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# The Price of Democracy: Hong Kong's Identity Crisis in the Umbrella Revolution

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THE PRICE OF DEMOCRACY:  
HONG KONG'S IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE UMBRELLA  
REVOLUTION



By  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
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# Chapter 1

## The Beginning of A New Movement

### Introduction - The Umbrella Revolution

On 28 September, 2014, Hong Kong, one of the world's most affluent financial centers, exploded into an unexpected outburst of civil unrest. Galvanized by popular support, tens of thousands of protesters from all levels of society poured into the streets, blocking major roads and paralyzing the city's central financial district, in the hopes of achieving universal suffrage by 2017. As the standoff between the police and protesters intensified, authorities decided to crackdown on public defiance due to an increased number of people joining the demonstration. As night fell, the peaceful pro-democracy movement was clashed with the police force in riot gear. The police entered the protest scene with batons, tear gas and pepper spray to fend off protesters. The use of yellow umbrellas as defenses by the infuriated masses to protect themselves against lachrymatory devices caused the demonstration to be later named as the "Umbrella Revolution."

The very first days of the movement started off with Occupy Central With Love and Peace. Mainly composed of college students, the Hong Kong Federation of Students managed to organize a series of town-hall meetings that initially had 700 participants. As the movement gained more momentum, student leader Joshua Wong also joined the force. "Rather than reject the things that we don't want, we want to fight for the things

we want,’ [mentioned Wong.] The movement, he felt, belonged to the students.”<sup>1</sup> This young boy with a bowl haircut staged a hunger strike prior to the Occupy Central protest, stormed onto the stage in front of the Legislative Council, and shouted out his plans into a microphone. Unfortunately, his actions had little effect on Beijing’s leadership, and only led to Wong’s arrest by the Hong Kong police force.

When footage of police arrests surfaced online, including that of Wong’s, the public became appalled and outraged. In fact, the most unnerving feature of deteriorating democracy is the erosion of a sense of moral justice. It signified a monumental collapse of hope, safety, and trust. It marked the beginning of a frightened community in search of a quest for a better collective destiny. Following Wong’s footsteps, thousands of students felt the need to take the movement into their own hands. For them, the movement is more than just fighting for democratic ideologies; it is about preserving the values and principles of being Hong Kongese. A year after the revolution, the people of Hong Kong have come to realize that the revolution itself has transformed into a powerful symbol of solidarity and liberalization.

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<sup>1</sup> Hilgers, Lauren. "Hong Kong’s Umbrella Revolution Isn’t Over Yet." *The New York Times*. 21 Feb. 2015.

## Historical Background

As the 20th century of Chinese modern history finished off with the speedy return of Hong Kong to the mainland, scholars and thinkers continue to define and redefine the problem of identity for Hong Kong people in an era of constant change. After much vicissitude of its transition, many Hong Kong people have been awakened from their dark days of political hibernation, and begun to develop not only political consciousness, but gradually roused to political actions.

Hong Kong is defined as “Fragrant Harbor” in Chinese, so named because of its deep natural harbors nurturing over seven million people on the densely populated island.<sup>2</sup> As one of the most popular travel destinations in Asia, Hong Kong is a dynamic city, fused by traditional and contemporary values, and a mixture of Eastern and Western cultural influences. The former British colony today is once again faced with Beijing’s “colonization” of its politics and economy. From an international relations point of view, Hong Kong has always been a devoted follower of the West, endorsing civil liberties and free-market capitalism. Yet, the issue of democracy has torn the once tranquil and politically apathetic island apart, transforming it into its own sovereign being. The political dependency of Hong Kong relies not simply on its former colonial lord or present sovereign master, but on its own hands. In the last few years, we have seen an increasing polarization over what kind of political system should Hong Kong have as a Special Administrative Region of China.

After 156 years of British occupation, Hong Kong is once again a part of China. In September 1984, Communist China and the United Kingdom signed the Sino-

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<sup>2</sup> "World Development Indicators." *Google Public Data Explorer*. World Bank, 16 Oct. 2015.

British Declaration, which allowed the Chinese government to resume its exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997. Under the agreement, “One Country, Two Systems” was proposed as a resolution to the reunification problem, as it “provides a rational mechanism for the coexistence of ... contradictory systems: socialism on the mainland, [and] capitalism in Hong Kong.”<sup>3</sup> However, under “One Country, Two Systems,” Hong Kong is verily losing its ground. China now is a nation on its stellar rise to the world’s stage, with phenomenal growth rates in the economic sector. Often unloved and misunderstood, the country gives off the impression of achieving objectives through carrots and sticks, instead of capitalizing on warm sentiments.<sup>4</sup> Beijing’s leadership have sought to reverse this negative image through various channels, including the expansion of foreign aid and forging multilateral cooperation in the region.

Under the current political climate, China has been increasingly exercising “soft power” in terms of cultivating cultural diplomacy and national marketing. In fact, China’s new diplomatic efforts have greatly enhanced its status as a regional power in the Asian community. During President Xi’s speech in the 2015 military parade, he pledged his country would “never seek hegemony or expansion. It will never inflict its past suffering on any other nation.”<sup>5</sup> Although the majority of the Western media may doubt the authenticity of Xi’s statements or simply regard it as lip service, such statements sought to soften tension and enforce cooperation are certainly favorable to its foreign relations.

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<sup>3</sup> Chao, Chien-Min. ““One Country, Two Systems”.” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 14.2 (1987): 107-24.

<sup>4</sup> Moss, Trefor. “Soft Power? China Has Plenty.” *The Diplomat*. 04 June 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Phipps, Claire. “China Military Parade Commemorates Second World War Victory – as It Happened.” *The Guardian*. 3 Sept. 2015.



Over the past few years, Beijing has gradually and systematically increased its grip over the city, avoiding direct challenges while focusing on experimentation of the system. Contrary to Beijing's expectations for cultural and economic assimilation, the two regions have only been growing apart. The reunification has brought to us a series of conflicts in the social, political and economic realms. Hence, contemporary values and norms of Hong Kong society are constantly being shaken up and incrementally supplanted by Chinese institutions and socioeconomic structures.

### **Hong Kong-Mainland Relations**

The relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland is often complex; the century-long separation between the two regions has generated major social and political gaps that are strenuous to bridge. Legally speaking, there are five major differences between Hong Kong and mainland China.

1. HKSAR passport holders are granted visa-free access or visa-on-arrival to visit 152 countries, whereas Chinese passport holders only have access to 45 countries visa free.<sup>6</sup>
2. Hong Kong runs on a different currency. Since the primary objective in Hong Kong's monetary policy is to maintain economic stability, the Hong Kong dollar

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<sup>6</sup> "Visa-free Access for HKSAR Passport." *Visa-free Access for HKSAR Passport*. Immigration Department. Web. 19 Jan. 2016.

- has a linked exchange rate system that connects to the U.S. dollar. On the other hand, the renminbi is the official currency of the People's Republic of China.
3. The official languages of Hong Kong include English and Cantonese. However, Hong Kong's official written language uses traditional, instead of simplified Chinese characters. Whereas in mainland China, the government has adopted simplified characters since the 1950s in an attempt to improve literacy rates. Even today, the debate on traditional Chinese characters and simplified Chinese characters is still ongoing, and has escalated fervent responses among users of Chinese characters with its implications of political ideology and cultural identity.
  4. Human rights are protected under the Basic Law of Hong Kong, guaranteeing a wide range of freedoms, from freedom of speech and press to the freedom of assembly. Hong Kong and Macau are the only regions in China where people can freely access Facebook, Twitter and other popular social media websites.
  5. Lastly, Hong Kong's commitment to small government and laissez faire economic policies has allowed the city to become one of the world's most prosperous economies, attracting major business investments in financial services and shipping. In mainland China, the lines between public and private sectors are blurred. A form of controlled, state-managed capitalism keeps both sectors active and aggressive.

In the following chapters, I will discuss how these legal differences between Hong Kong and the mainland unfold social, political, and economic conflicts as Beijing imposes mainland-style policies to facilitate assimilation.

### **Emergence of a New Identity**

While Beijing still plays a crucial role in its attempt to exercise political control over Hong Kong, the potent and omnipresent forces of modernization and globalization constantly questions the narrow definitions of national and individual identity of Hong Kong people. Strategies of “mainlandization” imposed by Beijing have continuously aimed at assimilating Hong Kong into Chinese society. However, similar to the law of physics, wherever there is an action force, there must also be a reaction force counterbalancing it. These forceful transformations of political hegemony after the transition of sovereignty required the destruction of traditional Hong Kong culture and lifestyles.

Hong Kong’s identity crisis has been brewing into a multidimensional epidemic waiting to explode. And yet, the only conditions that are postponing this apocalyptic time bomb are short-term economic incentives and constant social changes that leave no room or time for spiritual contemplation. People continue to enjoy a love-hate relationship with the popular culture of crass materialism, fast-frozen human relations, and spiritual void. The rags-to-riches phenomenon leads many to question the values and meanings of wealth; they strive to trace back to the old cultural traditions. A sense of nostalgia has always lingered in Hong Kong society. There is a sense of unwillingness to alter the ideological landscape, along with a faint hope for a better tomorrow.

Today’s political conditions present to us a new form of reality. Youth populations in Hong Kong start to question the logic behind nihilistic nostalgia. Hong Kong’s outstanding economic performances in the past no longer quench the desires for the new generation to search for a political consciousness, a democratic mind. “While the

Hong Kong government intentionally misinterprets the movement as simply a kind of social movement that can be solved by paying attention to specific policy issues, this is a political movement that is reshaping the ideological landscape of Hong Kong.”<sup>7</sup> Political movements such as the Umbrella Revolution not only function as a protest for political discontent, but also demonstrate a powerful ability to reconfigure hegemony through collective action, as well as expand the potential of forms of rebellion under systematic oppression.

The explosion of an identity crisis in Hong Kong is a recent phenomenon. It has raised important questions regarding Chinese despotism in the region and possible counter-hegemonic expressions. Will Hong Kong become the next Taiwan? Or will Taiwan become the next Hong Kong? The challenge of discussing the Hong Kongese identity is that the nuances are often misconstrued under the Western gaze. Westerners tend to see more similarities than differences between people of Chinese descent, and fail to acknowledge the numerous privileges and complexities embedded in these identities.

As certain regions in Asia become increasingly westernized, anti-Chinese sentiments have also become more pronounced. The economic takeoff in China has altered the social and political relations between Hong Kong and the mainland, producing a new Chinese identity that is amplified and constantly transforming. Hence, the ramification of Hong Kong’s transfer of sovereignty is that its political dependence towards China becomes more sensitive and such conditions can result in a larger societal change.

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<sup>7</sup> Kung, Lap Yan. "Occupy Central, Umbrella Movement, and Democracy - Syndicate Theology." *Syndicate Theology*. 30 Nov. 2014.

Prior to 1997, a revolutionary route to democracy through protests and uprisings was unthinkable. There has been a persistent pragmatic and apolitical culture that prevents the radical wind from blowing through the city. In fact, “Hong Kong was one of the few deviant countries that were high on the Human Development Index but undemocratic in 1990.”<sup>8</sup> However, the Umbrella Revolution is often interpreted as a democratization movement by the local news and Western media. Moreover, a broader undercurrent of social movements have been ongoing even before the revolution last year, such as the major demonstration in 2003 on Article 23 of the Basic Law, and the annual gathering at Victoria Park in remembrance of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. As a result, academics and lawmakers start to expand their understandings of the political aspirations of Hong Kong people for democracy.

Contrary to the popular opinion, the vast differences in social, political, and economic realms between the Hong Kong and mainland China have exemplified cultural meanings that extend beyond democracy. I argue that the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong is more than just democratization - it reflects a larger identity crisis that differentiates the Hong Kong from Chinese. The democratic movement has implications more than universal suffrage – it concerns distinctions of cultural identity and political ideologies of what it means to be Hong Kongnese.

Most past research on the democratization of Hong Kong has been generally concerned about on the ramifications of institutional power dynamics, and aimed to inform an audience whose primary interests were in China. Accordingly, understandings

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<sup>8</sup> Hsin-Chi, Kuan, and Lau Siu-Kai. "The Partial Vision of Democracy in Hong Kong: A Survey of Popular Opinion." *The China Journal* 34 (1995): 239-64.

of the culture and society of Hong Kong becomes limited, as they serve to support an argument for or against Chinese regional despotism. From public media coverage to scholarship articles, very little attention has been paid to the transformations of Hong Kong at the individual level. In a society that has been through constant social, economic and political transformations in the past decades, Hong Kong has developed a rich culture that demands analysis beyond the surface. This thesis focuses on the development of a unique Hong Kongese identity and its implications on the ongoing democratic movement. The following chapters will establish conceptual and empirical relations between cultural identities and political dissent in an attempt to form a dialogue for the understanding of local contextual complexities and global linkages of democratic movements in Hong Kong.

## Chapter 2

### Interpretations of the Umbrella Revolution

#### Introduction

On the core issue of democracy, discrepancies in the narrative of value and vision surface between the Central Government and Hong Kong people. In the wake of the recent democratic movement, it has become clear that the discrepancies are not simply a result of misunderstanding or misconceptions, but an intentional charade of power play in the pursuit of realist interests, for Beijing “knows too well in the pluralistic nature of Hong Kong society, ... [and] acted quickly to quell the heated controversies.”<sup>9</sup> In short, the logic behind Beijing’s political narratives has failed to convince the hearts and minds of Hong Kong people. Hong Kong’s vision of democracy, on the other hand, has been widely denounced as an upsurge for civil disobedience and chaos. Hence, the Umbrella Revolution has unfolded numerous interpretations from both sides of the argument. While the Western media has widely supported the movement, Chinese sources indicate otherwise. In the meantime, another theory has emerged in an attempt to evaluate the issue. It concerns the implications of cultural identity on the democratic movement. Broadly speaking, the voices behind the interpretations can be categorized into three basic approaches: *government position*, *democratic movement theory*, and the *ethnic identity theory*.

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<sup>9</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 65. Print.

In this chapter, all three interpretations will be incorporated into the discussion of the legal, intuitional, and ideological implications of the Umbrella Revolution. Concepts such as sovereignty, legitimacy, and the logic behind democratic movements will be explored in detail. I address the significant players in this conversation, such as the Central Government, the C.Y. Leung administration, Occupy Central, the University of Hong Kong, etc., as they all serve to dismantle the problem of “One Country, Two Systems” from various angles. While the *government position* and *democratic movement theory* strives to take center stage on the debate for universal suffrage and electoral reform, I argue that the *ethnic identity theory* examines the issue in a different light, and provides a more realistic framework in understanding the manifestations of cultural identities in the ongoing political currents of Hong Kong society.

### **Government Position**

As the trends of political participation in Hong Kong transform and evolve at a rapid pace, Beijing’s leadership has also altered their rhetoric in addressing issues related to sovereignty and autonomy of the Special Administrative Region. While the Central Government has been largely silent on the movement itself, preventing all Chinese media from reporting on the protests, Beijing has also utilized state-run media to deliver its voices.<sup>10</sup> Under the *government position*, Beijing’s leadership has raised three major concerns. In order to win over international sympathy, Beijing has played the role of the victim in its political narratives on the movement. First, Beijing used the strategy of

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<sup>10</sup> Huntsman, Jon. "China's Hong Kong Dilemma." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 2 Oct. 2014. Web.



associating the Occupy Central movement to a radical opposition group, identifying their commonalities in the forms of illegal conducts, violent mannerisms, and separatist ideologies. Beijing's stance was directed at denouncing and dismissing the democratic movement as a handful of radicals stirring up the public.<sup>11</sup> This line of reasoning insinuates that the Occupy protesters do not want true democracy. Instead, they want "a democracy in the form of being independent of the influence of the Central Government."<sup>12</sup> Not only does this argument oversimplify the motivations and principles behind the movement, and equate the pursuit of democracy to the pursuit of independence, Beijing has also viewed the movement as a demonstration of antagonism against China, instead of dissatisfaction toward the political system in place. To be fair, there is a small minority of supporters for Hong Kong's political independence. These supporters publically dispute patriotic ideologies and are usually referred to as *bentupai* ("home-soil faction").<sup>13</sup> However, majority of the protesters in the Umbrella Revolution do not identify with such ideas.

Leaving aside whether the Umbrella Revolution was an act of civil disobedience, from a legal standpoint, the *government position* has questioned the basis of protesters' political agenda. Beijing states that China has always abided by the basic principles of "One Country, Two Systems" and allowed for a "high level of autonomy" in the sovereign region. Therefore, claims of the Central Government violating such principles are groundless and incriminating. Moreover, this position states that "high level of autonomy" does not represent full autonomy, nor does the concept of "Hong Kong people

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<sup>11</sup> "Keep Alert to 'HK Independence' Rhetoric." *Global Times*. 8 Feb. 2015. Web.

<sup>12</sup> Nai-keung, Lau. "'Umbrella Revolution' Finally Ends in Failure." *China Daily*. 15 Dec. 2014. Web.

<sup>13</sup> Veg, Sebastian. "Hong Kong's Enduring Identity Crisis." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 16 Oct. 2013. Web.

administering Hong Kong” come into conflict with Beijing’s jurisdiction over the city.<sup>14</sup> Beijing’s stance on the issue of sovereignty is inflexible and uncompromising; there is no room for interpretations other than the *government position*. From a paternalistic standpoint, the *government position* asserts that “One Country, Two Systems” is only intended to “safeguard the sovereignty, security and development of the whole Chinese nation.”<sup>15</sup> They argue that following the nationalistic agenda and denouncing possibilities of nativism is for the benefit of Hong Kong as a whole. As a result, the 2017 chief executive election must also be conducted in accordance with the Basic Law, and comply with the constitutional principles of “One Country, Two Systems” for the sake of Hong Kong society.<sup>16</sup>

The National People’s Congress (NPC) of Beijing offered a new interpretation of the Basic Law of Hong Kong. According to *Guancha Syndicate*, “despite what ... the protesters have been crying out so loud China has not violated the Joint Declaration at all.”<sup>17</sup> Under Article 3 (4) of the Joint Declaration, it states:

*The Chief executive will be appointed by the Central People’s Government on the basis of the results of elections or consultations to be held locally.*

Moreover, the notion of “universal suffrage” is a contemporary concept, nowhere to be found under the Sino-British treaty at that time. The concept was first introduced in the Basic Law, and put into effect when Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of China on July 1, 1997. Article 45 of the Basic Law states:

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<sup>14</sup> "'Umbrella Revolution' Defeated." *China Daily*. 12 Dec. 2014. Web.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Li, Eric X. "The Umbrella Protestors Are Wrong: China Is Abiding by Hong Kong's Basic Law." *The Huffington Post*. [www.guancha.cn](http://www.guancha.cn), 5 Dec. 2014. Web.

*The method for selecting the Chief Executive shall be specified in the light of the actual situation in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and in accordance with the principle of gradual and orderly progress. The ultimate aim is the selection of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage upon nomination by a broadly representative nominating committee in accordance with democratic procedures.*

Hong Kong's constitution, states *Guancha Syndicate*, "has stipulated very clearly that for universal suffrage as the ultimate aim to be materialized, a number of criteria have to be fulfilled: it has to look into the 'actual situation,' to follow the 'principle of gradual and orderly progress,' and to nominate candidates by a 'nomination committee.'"<sup>18</sup> In the present day situation, the power to define these three terms solely belongs to the Beijing. In late August of 2014, the Central Government reconfirmed that Hong Kong could achieve "universal suffrage" by 2017. This version of universal suffrage, however, is vastly different from what Hong Kong people desire. Although more than five million voters in Hong Kong would be able to participate in the "one man, one vote" election, they must select their candidates from a 1,200-member Beijing-backed selection committee pool.

From the *government position*, the protestors in the movement both disregard the legal procedures of democracy and demand a "civic nomination" that is not strictly introduced under the Basic Law. Under a civic nomination, the public will be able to

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<sup>18</sup> Li, Eric X. "The Umbrella Protestors Are Wrong: China Is Abiding by Hong Kong's Basic Law." *The Huffington Post*. [www.guancha.cn](http://www.guancha.cn), 5 Dec. 2014. Web.

nominate candidates from any party, instead of the pool of Beijing-backed selection committee. Pro-democratic lawmakers in Hong Kong are determined to stand up against all odds in order to ensure that the selection committee is truly “broadly representative.” In fact, the “civic nomination” demand is particularly where the divide splits, as pro-democracy activists named Beijing’s proposal a “fake universal suffrage.”

Third, the *government position* states that political dissent in Hong Kong society is led by dissatisfaction toward internal social and economic issues, and that such issues are only a reflection of Hong Kong’s own deficiencies. Globalization and capitalistic market forces have largely benefited capital over labor, enlarging the rift between rich and poor, and generating numerous inefficiencies in the economy. However, the Central Government and even ordinary mainland citizens are being accused of causing these problems in Hong Kong.<sup>19</sup> Internal social conflicts are an outcome of the problematic “economic structure and social contradictions,” which “cannot be resolved by diverting attention.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, what Hong Kong lacks is an economic reform, not a political one.

In a nutshell, the *government position* has been aiming at downplaying the significance of democracy and discrediting those who are behind the movement. Beijing would like to see a true reunification between mainland and Hong Kong, where people would put “One Country” before “Two Systems,” and uphold the status of patriotism in all regards. Nevertheless, the Umbrella Revolution still gained steam on the international stage. The remarkable display of collective political action by Hong Kong citizens

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<sup>19</sup> Han, Zhu. "Hong Kong's Internal Contradictions Are Not the Mainland's Fault." *Global Times*. 6 July 2014. Web.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

reflects that the movement itself is not simply backed by a handful of radicals, but tens of thousands of protesters who felt a profound sense of desperation toward the present societal conditions. People in Hong Kong believe that the Central Government has both interfered with Hong Kong's internal affairs and extracted numerous economic benefits from the city, violating the Basic Law and eroding societal justice.

### **Democratic Movement Theory**

Three major players emerge under the *democratic movement theory*: Occupy Central, Alliance for True Democracy, and People Power Party. In June 20, 2014, the Public Opinion Program at The University of Hong Kong (POP) and the Centre for Social Policy Studies at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (CSPS) were commissioned by Occupy Central with Love and Peace to organize a Civil Referendum on the issues related to constitutional reform.<sup>21</sup> All three groups submitted their proposals to the government for the chief executive election in 2017. One was required to be aged 18 or above and a Hong Kong permanent resident in order to vote. The democratic referendum on universal suffrage garnered close to 800,000 participants, both local and overseas, indicating that one in five registered voters took part in this event. In short, the proposal by Alliance for True Democracy allows for the public, nominating committee and political parties to name candidates for the chief executive, and had a landslide

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<sup>21</sup> "6.20-29 Civil Referendum." *Popvote.hk*. Occupy Central with Love and Peace, 15 Feb. 2015. Web.

victory of 42.1% support.<sup>22</sup> While the three proposals were relatively similar, the other two did not allow political parties to name candidates.

Under the current political situation, the Hong Kong government understands that grievances and political sentiments in the community have been largely gathered by its own ineffectiveness and unpopularity. In addressing such grievances, the HKSAR government is hesitant to introduce political reforms, which on one hand may infuriate the Central Government in Beijing, and on the other add to the emotional burdens of Hong Kong people. Therefore, the Hong Kong government strives to maneuver around these two forces, and find a balance to please both. The C.Y. Leung administration, for instance, has only offered sweeteners to the public. The administration states that an important contribution would be made in the housing area; “but other than that, it is in a difficult position to deliver.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, it is clear to see why such “sweeteners” only aroused more public anger, as it miserably fails to address the real issues, and has been unsuccessful in finding a strategic reconciliation between Beijing and Hong Kong people. Overall, the *democratic movement theory* argues that constitutional reforms in the election process are key to democracy, and that the inconsistencies in government behaviors on such issues are the major driving force behind the Umbrella Revolution.

What can be said about the phenomenal success of this referendum is that Hong Kong people have legitimate concerns on the issues of political procedures and democratic progress. They genuinely believe that the true nature of political participation

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<sup>22</sup> "6.20-29 Civil Referendum." *Popvote.hk*. Occupy Central with Love and Peace, 15 Feb. 2015. Web.

<sup>23</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 9. Print.

demands people to step into the public sphere and engage in meaningful conversations that would help shape the future of a democratic society. A large majority would like to see all sectors of society engaging in a truly democratic and broadly representative election. The public has shown high interest, awareness, and knowledge about the current political situation.

### **Ethnic Identity Theory**

The last major interpretation of the Umbrella Revolution is the *ethnic identity theory*. Not much research has been done in this area, but academics from the City University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong University have found that ethnic identity patterns in Hong Kong tend to follow the trends of political orientations. From empirical analysis, they found significant correlations between the two factors. I will contribute to this theory in the next two chapters by establishing the links between ethnic identity and political sentiments.

When a popular movement like the Umbrella Revolution gains momentum, it is difficult for the public to actively distinguish between individual political orientations and societal wide identity shifts. And yet, inability to recognize the persistence of major identity shifts results in the attribution of responsibility of political inadequacy to systemic or institutional inefficiencies, which risks oversimplifying the intricate nexus woven into the relationship between politics and its people. Now, to say this is not to say

that institutional changes do not have an impact on individual identity, but that identity itself may shape people's perceptions of politics.

Historically speaking, the then-prevalent differences between the Hong Kong and Chinese were only addressed as differences between “the national” and “the local.” In contemporary society, Hong Kong is a city where both Chinese nationalist culture and Western modern influences constantly come into conflict. As capitalistic drives motivate people to value individualism, freedom of opportunities, and tolerance for diversity, Sinocentrism in its traditional sense becomes alienated from society. Accordingly, the status of Sinocentric patriotism itself may be equated to ethnocentric dogma, resulting in a slightly slanted perception of the incentives behind mainland-style policies. Moreover, among cultural identities exist numerous dualities, grey areas, and in-betweens. The transfer of sovereignty may have left behind the transfer of minds. In fact, ethnic identities have vast implications on individual preferences, norms, standards, and political behaviors. The materialization of such identities can result in societal wide changes in the political climate.

These conditions leave us to question how does ethnic identity feature in the deepening conflict-ridden processes of politicization and democratization of Hong Kong society? How does the public take part in the anxiety-provoking politics of China's nation building? How did the different courses of cultural influx and political integration between the two regions leave their marks in the disposition of Hong Kong identity? I argue that the reality behind the Umbrella Revolution lies beyond the surface of civil disobedience, principles of the Basic Law, and the constitutional fight for democracy.



The ongoing democratic movement is led by an ideological wedge between surface and substance, appearance and reality. It is a political movement that is embedded in culture, one that constantly reflects and resonates back to the problem of identity.

## Chapter 3

### Problem of Identity

#### Introduction

Let us rewind back to September 2014. According to majority of the mainstream media, protesters and activists at the Umbrella Revolution were ready to do whatever it takes to achieve universal suffrage. Spirited and determined, thousands of students linked their arms in solidarity during sit-in street protests. Many of them have vowed to face charges rather than resist arrest. Hand in hand, the Hong Kong Federation of Students and Occupy Central With Love and Peace discussed potential social-media strategies while organizing class boycott campaigns and business strikes. Within the next few days, the bustling metropolitan financial hub was turned into a miniature battlefield as police officers in riot gear started breaking up the human chains by rounds and rounds of tear gas and pepper spray. Protesters in turn defended themselves with yellow umbrellas, facemasks and rain ponchos while they returned and advanced courageously after each volley of tear gas. Although the protesters were able to fend off tear gas bombs with the aid of those fragile umbrellas, they were still unable to shield themselves from Beijing's political control.

On the surface of the Umbrella Revolution, the demonstrators have been galvanized by mainstream media as the knights of democracy, with a romanticized narrative of fighting against authoritarian control from Beijing's leadership. The politics of the situation, however, extend beyond the popular story. From a neoclassical

Bismarckian perspective, China's present strategy is one that "combines a subtle realpolitik effort at developing national capabilities and cultivating international partners" through economic and diplomatic engagements.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, from a strategic culturalist perspective, recent analysis of Chinese foreign relations has shown signs of greater acceptance of multilateralism and international norms.<sup>25</sup> Different narratives on the Umbrella Revolution itself have also attempted to interpret the ramifications behind democracy. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *government position* and *democratic movement theory* are distinguished voices on both sides of the argument. Yet, regardless of the viewpoint of these explanations of state behavior, it is impossible to deny the fact that Beijing's leadership is simultaneously facing security issues on different fronts of its periphery, and their means to handle such popular dissent have been relatively consistent.

Similar to the Hong Kong protests in 2014, civil unrests and riots have also occurred in Lhasa, Tibet in March 2008, and Ürümqi, Xinjiang in July 2009. Those who support Tibetan independence, such as Dalai Lama and Students for a Free Tibet, initially observed the nonviolent Tibetan Uprising Day. But when monks were arrested during peaceful demonstrations,<sup>26</sup> the event unfortunately turned into a series of violent ethnic conflicts that have been ongoing until today. In the following year, a protest in Ürümqi involving around 1,000 Uyghurs quickly escalated into violent attacks that were targeted towards the Han people, leaving "at least 156 people dead and more than 800 people

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<sup>24</sup> Avery Goldstein, 'An Emerging China's Emerging Grand Strategy: A Neo-Bismarckian Turn?' in John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (eds), *International Relations Theory And The Asia-Pacific*. (New York: Columbia University, 2003), pp. 60-61.

<sup>25</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Socialization in International Institutions', in John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (eds), *International Relations Theory And The Asia-Pacific*. (New York: Columbia University, 2003), pp. 107-62.

<sup>26</sup> Oster, Shai (28 March 2008). ["Lhasa Riots Expose Tibet's Split Society"](#). *The Wall Street Journal: Business*. Web.

injured.”<sup>27</sup> While security issues in Xinjiang and Tibet continue to remain delicate, the student led Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong not only won over the hearts and minds of the international community, but also once again shook the edifice of mandated hegemony in Chinese society.

Although strategies for addressing security issues in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong may differ due to distinctions in regime history and the extent of political control from Beijing, however, from the bloody riots that have roiled Tibet to the student tear gas fighters in Hong Kong, we can find one commonality amongst all three forms of civil unrests: Beijing’s nationalistic agenda of assimilation has “greatly strengthened the local identities, sharpened the sense of alienation and grievance felt by the targeted groups, and radicalized the activists among them.”<sup>28</sup> The formation of a unique Hong Kong identity was catalyzed by political oppression and fueled by cultural assimilation. Evidently, Beijing’s political strategy of hastening the process of assimilation has unfolded numerous tensions and generated drawbacks in various dimensions. In the recent years, Beijing’s “mainlandization” strategy is mainly consisted of a combination of political and economic convergence, social integration, and draconian internal security measures, which mostly yielded counterproductive results from its peripheral regions.

This chapter explores the impacts of Beijing’s social, political, and economic integration of Hong Kong on the formation of political dissent and cultural identity. Research and surveys over the last few years have questioned the responsiveness of cultural identities to Beijing’s authoritarian control. The evidence that emerged from

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<sup>27</sup> "Scores killed in China protests". BBC News. 6 July 2009. Retrieved 6 July 2009. Web.

<sup>28</sup> Pei, Minxin. "Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang: Triple Trouble on China's Periphery." *The National Interest*. 9 Oct. 2014. Web.

these data, which will be further discussed in the following chapter, indicate that increased political tensions brought on by continued mainlandization in Hong Kong is positively correlated to a change in people's cultural identities. Hence, if the political tensions generated by Beijing are one of the leading causes of the Umbrella Revolution, then a cultural identity shift may be the link between the two phenomena. This leads me to conclude as the formation of a Hong Kongese identity becomes more distinguishable, it is likely that popular dissent will expand while trends of political participation will become more democratic.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the various intersections between mainlandization policies, social stratification and the formation of a Hong Kongese identity. The mechanisms and processes of mainlandization combined with social stratification have sharpened identities and increased radicalization among local political forces. Next, the dynamics of identity becomes more complicated as I introduce the dual nature of Chineseness and the various grey areas that exist within cultural identities. By examining historical Chinese intellectual thought and contemporary patriotic ideology, I criticize the hypocrisy of realist mainlandization strategies of assimilation. Third, the literal and symbolic manifestations of identity come into light in the conversation on political participation. I argue that symbolic dimensions of cultural identities are necessary for producing counter-hegemonic forms of expression. The Hong Kongese identity is a symbol for solidarity and resistance, and therefore becomes key to our understanding of the ongoing democratic movements in society.

## Mainlandization and Identity Formation

### 1. Political Integration

The process of mainlandization has prevailed on different levels of society and demonstrated its success and weakness in three dimensions, namely, the political, social, and economic. First, the political situation of the city is one of the major concerns of Beijing's leadership. Mainland-style policies, which include a series of efforts aimed at limiting the freedom of speech, press, and civil liberties, have been vigorously met with constant criticisms from the local and Western news. Prior to 1997, the degree of Hong Kong's press freedom was one of the highest in Asia.<sup>29</sup> Although the book publishing industry in Hong Kong operates under a separate legal system from the mainland, nowadays, its freedom of press has been increasingly threatened by Beijing's censorship in silencing opposition and reshaping the media landscape in favor of China.

In the recent efforts to assimilate Hong Kong into China, Beijing has been on the watch for any "treason, secession, sedition and subversion," as a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Rocky Tse stated that "[writers'] harmful information will be harmoniously disappeared before you can even hit the send button."<sup>30</sup> There has been a "rapid jump in the number of violent attacks on members of the media, including 17 cases of assaults on journalists between June 2012 and June 2014."<sup>31</sup> An even more obscure incident occurred when a total of five booksellers from Mighty Current Media Company Limited, specializing in banned books in China,

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<sup>29</sup> Lee Chin-Chuan (1997). "Media Structure and Regime Change in Hong Kong", *The Challenge of Hong Kong's Reintegration with China*. Hong Kong University Press. pp. 160–161.

<sup>30</sup> Wolfendale, Stuart. "China Security Law Almost Definitely Probably Won't Be Imposed on Hong Kong | Hong Kong Free Press." *Hong Kong Free Press*. 12 July 2015. Web.

<sup>31</sup> Nossel, Suzanne. "Closing a Vital Window Into China." *Foreign Policy*. 4 Feb. 2015. Web.

mysteriously vanished one after the other beginning in October 2015.<sup>32</sup> Many speculate that the Chinese law enforcement agents may have illegally abducted these booksellers, further eroding the freedom of press and violating Hong Kong's Basic law. While some major news sources have sided with pro-mainland voices, majority of Hong Kong people fear that Beijing's persistent interferences may alter the city's political climate. In fact, Beijing's draconian political control of free speech and press, which attempted to impede the development of a democratic identity in Hong Kong, has not only resulted in significant reactionary backlash in the form of political dissent, but also in terms of cultural identity formation.

## **2. Cultural Integration**

In the socio-cultural dimension of assimilation, Beijing has attempted to mainlandize Hong Kong's youth through pedagogy of Chinese nationalism. In July 2012, thousands of Hong Kong protesters marched onto the streets to protest Beijing's plan to introduce a Chinese patriotism curriculum to the Hong Kong education system. Consequently, not only was the blueprint of indoctrination unsuccessful, but a powerful pro-democracy student activist organization, Scholarism, also emerged to backfire on Beijing's efforts. Led by the popular secondary school student activist Joshua Wong, the organization declared Beijing's interference with Hong Kong's educational policy unconstitutional.<sup>33</sup> According to Hong Kong's public broadcasting station, RTHK,

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<sup>32</sup> Yi-zheng, Lian. "Hong Kong's Missing Booksellers." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 21 Jan. 2016. Web.

<sup>33</sup> "No department of the Central People's Government and no province, autonomous region, or municipality directly under the Central Government may interfere in the affairs which the Hong Kong

approximately 90,000 activists and members of the public turned out at the event at Victoria Park,<sup>34</sup> and eventually forced Beijing's leadership to withdraw from its introduction of the curriculum as a compulsory subject in schools. At a local conference concerning protests on the issue, educators met at the Holy Cross Church, where an associate professor at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Dixon Sing, mentioned, "We are sitting on a volcano. Beijing is trying to speed up the process of integrating Hong Kong in the cultural sense, ahead of elections when everyone gets to vote."<sup>35</sup> The new national curriculum is similar to the one taught in mainland China, which "[includes] a handbook titled 'The China Model,' [describing] the Communist Party as 'progressive, selfless and united' and criticize multiparty systems."<sup>36</sup> Critics of the curriculum have argued that it is an attempt to brainwash Hong Kong schoolchildren, and selectively teaches about historical and political events. Consequently, people in Hong Kong are beginning to dread the idea of Chinese nationalism due to the vast amount of political implications it unfolds while striving to uphold the core values of being Hong Kongese.

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Special Administrative Region administers on its own in accordance with this Law." "THE BASIC LAW OF THE HONG KONG (Article 22)".

<sup>34</sup> Lau, Joyce. "Thousands Protest China's Plans for Hong Kong Schools." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 29 July 2012. Web.

<sup>35</sup> Liu, Juliana. "Hong Kong Debates 'national Education' Classes - BBC News." *BBC News*. 1 Sept. 2012. Web.

<sup>36</sup> Guilford, Gwynn. "Meet the Hong Kong Teenager Who's Standing up to the Chinese Communist Party." *Quartz*. 30 Sept. 2014. Web.



### 3. Social Integration

The social dimension of integration has also produced numerous undesirable effects on the Hong Kong society, including the polarization of cultural identities. After almost two decades of reunification, the cultural distance between Hong Kong people and mainlanders have only exacerbated. Clashes occur periodically amongst the two groups, especially when mainland tourists do not follow the British-influenced social standards in Hong Kong. When traveling in Hong Kong, behaviors such as eating on the subway, talking loudly in public, or spitting and littering in the streets are often deemed as “uncivilized.” Although such behaviors are also not socially acceptable in the urban areas of China, they tend to be tolerated.

Video clips of unwelcomed public behaviors are frequently uploaded onto the Internet, provoking public anger in Hong Kong. One of the viral videos contains footage of a toddler urinating publicly in Hong Kong’s streets. The parents of the child are mainland tourists who travelled to one of the most popular districts in Hong Kong – Mong Kok. An angry crowd quickly gathered as the parents try to defend their actions and “grab the memory card of someone in the crowd who had filmed the child.”<sup>37</sup> The clip was widely circulated and spurred aggravating debates on both sides. However, it is important to note that the video does not simply reflect longstanding cultural differences between the two regions, but also reveals public anger toward an enormous influx of mainland tourists into the city on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, some Hong Kongers have responded to these cultural differences with violent and barbaric actions, including the beating to death of a mainland tourist. In

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<sup>37</sup> Tharoor, Ishaan. "Chinese Toddler Pees in Hong Kong Street, Stirs Online Firestorm." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 30 Apr. 2014. Web.

October 2015, a 53-year-old mainland tourist tried to mediate a dispute at a local jewelry store, but was attacked by a group of four Hong Kong men and later passed away at the hospital.<sup>38</sup> The fatal attack prompted Hong Kong authorities to safeguard the rights of mainland tourists.

A derogatory term used by Hong Kongers to describe the mainland Chinese is “locusts,” a reference to tourists swarming into the city, taking its resources, and leaving a mess behind. While Hong Kong people called mainlanders “locusts,” Kong Qingdong, a social commentator and professor at Peking University, has also referred to Hong Kong people as “British running dogs.”<sup>39</sup> Kong mentioned, “to the best of my knowledge, my people in Hong Kong don’t consider themselves to be Chinese. Those types of people are used to being the dogs of British imperialists – they are dogs, not humans.”<sup>40</sup> His comments were broadcasted on Chinese television, which sparked yet another protest in the city.

Besides the verbal denouncements from both sides, Hong Kong citizenship has also become a key issue in the social realm. Hong Kong has very limited resources for a small island. Geographically speaking, Hong Kong is “about a third the size of Rhode Island (USA's smallest state).”<sup>41</sup> After the handover in 1997, more and more mainland mothers have been entering to Hong Kong to give birth, since children born in Hong Kong automatically receive not only permanent residency, but also better healthcare and education opportunities compared to China. On top of that, the Hong Kong passport

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<sup>38</sup> Lo, Clifford. "Mainland Tourist Dies Day after Being 'beaten Unconscious' While Intervening in Fracas at Hong Kong Jewellery Shop." *South China Morning Post*. 20 Oct. 2015. Web.

<sup>39</sup> "Dogs and Locusts." *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, 4 Feb. 2012. Web.

<sup>40</sup> Watts, Jonathan. "Chinese Professor Calls Hong Kong Residents 'dogs of British Imperialists'" *The Guardian*. 24 Jan. 2012. Web.

<sup>41</sup> "Report Examines Hong Kong: Small Island, Big Resource Demands." *Global Footprint Network*. 17 July 2010. Web.

makes traveling easier for mainlanders. Many mainland families also would like to have children in Hong Kong in order to avoid the one-child policy (now parents who are the only child can have two children). The fines for this law go up exponentially as the number of children in the family increases. In 2011, “nearly 4 in 10 births in Hong Kong ... were to mainland parents,” despite the fact that “official quotas on maternity care” are put in place for nonresidents.<sup>42</sup> In addition to benefits of birthright citizenship, mainland mothers often cross the border to purchase large quantities of baby milk powder. Although the government has set quotas on the number of milk power that can be brought into China, several areas of Hong Kong still face severe shortages in both hospital beds and milk power.

Taken as a whole, the conflicts and disputes have generated a wedge in cultural identity in Hong Kong society. People with distinct cultural identities attempt to dissociate themselves from one another when seeing a behavior that they disapprove. In Hong Kong society today, a cultural stigma against mainlanders has emerged. There is stigma of being suspected of accepting mainlanders, stigma of identifying with mainlanders, stigma of suspected of being a mainlander, stigma of being a mainlander. It is important to note that, however, such attitudes are not applied to all members of society, but only to those who follow the favorable wind.

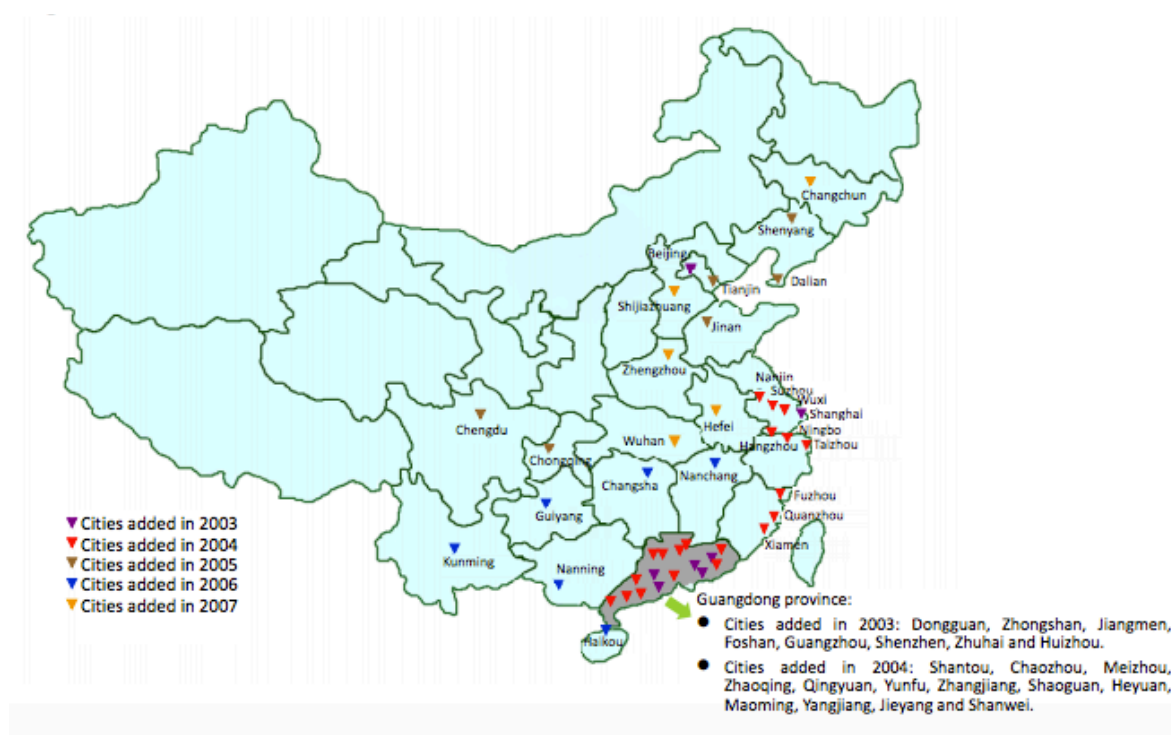
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<sup>42</sup> Lafraniere, Sharon. "Mainland Chinese Flock to Hong Kong to Give Birth." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 22 Feb. 2012. Web.

#### 4. Economic Integration

In the economic sector, Beijing introduced the Individual Visit Scheme in order to capitalize on tourism and boost Hong Kong's economy when the city was hit by SARS in 2003. The scheme was launched under the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) and allowed mainland tourists from certain cities to visit Hong Kong on an individual basis. Initially, the scheme was only open to mainland residents from four Guangdong cities, but was soon expanded to 49 major cities (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1 – Mainland cities under the Individual Visit Scheme**



Source: Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA)

As shown in the figure above, cities that were originally added to the scheme in 2003 were mostly located in the Guangdong province (area shaded in grey). Residents in the Guangdong province tend to speak Cantonese, and come from relatively similar geographic and cultural backgrounds. However, in the consecutive years, residents from other parts of China were also granted access to visit Hong Kong. In Figure 3.1, inverse triangles colored in red, gold, blue and yellow represent cities that were added to the Individual Visit Scheme from years 2004 until 2007. Gradually but systematically, more and more people from northern parts of China were included. The differences in language, cuisine, cultural practices and physical traits were intensified when northerners entered the city. Majority of the conflicts that arose amongst tourists and locals revolve around these differences.

According to the Hong Kong Tourism Commission, residents from these cities in China are now eligible to apply for an endorsement that is “valid for three months or one year and good for one or two visits to Hong Kong.”<sup>43</sup> From 2002 to 2013, there has been a 33.8 percent increase in the share of mainland visitors in Hong Kong. By 2013, 75 percent of all visitors were from the mainland. The scheme has generated profits for four major sectors in the economy: retail, servicing, transport, and tourism. Although Beijing’s strategy of economic integration appears to be immensely effective, taken together, the contributions of the scheme resulted in marginal economic growth. According to Government statistics, the scheme “amounted to HK\$26.1 billion in value-added (1.3% of GDP) and 114 280 in the number of jobs” in 2012.<sup>44</sup> While the job

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<sup>43</sup> "Tourism Commission - Visitor Information." *Tourism Commission - Visitor Information*. Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, n.d.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

creation process did prevent massive unemployment, the types of employment opportunities were mostly low-end, the value-added in overall GDP were minimal, and the contributions of the scheme towards long-term economic development were insignificant.

While the Individual Visit Scheme has entailed some short-term economic benefits to the city, it has also raised major concerns over the impacts mainland tourism has made on the local community. Some of the major complaints of the scheme involve an overcrowding issue on the railway system and inflated rental prices. According to the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the MTR Corporation Limited “introduced more than 1200 additional train trips per week in 2012 to expand its carrying capacity by three million passenger trips,” while other train lines, such as the Tsuen Wan Line, Island Line and Kwun Tong Line, have already reached their maximum level of train trips.<sup>45</sup>

In the recent months, the number of parallel traders in “areas of Hong Kong near the border with the mainland, such as Tuen Mun, Sheung Shui and Yuen Long” has driven up “the prices of goods and rents, pushing out small businesses serving locals.”<sup>46</sup> Hong Kong’s favorable exchange rates, non-existing taxes and tariffs, as well as lenient customs on the mainland border have made smuggling goods convenient to these traders. These parallel traders have taken advantage of the scheme and become professionals in importing goods from Hong Kong to the mainland. Besides, locals have complained that these traders create serious congestion on sidewalks and public transportations when

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<sup>45</sup> "Tourism Commission - Visitor Information." *Tourism Commission - Visitor Information*. Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, n.d.

<sup>46</sup> Steger, Isabella. "As Tensions Swell, China Reduces Mainlander Visits to Hong Kong." *China Real Time Report* RSS. The Wall Street Journal, 13 Apr. 2015.

carrying large suitcases. As local communities and small businesses suffered, the Individual Visit Scheme has mainly generated wealth for Western luxury brands. Some believe that the social costs of the scheme have largely outweighed its marginal economic benefits.

### **Stratification of Hong Kong Society**

As tensions swell, economic integration further aggravated the conflict of cultural identities. Undoubtedly, Hong Kong has generated much revenue from its economic collaboration with the rising Chinese state. Yet, not only do majority of the profits benefit the elites who cooperated with Beijing, but the ongoing democratic movement has also revealed a deep split in Hong Kong society between the grassroots and economic tycoons. Those at the top of the economic strata continue to benefit from a patronage system that values exclusiveness. In a sense, the elites in Hong Kong have carried out Beijing's mission of economic integration at an institutional level, and many "have come to identify with Beijing's priorities and interests more than those of the Hong Kong people."<sup>47</sup> Public opinion surveys and the local media have observed that, recently, there has been a trend of "resentment against the rich" in society.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the enormous and visible rift indicates that the city has been increasingly "integrated on top, collapsed on the bottom." A paradoxical result of the economic integration is that the closer China and Hong Kong are economically, the further apart they grow in terms of cultural identity.

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<sup>47</sup> Pei, Minxin. "Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang: Triple Trouble on China's Periphery." *The National Interest*. 9 Oct. 2014. Web.

<sup>48</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. xxiii. Print.

Prior to the handover, the colonial administration accomplished an outstanding performance in the city's economic development and social stability, which in many ways harnessed popular support from Hong Kong people. Similarly, Beijing has also gained considerable approval from mainland Chinese citizens by its phenomenal economic achievements in the recent decade. Among the many aspects that factor into the effectiveness of a government's legitimacy over its constituents, a steady level of economic prosperity has often been able to quell political dissent. In the recent years, however, the social stratification of Hong Kong has formed into an 'M-shape,' with its society reaching two extremes: "the high-end wealthy businessmen and low-end service workers."<sup>49</sup>

With the Gini coefficient continuously rising, there has also been an increasing amount of statistics depicting the severe level of inequality in Hong Kong society. The United Nations Development Programme published a report indicating that "Hong Kong's income gap was the largest among all Asian cities in 2008 and 2009" (Cheng, 2014). In 2010, Oxfam Hong Kong reported that the number of poor-working families had swelled from "around 172,600 at the beginning of 2005 to about 192,500, a rise of 12% in five and a half years."<sup>50</sup> The report also showed that as the poor-working class expanded, the incomes of these families had almost no improvement throughout the years. On the other hand, the median monthly incomes of the "richest one-tenth of families had increased by 16%... [which is] about 27 times that of the poorest one-tenth

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<sup>49</sup> Han, Zhu. "Hong Kong's Internal Contradictions Are Not the Mainland's Fault." *Global Times*. 6 July 2014. Web.

<sup>50</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 8. Print.



of families.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, when the global financial crisis hit in 2007, grievances expressed by the public toward the Hong Kong SAR government intensified. While housing-prices continue to skyrocket in the city, youngsters find it more and more difficult to have the purchasing power to own their own apartments in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, these legitimate sentiments were never met with adequate response from the government, leaving the public in an unsettled and insecure state.

Housing affordability is another major concern in Hong Kong society. When the numbers were crunched on the “12<sup>th</sup> Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey” in 2016, Hong Kong was ranked at the top of the list for the least affordable housing among 87 major markets (See Table 2.1).<sup>52</sup> As shown in Table 3.1, the higher the Median Multiple, the less affordable the housing market becomes in a metropolitan area. Hong Kong, with a Median Multiple of 19.0, is much less affordable than all of the other major cities around the world, such as Sydney (12.2), and Vancouver (10.8). In reality, what this number means is that “in Hong Kong, the median home costs 19 times the median annual pre-tax household income, making it the highest multiple *Demographia* has measured in 12 years of conducting the survey.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, from Figure 3.2 on housing affordability from 2004-2015, it is clear to see that not only is Hong Kong ranked much higher than the others, the slope of its housing unaffordability (in solid green) is also getting steeper from 2010 to 2014. In terms of ranking, Hong Kong leaped from number 17 in 2015 to the top in 2016. Taken together, while the city

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<sup>51</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 8. Print.

<sup>52</sup> Day, Bob. "12th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2016 Rating Middle-Income Housing Affordability." *Demographia* (2016): n. pag.

<sup>53</sup> Craze, Kirsten. "Australian City Has Come in as Second Least Affordable in Housing Survey." *News.com.au*, 25 Jan. 2016. Web.

has been notorious for its over priced real estate market for over a decade, the recent jump in housing prices is still unexplained for.

Interestingly, a counterintuitive fact about the real estate market in Hong Kong is that it has an unusually “high proportion (almost half) of all private housing...owned without a mortgage,” which indicates “sufficient wealth in the community to enable property to be purchased without bank financing.”<sup>54</sup> In light of this phenomenon, a popular argument explaining this is that Chinese buyers are flooding the real estate market and crowding out local buyers. Regardless of the truth behind this statement, the perception of the phenomenon may become materialized, shaping people’s perceptions toward the mainland Chinese. They believe that Hong Kong’s housing market no longer serves those who view housing as a necessity, but has become a luxurious investment for the rich. As a result, the housing bubble has generated much panic in society since property prices have become extremely susceptible to public sentiments.

Meanwhile, public housing is often not an option for the younger generation in the middle to lower economic strata either. The Housing Authority in Hong Kong reports that the average waiting time for general applicants for public rental housing is 3.7 years, while elderly people have an average waiting time of 2.1 years.<sup>55</sup> Younger single applicants, on the other hand, are “subject to a limited quota of homes, allocated according to a points system. No details of their average waiting time were revealed.”<sup>56</sup> In addition, youngsters will also be forced to share the compact living space with older

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<sup>54</sup> Brownlee, Ian. "Why Hong Kong Housing Affordability Has Little to Do with Supply." *South China Morning Post*. N.p., 17 Mar. 2015. Web.

<sup>55</sup> "Number of Applications and Average Waiting Time for Public Rental Housing | Hong Kong Housing Authority and Housing Department." Hong Kong Housing Authority, Dec. 2015. Web.

<sup>56</sup> Kang-chung, Ng, and Ernest Kao. "Want a Hong Kong Public Flat? Expect to Wait More than Three-and-a-half Years." *South China Morning Post*. 27 Oct. 2015. Web.

generations of the family, possibly even after marriage, which often leads to overcrowding. As living conditions continue to look gloom, current financial struggles and concerns for future development would certainly generate forms of political dissent amongst the youth population.

Ironically, Beijing's rhetoric on the Umbrella Revolution, its processes of mainlandization, combined with social stratification in Hong Kong have provided the groundwork for a reactionary backlash in terms of cultural identity. Politically, as Beijing's leadership denounce the democratic movement as an act of rebellion and civil disobedience, Hong Kong citizens are standing up against an authority that oversteps its powers, violates its promises of "One Country, Two Systems," and monopolizing the city's political artery. Simultaneously, in the economic realm, while interests groups and political parties seek a larger share of the pie, severe institutional problems in Hong Kong become clear: inefficiencies in the market economy are generated by unfair rules and non-transparency. The power relations embedded in the political dynamics of a stratified society produce marginalized groups that desperately demand to be heard. We come to find out that grassroots and youngsters easily become the victims of this system. We realize that the political system is no longer representative of the voices of these people. Consequently, distinct cultural identities are also most prominent among these groups.

And yet, the current problems in Hong Kong are far more complicated than the inefficiencies generated by the neo-classical economic model. It is crucial to refrain from a linear analysis of structural imbalance of power, leap between the ideological and concrete, and incorporate the realm of cultural politics into the equation. The new wave of pro-democratic movements is a product of the nexus of forces behind mainlandization:

the frequent ideological clashes between the rich and poor, the government and its constitutions, as well as the premature encounters of distinct cultural groups, as “close contact breeds not amity, but animosity, mutual disrespect and a stronger self-awareness.”<sup>57</sup> In a highly materialistic society, it is rare to see such a remarkable and distinct non-materialistic orientation in its political dissent. Participants of the Umbrella Revolution receive spiritual fulfillment from the campaign process, as their democratic ideologies are held at the highest regard throughout the movement. These spiritual gratifications generated by the process of democratic movements are, in turn, directly correlated to the principles of being Hong Kongese. Young participants in the movement are an enormous encouragement to society at large, as they are ready to take on the responsibilities of protecting the interests of the community. It is clear to see that in a society that is being torn apart, the democratic movement is one that upholds the core values of the Hong Kongese identity.

When it comes to identity issues in Hong Kong, people do not tend to think about the fact that there is a Hong Kongese identity, a Chinese identity, and many other forms of identities that lie in-between the two. What about those who realize that sovereignty do not necessarily produce a sense of belonging? How do they feel? Where do they go? What these identities mean to each individual has large implications on how they perceive their own relationship to the existing political system. It can be argued that social stratification of Hong Kong society has produced new identities, youth and grassroots in particular, that requires serious investigation. By moving beyond the narrow limitations of the victim-oppressor relationship, the study on cultural identity and its

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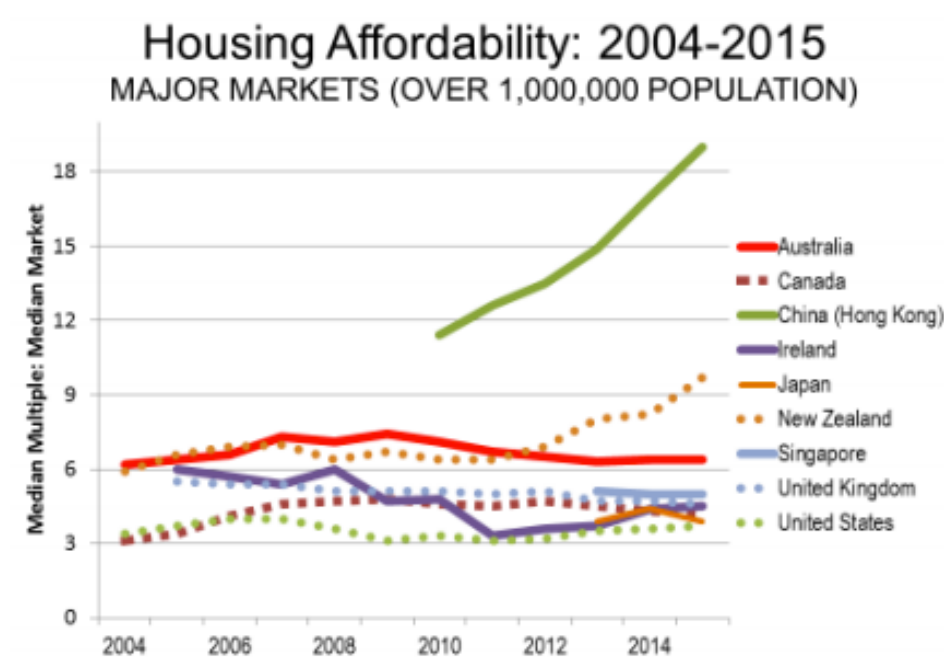
<sup>57</sup> Pei, Minxin. "Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang: Triple Trouble on China's Periphery." *The National Interest*. 9 Oct. 2014. Web.

relative subgroups enables us to create a more meaningful dialogue on the realities of being Hong Kongese. We must not simply analyze the ramifications of social stratification, but also the cultural implications of such consequences.

**Table 3.1**

10 Least Affordable Major Metropolitan Markets				
Rank: Least Affordable	Affordability Rank (Out of 86)	Nation	Metropolitan Market	Median Multiple
1	87	China	Hong Kong	19.0
2	86	Australia	Sydney, NSW	12.2
3	85	Canada	Vancouver, BC	10.8
4	82	Australia	Melbourne, VIC	9.7
4	82	N.Z.	Auckland	9.7
4	82	U.S.	San Jose, CA	9.7
7	81	U.S.	San Francisco, CA	9.4
8	80	U.K.	London (GLA)	8.5
9	78	U.S.	Los Angeles, CA	8.1
9	78	U.S.	San Diego, CA	8.1

**Figure 3.2**



Source: *Demographia*, “12<sup>th</sup> Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey”

### **Nationalism and Localism: Cultural Duality of Chineseness**

Recent studies on the relationship between hegemonic power and the notion of Chineseness present to us an intricate picture on cultural imperialism and the network of power relations. An alternative approach to the question of identity demands us to “depart from the narrow ‘ethnic’ conception of Chineseness, [and emphasize] the continuous process of how Chinese identity [can be] constantly disembedded and reintegrated.”<sup>58</sup> The fusion between “British colonialism and chauvinistic Chinese nationalism” may have produced “plural forms” of Chineseness in post-colonial politics.<sup>59</sup> In contemporary Hong Kong society, resistance against hegemonic Chinese culture has been steadily growing, while a distinct identity for the Hong Kong people has gradually emerged. An understanding of the development of a Hong Kongese identity requires us to not only dismantle “how Chinese identity has been received, perceived, and experienced,”<sup>60</sup> but also pay close attention to the sensitive contextual complexities tied to its local history, national issues, and global concerns. Is the Hong Kongese identity a form of counter-hegemonic expression? Or does it contain a completely different set of values, norms and standards from the Chinese identity?

Prior to the transfer of sovereignty, in traditional Chinese nationalist culture, scholars often referred to Hong Kong as a “cultural desert” that lacks the capacity to produce real intellectual thought. They believed that the “colonial atmosphere and conservatism” leaves Hong Kong nothing more than “a filthy corner of an unreclaimed

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<sup>58</sup> Law, Wing Sang. *Collaborative Colonial Power: The Making of the Hong Kong Chinese*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2009. p. 5. Print.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

Chinese territory that could give rise only to misgivings or bad feelings.”<sup>61</sup> Hong Kong was seen as a desolated island marked with cultural decadence and intellectual backwardness. Anti-imperialistic narratives severely hindered the growth of Hong Kong culture, as they tarnished Hong Kong’s image and diminished the significance of colonial culture.

Yet, according to these mainland critics, the most revolting characteristics of Hong Kong people lies in their “sexual and moral unpredictability, which was seen as responsible for the ethnic hybridity exemplified by the many cases of miscegenation there.”<sup>62</sup> In colonial Hong Kong, many students spoke fluent English and studied from western-style education; they ate western meals and fell in love with western men. Critics believed that colonization of land corresponded to colonization of mind, and speculated that people who were born and raised in Hong Kong must have lost their Chinese nationality, their Chinese soul. Hence, their perception of “women’s loss of chastity [was that] colonization [led to] Hong Kong’s moral decay,”<sup>63</sup> and ethnic hybridity generated cultural infertility and intellectual barrenness.

Apart from the arrogant dogma behind this narrative, it was evident that Hong Kong was becoming the “Chinese nationalists’ internal other – backward, vulgar, and colonized.”<sup>64</sup> Political conversations on Hong Kong and the mainland required no efforts to be further explored or understood. It is equally frightening and dangerous since moral and cultural decadence of the colonized was assumed to be self-evident and logical. But

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<sup>61</sup> Law, Wing Sang. *Collaborative Colonial Power: The Making of the Hong Kong Chinese*: Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2009. p. 113. Print.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

this does not mean that there is no envy behind this narrative, since the phenomenon can almost be described as reverse discrimination. In the dialectical discourse between “capitalistic paradise” and “cultural barrenness,” the nationalistic logic left its marks in the configuration of the Hong Kongese identity.

Moreover, cultural antagonism from mainland scholars also reveals a “transformation of status, through a perverse logic of identification with the colonizer, from that of victim to that of dominant cultural power – a transformation that has been integral to the formation of contemporary Chinese nationalism.”<sup>65</sup> The psychological satisfaction generated from this perverse logic, however, is almost just as vulgar and abhorrent as colonization itself. Ideological dissociation of Hong Kong from the mainland “borrowed a tourist-like gaze from the West,” and effectively “rationalized the legitimacy of an Orientalist exoticism, which framed the Chinese nationalist’s gaze on its internal other.”<sup>66</sup> Being the cultural Other, regardless of its political conformity or transfer of sovereignty, Hong Kong would never be able to reach the same level of playing field as other major mainland cities. Gradually, the views of mainland scholars on Hong Kong materialized into deep-rooted beliefs in contemporary patriotic ideology.

In the recent comments by Kong Qingdong, a professor at Peking University, he used “bastards,” “thieves” and “dogs of British imperialists” to describe the people of Hong Kong.<sup>67</sup> Later in a blog post, Kong wrote “I know there are many nice people in

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<sup>65</sup> Law, Wing Sang. *Collaborative Colonial Power: The Making of the Hong Kong Chinese*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2009. pp. 116. Print.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Watts, Jonathan. "Chinese Professor Calls Hong Kong Residents 'dogs of British Imperialists'" *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 24 Jan. 2012. Web.



Hong Kong, but many Hong Kong people are still dogs.”<sup>68</sup> Of course, Kong uses “dogs” metaphorically, indicating that Hong Kong people are still living under a colonial mentality and do not to produce their own culture. However, by imposing negative stereotypes that lump all members of society together, Kong also fails to see Hong Kong people as individual beings. We can see a continuation of nationalistic perspectives in contemporary Chinese intellectual thought. The perception of Hong Kong being a “foreign country” in China becomes evident.

The hypocrisy of this particular nationalistic narrative greatly hinders the democratic interests of Hong Kong society and infringes on the possibilities of a Hong Kongese identity. While the Central Government stresses on the importance of social, economic, and political assimilation of Hong Kong to the mainland for the betterment of the nation as a whole, cultural identity divergence and ideological rifts only seem to exacerbate under the nationalistic logic. Hong Kong cannot be both assimilated and the Other at the same time. Under this narrative, Hong Kong people cast doubts on the genuineness of mainlandization policies and speculate that realist interests that may have sprung behind it. Hence, desire for a distinct Hong Kongese identity becomes understandable, as it signifies a refusal to be stereotyped and provides a possibility for counter-hegemonic expression.

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<sup>68</sup> Watts, Jonathan. "Chinese Professor Calls Hong Kong Residents 'dogs of British Imperialists'" *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 24 Jan. 2012. Web.

## Reinventing Hong Kong Identity

Most past research attempting to unfold the culture and society of Hong Kong have professed a sense of fascination over its laissez-faire prosperity, political peculiarities in post-colonialist society, and the exoticness of a hybrid form of Hong Kong culture. The liberal-modernist narratives on the growth of Hong Kong are not only “highly sympathetic to colonial rule,” often portraying it as a “barren-rock-turned-capitalist paradise,” but also tend to reveal a glamorized version of the city’s history and culture, describing it as a “natural arena where both Western and Eastern cultures could intermingle.”<sup>69</sup> By contrast, the Chinese nationalistic perspective superficially selects “anti-British and pro-China assertions ... of colonial history,”<sup>70</sup> while pushing for a political agenda that prioritizes “One Country” before “Two Systems.” Despite the polarization of views on Hong Kong’s historiography, intellectual thought concerning the region has generally emphasized a hackneyed linear power dynamic of colonialism and power, with its propensity to convey a mere political analysis or social commentary on Hong Kong’s transition of sovereignty. The political transformations Hong Kong society has undergone confine our attention to the larger picture: it characterizes hegemonic power as an instrument for legitimizing domination of the rulers over its constituents. However, the traditional definition of hegemonic power is no longer appropriate in examining the multiplicity of Hong Kong’s network of power relations and the impersonal forces of cultural imperialism.

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<sup>69</sup> Law, Wing Sang. *Collaborative Colonial Power: The Making of the Hong Kong Chinese*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2009. p. 1. Print.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

The notion of Hong Kongese encompasses both literal and symbolic manifestations. Narrowly construed, the Hong Kongese identity refers to those who carry Hong Kong citizenship with a sense of belongingness to Hong Kong. Broadly speaking, it refers to a conceptual and symbolic way of organizing values, norms, and standards so that they are unique to a society. The difficulty in comprehending cultural identity arises from the failure to distinguish between three perspectives: the personal, social, and political. Moreover, interactions between the three perspectives on identity may also reveal how hegemony of a certain identity may reproduce and solidify cultural and political forms of domination. Hegemony of identity indicates the possibility of cultural imperialism and forms of systematic oppression within a society. The power formation in Hong Kong can be constituted by pre-existing forms legitimate domination that trickles down to every single layer of society, including individual preferences and societal norms.

In the case of a political uprising in the name of democracy, personal and social identities heavily influence people's preferences and decisions on their political system and its respective forms of representation. Since the early 1980s, Hong Kong's political culture has been gradually cultivating "civic awareness and the corresponding quest for a political community."<sup>71</sup> Although the Chinese government has initially allowed for people's self-identification, the issue becomes more complicated when "the process of decolonization meets with the process of democratization, as the latter is conducive to the development of an indigenous political community."<sup>72</sup> Thus, the development of a

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<sup>71</sup> Ka-ying Wong, Timothy. "Civic Awareness and National Identity in Hong Kong: A Survey of Popular Opinion". *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 12.2 (1998): p. 453.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 453.

political force is a product of growth in cultural identity, and that political actions are the outcome of such movements.

For instance, the bloody repression of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 has always lingered in Hong Kong people's memories. On June 4, 1989, the popular student-led demonstration was cracked down with assault rifles and military tanks in the heart of Beijing. Eight years prior to the handover, Hong Kong has already started to lose confidence in the mainland government. The repression of democracy in 1989 has also "entailed an ongoing population exodus from Hong Kong throughout the 1990s and paved the way to the protest movements of 2003."<sup>73</sup> The political movements in Hong Kong represent people's striving efforts to preserve a unique Hong Kong heritage, its collective memory, and political consciousness. Hence, there is an urgent need to review and evaluate the value of Hong Kongese identity and the perceived notions of power and privilege attached to it.

Although the literal component of cultural identity contains heuristic usefulness, it is necessary to focus on the broader dimension of symbolic identity. Theoretically, collective symbolic identity allows us to incorporate other variables embedded in the notion of Hong Kongese, such as age, race, gender, sexual-orientation, socioeconomic class, education level, etc. These variables will be statistically examined in the following chapter. The symbolic value of cultural identity can unveil the multiplicity of interactive forces and power structures within a society with or without the presence of a discernable ruler. The literal component, on the contrary, pinpoints social and political oppression from a linear power dynamic, and associates it directly to the ruler itself. There is no

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<sup>73</sup> Veg, Sebastian. "Hong Kong's Enduring Identity Crisis." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 15 Oct. 2013. Web. 01 Mar. 2016. Web.

doubt that the transition of sovereignty in Hong Kong has shifted the literal component of identity, but the ideological and symbolic manifestations of postcolonial identity formation are equally as significant, since they provide us with a new framework to grasp the undercurrents of Hong Kong society under political transformation.

## Chapter 4

### The Rise of Youth Political Participation

#### Introduction

Since the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong in 1997, the Chinese government and other pro-mainland voices had high hopes of gradually merging the two regions together in terms of cultural identity, especially among the youth population. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Beijing has slowly but systematically developed a model of assimilation, which consists of various mechanisms under the processes of mainlandization, in order to solve the “problem” of Hong Kong’s cultural defiance.

In the 1980s, the leader of China, Deng Xiaoping, formulated “One Country, Two Systems” to reach peaceful reunification, and allow regions such as Hong Kong and Macau to retain their own legal, political and economic systems for 50 years, even under the control of socialist China. The principle was also designed under the rationale that once the colonial system has left the region and “ceased poisoning young minds, ... future generations would embrace the worldview and politics favored in Beijing.”<sup>74</sup> The departure of such practices, however, did not take place with the consent of Hong Kong people.

Years after the transition of sovereignty, the policies of mainlandization have only intensified the growth of a distinct cultural identity, especially among younger and more

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<sup>74</sup> Veg, Sebastian. "Hong Kong's Enduring Identity Crisis." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 15 Oct. 2013. Web. 01 Mar. 2016. Web.

educated generations in post-colonial Hong Kong society. Since the 1980s, youth uprisings have been tied to civilized mass street protests that are organized by students. There has been an honorable cultural tradition of valuing youth intellectual thought and political fervor. The rise of youth populations as a political force has been increasingly prominent in the recent years. Typical examples include “the Star Ferry Pier [protests] in 2007, ... the anti-high-speed-rail campaign and the by-elections in 2010.”<sup>75</sup>

Over the last few years, the youth population in Hong Kong has gradually become a strong new participant in the political arena. The social attitudes, value orientations, and political participation among the youth group have exhibited distinct behavioral patterns when compared to those of the older generations. They advocate for their vision of *Hong Kong core values*, “with emphasis on social justice, poverty alleviation and democracy.”<sup>76</sup> Their objectives are aimed at targeting structural problems existing in the government and society, including issues related to the widening wealth gap, rising property prices, environmental conservation, heritage preservation, government credibility, business collusions, lack of social mobility, and a stagnant democratic development in the city. On the contrary, for older generations, the connection between democracy and revolution has made many people nervous. Many believe that if they associate themselves with the movement, they will be associated with civil disobedience, rebellion, and chaos. For some, this is a frightening thought. Thus, the polarization of political dissent has been occurring across different age groups. In order to grasp the full extent of the complexities embedded in the nature and dynamics of such mass rallies, we

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<sup>75</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 385. Print.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.

must also dismantle the network of power relations and interpersonal forces that are at work at Hong Kong's political crisis.

Thus far, we have established the theme of identifying symbolic cultural identity as one of the major factors contributing to political dissent. This chapter focuses on data analysis of public opinion and political development of youth populations in Hong Kong. Recent studies on the public opinion of the Umbrella Revolution have indicated a polarization of political views in Hong Kong society amongst different age groups and education levels. Younger populations and those who received higher levels of education tend to be more democratic. This chapter will examine statistics of those who were born between 1975 and 1999. As of the year 2014, those aged 15 to 39 will be included in the study. Other factors, such as socioeconomic status, employment opportunities, social mobility, and political trust also come into light when discussing about the political orientations of different subgroups in society. An empirical analysis on social attitudes, political orientations, and identity of these respondents indicate that younger generations have the highest tendency to identify as Hong Kongese, distrust the Central Government, and support unconventional forms of political participation.

It is important to note that symbolic cultural identity encompasses a variety of different perceptions from its respective subgroups, and that a divergence from this identity may produce new forms of power dynamics. As political tensions soar in the midst of mainlandization, cultural identity shifts become an increasingly crucial factor in determining the level of dissent. These shifts reveal significant implications of Chinese hegemony on Hong Kong society, as political oppression may occur with or without a discernable ruler. Moreover, public discourse in the form of street protests has become



synonymous with political participation of the youth. There is an immediate linkage between youth identity and more radical forms of political movements in Hong Kong society. In this chapter, I will empirically demonstrate a strong positive correlation between the youth identity and the Hong Kongese identity, which in turn gave rise to the Umbrella Revolution. This chapter first defines the youth population in Hong Kong in terms of its literal and symbolic meanings. Second, the formation of youth identity will be explored, unfolding its implied definitions and relation to political dissent. Lastly, discussions on the rise of youth as political force will be centered on three main areas: economic perceptions, political attitudes, and civic awareness.

### **Defining the Youth Population**

The term “youth” can be broadly understood as a category of people transitioning from childhood to adulthood. The “Post-80s” and “Post-90s” are popular terms describing the younger generations in Hong Kong. They are used to categorize those who were born in or after 1980 or 1990. Youngsters who were born in these time periods have distinctive experiences growing up in a society that has undergone tremendous economic and political transformations. Circumstances for older and younger generations in Hong Kong have been different. Older generations possessed a sense of superiority living under the colonial regime due to economic prosperity, whereas younger generations, some argue, have developed an “inferiority complex” as a result of the economic slump.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 386. Print.

Thus, the public conversations of these younger generations also derive from new forms of liberation, education, and social status, which in numerous ways have catalyzed the formation of a distinctive Hong Kongese identity among the youth.

The relationship between the youth and politics is complex. In a refined sense, younger generations in Hong Kong have the tendency to “doubt the rationale of the existing institutional design, [and are often] described as activists by the local media.”<sup>78</sup> Not only do the youth have relatively negative opinions on democratic progress, they also are extremely unsatisfied with the political structure, unconfident in political trust, and pessimistic about Hong Kong’s future economic development. They actively demand the government to address and tackle issues “such as rising property prices, the gap between rich and poor, cultural heritage and the road map of democracy development.”<sup>79</sup> Hence, social issues are an immediate concern for younger generations that are about to face the real world plagued with troubling economic and political conditions. Youth political engagement in the public sphere becomes key to democratic principles, as it creates a platform for addressing political dissent.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 386.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 386.

## Youth Identity Formation

### 1. National Identity and Public Sentiments

General trends in Hong Kong society have indicated a growing ideological gap between the old and young, widening wealth gap between the rich and poor, and eroding trust between people and the government. The growth of democratization around the globe has also been hastened by the development of information technology, in particular, the Internet. Advancements of communication patterns, information spread, and media culture have substantially impacted on the ways in which younger generations perceive the world. The shifts in ideological landscape for Hong Kong youth “gravely concerns” Beijing, for that they believe it suggests a lack of national identity. At a local deputies meeting in Shenzhen, a Hong Kong deputy to the National People’s Congress, Michael Tien Puk-sun, mentioned “the reason why they see a problem is that polls have found that more people identified themselves as Hongkongers instead of Chinese. Some have even waved the old Hong Kong flag, and there was strong opposition to the introduction of national education.”<sup>80</sup> In fact, according to the Categorical Ethnic Identity poll conducted by Hong Kong University since 1997, on top of the widening ideological and wealth gaps, the ethnic identities for Hong Kong people have been polarizing as well.

The Categorical Ethnic Identity survey is conducted by telephone interviews for Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong aged 18 or above, with a sample size of more than 500 each time. They survey broadly categorizes ethnic identity into five groups: Hong Kong Citizen, Chinese Citizen, Hong Kong Chinese Citizen, Chinese Hong Kong Citizen, and

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<sup>80</sup> Lee, Colleen, and Gary Cheung. "Beijing Concerned about National Identity in Hong Kong Youth." *South China Morning Post*. 15 Jan. 2013. Web.

Others. Respondents may identify with only one of the choices according to their own interpretation of the term. Figure 4.1 indicates the trends of all five categories of ethnic identity, with light green as Hongkonger, red as Hongkonger in China, navy blue as Chinese in Hong Kong, dark blue as Chinese, and purple as Mixed Identity. Leaving the category of Mixed Identity aside, there has been a significant jump in the light green line for Hongkonger since 2008, and a dramatic decrease of the Chinese identity starting from 2007. The other two lines, Hongkonger in China and Chinese in Hong Kong have shown relatively modest changes. However, the category of Hongkonger in China has been historically above the Chinese in Hong Kong.

Similarly, Figure 4.2 demonstrates the polarization of categorical identity issues in a clearer fashion. The dark red line is a combination of two ethnic identities that are closer to the Hong Kong identity, namely, the Hongkonger and Hongkonger in China identities. The dark green line, on the contrary, represents two identities that are closer to Chinese identity, which includes Chinese and Chinese in Hong Kong. The dark red line places an emphasis on Hong Kong, whereas the dark green line focuses on the Chinese identity. While the identities Hongkonger and Chinese may seem clear, the other two may appear vague and obscure. In broad terms, the category Chinese in Hong Kong indicates that one identifies as a Chinese person residing in Hong Kong. The category Hongkonger in China, suggests that while Hong Kong belongs to China, the identity of Hong Kongese is different from that of the Chinese.

From Figure 4.2, beginning in 2008, there has been a drastic separation between the dark red and dark green lines, revealing a major shift in people's perception of what it means to be Hong Kongese or Chinese. An increasing number of people have chosen to

identify with Hong Kongese identities instead of Chinese. From 2003 to 2007, the ethnic identities of people in Hong Kong were relatively less divergent. The split between Hong Kongese and Chinese identities were approximately at a 50/50 ratio. Yet, in year 2015, the Hong Kong identities have gained about 70 percent of recognition, while Chinese identities fell to 30 percent. What drastically altered people's perception of the Chinese identity, which allowed for the Hong Kong identity to gain steam in the following years? What are the factors that continuously shape and favor a Hong Kongese identity in society?

First of all, identity shifts can occur as a result of major political or economic transformations. Local or national policy implementations, economic agreements, or even significant events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics may alter people's perception of identity. Second, globalization and technological advancements in the Internet has also made people more connected than any point in history. There has been exponential growth in cyber-communities, leading to the interconnectedness of political and social conversations on a global scale. Third, while a wide variety of factors may contribute to identity shifts, there may also be a lag in response in people's perceptions to their environmental transformations. Therefore, identity shifts may not directly correspond to a single event, but rather to a series of gradual changes overtime.

Figure 4.1

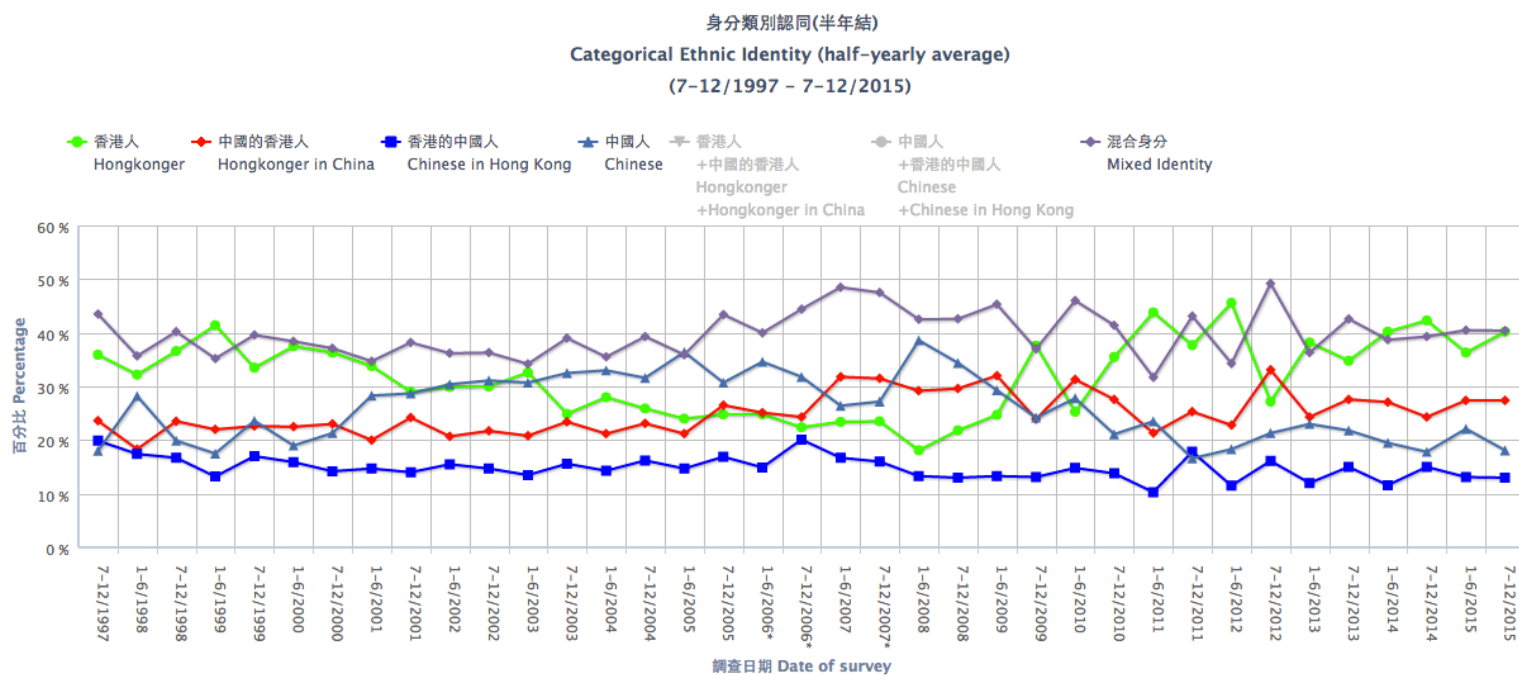
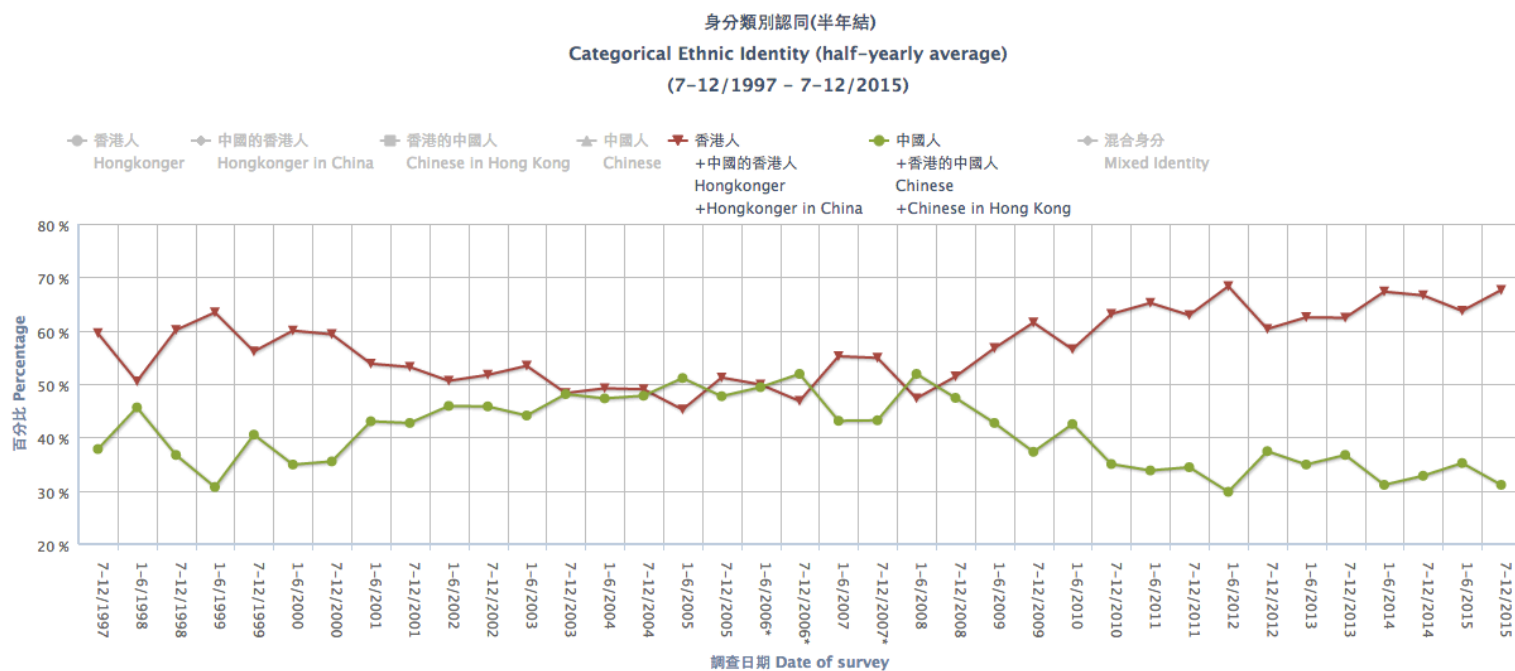


Figure 4.2



In this paper, I will only consider the general trends overtime in identity shifts, since it is relatively difficult to pinpoint distinct causes of a sudden identity shift in a given year without an econometric regression model. Thus, structural changes in the political and economic arena in year 2008, in particular, would require a different analysis. In order to answer the questions addressed above, we must trace back to the connections between identity and public sentiments.

The Public Sentiments Index (PSI) in Figure 4.4 is another key survey conducted by Hong Kong University in an attempt to measure the possibility of collective behaviors in society. There are two major components to the PSI index: the Government Appraisal (GA) score and the Society Appraisal (SA) score. Scores are collected from various opinion surveys and calculated on a scale ranging from 0 to 200, with 100 being the normal score. The higher the score, the more satisfaction and appraisal there is toward the government and society. If we take a look at Figure 4.4 on the index of Public Sentiments in Hong Kong, it is fairly easy to identify the general patterns for all three indexes on the graph. As shown in the graph, three major trends have occurred in terms of public sentiments. The slope of PSI is negative between 1997 and 2001, positive from 2002 to 2007, and negative from 2008 until 2015.

Now, let us compare these trends to the Categorical Ethnic Identity data in Figure 4.3. The two identities included in this figure are Hongkonger (light green line) and Chinese (dark blue line). Interestingly, the patterns of this graph are strikingly similar to those of the public sentiments figure. From 1997 to 2001, the Hongkonger identity is above the Chinese one, indicating a strong popularity for people identifying with Hong Kong. From 2002 until 2007, the pattern becomes reversed, as the Chinese identity rises

above the Hongkonger identity. After a significant identity shift in 2008, the Hongkonger identity picks up its momentum again and rises above the Chinese identity from 2008 to 2015. In short, the trends reveal a strong indication that there is a positive correlation between the Chinese identity and public sentiments, and vice versa for the Hongkonger identity (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 - Identity and Public Sentiments**

	<b>PSI</b>	<b>Chinese identity</b>	<b>Hongkonger identity</b>
1997 – 2001	Negative (-)	Negative (-)	Positive (+)
2002 – 2007	Positive (+)	Positive (+)	Negative (-)
2008 - 2015	Negative (-)	Negative (-)	Positive (+)

The comparison of identity and public sentiments observes the political arena of Hong Kong in its broadest sense. Public sentiments as a result of political or economic transformations, such as mainlandization, directly affect not only individuals, but also groups in society. Collective identity shifts tend to go hand in hand with public sentiments, as they represent a plethora of stakeholders, organizations, and interest groups in society. Moreover, Figure 4.3 measures the two most “extreme” categories of identity, namely, the Hongkonger and Chinese. These two identities differ from the others in that their literal definitions exclusively imply complete identification with either Hong Kong or China, not both. Similar to the mechanisms behind democratic elections,



moderates tend to identify less with popular sentiments, but the views of those at the two ends of the political spectrum almost become synonymous to political dissent. Taken as a whole, Beijing's concerns for a lack of national identity becomes legitimate, since the implications of a Hong Kongese identity may extend beyond cultural and ethnic connotations: an underlying political and social transformation in Hong Kong society is gradually underway.

Figure 4.3

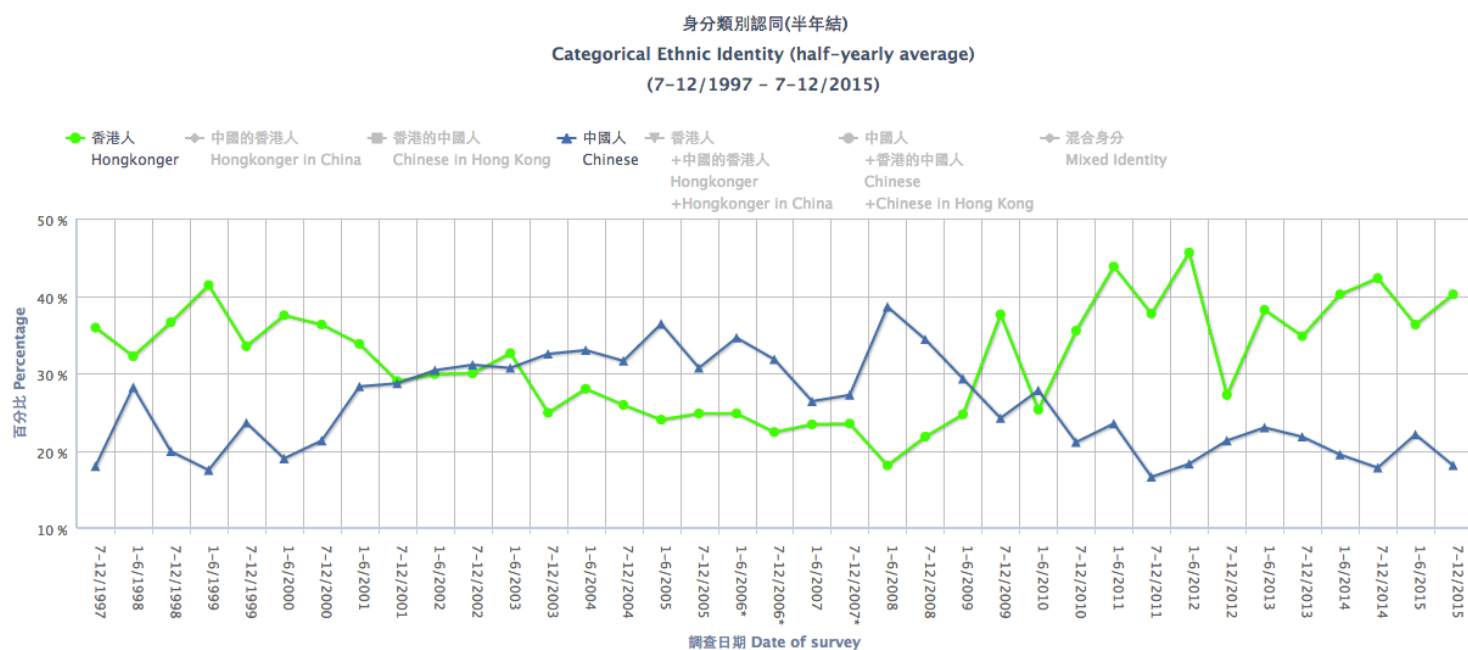
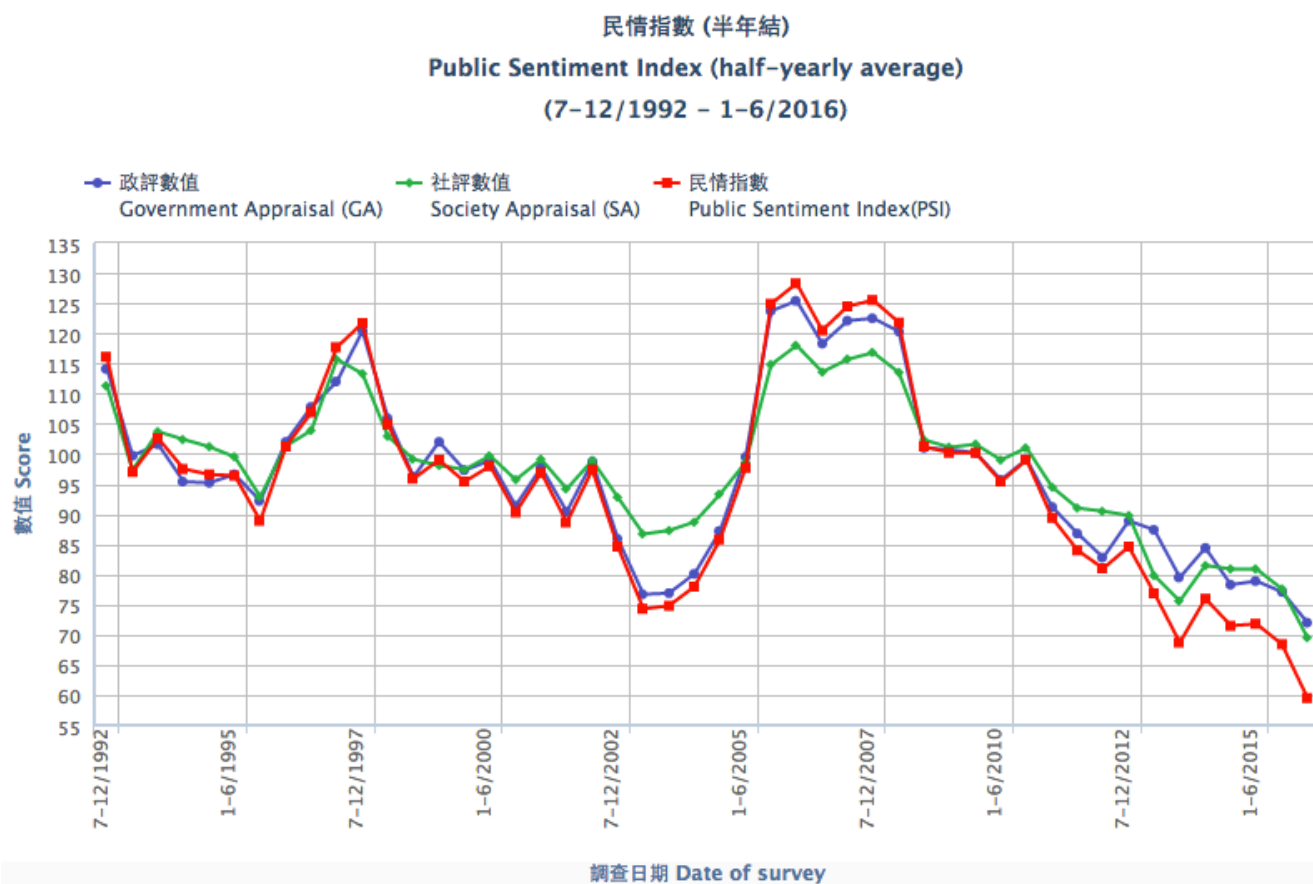


Figure 4.4



## 2. Demographics of the Hong Kongese Identity and Political Trust

An understanding of the demographics of the Hong Kongese identity will significantly contribute to establishing the connections between popular sentiments and identity. According to a study on the “Social Attitudes of the Youth Population in Hong Kong: A Follow-up Study,” conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong in March 2015, “an overwhelming majority of the two younger cohorts (15-19, and 20-29) identify themselves as Hong Kongers, both over 80%, in contrast to 10% being Chinese.”<sup>81</sup> The older generation of respondents (30-39) has a 63% rate of identifying with Hong Kong, and 21% of being Chinese (See Figure 4.5 and Table 4.2).

Figure 4.5 shows the relationship between age, identity and political trust. The 2,000 respondents of the survey are divided into three age groups: 15-19, 20-29, and 30-39, as of year 2014. The blue bar corresponds to the youngest age group (15-19), with the red bar representing the second youngest (20-29) and green bar representing the oldest generation (30-39). Three indexes are measured on the horizontal axis: (A) Identity, (B) Trust in HK SAR Government, and (C) Trust in Central Government.

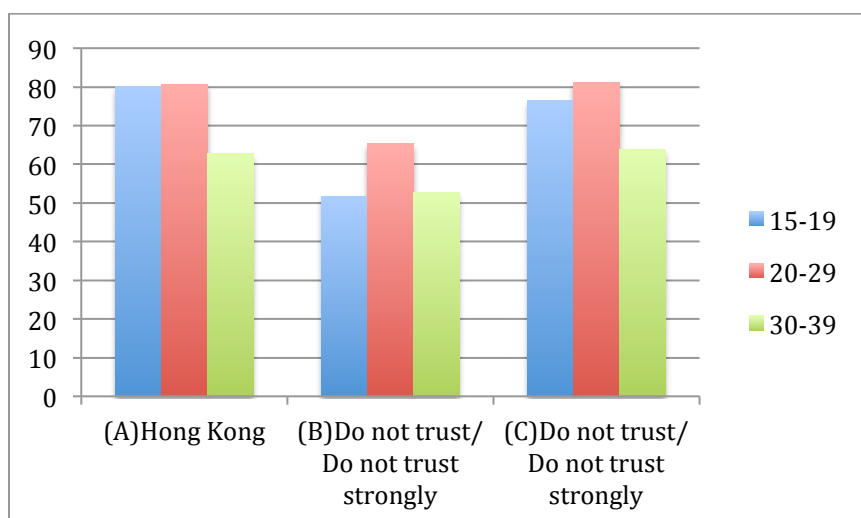
If we take a look at Table 4.2, each of these indexes is further divided into different categories. For example, the Identity index includes the “Chinese,” “Hong Kong,” and “both or both not.” Whereas the options for Trust in HKSAR Government or the Central Government include “Trust/Trust Strongly” and “Do not trust/Do not trust strongly.” In order to simplify the case, I only use the Hong Kong identity for (A), and

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<sup>81</sup> Chiu, Stephen Wing-kai, and Yee-kong Leung. “Social Attitudes of the Youth Population in Hong Kong: A Follow-up Study.” *Chinese University of Hong Kong* (2015).

“Do not trust/Do not trust strongly” for (B) and (C) in Figure 4.5. In Figure 4.5, the vertical axis measures the percentage of the population within each age group identifying with the above indexes. As shown in the graph, the Post-80s and Post-90s (15-19 and 20-29) have the highest tendency to identify as Hong Kongese and not trust the Central Government. The middle age group (20-29) indicates a much higher level of distrust (more than 10% difference) towards the HK SAR Government compared to the other two groups. Overall, it can be observed that the middle youth group (20-29) has the highest level of distrust for both governments, and the highest identification level (80.7%) toward the Hong Kong identity.

In a society where younger generations have demonstrated high levels of distrust toward the government, political dissent is more likely to prevail. From the fragile economic conditions to the escalating authoritarianism under mainlandization, youth political dissents materialize, legitimize, and actualize. Regardless of the ideological polarization between the old and young generations, the major problem is that newly emerging social conditions directly impact the younger generation in the form of sheer economic force and naked political power. We must, therefore, recognize the rise of the youth identity as a principle political power in Hong Kong society.

**Figure 4.5 - Identity and Political Trust**

Notes: (A) refers to Hong Kong Identity, (B) refers to Trust in HKSAR Government, and (C) refers to Trust in Central Government.

**Table 4.2 - Identity and Political Trust**

	Age			All
	15-19	20-29	30-39	
	%	%	%	
(A) Identity				
(認為自己是香港人多些，還是中國人多些)				
Chinese	10.5	10.3	20.6	13.4
Both or both not	9.4	9.0	16.6	11.3
Hong Kong	80.1	80.7	62.7	75.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(638)	(768)	(577)	(1983)
(B) Trust in HK SAR Government				
Trust / Trust strongly	48.2	34.6	47.4	42.6
Do not trust / Do not trust strongly	51.8	65.4	52.6	57.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(616)	(748)	(547)	(1911)
(C) Trust in Central Government				
Trust / Trust strongly	23.6	18.8	36.1	25.2
Do not trust / Do not trust strongly	76.4	81.2	63.9	74.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(625)	(739)	(537)	(1901)

p < 0.001

## Rise of the Youth as Political Force

There are three main reasons for the youth to rise as a major political force in Hong Kong. On an individual level, worsening economic conditions have made them sensitive to the gradual decrease in occupational mobility.<sup>82</sup> Collectively, the expansion of higher-level education and global Internet use have not only advanced their means to acquire public information, heightened their response to social issues and political interests, but also aroused a sense of civil awareness amongst the youth population in society.

In terms of economic conditions, research on social mobility generally measures the ability for a group of people to move from one economic sector to another in society. More narrowly construed, differences between intergenerational and intra-generational occupational mobility also exist. Intergenerational mobility is a measure of social openness, while the latter concerns about the possibility of changing jobs after one's first job.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, upward mobility is defined as the movement from an occupation in the lower economic strata a higher one, and vice versa for downward mobility. In Table 4.3, we can see that the Post-80s generation (1980-1989) has the highest level of intra-generational immobility and inter-generational upward mobility. The data indicates that younger generations may find it difficult to move to a higher paying job even with a high degree of social openness.

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<sup>82</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 387. Print.

<sup>83</sup> HKUST (2010), "HK's Post 80s Generation: Profile and Predicaments," P.27.

**Table 4.3 – Trends in Occupational Mobility in Hong Kong**

	1946-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979	1980-1989	Total
Inter-generational mobility					
Upward mobility	51.09	60.31	66.26	<b>67.79</b>	60.49
Immobility	11.93	9.28	11.72	<b>5.56</b>	10.11
Downward mobility	36.98	30.41	22.02	<b>26.67</b>	29.41
Intra-generational mobility (first to current job)					
Upward mobility	30.25	31.82	24.36	<b>21.28</b>	27.92
Immobility	41.36	43.14	57.41	<b>65.35</b>	49.54
Downward mobility	28.40	25.04	18.23	<b>13.27</b>	22.55
Intra-generational mobility (From 2001 to current job)					
Upward mobility	5.96	8.09	9.96	<b>22.02</b>	8.71
Immobility	87.09	84.29	80.69	<b>62.39</b>	82.95
Downward mobility	6.95	7.62	9.35	<b>15.60</b>	8.33

Source: HKUST (2010), “HK’s Post 80s Generation: Profile and Predicaments,” P.28.

Perceptions for future economic development also fundamentally shape youth political dissent. According to Table 4.4, the fresh-out-of-college generation (ages 20-29) has the most pessimistic views on the opportunities for future personal development in Hong Kong. Majority (51.2%) of young people in this generation believe that future personal development will be “worse than now.” Overall, a large percentage (49.4%) of all age groups believe that future opportunities for personal development will become worse.

**Table 4.4 - Compared to the present situation, will opportunities for personal development in Hong Kong become better or worse in the future?**

	Age			All %
	15-19 %	20-29 %	30-39 %	
Worse than now	46.9	51.2	49.9	49.4
About the same	39.0	38.9	41.0	39.5
Better than now	14.1	9.9	9.1	11.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(638)	(771)	(559)	(1968)
p < 0.05				

Source: CUHK (2015), "Social Attitudes of the Youth Population in Hong Kong: A Follow-Up Study," P.13

On a collective level, the expansion of higher-level education in the 1990s heightened political participation among youth groups. As tertiary educational opportunities increased, Hong Kong gradually transformed into a knowledge-based economy, and younger generations became beneficiaries of the system.<sup>84</sup> "New values and ideas" were infused into society, for example, "individualism, human rights and democracy, social justice and environmental protection."<sup>85</sup> The reality of Hong Kong society, however, is far from these ideals. Youth unemployment soared over the past decade due to a lack of structural expansion in the labor market to absorb new workers.<sup>86</sup> Thus, when future expectations fail to materialize, pessimistic attitudes and political dissent may result in more unconventional forms of political participation.

<sup>84</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 389. Print.

<sup>85</sup> The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (2010), "HK's Post 80s Generation: Profile and Predicaments," Hong Kong: HKUST

<sup>86</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 389. Print.



Starting from the 1990s, the expansion of higher-level education has also been complemented with an expansion of the Internet. The spread of new technologies and free information has allowed “e-mobilization” to surpass conventional forms of collective political behavior, encouraged the concepts of human rights, free speech, and democracy, and introduced a brand new and innovative culture of political participation. In cyberspace, activism no longer remained in the realm of face-to-face personal connections. The rise and fall of social movements have become an outcome of advancements in Internet skills and technological opportunities for forming coalitions with the public mind.<sup>87</sup> While earlier democratic protests seem detached from the rest of the world, recent political movements, the Umbrella Revolution in particular, gained international recognition. From protest images to political artwork (see image below), media platforms were extensively applied to galvanize the movement. Support for the movement became global, and the platform for democratic discussions greatly expanded. Within a few days, the yellow umbrella quickly became an easily recognizable yet powerful symbol, demonstrating solidarity and resistance.



<sup>87</sup> Tarrow, S. ed. (2011). *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

As social media becomes a useful tool for social activism, youngsters find it more and more convenient to maneuver the Internet with its high flexibility, low cost, and high speed. Although as of year 2010, television still remains the most popular channel for learning about political activities, in Table 4.5, the Post-80s and Post-90s have a much higher tendency to use “Electronic communications” than the Post-70s generation. They slowly move away from the more conventional forms of media, such as newspapers, radio, and even television.

**Table 4.5 - Channels for Learning About Demonstrations or Rallies to be Organized (multiple responses allowed)**

	Post-90s	Post-80s	Post-70s	All
	%	%	%	%
TV	69.8	69.8	76.9	72.6
Newspapers	45.8	60.4	66.9	59.0
Electronic communications (e.g. Internet or SMS)	49.0	45.8	30.5	40.6
Informed verbally by others	17.3	15.9	16.7	16.6
Radio	0.2	0.9	1.3	0.9
Banners or handbills	0.2	0.9	0.4	0.5
On street propaganda by political parties	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.2
Magazines	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
School / Teachers	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.1

Source: CUHK (2010), “Social Attitude of the Youth in Hong Kong,” P.37.

The incorporation of social media into political action directly alters the political culture of Hong Kong society. Freedom of speech in the Internet domain breaks free of traditional confinements of elitist participation, and allows for mass engagement on the

popular level. Even though young political activists participate in “both conventional (election) and unconventional (social movements)” methods of local politics, changing societal values drive them to “shun traditional forms of participation, such as voting and political parties, in favor of unconventional tactics, expressive and elite-challenging mass action, through loosely organized civic networks.”<sup>88</sup> Youth participation in unconventional tactics may indicate their own lack of confidence in influencing government decisions. They adhere to a bottom-up approach due to the deficient “electoral institutions and the low integration of civil society.”<sup>89</sup> The long simmering growth of civic awareness has finally emerged to the surface of society, boldly exhibiting its revolutionary and progressive characteristics of democracy, searching for a like-minded political community.

When asked about democratic progress in Hong Kong since 1997, majority of the youth population believe that it is too slow. In Table 4.6, the middle age group (20-29) has the highest tendency (62.6%) to believe that the progress for democracy is too slow. Moreover, on average, majority of all age groups (54.3%) believe that democratic progress has been too slow, while very few people (5.4%) believe that it has been too fast.

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<sup>88</sup> Zheng, Yushuo, and Chor-yung Cheung. *New Trends of Political Participation in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: City U of Hong Kong, 2014. p. 392. Print.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 394.

**Table 4.6 - Democratic Progress since 1997**

	Age			All
	15-19	20-29	30-39	
	%	%	%	%
Too fast (太快)	5.6	4.5	6.2	5.4
About right (適中)	46.2	31.3	35.9	37.4
Too slow (太慢)	46.4	62.6	51.9	54.3
Don't know (唔知道/好難講)	1.7	1.7	6.0	3.0
Total	99.9	100.1	100.0	100.1
(N)	(638)	(780)	(582)	(2000)
p < 0.001				

Source: CUHK (2015), "Social Attitudes of the Youth Population in Hong Kong: A Follow-Up Study," P.22

Corresponding to perceptions on democratic progress is social attitudes toward the Occupy Central movement (or Umbrella Revolution) for universal suffrage by 2017. In Table 4.7, close to 60% of respondents in the middle age group (20-29) "support or strongly support" the movement. Both youth groups (15-19 and 20-29) show a higher tendency to support the movement. Attitudes towards the movement are split amongst the oldest group (30-39), with 46.7% supporting the movement, and 46.4% indicating the opposite. Across all age groups, near 54% of respondents support the movement. It is important to note that there is a strong correlation between people's perception of democracy and their methods of political participation. If one considers the Occupy Movement too radical, he or she may also believe in more modest and gradual strategies for achieving democracy.

**Table 4.7 - Support “Occupy Central” for Genuine Universal Suffrage in 2017 Chief Executive Election**

	Age			All
	15-19 %	20-29 %	30-39 %	
Don't support / Strongly don't support (唔支持 / 非常唔支持)	42.6	34.4	46.4	40.5
Support / Strongly support (支持 / 非常支持)	53.6	59.7	46.7	53.9
Don't know (唔知道 / 好難講)	3.8	5.9	6.9	5.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9
(N)	(638)	(776)	(580)	(1994)
p < 0.001				

Source: CUHK (2015), “Social Attitudes of the Youth Population in Hong Kong: A Follow-Up Study,” P.18

In conclusion for the data analysis, the middle age group (20-29) has shown the strongest level of dissent toward the present political and economic conditions in Hong Kong. Both younger generations (15-19 and 20-29) have a higher tendency to associate with the Hong Kong identity, support the Occupy Movement, and indicate strong distrust towards the Central Government. Demographically speaking, social attitudes in the youth population (15-19 and 20-29) are not divided. However, there is a significant divergence in the ideological orientations between the younger and older generations. After all, the political and economic circumstances have greatly transformed in the past few decades in Hong Kong history, resulting in distinct social experiences for different generations.

An integral part of the numerous changes that have taken place in Hong Kong is the emergence of a political consciousness that has been simmering even prior to 1997.

This phenomenon has particularly been prominent amongst the youth populations. Some believe that the student-led Umbrella Revolution marks the “watershed of the political movements in Hong Kong.”<sup>90</sup> Considering the sacredness of Hong Kong’s outstanding capitalist economy and a lingering presence of traditional social values, the notion of non-cooperation itself challenges the socio-political ideology of the city. Contemporary Hong Kong society presents to us a new form of reality, one that focuses on popular dissent of the youth population. Social movements created by the youth counterbalances oppressive forces and transcends into a powerful form of symbolic cultural identity. The Hong Kongese identity, in turn, becomes a possibility for counter-hegemonic expression.

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<sup>90</sup> Kung, Lap Yan. "Occupy Central, Umbrella Movement, and Democracy - Syndicate Theology." *Syndicate Theology*. 30 Nov. 2014. Web.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

It is a fallacy of the radical youth to demand all or nothing, and to view every partial activity as compromise. Either engage in something that will bring revolution and transformation all at one blow, or do nothing, it seems to say. But compromise is really only a desperate attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. It is not compromise to study to understand the world in which one lives, to seek expression for one's inner life, to work to harmonize it and make it an integer, nor is it compromise to work in some small sphere for the harmonization of social life and the relations between men who work together, a harmonization that will bring democracy into every sphere of life.<sup>91</sup>

-RANDOLPH S. BOURNE,

*Youth and Life* (1913)

Now that the umbrellas have been folded, the revolutionaries themselves are asking, so what is the price of democracy? Some of them have missed school, others have skipped work; some have been beaten up, tortured, and interrogated; very few even lost their lives. Was the struggle worthwhile after all? Should they have given up on the faint hopes of democratic principles, and searched for a more realistic version of compromise?

In order to answer these questions, we must first acknowledge that in the process of the democratic movement, a new political culture has been nurtured. The Umbrella

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<sup>91</sup> Bourne, Randolph Silliman. *Youth and Life*. Mifflin: Houghton, 1913. Print.

Revolution has encouraged countless number of ordinary Hong Kong citizens to speak up and engage in various forms of political participation. The recent trends of political participation has led me to question the motives and interests behind the new wave of democratic movements in Hong Kong. This thesis argues that the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong is more than just democratization - it reflects a larger identity crisis that has been ongoing in society, which separates the Hong Kong from the Chinese. The vast amount of implications of the movement unfolds are indicative that the nature of public sentiments extends beyond universal suffrage. It concerns the manifestations of cultural and political ideologies of what it means to be Hong Kongese.

In light of the democratic movement, the first two chapters establish historical and contextual grounds for the rest of the thesis, and provide three major theoretical frameworks that have emerged in and around the Umbrella Revolution, namely, *the government position*, *democratic movement theory*, and the *ethnic identity theory*. I describe the various legal, institutional and ideological components of the current political system of Hong Kong. Relationships between the Sino-British treaty and Basic Law of Hong Kong, the Central Government's position and popular opinions, the academic voices from the University of Hong Kong, the political parties, the C.Y. Leung administration, etc., represented themselves as reactionary and counter-reactionary forces of the democratic movement that are striving to take center stage in the ongoing political debate. They form into an intricate nexus of power configurations that manifest in Hong Kong society.

However, my investigation of the web of interconnectedness of power dynamics is not geared towards an institutional analysis of realist strategies, but rather a



demonstration of how a unique Hong Kongese identity grows and multiplies under the current political conditions. The voice of the *ethnic identity theory* becomes the core of the discussion in Chapter 3 on the problem of identity. In this chapter, I examine the different aspects of how Beijing's strategy of mainlandization combined with the social stratification in Hong Kong has produced a divergence in cultural identities of different groups in society. While the rich have largely supported Beijing's political stances, youth and grassroots became the principle advocates of the democratic movement, as they also find themselves identifying closely with the Hong Kongese identity. Moreover, to get beyond the linear understandings of Hong Kong and Chinese identities, I establish the grey areas, in-betweens, and the duality of such ambiguous concepts by delving deeper into the colonial history of Hong Kong and the tradition of Chinese intellectual thought. Contrary to majority of the mainstream studies on the psychoanalytic dynamics of Chinese identities, this thesis focuses on the formation and metamorphosis of identities from a Hong Kong perspective. The rich and contextual analysis of this chapter contributes into its conclusion that a symbolic cultural identity is required for collective political participation.

Chapter 4 of this thesis primarily focuses on the manifestation of youth political participation in Hong Kong society. As cultural identities should not be understood simply as personal experiences, I introduce an empirical analysis on the intertwined relationship between identity and politics, hegemony and resistance. Major findings of the chapter include a strong negative correlation between the Hong Kongese identity and public sentiments, which indicates that when the government and society appraisal rates are high, people tend to have more favorable opinions toward the Central Government.

This chapter also complicates the *ethnic identity theory* mentioned in previous chapters by demonstrating a divide within Hong Kong society among the rich and poor and the old and young. Youth populations in Hong Kong have a higher tendency to associate with the Hong Kong identity, support the Occupy Movement, and indicate strong distrust towards the Central Government. As a result, the empirical analysis reveals that recent trends in youth politics and youth political participation is evident. Such trends show that not only do the stages of metamorphosis of Hong Kongese identity follow the patterns of political dissent, but that political and economic forces have formidable abilities in shaping and transforming the vicissitudes of such terms. Thus, the Umbrella Revolution of the youth counterbalances oppressive forces and becomes a channel for counter-hegemonic expression.

It can be said that a longing for energizing democratic visions, the pursuit of idealistic humanitarian goals, and the chase after powerful stories that are grander than themselves are present in youth populations across the globe. The narrative of the Umbrella Revolution has become emancipating for younger generations living under political oppression and economic slump. When taken together, these fascinating narratives of contemporary democratic struggles are no longer isolated incidents, but transform into an ingrained belief that a revolution must contain magical powers of redemption, for both the mind and the soul.

In post-colonial Hong Kong, democratic literature thrives in the time of identity crisis, and through our imaginations, these narratives tend to function as a resolution to the relevant crisis. When discussing the democratic ideologies of the youth, on one hand, it is necessary to address the wide ranges of individual fever and fear; and on the other,

collective frenzy towards the notion of revolution not only function as a societal commentary on the gradual decay of contemporary Hong Kong society, but also demonstrate a powerful ability to reconfigure our standards and values through fantastical narratives.

Now, besides the psychological connotations of the popularity of democratic literature, youth intellectual thought is also a field that should be taken seriously and given appropriate approval. Although framing political goals in idealism may not sound pragmatic enough, young activists in Hong Kong have expressed that “the core of our idealism rests in our concern about the land and its people... Only within this idealism can we resist the kind of instrumental rationality ... presupposed by our city’s dying model of elections in the legislature ... and by the rhetoric and logic of our middle-class democracy.”<sup>92</sup> They believe that in order to hold on to the core values of Hong Kong society and gather its collective inertia, one must not yield to mediocre improvements, or incremental change. They strive for a vision of democracy that is closely correlated to the individual ethos, one that relies on individual political awareness to enact on the public sphere.

The narratives of the rising political youth culture have both strengths and limitations. We must take into consideration the fragility of the Communist ego, the boundaries of legitimacy and security, the economic realities, and the ironclad stance of Beijing on the issue of sovereignty. Such realities warn Hong Kong people of the dangers of going against the tide of Chinese hegemony. However, Hong Kong’s youth have also significantly contributed to the development of civil awareness and political

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<sup>92</sup> Chow Ching, “A Reflection on the Five-District De Facto Referendum: A Footnote on My Idealism,” in *Pre/Post-80s: Going Beyond Social Movement, Discourse and Generational Imagination*, Hong Kong: Roundtable Synergy Books, 2010, 84 and 86.

consciousness in society at large. The Occupy Movement's referendum has forced the silent majority to pick a side and vote over issues on electoral politics. The Umbrella Revolution has roused a sense of justice across all ages and genders. The democratic movement has created a space where ideal forms of civil participation may take place in the public sphere. Students have demonstrated an adamant determination in their quest for democracy as they banded together with a brim vision of hope, pain, frustration, and fear.

So, what is the price of democracy? At the end of the day, Hong Kong society may still be in search for reconciliation between idealism and reality. The youths may even become disillusioned by the harsh consequences of political hegemony, as their hearts have already been crushed by police batons, their eyes been drenched by pepper spray. But the Umbrella Revolution is not over yet. The pursuit of democracy will be a continual progress, and this is just the beginning. Hopes and fears of Hong Kong people are so closely tied to their political ideologies that they transform into a platform for these silenced voices to fight for a better tomorrow. The umbrellas of solidarity and resistance will continue to linger in the minds of Hong Kong people.

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