

法國人路易·達蓋爾 (Louis J. M. Daguerre, 1787-1851) 與英格蘭人威廉·托博 (William H. F. Talbot, 1800-1877) 先後在 1839 年公布發明了用光線構成圖像的攝影術，之後短短不過六年，香港島就出現了首家商業照相館。一位名為韋斯先生 (Mr West) 的西方人，在 1845 年 3 月 6 日出版的英文報章《德臣西報》(The China Mail) 裡刊登廣告，宣稱在中環卑利街近皇后大馬路處開設了一家經營達蓋爾攝影法的人像照相館，營業時間為上午 10 時至下午 4 時。

攝影很早傳入，但十多年後才有香港景物照

香港葛爾小島，位於距離倫敦與巴黎遙遙數千里之外；在當時環球交通還是倚靠遠洋帆船的年代，何以在這麼短的時間之內攝影術就已經傳到此間？研究中國攝影歷史的學者的觀點相當一致，都認為與西方帝國主義擴張、特別是鴉片戰爭後清朝政府與大不列顛帝國簽訂《南京條約》將香港割讓成為後者的殖民地有關。例

## 後公共影像時代的 香港景物攝影

黎健強

如 1997 年「圖像香港」(Picturing Hong Kong) 攝影展覽的策展人伍美華就指出道：「新成立的商業中心有外國商人和軍士，足以招引旅行商業攝影師在 1840 年代初期來到這個邊遠之地了。」

韋斯先生的照相館廣告只在香港報章出現了個多月就消聲匿跡，此後十多年間，再有三

數位使用達蓋爾法的攝影師曾經在香港島上短暫經營人像攝影；然而迄至今天為止，我們都沒有發現他們為香港的景物——所謂景物，是除了土地山水建築物之外，也包括以社會學、人類學、民俗學等角度來描繪的人與物——攝製過的任何照片。伍美華的看法是由於達蓋爾攝影法所用的片基是銅板，生產成本也比較昂貴的緣故。對此我並不完全信服，因為 1850 年代攝影改用玻璃濕片——藥膜黏著劑是火棉 (collodion)，必須在未乾涸以前沖洗——為底片以後，除了一兩幀實在難以完全確定拍攝年代的影像外，我們也沒有看見過這段時期的香港景物照片。對於這樣的影像真空，我猜測有兩個原因：一是攝影師們的主要收入是給在香港的外籍人士拍製人像照片，如果顧客沒有興趣，他們是不會拍製香港的景物照片的；另一個原因則可能是他們自己也覺得這個題材在商業上來說並不吸引，並且估計在本地或海外都不會有顧客購買，所以就沒有進行拍攝了。

無論如何，當前我們可以確定年月的最早香港景物照片，是在 1858 年下半至 1859 年之間拍攝的。1857 年底英法聯軍攻陷了一直拒絕讓外國人進入的廣州市，大概是受到這個消息的鼓舞，倫敦著名照片出版社尼格列特與森巴拉公司 (Negretti & Zambra) 就派遣了瑞士籍攝影師皮埃爾·洛西亞 (Pierre Rossier, 1827-約 1897) 到來中國拍攝風土民情。洛西亞在 1858 年 7 月初抵達香港，在他逗留期間，起碼拍攝了《香港景貌》(General View of Hongkong) 及《香港海港》(View from Hongkong Harbour) 兩款濕片立體照片 (stereograph，由雙鏡頭照相機拍攝印曬而成)。再越一年，歸化了英籍的威尼斯人菲列斯·庇雅托 (Felix Beato, 1832-1909) 隨著從印度開出的英國軍艦到了香港；在大軍準備北上進行第二次鴉片戰爭之前，庇雅托拍攝了中環聖約翰大教堂等西式建築物，以及由幾幅照片拼湊而成的香港港口及在九龍半島的英軍營地的橫幅全景圖像 (panorama)。

#### 以旅客觀點為依歸的公共影像

1860 年清廷戰敗簽訂《北京條約》，被迫租借出九龍半島並對外開放更多口岸和讓西方人進入內陸。於是前往中國拍攝的旅行攝影師的數目大增，許多且以香港為他們的補給基地，包括廣為人知的蘇格蘭攝影師約翰·湯姆森 (John Thomson, 1837-1921)。在這樣的情況之下，香港景物的照片就大量增加了。由於這些攝影師的顧客對象主要是其本國或歐美人士，他們選擇的題材與表達方式就往往帶著旅遊獵奇性質的拍攝角度和風格。這樣的傳統後來傳到從他們處學習得攝影術的華人攝影師，也由起先的印曬照片傳到明信片甚至於二十世紀彩色印刷的圖片月曆。直到今天，如果我們登進官方的香港旅遊發展局的網址去看看，那些著名景點人物節日習俗等的攝影圖像，豈不還是帶著文化理論家艾德華·塞伊德 (Edward W. Said, 1935-2003) 所說的「東方主義」(Orientalism) 的色彩嗎？

上面兩段所說的東方主義式的香港景物影像傳統，基本上是由專業攝影師們從十九世紀中葉開始逐漸建立起來的：香港歷史博物館收藏有一冊約翰·湯姆森在 1870 年前後拍攝的四十頁香港照片簿，可以視為這個傳統的早期結集；必發公司 (Kelly & Walsh) 在 1926 年時出版的《香港：美麗與浪漫》(Hong Kong: Its Beauty & Romance) 一書，裡面的二十四幀棕色影像，則應該可以視作那個時期的代表。我打算將這些照片稱之為香港的「公共影像」，因為從意識形態方面來說它們的影響力非常廣泛而且深入民間，令到後來出現的業餘攝影也長時期的服膺於這個傳統之中。

## 公共影像之下的業餘攝影與藝術攝影

目前來說我們很難肯定香港的業餘攝影是甚麼時候開始的，但它的首個里程碑無疑是1888年10月26日下午、一個名為「照相機會」(The Camera Club)的組織在中環大會堂(大約是今日的匯豐銀行和舊中國銀行大廈的範圍)所舉辦的一個有九十幀照片的展覽會。因為展覽地點是當時的香港文化活動中心，同場展出的還有「香港描繪會」(The Hong Kong Sketching Club)的八十幅畫作，我們也可以視之為香港的第一個藝術攝影展覽會。從後來的報章報導可知，「照相機會」的成員都是外籍人士，只是作品內容方面卻交代得不很清楚。

直到1936年，五位外籍人士發起的香港攝影學會成立，很快就扮演了本地業餘攝影及藝術攝影的領導角色。我們只要從曾擔任該會秘書的羅拔·貝斯(Robert Bates, 生卒年期不詳)的得意作品「最後的陽光」(*Last Ray*, 1938年)，就可以看到他們的美學仍是很接近公共影像的：那是一幀直幅的黑白照片，維多利亞海上有好些中國帆船，前面的幾艘有兩個帆兒被斜射的陽光照得耀眼的通白，背景則是高高的香港山線和藍天。

第二次世界大戰之後，香港藝術攝影的主導權逐漸由外籍人士轉移到華人手中，當中兩本名家照片合集《香港攝影1954-1969》和《香港攝影1970-1975》大概最具代表性的地位。公共影像的題材仍然十分流行：讀者不難在兩本書裡面找到海港景色、地標建築物、華人風俗、節日宗教、漁民、人力車、老行業和傳統工藝等的作品。至於今次展覽，我以為陳迹、鍾文略、邱良、翟偉良幾位前輩的照片，及在上世紀六十年代中出生的吳文正的老店系列，都類屬公共影像的範圍；而馮建中的《樓花》系列和蘇慶強的偽舊照片，也與這個傳統有關。

公共影像之所以長期主導香港攝影，我以為有好幾個重要的因素：一是自從香港攝影學會成立後至上世紀七十年代左右，香港的藝術攝影一直都有著根深柢固的運作模式，以及通過沙龍比賽和展覽建立了穩定而變化緩慢的美學標準；二是公共影像顯示的正面、肯定、樂觀、美善、人道主義的世界觀，與中國人傳統的儒道精神頗為銜接，於是廣為本地華人所接受；三是1950年代以來香港經濟持續發展，而且社會政治制度雖然並不完善公平，但已是同時期華人社群之中很不錯的避難所了。是故我們雖然有稱頌基層人民的影像——陳迹、鍾文略、邱良、翟偉良幾位都是，值得要提的還有麥烽(1918-2009)和蒙敏生(1919-2007)

— 卻沒有出現像美國在十九世紀末積各·里爾斯 (Jacob Riis, 1849-1914) 揭露貧民生活實況並呼籲改善的報導攝影專集《另一半人是怎麼生活的》(How the Other Half Lives, 1890)，以至羅拔·法蘭克 (Robert Frank, 1924年生) 在同是戰後初期的1958年出版、全面批判美國社會的照片集《美國人》(The Americans) 這樣的著作。

### 從公共影像走向個人世界

新一代的香港大會堂於1962年在中環海傍落成，很快就成為了香港藝術攝影者鍾愛的展覽場地。但是在1970年代的初期，這裡卻先後出現了兩次風格迥異的七人攝影展：牆上不再是觀眾熟悉的簡潔唯美易明的照片，而是荒腔走板，甚至模糊不清的景象。然而，一直再要去到1980年代，我們才看見有較多公共影像以外的攝影作品出現。

今次展覽有彩色作品展出的高志強，正是在1980年代時冒起的其中一位重要人物。多年來他的藝術攝影都是黑白作品為主：那些使用35毫米照相機拍攝的影像因為放曬時保留了黑色的邊框，很容易令人以為其影響是來自提出「決定性瞬間」的法國著名攝影家昂利·卡泰亞·布列松 (Henri Cartier-Bresson, 1908-2004)；但是在細心再看之下，我們不難明白高志強所要表達的並不是卡泰亞·布列松要捕捉的事件真諦，而是他對於世情的個人看法：那是隨遇和日記式的，富於情感（每每是荒涼以至悲觀），而題材也多屬於公共影像以外的尋常事物、瑟縮於幽暗偏僻的角落，直至在高志強的畫面組合下纔發出了詩意、微弱卻奇異的光芒。

推動卡泰亞·布列松的「決定性瞬間」攝影美學的，其實是與高志強同時期的馮漢紀。那時我也有在攝影中心上馮漢紀的課，記得他的學生們都很熱衷於紀實攝影，但同時也都已經比較嚮往於冷門、少為人注意的題材。今趟展覽的中青代攝影師裡不少人都曾經受教於馮漢紀或者被「決定性瞬間」的概念所影響，當中吳文正的題材尚算較為接近主流之外，余偉建、沈嘉豪、劉清平、蘇秀儀和謝至德雖然仍保留了相當重的人道主義精神；但他們和陳偉民、陳廣源、安杰路·哥密斯 (Evangelo Costadimas) 等各人的攝影，無論在主題或風格上都發展出了他們自己的興趣與路向，跟由卡泰亞·布列松與友儕創辦的馬格南圖片社 (Magnum Photos) 及1955年美國紐約現代藝術館的「人類大家庭」(The Family of Man) 展覽的理想，各有不同的距離了。

1980年代香港另一具影響力的攝影老師，是參加過兩次七人攝影展的吳漢霖。經過數年留學英國之後，這時候他傳授的基本上是英美藝術攝影潮流從十九世紀後期發展出來的、追求純粹超越的一套美學。今趟展覽的參加者中，劉清平和吳世傑都曾經是吳漢霖的學生。他們感到興趣的場景，個人的喜好基本上遠遠凌駕於它們的公共意義：以吳世傑為例，他往往能夠在紊亂繽紛的城市景物之中，用他的照相機框出一個結構紋理光影變化複雜而儼然有其節奏韻律的場境。觀者看他的黑白照片的時候，彷彿就是用眼睛聽了一段協奏的樂曲。

#### 世代交替：後公共影像與本土意識的崛起

高志強和吳漢霖都屬於香港戰後成長的一代，即是所謂的嬰兒潮，而且都曾在外國修讀攝影。一方面他們的攝影理念都受到西方現代主義的洗禮，另一方面他們對於香港也有較強烈的本土意識和感情。與他們時期和背景相近的還有梁家泰和王禾璧，兩人近年先後拍攝了好些消逝之中的香港景物，包括梁家泰在今次展覽中的平房後巷，都散發著這一代人的本土情懷。

事實上，環顧今次展覽，使用照相機記錄轉變中的香港景物的攝影者不在少數。例如余偉建自從2003年就開始拍攝因為填海而不斷改變面貌的海岸線，蘇秀儀關注重建工程如何破壞原有社區的景觀；吳文正鏡頭下的老店不獨是那些舊式商舖的紀錄，也是那些經營者們的踏實、拼搏、刻苦、友愛、互信、忍讓的傳統人本精神的紀錄；謝至德的上世紀九十年代的影像既有往日平民樸素的作息模式，也見證了新興生活的浮誇。

有一點特別值得注意：對於最近十多二十年香港景物與社會變化，好幾位攝影者都是顯得憤怒或憂傷的。蘇秀儀的街頭地盤工程照片，明顯地有一種寓憤怒於畫面暴力的況味；黃勤帶的舊區照片，則充滿了無助、失落與空虛；陳偉民的香港景物，扭曲裁剪到幾乎難以辨認的程度；最年輕的賴朗騫，拍攝的卻也是最邊緣最角落的地方：我想到的是被壓抑的小眾的心理狀況，也聯想起戰後第二代在現時後工業年代的困境。最後，朱德華之前的《遊行》系列對群眾社會抗爭的立場頗為負面，但是在再填海的中環為背景的新作中，他的心理似乎也發生了微妙的轉變。

面對政治經濟環境的轉變，近幾年來我們似乎也多了攝影者對香港社會運作重新發出檢視與反思。陳廣源的《梅加浮娜》(Megafauna)系列用上了生物學的詞彙，他的分析角度卻是民俗學和社會學的，焦點是巨

像崇拜與消費主義的關係。謝明莊和蔡旭威都在看香港的城市生活：謝明莊的照相機蒐集了好些建築物與建築物之間的通道與行人的景象，然而總是予人一種沒有出路的形勢；蔡旭威用上了對紅外線感光的黑白菲林，於是街上常見的景物忽然都詭異起來。

孫樹坤與鄭瑋玲對香港社會的審視，則改為在室內進行。通過針孔成像的照相機原理，孫樹坤將一些香港人從住處窗外可見的景象倒置於他們的室內布置之上，造成非意識般的效果及對比；鄭瑋玲運用的是流行的擺佈手段，有點戲劇化地表達了我們怎樣處理有限的家居空間和時間。

### 走出香港，認識中國和世界各地

對外關係方面香港在過去的二十年來有兩個重大發展：一是與中國大陸有愈更密切的往來與交通，一是在全球化的趨勢之下世界各國於我們來說都不再是遙不可及的地方。反映於香港當代景物攝影之中，趙嘉榮的影像令觀者難以迴避香港人對中國政權的憂慮，又一山人（黃炳培）、岑允逸和王希慎則帶我們去了解中國某些市鎮和農村在經濟起飛之中呈現的各種局面。在倫敦北部的克尼區，張康生似乎像導遊也許更令我想起電視劇《頭號嫌疑犯》（*Prime Suspect*）裡海倫·美蘭（Helen Mirren）飾演的珍·坦尼森（Jane Tennison）總督察，他在一家棄置的兒童醫院做的光繪圖像系列，在在有如罪案的現場；劉清平的《薄如空氣》系列驟看時最像觀光照片，但愈看愈覺得時間空間都忽然都凝止了下來，很存在主義式的地老天荒。這幾年來尹子聰去了亞洲多個大城市，用多重曝光的手法將它們的主要街道的華燈夜色壓縮成為一幅一幅的黑白圖案：這些震耳欲聾的光影，彷彿在問我們喜不喜歡全球一體化呢？

香港的居民雖然是以華人為主，但是一百七十年來它一直都是個很開放和國際化的地方。正如本文開始時所說，香港開埠後不久就有外籍攝影師出現；實際上外籍攝影師的活動和作品，對本地攝影一直都有著各種的影響。在今趟展覽之中，安杰路·哥密斯讓我們知道一位久居香港的外籍攝影者對本地華人的印象；至於曾在香港居住十多年的德國攝影人米高·沃爾夫（Michael Wolf），他的杜素多夫學派（Düsseldorf School）式圖譜學照片曾經令我們以嶄新的角度再次認識香港的城市景觀，不過這裡展出的是他在美國芝加哥市拍攝的近作。

近代藝術觀有所轉變，香港也多了藝術家使用攝影來生產他們的作品。在我而言，這些作品總是令人對攝影有新異的經驗。梁志和是這方面的先行者之一，城市高樓大廈界劃天空也是他多年以來屢次拍攝和轉化



的題材，今次他會和太太黃志恆合作將香港的天空詩意轉化為零食。馬琮珠使用攝影時也是觀念為先：攝影人難免都聽過戰地攝影師羅拔·卡柏（Robert Capa, 1913-1954）的名言「如果你的照片不夠好，那是因為你不夠接近的緣故」，馬琮珠卻嘗試以遙遠為起點，探討現代的資訊科技、影像與距離的關係。

### 從移民社會、居民社會，再走向公民社會的香港攝影

總的來說，攝影在十九世紀四十年代由西方職業攝影師傳入香港，起先基本上只拍攝人像，其後才逐漸擴展到景物攝影，並且初步建立了香港公共影像的範式、題材與風格。這個範式之後由本地華人商業攝影師、本地外籍人業餘及藝術攝影者、華人業餘及藝術攝影者等交互承傳，經過一百多年的運作調節，成為了香港主流的景物影像模式。直至上世紀八十年代，戰後嬰兒潮世代的香港藝術攝影師冒起，開始打破了公共影像壟斷的局面。基於不同的時代環境與文化意識，所接受的攝影美學觀點也不是人人相同，新一代的香港藝術攝影師沒有建立另一個系統的公共影像，而是根據各自的喜好與取向，表達著更為廣闊的題材、多樣化的風格和訊息。

這樣的綜合簡述和分析，本來很容易就可以用「多元化」來總結了事，可是我實在並不甘心於就此罷休。不久之前我讀了一段今次有份參展的岑允逸討論香港當代藝術攝影的文字，他很反省地以自己為例道：「在殖民地年代一直在一種相對和諧和有秩序的社會氣氛下，在宗主國極其成功的安撫民心的政策下，整體傾向循規蹈矩，香港攝影人相對內斂，表達自己的方法也比較隱晦，所以香港的攝影作品比較少如擺佈攝影這樣要求清晰闡述自己的創作風格。」

我以為岑允逸所指的基本上是戰後香港第一代以至第二代的攝影人的普遍取向，也即是今次展覽的絕大部分——如果不是全部——的參展者。香港學者近年每每用世代論來研究當前香港的社會結構狀況，特別是世代之間彼此的矛盾與分歧；我自己更為關心的，其實更是世代之間是否有所提升或者演進：1980年以前香港可以說是移民社會，培育了本土意識就成為了居民社會；2003年7月之後，前任香港藝術館總館長朱錦鸞提出，香港好像開始有了公民社會的跡象。從香港的藝術攝影發展歷史來看，我們無疑已經走出了公共影像的範圍，也許，我們也正在朝向公民影像的境界了吧？

The Frenchman Louis J.M. Daguerre (1787-1851) and the Englishman William H.F. Talbot (1800-1877) announced separately in 1839 that they had invented photography, a process that produced pictures through the actions of light. Only six years later, Hong Kong already had its first commercial photo studio on the island. A Westerner in the name of Mr West placed an advertisement in a local English newspaper *The China Mail* on 6 March 1845, publicizing that he had opened a Daguerreotype portrait studio in Peel Street near Queen's Road. Business hours were 10am to 4pm.

**Despite photography's very early introduction, no Hong Kong scenery photographs until more than a decade later** Thousands of miles from London and Paris, the tiny island of Hong Kong at that time still relied on ocean-sailing vessels for global travel. How could photography have got this far within such a short time? Scholars specializing in the history of Chinese photography tend to think this is associated with Western imperialist expansion, in particular the British colonization of Hong Kong by the Treaty of Nanjing signed between the Qing rulers and the British Empire after the Opium War. For example, Roberta Wue, curator of the photography exhibition "Picturing Hong Kong" (1997), pointed out that, "[T]he creation of a new mercantile center of foreign merchants, traders, and military men was enough to draw itinerant commercial photographers to the new outpost by the early 1840s."

Mr West's advert appeared in Hong Kong newspaper only for more than one month, since then it was not heard of anymore. Over more than a decade thereafter, a few other Daguerre photographers had operated portrait photo studios on Hong Kong Island. All of them were short-lived, and no local scenery photographs shot by these photographers have been found. Here scenery

photographs cover not only landscape pictures, but also images of people and objects in the mode of sociological, anthropological or ethnic studies. Wue's explanation of this paucity was the daguerreotypes were too costly to produce as they were made on expensive copper plates. I am not totally convinced about this, because in the 1850s the daguerreotypes had been generally replaced by wet collodion plates – both exposure and processing must be done when collodion, the emulsion adhesive, was still wet – but except for one or two images of doubtful dates we still do not have Hong Kong scenery photos from this period. I have two reasons for this absence: first, photographers in those days earned their living mainly from taking portraits of the Westerners in Hong Kong. Unless the customers expressed interest in local scenery photographs, they would not produce them. Second, the photographers themselves too did not find the Hong Kong scenery attractive, and believed that neither local nor overseas customers would buy such photographs. Consequently, they did not make any of them.

## Hong Kong Scenery Photographs in the Era of Post-Public Image

Edwin K. Lai





Whatever the reasons, at this date the earliest Hong Kong scenery photographs that can be certainly dated were taken between the latter half of 1858 and 1859. In December 1857, the Anglo-French allied forces captured the city of Guangzhou which had imposed a strongly resistance against the entrance of foreigners. Probably encouraged by this event, renowned London-based publisher Negretti & Zambra sent Swiss photographer Pierre Rossier (1827- c.1897) to China to record its land and people. Rossier arrived in Hong Kong in early July 1858, and during his stay, he had taken at least two wet plate stereographs (taken with a twin lens camera and then printed the two images side by side), namely *General View of Hongkong* and *View from Hongkong Harbour*. One year later, Felix Beato (1832-1909), a naturalized British photographer of Venetian origin, came to Hong Kong via a British naval ship sailing from India. While the British troops were busy making preparations for the Second Opium War, Beato photographed the Western-style buildings here including St. John's Cathedral in Central and several pieced-up panorama photographs showing the Hong Kong harbour and the British barracks in the Kowloon Peninsula.

#### **Public images made from the perspectives of foreign travellers**

In 1860, the defeated Qing dynasty signed the Treat of Peking under which Kowloon Peninsula was leased to Britain, more ports were opened and Westerners were now given access to the Mainland. As a result of these new terms the number of travelling photographers in China grew significantly. Many of them used Hong Kong as a base for their activities, including the celebrated Scottish photographer John Thomson (1837-1921). It was in this backdrop that Hong Kong scenery photographs increased significantly. Since these travelling photographers sold their works mainly to fellow countrymen or Europeans, they took an exotic stance in their choices of subjects and the style of representation. This tradition was later handed down to the native Chinese photographers who acquired their skills from the foreign photographers, and was evident first in printed photographs and then in postcards or even colour calendars of the twentieth century. Even today, if we visit the website of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, we can easily see photographic images of famous attractions, people, festivals and customs are still full of "Orientalism" as described by cultural theorist Edward W. Said (1935-2003).

The orientalist tradition of Hong Kong scenery photos mentioned in the last two paragraphs was established through a gradual process by professional photographers since the nineteenth century. The Hong Kong Museum of History has in its collection a 40-page photo album of Hong Kong photographs taken by John Thomson around 1870. This can be seen as an early example of this tradition. *Hong Kong: Its Beauty & Romance*, a book published by Kelly & Walsh in 1926 features 24 sepia images of Hong Kong scenery, witnessed the development of the tradition in that period. I intend to call these photographs "public images" of Hong Kong, because from an ideological point of view their influences were extremely profound and far-reaching, to the extent that many later amateur photographers adhered to this tradition for a long period of time.

#### **Amateur photography and art photography under the banner of public images**

While it is difficult to pinpoint when amateur photography budded in Hong Kong, we can be certain its first milestone came in the afternoon of 26 October 1888 when a group called The Camera Club held an exhibition in the City Hall

in the Central District (somewhere near the HSBC headquarters and the old Bank of China building today). A total of 90 photographs were exhibited. Given that the venue was Hong Kong's centre of cultural activities at that time, and the photographs were shown alongside 80 paintings by The Hong Kong Sketching Club, this event can also be viewed as the first art photography exhibition in Hong Kong. As revealed by later newspaper reports, all members of the Camera Club were Westerners, but little were known about the subjects or contents of the exhibited works.

In 1936, five expatriates founded the Photographic Society of Hong Kong, an organization which quickly assumed a leading role in the local amateur and art photography scene. As evidenced in *Last Ray* (1938), a photograph by the society's secretary Robert Bates (dates unknown), the aesthetics of the Photographic Society of Hong Kong remained close to the public images. *Last Ray* is a black-and-white photograph in the vertical format, depicting the Victoria Harbour with a number of Chinese junks, the sails of a few of them in the foreground are glowingly white in the slanting sunlight. In the background we can see the familiar Hong Kong hills and a clear blue sky.

After the Second World War, the leadership of Hong Kong art photography gradually passed from the expatriates to their Chinese counterparts, whose works are best represented by two publications: *Photography in Hong Kong 1954-1969* and *Photography in Hong Kong 1970-1975*. From these publications we can easily conclude that public images were still highly popular: subjects such as harbour vistas, landmark buildings, Chinese customs festivals and religious ceremonies, fisherfolks, rickshaw coolies, traditional trades and crafts occupy most of the pages. As for the current exhibition, I think works by Chan Chik, Chung Man-lurk, Yau Leung and Chak Wai-leung, as well as the *Hong Kong Old Shops* series by Simon Go who was born in the 1960s, can all be categorized in the domain of public images. In addition, the *One Square Foot* series by John Fung and the seemingly old photographs by So Hing-keung are also closely related to this tradition.

In my opinion, the long domination of public images in Hong Kong photography is due to several important reasons. First, since the establishment of Photographic Society of Hong Kong to about 1970s, art photography in Hong Kong had followed a deep-rooted pattern of operation, which through the organizations of salon competitions and exhibitions had developed a stable and slow-changing set of aesthetic standards. Second, public images projected a positive, affirmative, optimistic, beautiful and virtuous, and humanistic world outlook, which coincided the teachings of the traditional Chinese Confucian and Taoist schools of thoughts. For this reason they became very well received by the local Chinese. Third, the Hong Kong economy had witnessed a sustained growth from the 1950s onwards, and although the social and political systems here could not be considered perfect or fair, at that time the territory was already considered a good sanctuary when compared with other Chinese communities. Consequently we have images saluting the grassroots – such as photographic works of Chan Chik, Chung Man-lurk, Yau Leung and Chak Wai-leung, as well as Mak Fung (1918-2009) and Mong Mun-san (1919-2007) – but no work like Jacob Riis' (1849-1914) *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) that sought in the USA in the late 19th century to expose the harsh realities of the poor and call for improvements, or like Robert Frank's (born 1924) *The Americans*, published also in the early postwar period of 1958, severely denounced the American society.

### From public images to personal world

The new City Hall opened in waterfront Central in 1962. Before long it became the favourite exhibition venue of Hong Kong art photographers. In the early 1970s, however, the City Hall had presented two group exhibitions of seven photographers whose works were very different from the mainstream. On the walls were not the commonly seen uncomplicated, beautiful and easily comprehensible photographs, but images that were confusing, blurred or even absurd. Yet, photographic works outside the public image category did not really appear in a significant way until the 1980s.

Alfred Ko, one of the photographers featured in this exhibition, is a key figure who emerged in the 1980s. For years his art photographs are mainly black-and-white and taken with 35mm cameras. Since they normally have a black border that reminds the work of the renowned French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004), viewers tend to think that Ko has been influenced by Cartier-Bresson's concept of "decisive moment". Yet a closer look will tell us that Ko is not essaying to express the truth of events that Cartier-Bresson wanted to capture, but rather his personal view on the ways of the world. His photographs are casual and diaristic in style, and are packed with emotions (often bleak or even pessimistic). His subjects are often commonplace objects and events outside the public image category, they are cringed in neglected dim corners until Ko reveals their poetic, smothering and wonderous glow with his camera and picture compositions.

Cartier-Bresson's photographic aesthetics of "the decisive moment" was really promoted by Joseph Fung, who emerged round about the same time as Alfred Ko. I had attended Fung's class at the Photographic Centre and remember that most of his students were enthusiasts of documentary photography. At the same time they were also partial to uncommon and less noticed subjects. Many middle-aged and young photographers featured in this exhibition have received training from Fung or have been influenced by the "decisive moment" concept. Except for Simon Go whose subjects are relatively closer to the mainstream, others like Vincent Yu, Bobby Sham, Lau Ching-ping, Gretchen So and Ducky Tse who whilst maintaining considerable humanism in their works, have all developed their individual interests and directions both in themes and styles as the same can also be said about Raymond Chan, Dick Chan and Evangelo Costadimas, who are different in varying extents from the ideals of Magnum Photos founded by Henri Cartier-Bresson and his peers, and "The Family of Man Exhibition" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1955.

Ng Han-lam, who had participated in the two group exhibitions of seven photographers mentioned above, is another influential teacher of photography in Hong Kong during the 1980s. After studying photography in the UK for some years, Ng now taught an Anglo-American approach of art photography that started in the late nineteenth century that promoted puritan and transcendental aesthetics. Amongst the photographers in this exhibition, Lau Ching-ping and Ng Sai-kit were students of Ng Han-lam. In their selection of subjects and sceneries, they give much greater priority to their personal preferences than to public significances. Ng Sai-kit, for example, is especially capable of organizing complex, changing yet rhythmic pictures with his camera from disorderly and confusing urban sceneries. The experience of looking at Ng's black-and-white photographs is like listening to a concerto with one's eyes.

### **Alternation of generations: the rise of post-public images and local identity**

Both Alfred Ko and Ng Han-lam belong to the first generation of postwar Hong Kongers, or the so-called baby-boomers, and both had studied photography overseas. On the one hand, their concepts of photography have been baptized by Western modernism, and on the other hand they have developed a much stronger consciousness of local identity and belonging for Hong Kong. Leong Ka Tai and Wong Wo-bik are two other photographers from the same period and with similar backgrounds. In recent years, Leong and Wong have photographed a number of Hong Kong subjects that are rapidly disappearing, including the photographs of low-rise tenements and back alleys that Leong exhibits in this exhibition. All these images carry indigenous sentiments that are typical of the generation.

In fact, a fair number of photographers featured here have recorded the changing faces of Hong Kong with their cameras. For example, Vincent Yu has been shooting the rapidly changing Hong Kong coastline under reclamation since 2003, while Gretchen So is concerned about how redevelopment is altering the original outlooks of local communities. The old shop photographs of Simon Go are not merely records of old-fashioned shops, but also records of a traditional humanist spirit of pragmatism, enterprise, diligence, friendliness, mutual trust and tolerance. Ducky Tse's images of the 1990s celebrate the ordinary peoples' simple way of life and stand witness to the ostentation of the new citylife.

One point worth noting is that quite a few photographers are apparently angered or saddened by the changes in Hong Kong's sceneries and society over the past two decades. The violent nature of Gretchen So's photographs of construction sites obviously reflects her anger about the redevelopments. Wong Kan-tai's images of old districts, on the other hand, are filled with helplessness, loss and emptiness. Raymond Chan's Hong Kong scenes are so radically framed and cropped that the places can hardly be identified. The youngest photographer here, Lai Lon-hin, has chosen to photograph the most marginal corners in the city. These images bring to mind the psychological state of the repressed minorities, and the difficulties facing the second generation of postwar Hong Kongers in today's post-industrial era. Finally, Almond Chu has been quite negative about social protests and confrontations in his *Parade* series, but in his new picture that uses reclamation sites in the Central District as the background of his set-up, his mental state seems to have developed a subtle change.

Consequent to the great changes in political and economic situations in recent years, more and more photographers are making reflections and reviews of Hong Kong's social mechanism. In his series *Megafauna*, Dick Chan has used a biological term for the title, but his analytical approach is essentially anthropological and sociological: here the focus is on the relationship between the tradition of huge figure worships and consumerism. Tse Ming-chong and John Choy both have their eyes on the urban life of Hong Kong. Tse has collected many scenes of passages between buildings and pedestrians with his camera, but all of them give you a feeling of no way out. In Choy's photographs, the use of infrared black-and-white film has made common street objects look uncanny.

As for Leon Suen and Tay, Wei Leng, their examinations of the Hong Kong society takes place indoors. Using pinhole images which are the basics of photography, Suen introduces inverted images of sceneries many Hong Kong people

normally see from their windows into their houses and interior setting, creating contrasting and unconscious effects. Tay adopts the staging method now popular in art photography, and in a somewhat dramatic way expresses how we manage our limited domestic space and time.

### **Out of Hong Kong, to China and other parts of the world**

Over the past two decades, Hong Kong has seen two major developments in external relations. The first is the increasingly close interactions and communications with China, and the second is the globalization tendency that connects us with different parts of the world. As reflected in contemporary scenery photographs by local photographers, the works of Karl Chiu express the unavoidable anxiety of Hong Kong people about the Chinese political regime. Meanwhile, Another mountain man (Stanley Wong), Dustin Shum and Hisun Wong led us to see various situations bred from the economic take-off in some rural and urban parts of China. In England, taking us to Hackney in North London, Enoch Cheung plays the role of a tour guide, or even chief inspector Jane Tennison (played by Helen Mirren) in the television drama *Prime Suspect*. The series of light paintings that Cheung has made in an abandoned children hospital are so unsettling that they look like crime scenes. Lau Ching-ping's *Thin as air* appears to be a series of tourist snapshots at first glance, but the more you look at them the more you feel time and space are gradually slowing down and eventually stop, almost an existential sense of eternity. Over the last few years, Simon Wan has visited many large Asian cities. By means of multiple exposures, he has compressed the lights and night scenes of the main streets of these cities into a series of highly illuminated black-and-white sceneries. These deafening lights and shadows seem to be asking the viewer: So you like globalization, right?

While Hong Kong is primarily a Chinese society, she has been very open and cosmopolitan for the past 170 years. As mentioned in the beginning of this essay, Western photographers appeared in Hong Kong very shortly after the British colonization. As a matter of fact, the activities and works of Western photographers have always been an influential factor in the development of photography in Hong Kong. In this exhibition, Evangelo Costadimas shows us, as a foreign photographer who has lived here for quite a long time, what are his impressions of the local Chinese. German photographer Michael Wolf also has lived here for more than ten years, his photographs in the style of Düsseldorf School have more than once inspired us to rediscover urban Hong Kong from new perspectives. In this exhibition, however, he is showing his latest works shot in Chicago, USA.

In tandem with evolving and revised artistic views during the last few decades, more Hong Kong artists are using photography to produce their art works. To me, these works always bring new ideas and approaches to photography. Leung Chi-wo is one pioneer in this area. For many years he has photographed the city skyline demarcated by highrises and used the images for creative transformations. This time, he is teaming up with his wife Sara Wong to poetically convert the Hong Kong sky into snacks. Ivy Ma also uses photography in a conceptual way. While most photographers

are familiar with the famous remark by renowned war photographer Robert Capa (1913-1954): "If your picture isn't good enough, you're not close enough," Ma opts for the opposite: by establishing the remote as her starting point, she seeks to investigate the relationships between modern information technology, images and distances.

### **Hong Kong photography: from migrant society, resident society to civic society**

Photography was introduced to Hong Kong from the West in the 1940s. Initially used only in portraiture, it later extended into scenery photography and gradually developed the first paradigm of Hong Kong public images both in the choices of subject matters and visual styles. This paradigm was handed down from generation to generation through an interplay between local Chinese commercial photographers, local Western amateurs and art photographers, Chinese amateurs and art photographers. After more than 100 years of practice and tuning, it became Hong Kong's mainstream scenery imaging pattern until the baby-boomers emerged in the 1980s. These new players in Hong Kong art photography soon broke the monopoly of public images. Given the differences in their historical backgrounds, trainings and cultural awareness, their aesthetics are not really the same. Consequently the new generation of Hong Kong art photographers have not established an alternative system of public images, instead according to their individual interests and tendencies, they have worked on a much wider range of subjects, styles and messages.

The discussions and analyses above, hence, can be easily summed up as "diverse" and "multifarious". However, I really do not intend to resign myself to this simple conclusion. A short while ago, I have read an article on contemporary art photography in Hong Kong by Dustin Shum, one of the participating photographers in this exhibition. Taking himself as an example, he reflects that, "Living in a relatively harmonious and disciplined society during British colonial rule, with the sovereign state exercising highly successful policies in pacifying the people, we generally tended to observe rules and conform to conventions. Hong Kong photographers have been relatively withdrawn with a more obscure way of self-expression. Therefore works like staged photography which demands clear messages in creative expression have been rare in Hong Kong."

I think Shum mainly refers to the general orientation of first and second generations of postwar Hong Kong photographers, i.e. the majority, if not all, of the photographers participating in this exhibition. In recent years Hong Kong scholars have frequently studied the contemporary Hong Kong social formation with the generation theory, particularly so when looking at conflicts and contradictions among the different generations. What concerns me more is whether there have been improvements or evolution from earlier generations to later generations. Hong Kong can be regarded as a migrant society before 1980, when indigenous consciousness and local identity were later cultivated, it evolved into a resident society. After July 2003, Dr Christina Chu, former Chief Curator of the Hong Kong Museum of Art, argues that Hong Kong seems to show signs of a civic society. Applying this to the history of art photography in Hong Kong, we have undoubtedly treaded beyond the confines of public images. Perhaps, we are now advancing towards the realm of civic images.