



The Chinese Silicon Valley (ShenZhen) in 2046 - 3D rendering by Qwen Ai (Alibaba Cloud)

Scenario A to D by Choy Ka Fai

This speculative musing examines the trajectory of the arts in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) in the near future. As regional integration deepens, the cultural landscape is shifting rapidly, prompting critical questions about identity, collaboration, and innovation. These reflections stem from personal experiences and encounters at a recent dance festival in Hong Kong. As of 2025, Hong Kong remains the cultural apex of the region, acting as a vital conduit between local traditions and global contemporary practices. Through the lens of contemporary dance and dialogue, this exploration considers how cross-border dynamics may shape the next generation of artistic expression, weighing the potential for synergy against the challenges of integration.

Note on Independence: Please note that this article represents my personal opinion and artistic interpretation. It is not associated with, endorsed by, or written on behalf of the festival or any institutions mentioned. All analysis is independent and subjective.

Scenario A: Best-Case Scenario: Two Crash Courses

At the end of autumn in 2015, I visited Hong Kong for three days to meet with four local dance makers. It was part of my research in the China region for “SoftMachine¹,” focusing on the contemporary dance landscape across Asia, where I collected 18 interviews from Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing. I am not an expert in dance, but rather a keen observer with immense curiosity. It felt like a crash course in discovering who is interesting, what is experimental, and how dance works are made. At the time, the scene felt fresh, naive, and full of synergy. The dance community was varied, with all kinds of related activities, and there was a more-than-healthy dose of visiting international artists and performing arts festivals. Freedom of expression was very much alive.

At the end of autumn in 2025, I had the great pleasure of revisiting Hong Kong to attend the intensive opening three days of the Freespace Dance Festival at the West Kowloon Cultural District. The festival’s theme, “Speculative Future: Asia Pacific Perspective²,” was headlined by Chunky Move, Gonzo x TS Crew, and Nadim Abbas x Chan Wai-lok. I particularly cherished the informal encounters with the local arts community and sensing what had evolved over the last decade. The Freespace team also organized an ingenious dim sum brunch with a communal speed-dating format, where local creators, artists, and choreographers shared their practices with us. The first creation platform left a lasting impression on me; it is a commendable effort reflecting a deep dedication to nurturing the next generation.

The support system of the Hong Kong contemporary dance scene has certainly evolved. While established institutions like the City Contemporary Dance Company (CCDC) and the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA) have continued to produce talent, newer institutions like West Kowloon, Tai Kwun, and East Kowloon cultural centers are carving out their own curatorial niches. As a dance artist in Hong Kong, one has to be extremely hardworking, and there seem to be sufficient opportunities for everyone. Dance expression is very much alive.

In a best-case scenario—where there is no World War III—international touring productions like Melbourne-based Chunky Move’s “U>N>I>TE>D³” will continue to flourish. There will be ample funding and viewership for dance spectacles in the Asia-Pacific region. The question of climate responsibility for artists may well be offset by China’s tremendous progress in producing green energy and its realistic ambitions for carbon neutrality. In 2025, China’s high-speed rail network exceeded 50,000

¹ <https://ka5.digital/projects/softmachine>

² <https://www.westk.hk/en/event/freespace-dance>

³ <https://www.westk.hk/en/event/freespace-dance/united>

kilometers—representing over 70% of the world’s total—fulfilling key goals of the Chinese Communist Party’s 14th Five-Year Plan⁴ . As part of the Southeast Asia Belt and Road Initiative, existing railway infrastructure built and assisted by Chinese companies would enable climate-conscious artists to travel by land. In theory, a 2,600-kilometer journey from Singapore to Hong Kong would take about five days. In a plausible future, one dares to dream that China would eventually build an underwater tunnel for its high-speed rail network, connecting mainland Asia to the Pacific region of mainland Australia.



Zebra mussel as a cultural metaphor in the Greater Bay Area - 3D rendering by Qwen Ai (Alibaba Cloud)

Scenario B: Moderate Scenario: Invasive Species

Freespace Dance: First Creation Platform⁵ is a research and development platform supporting independent Hong Kong choreographers. It offers first looks at emerging ideas and insights into their creation process, inviting feedback and discussions from audiences and industry peers. One presentation impressed me with its rigorous research and juxtaposition of ideas: Cheung Wai-Yi shared his synthesis of the invasive zebra mussel species and the non-native art of pole dance. With a professional background in marine biology and a love of pole dancing, Wai-Yi opened up an

⁴ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202512/1351591.shtml>

⁵ <https://www.westk.hk/en/event/freespace-dance/first-creation-platform>

intriguing space for choreographic experiments. His methodical presentation signals an exciting cohort of emerging local artists where the notion of dance is being expanded into various tangents. All six presentations spoke of different concepts and unique thematics, ranging from vernacular language structure to gender inequalities and somatic body practices. I envy the cordial art university environment for discourse on these presentations. The public was able to engage with every artist, and mentorship and dramaturgy were prioritized in a holistic manner that greatly supports the development of young artists.

The narrative about the zebra mussel stayed with me. Known for attaching to foreign surfaces and filtering the very ecosystem they inhabit, these invasive species fundamentally alter their host environment. Essentially, they form dense colonies that disrupt the ecology of their new home. This notion of a non-native entity serves as a perfect metaphor for cultural productions in Hong Kong. For 150 years, Hong Kong as a British colony was defined by an “East-meets-West” hybrid identity, which can be further dissected as a form of strategic “Chinese-ness.” The British colonial government deliberately used traditional Chinese culture to stabilize Hong Kong and build a local identity distinct from mainland China’s political ideologies. With the implementation of these strategic policies, traditional arts like Cantonese opera were promoted, while many other folk practices were preserved by default. Historically, Hong Kongers have tended to differentiate themselves culturally from mainland Chinese. This intricacy can be mapped through a combination of linguistic pride, colonial-era fusion, and a distinct civic value system. While ethnically similar, over 150 years of separate history created what scholars call “proximate otherness”—a condition where geographic closeness paradoxically heightens cultural boundaries⁶.

However, these cultural boundaries are slowly diminishing. When I presented a lecture at a local art university, 80% of the attending students were from mainland China. I had to curb my desire to communicate in Cantonese. English is understood here, but Mandarin (Putonghua 普通话) is now normalized in Hong Kong. This is one of the major transitions for the city's linguistic culture; census data indicated that Putonghua has overtaken English as the second most spoken language in Hong Kong⁷. While the 2010s saw a large influx of mainland Chinese residents, Hong Kong subsequently experienced two distinct waves of local talent exodus—one following the 2014 Umbrella Movement and a much larger, more sustained wave starting in 2020. To offset this brain drain, the Hong Kong government launched aggressive recruitment schemes. The population rebound was largely driven by mainland Chinese professionals moving to the

⁶ <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1643942/full>

⁷ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-CJB-15295>

city under these new talent schemes⁸. In the long run, non-native populations will be the integral driving force for the economy, arts, and culture.

In a moderate scenario, young and experimental artists will thrive in times of significant societal transition, especially within Hong Kong's cultural productions from 1997 to 2047⁹. Experimental artists are sensitive to the tremors of change, translating them into new forms of artistic expression. In this trajectory, a Hong Kong cultural identity that resonates with the past could be reinvented by the growing non-native hybrid population of the present.



The Greater Bay Area Commercial Port in 2046 - 3D rendering by Qwen Ai (Alibaba Cloud)

Scenario C: High-Risk Scenario: Hardly Working

No Time To Die: An Inert Liquid Assembly¹⁰ by Nadim Abbas x Chan Wai-lok is a fascinating project that is both an installation and a performance. It reminded me of Hardly Working¹¹ (2022), an artwork by Total Refusal, which asks, “Are we all NPCs (Non-Playable Characters) in our own system and reality?” That artwork was entirely bootlegged from the video game Red Dead Redemption II. Four NPC game characters are given center stage, as if in an ethnographic film that observes their daily work

⁸ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/hong-kong-migration-shuffle>

⁹ <https://rsaa.org.uk/blog/less-than-a-decade-to-decide-what-to-do-about-hong-kong/>

¹⁰ <https://wailokcwl.com/nt2d>

¹¹ <https://totalrefusal.com/home/hardly-working>

rhythms and tireless loops. Normally, NPCs are mostly irrelevant and insignificant in the grand scheme of things; they exist for the sake of others, merely to provide a sense of reality to the player.

Within the regional context, *No Time To Die: An Inert Liquid Assembly* appears to be asking similar questions. Are we all NPCs in a world of overconsumption and overproduction? Is our society being driven into an era of fatigue and burnout? It speaks to a common workplace phenomenon termed “996” culture¹². Originating in the Chinese tech sector, it demands that employees work from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week. On the flip side, Chinese youth are resisting with a “lying flat” attitude¹³ (Tang Ping, 躺平), a movement that emerged in 2021. It describes generations born in the late 1990s and 2000s who, disappointed by a lack of social mobility and economic stagnation, have decided not to strive for a traditional future. They resist social norms regarding hard work, homeownership, marriage, and rising living standards.

Nadim Abbas and Chan Wai-lok created an aesthetic space for these thoughts. The four performers are decked out in fashionable workwear, pacing through an organized clutter of stylized packaging material. The passing of time is skillfully portrayed through subtle lighting design, illuminating the moving shadows of window frames. The mechanical gadgetry of a conveyor belt and oversized rolls of bubble wrap enhance the immersive experience of an automated “non-space.” The performing bodies carry out repetitive choreographic routines with occasional bursts of emotion, suggesting an almost human-like quality. They seem to be doing something and nothing at the same time; perhaps they are desiring a glitch in the system, hoping for a pathway to escape this man-made samsara. It is an expression that many Hong Kongers and mainland Chinese can easily relate to.

This socio-economic paradigm is associated with the concept of “involution¹⁴” (Nei Juan, 内卷). In China, this describes a “race to the bottom” characterized by intense, self-defeating competition where individuals or companies work harder for diminishing returns. As an artistic expression, *No Time To Die* does not merely reflect the human condition; it highlights the involution paradigm of the entire region.

In a High-Risk Scenario, Hong Kong as we know it may cease to exist. Since the 19th century, the city has functioned as China’s bridge to the rest of the world, defined by its free-port status and a confluence of diverse cultural influences. However, in 2019, China began a new development 50 times larger than Hong Kong: The Greater Bay Area¹⁵ (GBA). By 2035, the GBA will connect 11 cities into a “one-hour living circle” via

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/996_working_hour_system

¹³ <https://eastasiaforum.org/2022/10/27/chinas-young-lie-flat-under-social-challenges/>

¹⁴ <https://www.credit-agricole.com/en/news-channels/the-channels/economic-trends/china-behind-involution-lie-deep-seated-economic-imbalances>

¹⁵ <https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/en/knowledge/publications/a31be7c6/china-issues-outline-development-plan-for-the-guangdong-hong-kong-macao-greater-bay-area>

high-speed rail. As national policy distributes strategic roles across these cities, Hong Kong has become an integrated part of a much larger picture. With this looming in the background, one must ask: Can Hong Kong still survive as a unique cultural bridge to the future?

Scenario D: Survival Scenario: Cultural Bridge

In some places on Earth, artists risk their lives just to express themselves. Hong Kong artists seem less likely to speak openly these days; instead, they articulate their ideas with a kind of restraint, searching for alternative ways to express themselves. This "middle-way" approach may be more constructive for their community. Hugh Cho, the artistic director of TS Crew, moved from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom—one of 170,000 residents to do so via the British National (Overseas) visa¹⁶ route since 2021. However, for the last couple of years, Hugh has returned to Hong Kong for a collaborative work between TS Crew and the Japanese collective Contact Gonzo. Their performance, *Bridging Bridge*¹⁷, is a bold, experimental piece blending physical theater and martial arts to explore themes of unity and division in an increasingly polarized world.

The audience was asked to make a choice at the beginning of the performance, which designated the side of the theater where we would sit. The show began with a football match, which Hugh attributed to the shared cultural language between the British and Hong Kongers. On a secondary layer, the physical contact of the game bridged cultural differences with the Japanese artists. The collective's energetic display mimicked a real stadium atmosphere, complete with live commentary. I thought it was a perfect tribute to the Hong Kong national football team¹⁸.

After the mini series of football matches, the performance shifted into the familiar atmosphere of a Contact Gonzo work, infused with TS Crew's youthful mixture of beatboxing, street dance, martial arts, and parkour. It was engaging and thoroughly enjoyable. For me, the artistic expression of Contact Gonzo always suggests a desire for resistance. Resistance against forces larger than the individual, or against the natural elements of wind, water, and waves. Whether a playful commentary on social conformity or the abnormalities of contemporary life, Contact Gonzo has always liked to "play"—as kids, as boys, and now as husbands and fathers. This sense of play is vital to their universe and is evident throughout this collaboration.

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hong-kongers-offered-new-lives-as-uk-expands-safe-and-legal-routes>

¹⁷ <https://yokohama-dance-collection.jp/en/program/program08/>

¹⁸ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/03/25/fans-rush-to-snap-up-last-hong-kong-football-jerseys-before-china-added-to-official-name/>

I was designated to watch the performance from behind a row of ubiquitous grey sidewalk metal fencing, while the other side had an unobstructed view. In Hong Kong, these pedestrian management features carry symbolic meanings of control and defiance¹⁹. In the middle of the performance, there was an interesting moment where a small number of audience members were allowed to switch sides, enjoying a newfound freedom of perspective.

In a survival scenario, freedom of perspective is vital, as freedom is always relative. Hong Kong may still persist as a cultural apex with many possibilities. The need to survive will open new doors, especially within the Greater Bay Area, which offers 50 times more opportunities and audience members. A pragmatic approach could lead to developments in the performing arts scene that go beyond traditional opera or populist musicals. Furthermore, Shenzhen's "Silicon Valley" is churning out advanced tech-art projects, from choreographic drone spectacles to "kung fu" robotics. While Shenzhen is just 14 minutes away by high-speed train, the psychological distance remains for many Hong Kong artists. They must be mindful of identity negotiations as they search for a new, common cultural language. This cultural bridge remains a speculative option for now, as there are much deeper issues to resolve than merely crossing physical borders. I hope they continue to search for a place where freedom flows.

>>> *End of Speculation on 3rd March 2026*



Choy Ka Fai is a Berlin-based Singaporean artist whose visionary practice reimagines the limits of the human body at the intersection of dance, media art, and performance. His multidisciplinary work transcends traditional realms to question realities beyond our own. His acclaimed CosmicWander series (2019–present) investigates Asian shamanic dance cultures through performance and exhibition, premiering at the Singapore Art Museum and tanzhaus nrw Düsseldorf. His performance works have been presented by Sadler's Wells (London), ImPulsTanz (Vienna), and Kyoto Experiment (Japan). Recent exhibitions have been featured at the Biennale of Sydney, Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), and Bundeskunsthalle (Bonn). Ka Fai holds an M.A. in Design Interaction from the Royal College of Art, London.

¹⁹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-14/hong-kong-s-much-hated-pedestrian-fences-won-t-die>