the ceremonial centers and the hamlet-dwelling farmers. The dominant group was apparently of religious origin, although material or commercial segments of it might have been developed later. The village communities seem to have preserved their folk culture little affected by the culture of the upper class. The pseudo-urban character of the ceremonial centers, if it is true that they had not a large resident population and that some of the functions of real cities were lacking, and strong class barriers might have been the factors preventing the cultural influence of the ceremonial centers from filtering down to the rural masses, transforming their folk culture into peasant culture. If this view is correct, the world outlook and moral order of the Maya sophisticated aristocracy and the rural people must have been sharply different. In this light the collapse of the classic Maya civilization was in fact the disintegration of the pan-Maya upper stratum of society, leaving practically intact the underlying local folk cultures. That this actually happened has been made very apparent by Longyear's report on Copan, and the hypothesis is not in contradiction with the scanty data we have on this collapse from other places.1

2. Real and Reel Life in Hong Kong — Film Studies of Cultural Adaptation?

JOHN H. WEAKLAND
Mental Research Institute, Palo Alto, U.S.A.

It might seem inappropriate to couple the serious interest of scholars with the fascination Hong Kong exerts over countless casual tourists, yet their fundamental basis is probably the same. At all levels, stimulation and perception arise out of contrasts and comparisons, and Hong Kong is an almost unrivaled mixture and meeting place. Here is a society so small as almost to be seen at a glance, yet so populous and active as to be obviously significant in the world. Only a hundred-odd years old, it still is deeply rooted in the past on one hand, while on the other it appears very actively focused on the present and the future. Most of all, though in many ways almost a separate and independent society, Hong Kong is even more obviously a product of two great and very different nations, China and Great Britain.

Hong Kong is overwhelmingly Chinese in population, and therefore in basic culture and customs. Yet it is equally British in its elite, in political control and formal institutional structure, and in its economic and technological foundations. One of these sources was, until recently, the dominant representative of modern Western civilization, while the other is probably the most important representative of traditional Asian societies – and that most different from the West. Moreover, these two, while remaining distinct, have been in sufficiently long and close contact for the development of relatively stable systems of mutual adjustment. Thus Hong Kong epitomizes many aspects of that increasing contact and interaction between "the West" and various other societies of inferior wealth and power, and widely different cultural traditions, that is so dominant a feature of the contemporary world. Correspondingly,

Hong Kong is potentially an unrivaled laboratory for the study of this both theoretically and practically important process of social change and development. It is important in itself for study of a well-established case. It is important as a major representative of a whole class of cases which probably share some fundamental features, even though there must be other differences related to the natures of the particular societies involved. And especially, Hong Kong is important for comparison with two other Chinese societies—Taiwan and Communist China—pursuing alternative lines of development.

This process of change is commonly characterized as “modernization.” The term is a convenient shorthand reference, but like all labels it tends to conceal whatever is not specifically pointed out. Concerns about “modernization” tend to focus on technology and economics, with some attention to formal governmental structures, in line with the preoccupations of the Western world. Meanwhile, relatively little attention is paid to how basic socio-cultural patterns of those undergoing “modernization”—such factors as underlying values, attitudes, premises of thought, and styles of social interaction—are involved and are modified in this process, although this also is clearly significant for positive adaptation or difficulties, resistance, and conflict.

Study of adaptation of such fundamental Chinese patterns under Western influence in Hong Kong should be correspondingly valuable, but two considerable difficulties are evident. One, compared to the concrete facts of technology and economics, socio-cultural patterns by their nature are complexly interwoven, yet they also appear as insubstantial and elusive—indeed there are always important aspects so taken for granted as to be unrecognized by the participant actors. Two, to the very degree these factors are basic their investigation calls for some general overview. Small as it is compared to other significant societies, even Hong Kong is large and complex enough to make this appear a formidable task.

We propose the study of Hong Kong-produced motion pictures—ordinary fictional feature films—as one promising approach to this complex of research opportunities and obstacles. Like the myths of primitive societies, films offer a cultural distillate that otherwise is rare in large societies, and that has many advantages for study. Films are composed of interrelated concrete images of individual behavior in social situations of common concern. By selection and organization they exemplify large and ramified social matters in compact, permanent units which, although still rich in detail, are small enough to study closely and repeatedly. This exemplification of course involves fictional interpretation of whatever segment of social life is being depicted, yet this itself has certain positive values. Fiction is not fact, but social organization and behavior are never based on facts as such. Culturally structured perceptions and responses are always involved, and these may be clarified by the highlighting of patterns, compared to daily life, that the selection, emphasis, and ordering of fictional interpretation provides. This has been recognized by authorities as diverse as Freud, who said “Go to the poets” for an understanding of human behavior, and Mao Tse-tung, who reminds us that “the creative forms of literature and art supersede nature in that they are more systematic, more concise, more typical, more idealized, and therefore more universal.”

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