is the Handover date of Hong Kong. The concept of the allotted date repeatedly appears in the film through the date on the canned pineapple and Wu's voice-over, and it not only symbolizes Wu's love relationship, but also exhibits the feature of commodities in

commercializing space and Hong Kongers' anxiety toward the date of Handover. Both the protagonists in the film and Hong Konger before 1997 show their anxiety toward the uncertain future after the Handover and unwillingness to confront with the truth of the destined change.

As a consequence, the features in *Chungking Express* create the atmosphere of Hong Kongers in pre-1997, such as the indecisive mental states, the anxiety toward identity and belonging, the fragmented culture experience, and the unwillingness to confront with the truth of the destined change when the date of the Handover is approaching.

Discussion

By applying Propp's morphology, there are three noticeable findings, such as the lack of past and future of the protagonists, the ineffective item and helper, and the great emphasis on the struggling process, which collectively form the aura of uncertainty and mutability and reflect the Hong Kongers' anxiety in pre-1997. However, the application of morphology is limited to classify and identify the events' function in the film, rather than going deep to the meaning and the symbol of each event. Hence, this paper is not fully relying on Propp's morphology only to classify the functions, but to discuss the selected plots with similar functions and explore the meaning in-depth.

Conclusion

Both the protagonists in *Chungking Express* and Hong Konger before 1997 share features of anxiety towards identity, fragmented lives experiences, and indecisive mental state towards uncertain future after 1997. These features are interweaving and mutually affected with each other from the aspects of genre, character building,

process of pursuit, and repetitive struggle. However, it is not to use these features to claim *Chungking Express* as a political metaphor toward the Handover of Hong Kong, but to see Wong's *Chungking Express* as an example of depicting both the state of people and their city. Namely, it is not to claim the intention of director, but to see film and its contemporary as two subjects, which can mutually interact and contrast with each other. Therefore, the film is empowered to capture the intangible feelings of people and the city through Wong's unique narrative and cinematography.



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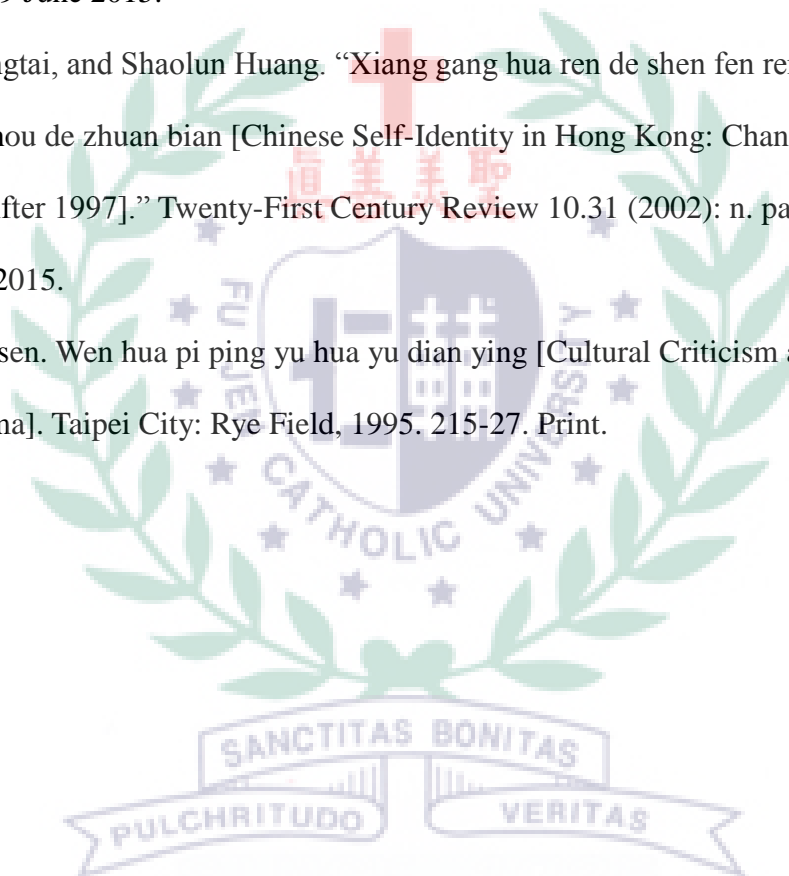
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Appendix A: Propp's Morphology: 31 functions of dramatis personae

Table 1. Propp's 31 functions of dramatis personae

1 st Sphere: Introduction	1. Absentation: Someone goes missing
	2. Interdiction: Hero is warned
	3. Violation of interdiction
	4. Reconnaissance: Villain seeks something
	5. Delivery: The villain gains information
	6. Trickery: Villain attempts to deceive victim
	7. Complicity: Unwitting helping of the enemy
2 nd Sphere: The Body of the Story	8. Villainy and lack: The need is identified
	9. Mediation: Hero discovers the lack
	10. Counteraction: Hero chooses positive action
3 rd Sphere: The Donor Sequence	11. Departure: Hero leave on mission
	12. Testing: Hero is challenged to prove heroic qualities
	13. Reaction: Hero responds to test
	14. Acquisition: Hero gains magical item
	15. Guidance: Hero reaches destination
	16. Struggle: Hero and villain do battle
	17. Branding: Hero is branded
	18. Victory: Villain is defeated
	19. Resolution: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved
4 th Sphere: The Hero's Return	20. Return: Hero sets out for home
	21. Pursuit: Hero is chased
	22. Rescue: pursuit ends
	23. Arrival: Hero arrives unrecognized
	24. Claim: False hero makes unfounded claims
	25. Task: Difficult task proposed to the hero
	26. Solution: Task is resolved
	27. Recognition: Hero is recognised
	28. Exposure: False hero is exposed
	29. Transfiguration: Hero is given a new appearance
	30. Punishment: Villain is punished
	31. Wedding: Hero marries and ascends the throne

Appendix B: Propp's 31 functions of dramatis personae in the stories of He Zhiwu,
the woman in blonde wig, Cop 633, and Faye

Table 2. Functions of dramatis personae in the story of He Zhiwu

		He Zhiwu, Cop 223 (He Zhiwu will be mentioned in the abbreviation of "Wu," and the woman in blonde wig will be in abbreviation of "the blonde")
1 st Sphere	Plot Description	
	Analys is	1. Absentation: Someone goes missing
		9. Mediation: Hero discovers the lack
Plot Description		
2 nd Sphere	Analys is	10. Counteraction: Hero choose positive/negative action
		11. Departure: Hero leave on mission
	Plot Description	
3 rd Sphere	Analys is	14. Acquisition: Hero gains magical item
		Plot Description
	Plot Description	

Analyses	15. Guidance: Hero reach destination	As Wu encounters the difficulties to find someone to accompany with, the stand owner serves as the helper to offer another possible direction or solution.
Plot Description		Wu keeps seeking any possibility of A-May's back through pager and phone call; simultaneously, he struggles in admitting the failure of this relationship by buying pineapple cans and running or turns to look for another girl.
Analyses	16. Struggle: Hero and villain do battle	<p>Although there is not a certain villain, by means of analyzing his different ways in struggling, the villain can be regarded as invisible one, which is failure in love relationship or rejection.</p> <p>Wu's struggles can be categorized as</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pursuit: Seeking A-May's back 2. Relief: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Buying pineapple cans until the expiry date, May 1st, Wu will regard this relationship is also expired. b. Running until sweat dripping off his body 3. Turning the attention away: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Seeking the 2nd A-May b. Seeking a woman (the blonde) in bar
Plot Description		Wu neither gets A-May back nor starts out a new relationship; however, he gets a birthday blessing from the blonde which becomes his emotional sustenance to rely his love and hope on.
Analysis	18. Victory: Villain is defeated	Although Wu's villain of failure in love relationship and rejection from other people is not really defeated, he temporarily relieves because of a rare (the only) feedback from the blonde.

		19. Resolution: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved	Wu's lack of love is temporarily fulfilled by the blessing from the blonde; however, Wu's struggle is not finished yet.
4 th Sphere	Plot Description		Wu packs his running shoes and order a cup of coffee in the stand, and the stand owner recommends Faye.
	Analysis	20. Return: Hero sets out for home	Whether Wu is return depends on whether he is continuing his pursuit for a relationship or not. Running shoes indicates running is the temporarily solution for him. However, whether Wu will start out his mission or not remains unknown since it is the end of his story in the film.



Table 3. Functions of dramatis personae in the story of the woman in blonde wig

		Heroin	The woman in blonde wig (The woman in blonde wig will be mentioned in the abbreviation of “the blonde,” and He Zhiwu will be in abbreviation of “Wu”)
1 st Sphere	Plot Description		The blonde firstly appears in the bar and accept a bag of money from bar owner.
	Analyses	9. Mediation: Hero discovers the lack	Although there is no indication for the blonde’s motivation to work for bar owner, the lack of the sense of security is later on exposed through the voice-over from the blonde. The lack of security can be fulfilled through getting money or getting mission completed. Security becomes the prince, and the lack of security becomes the villain. The bar owner here serves as the donor for offering the magical item, money.
2 nd Sphere	Plot Description		The blonde shuttles in Chungking Building, hiring a group of Indians and arranging the preparation process for drug smuggling.
	Analyses	10. Counteraction: Hero choose positive/negative action	The blonde takes a positive action to devote herself in drug smuggling.
		11. Departure: Hero leave on mission	She goes on her mission without leaving this city.
3 rd Sphere	Plot Description		The blonde comes to a group of Indians and hires them by giving cash.
	Analyses	14. Acquisition: Hero gains magical item	The blonde already gets the magical item from the bar owner, and now she uses money to exchange labors.
	Plot Description		The Indians agrees to have this deal with the

		blonde.
Analyses	15. Guidance: Hero reaches destination	The Indians here serve as the helper and become the tool for the blonde to smuggle drug, helping the blonde to finish her mission.
	Plot Description	The blonde brings a group of uncontrollable Indians to go purchase and pack drug. When they finally reach the airport to smuggle drug, the Indians just disappear. She comes back to Chungking Building to chase them back; however, as she fails to get them back in the permitted time, she turns to be the one who is being chased after.
Analyses	16. Struggle: Hero and villain do battle	There is no a certain villain right at the beginning; however, the sense of uneasiness and the lack of security are noticeable from the blonde. As the permitted date is expired, the bar owner becomes the villain to have a bunch of people to chase after the blonde. The blonde's struggles to shrug off uneasiness and the bar owner can be categorized as 1. Pursuit of money: a. Drug smuggling and hiring the Indians b. Chasing the Indians back c. Kidnapping an Indian's daughter 2. Pursuit of security a. Escaping from the haunt of the Indians
	Plot Description	The blonde gives vital shots to the bar owner, and she takes off her blonde wig and leaves it on the ground.
Analyses	18. Victory: Villain is defeated	The villain (the bar owner) is defeated.
	19. Resolution: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved	The sense of security is temporarily fulfilled since there is no urgent danger surrounding the blonde.
4 th Sphere	Plot description	The blonde's story ends here without further description.

	Analyses	20. Return: Hero sets out for home	The blonde's original mission of drug smuggling no longer exists, and the sense of security is temporarily fulfilled. However, her future is unknown in the film.
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Table 4. Functions of dramatis personae in the story of Cop 633

	Hero		Cop 633
1 st Sphere	Plot Description		Through Cop 633's purchase and conversation with the stand owner at the fast food stand, the information of breaking up with his girl friend is revealed.
	Analys is	1. Absentation: Someone goes missing	Cop 633's girl friends, the flight attendant, breaks up with him. The flight attendant is Cop 633's princess who he wants to get back.
		9. Mediation: Hero discovers the lack	The loss of his girl friend is Cop 633's lack of love.
2 nd Sphere	Plot Description		The flight attendant once comes back and hands the letter to the stand owner; however, Cop 633 is unwilling and rejects to get the letter.
	Analys is	10. Counteraction: Hero choose positive/negative action	In terms of the attempt to get his girl friend back, Cop 633 takes a negative action by not accepting the letter.
		11. Departure: Hero leave on mission	By not facing the fact that the flight attendant has broken up with him, Cop 633 chooses to wait in his routine life as a cop without leaving the city.
	Analys is	14. Acquisition: Hero gains magical item	Faye here serves as the donor to give the magical item, the letter, to Cop 633. However, Cop 633 rejects it.
	Plot Description		After knowing the letter from the flight attendant, Cop 633 stays at home for a while and further transfer to another place and patrol. Faye always meets him during the lunchtime when she drags a basket of vegetable; at the same time, through the conversation with Cop 633, Faye gets to know the address of Cop 633's house and

		intrudes into his house. Simultaneously, Cop 633 always has a feeling that his girl friend is back to his house.
	Analyses	16. Struggle: Hero and villain do battle There is no a specific villain who causes Cop 633's struggle; however, he struggles to accept the fact that his girl friend has already left him. The villain here can be regarded as the change in his life, which he refuses to accept (including the real change in his house). His struggle can be categorized as 1. Staying in daily routine: Regularly having the lunchtime and patrol 2. Ignoring the changes in his house: His conversation with things in his house, such as soap, towel, and dolls 3. Hope for his girl friend's back: Rushing back to his house
1 st Sphere	Plot Description	Cop 633 accidentally finds the intruder, Faye, in his house, and he suddenly realizes that the changes in his house are done by Faye. He turns to pursue Faye, who he has observed for a while.
	Analyses	9. Mediation: Hero discovers the lack Cop 633's lack is out of the loss of his girl friend, and he realizes that maybe Faye can fulfill his lack. Faye becomes his 2 nd princess.
2 nd Sphere	Plot Description	Cop 633 comes to the fast food stand to ask the letter which is left by the flight attendant, and then he further asks Faye to go on a date with him at California Restaurant tomorrow night.
	Analyses	10. Counteraction: Hero choose positive/negative action Cop 633 takes a positive action to pursue Faye by inviting her to go for a date, and he cleans up the stuff of the flight attendant.

		11. Departure: Hero leave on mission	Cop 633 again starts out to go for his mission to pursue Faye.
	Plot Description		Cop 633 waits Faye in California Restaurant; however, Faye does not show up in the end. The stand owner comes and gives Cop 633 a letter from Faye, recommending Cop 633 another girl, A-May.
	Analyses	14. Acquisition: Hero gains magical item	The stand owner serves as the donor who brings the magical item, the letter, to Cop 633; in the meanwhile, he serves as the helper to give a possible solution by recommending a girl to Cop 633.
	Plot Description		After unexpectedly meeting the flight attendant in the convenient store, Cop 633 throws the letter away then takes it back until it rains.
	Analyses	16. Struggle: Hero and villain do battle	Cop 633 again struggles in accepting the fact that he is abandoned again. He wonders whether to open the letter or not. 1. The confirmed abandonment: The flight attendant has another boyfriend 2. The missing chance: The letter he gets from Faye is actually a handwriting flight ticket; however, the meeting place is blurred due to the rain.
	Analyses	18. Victory: Villain is defeated	Whether the villain (not accepting the changes in life) is defeated or not remains unknown.
		19. Resolution: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved	The lack of love relationship is not fulfilled yet. The lack is solved or not depends on whether Cop 633 is continuing the pursuit of love or not. Hence, it also remains unknown.
4 th Sphere	Plot Description		Cop 633 unexpectedly finds out that Faye comes back to the fast food stand in the dress of flight attendant, and he asks the place written on the wet flight ticket. Faye decides to write another flight ticket for Cop 633.

Analysis	20. Return: Hero sets out for home	This is the counterpart of the departure to wait for the first flight attendant's back. However, the return part lacks due to the disappearance of original motivation. (Cop 633 turns to Faye rather than focusing on the first flight attendant.)
	29. Transfiguration: Hero is given a new appearance	Cop 633 becomes the stand owner and frees himself from the life with regular routine.
	31. Wedding: Hero marries and ascends the throne	Faye writes another flight ticket for Cop 633, and it indicates the possible love relationship for them.

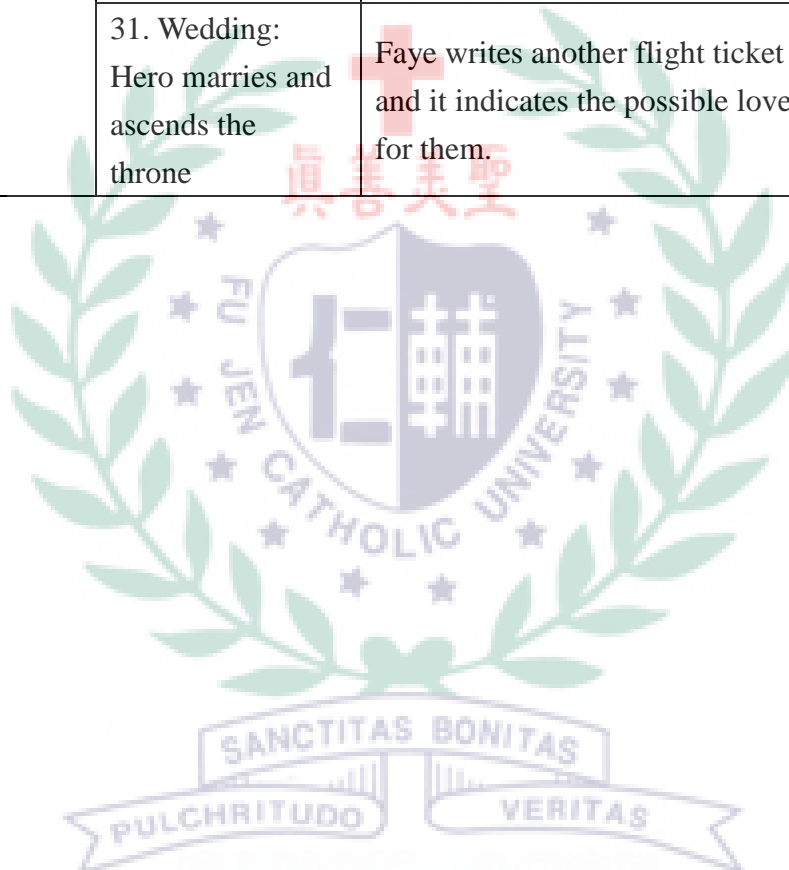


Table 5. Functions of dramatis personae in the story of Faye

	Heroin	Faye
1 st Sphere	Plot Description	Faye likes to have loud music playing when she is working in the fast food stand, and she says to Cop 633 that the loud music makes her no need to think. She also does not know what she really likes when Cop 633 asks about it.
	Analyses 9. Mediation: Hero discovers the lack	Cop 633 reveals Faye's lack of goal in life through their conversation. Cop 633 becomes Faye's goal (the prince) as she has crush on him.
2 nd Sphere	Plot Description	After Faye knows the fact that Cop 633 is transferred to another patrol zone as she meets him at the marketplace, she meets him many times and even intrude his house with key and information of his address.
	Analyses 10. Counteraction: Hero choose positive/negative action	Faye chooses to take a positive action as she actively meets Cop 633.
	Analyses 11. Departure: Hero leave on mission	Faye goes on her mission by approaching Cop 633 and intruding his house.
	Analyses 14. Acquisition: Hero gains magical item	Faye gains two magical items, key and address, from the flight attendant and Cop 633 who unconsciously become the donor.
	Plot Description	Faye keeps meeting Cop 633 in the marketplace; in the meanwhile, she intrudes his houses, exploring, playing, and changing the stuff in his house.
	Analyses 16. Struggle: Hero and villain do battle	Anyone who possibly attracts Cop 633 can be Faye's villain, including the flight attendant. Even though the flight attendant

			<p>has left, her influence and importance to Cop 633 still threatens her. (eg. When Faye finds a long hair on Cop 633's bed, she cries aloud.)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obstruction: Preventing Cop 633 from developing relationships with other girls 2. Progressing Occupation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. First of all, Faye just plays in Cop 633's house as exploring in a playground. b. Secondly, she gradually replaces the supplies with ones she brings. c. Thirdly, she aggressively takes control of his house and life, such as putting sleeping pills in the bottle.
	Plot Description		Cop 633 finds the intruder, Faye, and realizes that it is Faye, who does all changes in his house. Cop 633 then actively asks Faye to have a date with him.
	Analyses	18. Victory: Villain is defeated	Villain is defeated since Faye has successfully got Cop 633 attention.
		19. Resolution: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved	The lack is resolved since she also wins Cop 633 interest.
4 th Sphere	Plot description		However, Faye does not meet Cop 633 but chooses to go to the real California instead of the California Restaurant. The only thing she leaves is the handwriting flight ticket. After a period of time, she comes back as a flight attendant.
	Analyses	20. Return: Hero sets out for home	This is the counterpart of the departure. However, this return part does not totally correspond to the previous part since the journey she takes to California does not correspond to her pursuit of Cop 633.
		29. Transfiguration: Hero is given a new appearance	Faye has a new appearance, as she becomes a flight attendant.

	31. Wedding: Hero marries and ascends the throne	As she comes back and accidentally meets Cop 633 in the fast food stand, she decides to write another flight ticket which indicates the possible development of the relationship with Cop 633.
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Appendix C: 7 characters in the stories of He Zhiwu, the woman in blonde wig, Cop 633, and Faye.

Table 6. 7 characters in the stories of He Zhiwu, the woman in blonde wig, Cop 633, and Faye.

The hero/heroine	He Zhiwu (Wu), Cop 223	The woman in blonde wig (The blonde)	Cop 633		Faye
The princess/prince	Love relationship (A-May, the 2 nd A-May, and the blonde)	Security (can possibly be fulfilled by money)	The flight attendant	Faye	Cop 633
The villain	Failure in love relationship/rejection	The lack of security The bar own (becomes villain when the blonde's mission is failed.	The changes in life (The break-up/abandonment)		The flight attendant Anyone who has interest in Cop 633
The donor	Hong Kong, the city (offers communication apparatuses, like pager and phone)	The bar own (offers money)	Faye (gives the letter from the flight attendant)	The stand owner (gives the letter from Faye)	The flight attendant Cop 633 (gives the key and address)
The helper	The stand owner (suggests possible solution)	The Indians (helps smuggling drug)	The stand owner (suggests possible solution)		X
The dispatcher	X	X	X	X	X
The false hero/heroine	X	X	X	X	X

Appendix D: Adjusted dramatis personae of *Chungking Express*

Table 7. Propp's 31 functions of dramatis personae

1 st Sphere: Introduction	1. Absentation: Someone goes missing
2 nd Sphere: The Body of the Story	9. Mediation: Hero discovers the lack
	10. Counteraction: Hero chooses positive action
	11. Departure: Hero leave on mission
3 rd Sphere: The Donor Sequence	14. Acquisition: Hero gains magical item
	15. Guidance: Hero reaches destination
	16. Struggle: Hero and villain do battle
	18. Victory: Villain is defeated
	19. Resolution: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved
4 th Sphere: The Hero's Return	20. Return: Hero sets out for home
	29. Transfiguration: Hero is given a new appearance
	30. Punishment: Villain is punished
	31. Wedding: Hero marries and ascends the throne

