**Hong Kong-ness from the Mainland Eyes**

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**Abstract**

In recent years, local identification has become a popular area within Hong Kong studies. However, the Mainland factor is largely ignored. To fill the gap, this article will draw the Mainland perception of "Hong Kongness." Through the interview and content analysis of social narratives, this article argues that treating Hong Kongese as Chinese is not something taken-for-granted, but a negotiated product of their perceived differences and the state narratives, and that strategy could change due to the realpolitik. During the protests period, the Mainland did pay unprecedented attention to Hong Kong and overwrite the previously vague image. They started to recognize the real differences between "us" and "them," but the undisputed doctrine of national sovereignty and unification inhibited them from making a difference. Through the "devaluation" practice, the cognitional and emotional cleavage is *de facto* enlarging, and the cumulative effects would injure the relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China. This article also contributes theoretically that transvaluation practices can be based on the downgrading evaluations but concurrently maintain the group membership out of higher ethnic principles.

*Keywords:* boundary making, Hong Kong-Mainland Relationship

# 1 Introduction

In recent years, local identification has become a popular area within Hong Kong studies. The focus is on how identifications take place within the local field, but they largely ignore how an external categorization might influence the local identification. Or they simplify the categorization to the pressure of the central government. But one might ask: How about the evaluation from their Mainland brothers? Few studies have paid attention to that, as, to the best of my knowledge, there is no relevant study recoding how Mainlanders think of Hong Kong from both Hong Kong and Mainland scholars. To make clear, the bulk of work relating to the Mainlander is the immigrant's experience in Hong Kong, but a Mainlander outside Hong Kong may have totally different perceptions of Hong Kong.

The article would employ "Hong Kongness" to reflect on how Mainlanders think of Hong Kong. According to Merriam-Webster, the suffix "-ness" is to describe the "state, condition, quality, and degree" of the attached prefix, which is usually an adjective. Naturally, "Hong Kongness" is to display the "state, condition, quality, and degree" of Hong Kong. To make no confusion, as the article sheds light on the Mainland perception of "Hong Kongness," the article is titled with "'Hong Kongness' from the Mainland Eyes." Instead of treating "Hong Kongness" as a static and solid entity, the article adopts a relational perspective (Emirbayer, 1997), suggesting that Hong Kong-Mainland relations constitute "Hong Kongness."

In this article, I address the gap through the interview and the content analysis on the state and social narratives. Specifically, I explore how Mainlanders might consider Hong Kong through the lens of Anti-Extradition Law Protests. I argue that treating Hong Kongese as Chinese is not something taken-for-granted, but a negotiated product of their perceived differences and the state narratives, and that strategy could change due to the realpolitik. During the protests period, the Mainland did pay unprecedented attention to Hong Kong and overwrite the previously vague image. They started to recognize the real differences between "us" and "them," but the undisputed doctrine of national sovereignty and unification inhibited them from making a difference. Through the "devaluation" practice, the cognitional and emotional cleavage is *de facto* enlarging, and the cumulative effects would injure the relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China. This article also contributes theoretically that transvaluation practices can be based on the downgrading evaluations but concurrently maintain the group membership out of higher ethnic principles.

# 2 Theoretical Background

The concept of "identity" has swiftly entered the central stage across a variety of disciplinary areas. There are two primary but heterogeneous ways of thinking identity. As Hall (2014) remarks, one conception posits identity as a fixed essence, providing us with "stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" (223), while the other recognizes identity as a matter of becoming that "undergo constant transformation" and is "made, within the discourses of history and culture" (226). The distinction between these two conceptions lies at the heart of whether there is sameness across a collective's members and sameness over time.

Recent practices tend to reject that sameness (Cerulo, 1997), but the constructionist view may be too weak to perform serious inquiry due to its premise that "identities are multiple, malleable, fluid, and so on" (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). "Identity" runs into the cul-de-sac where, on the one hand, the loose use wears down its clear reference, but "there are no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them" on the other (Hall et al., 1990). "Identification" turns

out to be an alternative term that might substitute for "identity" (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Echoed by Hall (2000: 17-18), "identities can function as points of identification...because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside,' abjected."

Identifications are contextual and situational, varying from individual to collective level. However, for both levels, the interplay between the internal recognition and external categorization is the same. The early stage of socialization is vital to individual identification, as it allows one to develop the primary cognition. Of no doubt, all identifications change across time and space, but those primary cognitions are more resilient than those developed in the later stage (Jenkins, 2014). Turning to collective identification, who does the identifying is of the primary importance, for it then decides whether a collectivity is seen as a group defined by the mutual recognition of its members or a category based on the criteria of observers. Although categorization is generally secondary to internal recognition, categorized groups may internalize that imposed definition through acceptance, reinforcement, or even denial (Jenkins, 2000). In a nutshell, identification and categorization are generic processes (Tajfel and Turner 1986), without which the formation of identity in no way could happen.

## 2.1 Bringing Mainland Back In

When studying "Hong Kong identity," scholars generally admit its existence, which is "historically and culturally real for the local" (Fung, 2004, p. 401). The return of Hong Kong's sovereignty brought another identity, that is, "Chinese," and more people claimed a mix of Chinese-Hong Kong identity. After the first decade of the honeymoon, local identity seemed to be more incompatible with the "Chinese," as shown by both HKU POP and CUHK CCPOS. Some emphasize that it was due to the fading political trust (Steinhardt et al., 2018), while more studies ascribe that shift to the rising localist narrative that gradually created in a series of social events (Ku, 2012; Ma, 2015; Veg, 2017). In recent years, two identities have been explicitly "split" or "zero-sum terms," especially for the younger generations (Fung & Chan, 2017).

Most studies focus solely on local identification, which, as specified by some studies, has been experiencing the shift from the ethnocultural mode to the civic mode (S. Chow et al., 2020; Veg, 2017). Yet how local people respond to the external categorization receives less attention than it deserves, and what the categorization is from the Mainland remains unknown. Surely, categorization by the central government is "one of the most typical expressions of that monopoly over legitimate symbolic violence which belongs to the state or to its representatives" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 21), but it should not be mistaken as the only source. Only bringing the Mainland back in could the local identity studies become more comprehensive.

## 2.2 Toward the Categorization Process

To fill that lacuna, this article will delve into the "Hong Kongness" from the Mainland eyes, which involves the value distinguishment process between what represents the Mainland and Hong Kong. As Lamont (2012) shows, categorization lies at the center of evaluation. Thus, the everyday use of collective identification, as a category to be internalized, would promise a fruitful outcome. Regarding what constitutes the group, Barth (1969) emphasizes that it is not the cultural stuff, but the boundary that marks the group off from each other and defines the group. In his later work, he clarifies that "boundary" embraces three layers of abstraction– a border "on the ground," a setting that produces social differences, and a template for categorization. Further, they are classified by Lamont and Molnár (2002) into two levels that the symbolic boundary is a

conceptual distinction made by social actors for categorization, while the social category is the objected forms of social differences.

Building on Barth and Lamont's typology, Wimmer (2008) provides a multilevel process model, explaining "the varying features of ethnic boundaries as a result of the negotiations between actors whose strategies are shaped by the characteristics of the social field" (973). It is obvious that actors cannot choose whatever strategies they like, and they are constrained by the institutions, social positions, and the network of political alliances. Depending on their positions in the social field, different actors will choose different strategies to redraw a boundary or modify the existing boundaries. Such strategies include expanding (expansion) or limiting (contraction) the domain of people in one's own ethnic category, challenging the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories (transvaluation), changing one's own position within a boundary system (positional move), and emphasizing other, non-ethnic forms of belonging (blurring).

Often, actors have to enter a negotiation process with other actors and then reach the consensus over the boundary. That consensus could be partial that on either side, some disagree on nature and the meaning of the ethnic divide; or the consensus may be asymmetrical, implying that only one side agrees on the relevance and legitimacy of the boundary. Then, that consensus could shape the boundary features– the degree of political salience, social closure, and cultural differentiation. Instead of being static, the boundary may change exogenously through major political events or the diffusion of new strategies, and endogenously by cumulative consequences of the strategies pursued by actors. However, it would be careless to assume that the word is necessarily composed of sharply bounded groups. Sometimes, a fuzzy distinction and soft boundary allow one to maintain multi-memberships and switch them situationally (Wimmer, 2013).

Despite the model's insight, "boundary" is subject to some criticisms. Jenkins (2014) contends that boundary is largely a metaphor that demands vigilance whenever adopting such a construct. Similarly, for Brubaker (2014) he believes that there is no need to bother "boundary" for analyzing the practices of categorization. On the adoption of "boundary," I agree with Wimmer (2014) that its advantages outweigh the limitation since it allows us to capture the diverse modes of classification.

Situated in Wimmer's framework, Li (2016) observes ethnic Chinese groups in Australia and captures Hong Kongnese may strategically mobilize different interpretations of pan-Chinese identity as a way of managing (playing) differences. Despite the same focus on Hong Kongese and PRC-Chinese, his context where Hong Kongese and PRC-Chinese are foreign to Australia and interact with others under pan-Chinese identity differs a lot from mine. For either Hong Kongese or (Mainland) Chinese, the other's life is largely, if not totally, absent. In other words, the existence of a physical border and its implications make that way of playing differences no longer applicable. But, on the other hand, the situation is similar to how Borneman (1992) regards the Berlin Wall, the border that cut off the connections between the East and West Germany and then promoted the construction of two Germanness.

## 2.3 The Field Characteristics

In Mainland China, the institution takes the central stage to understand the field. The state attempts to shape students' political and social beliefs via Politics textbooks (Cantoni et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Chinese leaders encourage popular expressions on preserving national sovereignty and the reunification of China, as these discourses could help them mobilize the population in support of their policy (S. Zhao, 2013). Also, with the help of young patriotic netizens ("Little

Pinks"), the official media successfully fostered an alliance between the nation and its citizens (Guo, 2018).

Beyond the ideological guidance, the state has established a sophisticated censorship apparatus. In no doubt, the Great Firewall that blocks millions of online users from accessing websites that are deemed politically sensitive by the state. During the Umbrella Movement, 21 keywords, including protests and universal suffrage, were regarded as sensitive and blocked by Weibo (J. Zhao, 2017). Other than the blockage, the state may hire as many as 2 million online commentators (50c party) to fabricate massive social media posts for the strategic distraction of certain controversial issues (King et al., 2017). By adopting Wimmer's model, I will focus on how Mainland people perceive "Hong Kongness" and what they might change as a result of the event. Due to the state's censorship, actors generally face more costs to obtain what really happens, and I will specifically draw attention on whether they use the censor invading technology, which could identify their social position. Out of the same consideration, I will record their political status for reference.

# 3 Methods

To investigate the perception of "Hong Kong-ness," I adopted a twofold approach, combining interviews with textual analysis. Interviewing is particularly helpful in revealing the emotional dimensions of social experience that are not often evident in behavior. (Lamont & Swidler, 2014)

## 3.1 Content Analysis of Textbook

The explicit goal of China's 8th Curriculum was to shape students' political and social beliefs. After China's 8th Curriculum Reform, the Politics textbooks are common to all provinces. As found in politics textbooks were "often successful in changing students' attitudes in important issues, in the direction intended by the Chinese government (Cantoni et al., 2017). However, regardless of whether one intends to specialize in the science or humanities track, all students have to take the mandatory modules of the Politics textbook before the Academic Assessment ("Little Gaokao"). To examine the potential influences, I conducted textual analysis on the mandatory modules (*Economic Life, Political Life, and Cultural Life*) and corresponding instructor's manuals. I marked the section that involves Hong Kong and focused on the information, emotion, and value that it designs to convey. To better capture the portray of Hong Kong, I applied the same procedure on mandatory modules (*Political History, Economic History, and Cultural History*) of History textbooks and manuals.

## 3.2 Content Analysis of the Press Releases

In line with the lens of "event," I performed content analysis of press releases published by Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HMO) on its website. HMO is the agency of the State Council responsible for promoting cooperation and coordination of political, economic, and cultural ties between Mainland China and Hong Kong. Hence, HMO represents the official position and its statements will be the reference of the news reports in Mainland China. These releases consist of transcripts of three press conferences held on 29 July, 6 August, and 3 September and announcements on certain events. I coded key phrases, classified them into categories, and clarified their meanings within the full text of press releases. It supplements the social narrative

in which an individual was situated during the protests period and could be particularly helpful in a country where the flow of information is censored.

### 3.3 Interviews

From January to April 2020, I conducted 10 interviews with youths who have finished high school in Mainland China. All respondents are currently in the college and from diverse majors, varying from freshmen to senior students. All are from the middle-class, but only one respondent reported that she had been to Hong Kong. I recruited participants through snowball sampling from a civic education program in which all of them participated or have participated. Because my study involves some irregular topics that few people would choose to formally discuss with someone strange, that program was helpful in gaining consent. Besides, that project allowed me to find qualified participants who have pre-knowledge and can better elaborate on value-judgment questions, as they have touched these issues.

Following Wimmer's (2008) idea that major political events may provide incentives to pursue new strategies of boundary-making, I included protests triggered by the amendment of the extradition bill as a site to examine how they perceive "Hong Kongness." I prepared a timeline of significant events from June to August 2019, several photos, and a phenomenal article circulated in social media in June 2019, in case they forget some information that destabilizes the evaluation process.

Interviews lasted 90 to 180 minutes, and half of them took place at the time and place of participants' choosing, while the other half took place via online meetings (WeChat or Zoom) due to the outbreak of coronavirus. All were recorded and transcribed word-by-word under participants' consent.

Interviewing is a social encounter where knowledge is actively formed and produced (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Basically, I treat participants as active narrators and would not interrupt their words even they digress a little or mistake something. For evaluation questions, I encourage them to clarify the premises they hold and interpret the meaning of certain concepts. Besides, I tried to observe how participants reacted when I displayed any information as mentioned above. On the other hand, it is possible that my words revealed my political stances and influenced the tone of interviews. In China's ideological spectrum, I am liberal (right), which may have primed participants to favor western values (which they did not).

## 4 An Initial Image of Hong Kong

Regarding textbooks, they provide little information on Hong Kong, most of which is embedded in the national narrative. Hong Kong only appears twice in the History textbook. The first mention is in the section of "Opium War," and Hong Kong is part of the introduction of the Treaty of Nanking, which is defined as the first unequal treaties of modern China. The second is a particular topic of Hong Kong under the section of "Great Cause of Reunification." That part mainly focuses on "one country, two systems" and regards it as a great design and achievement. Turning to the Politics textbook, the only emergence links to the sovereignty that the return of Hong Kong was a successful example of safeguarding the national interest. It also cites some claims made by Deng Xiaoping to reify what national interest is, like "we should always put sovereignty and national safety in the first place" (Political Life: 98).

In general, respondents offered a positive image when I asked them to tell their first impression of Hong Kong. In their mind, Hong Kong is a "financial center" or "a prosperous

city." "British style" and "former colony" were less prevalent categories. In addition to these labels, one respondent who studies maritime law specifically emphasized Hong Kong as an international shipping center. Except for the only respondent who had visited Hong Kong, she proffered a negative response:

> My first and most profound impression (of Hong Kong) is not being respected. I still remember the experience in a famous restaurant where the waitress was indifferent, and he even did not have any eye contact with us. I did not know why, but I believed it might relate to the language (Mandarin) that I spoke. I immediately felt offended and angry. Afterward, I decided to use English whenever it was possible because I was not comfortable with being treated like that. Another impression is chaos, especially when I saw lots of ethnic minorities wandering in Tsim Sha Tsui. (Yvonne, 22, Economics)

The evaluation turns out bipolar between those who had not been to and one that visited Hong Kong three times. Nevertheless, their familiarity with Hong Kong's pop culture and history is almost identical. All of them confirm that they listened to the Cantonese music. Each respondent named Eason Chan, and the majority admitted that listening to his song was prevalent in school or influenced by their friends. Besides, that they once sang his Cantonese songs in karaoke with their friends seems to be a shared experience. It is noteworthy that none can understand Cantonese, as Dylan (21, Engineering) frankly declares, "I know nothing about Cantonese other than one or two dirty words, but it would not deter me from singing some Cantonese songs with my friends." Despite the situation that Denise Ho was added into the blacklist of the authority due to the political reason, one female respondent, Zoey (22, Education), told me that she likes Ho's music, and it becomes harder for her to find Ho's music today.

The film exposes a similar pattern to the music. All respondents congruously held that they know the Hong Kong film, and the only difference lies in the number of movies that they have seen. Nevertheless, the film that they watched is the Mandarin dubbing version. Regardless of the language, they suggest that Hong Kong films constitute one part of their childhood memory. By contrast, nobody has read any literature or nonfiction work of or in Hong Kong. It seems that the specific piece with which they are familiar lies in the popular culture from the late 90s to 00s, the last golden era when Hong Kong could exert its influence over the Mainland.

In light of the knowledge of Hong Kong's history, what they possess does not exceed much from the history textbooks. Noah explicitly pointed out:

> If you want to identify how much I know about Hong Kong's history, my answer and History textbook will be pretty much the same. Honestly, I do not draw much attention to that. (Noah, 21, Maritime law)

Their expression of how much they know confirms the same pattern. Most of them merely referred to a trinity of historical events– the cession of Hong Kong as a result of several unequal treaties, the firm stand of recovering Hong Kong during the Sino-British negotiations, and the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. Interestingly, one respondent mistook Macau's returning year for Hong Kong's, but he noticed the 1997 Asian financial crisis:

> In 1997, there was a financial crisis. If there had been no support from the central government, Hong Kong would not have survived. (Elm, 20, Law)

In respect to how they evaluate their knowledge of Hong Kong compared to their peers, most respondents considered themselves as the average. To put segmented pieces together, an initial

image is about to emerge. Their image of Hong Kong revolves around the entertainment culture, most of which were popular in the early 2000s. However, for other aspects, their definition could be compressed into one sentence: a former British colony formed by a series of unequal treaties now come back to China and practices capitalist orders under "one country, two systems" that was put forward by Deng Xiaoping.

## 5 Who are we and Who are they?

"Hong Kongness" is a product of categorization vis-a-vis the identification of Chineseness. However, their image only contours what they know about Hong Kong, and it is insufficiently to grasp what they think of "Hong Kongness." To unveil their perception, it is necessary to figure out how they think of Hong Kongness in relation to Chinese.

The Politics textbook provides a glimpse of how the state apparatus interprets what we should follow. *Cultural Life*, the third module, spends the 60 pages discussing the importance of culture and cultural inheritance, and the other 60 pages introducing Chinese culture, national spirit, and how to develop socialist culture with Chinese characteristics. The section of "Our National Spirit" provides:

> During the 5000 years, the Chinese nation has formed a great national spirit. The kernel is patriotism, and it also favors unity and solidarity... Regardless of whether our country is in prosperity or adversity, that solidarity will generate powerful force, making any act of conquering or disrupting the Chinese nation impossible.

"Chineseness" is often a kind of cultural essentialism that, on the one hand, creates an internal cohesion within the Chinese nation, while draws a symbolic boundary between China and the rest of the world on the other (R. Chow, 1998). That is not the cliche, but what the vast majority of respondents believe. They unanimously agree that they are Chinese and expect others to categorize them as Chinese. That is even true for the only respondent who prioritized another identity over Chinese:

> There is no doubt that I am Chinese. However, I would put being a Zhejiangnese in front of being Chinese because I think that people from different provinces differ a lot. So, whenever possible, I would call myself a Zhejiangnese. (Dylan)

That choice makes him unique among all respondents, but that reasoning process is general. While agreeing with the national identity, they do not regard it as the only identity that they hold. Instead, they tend to embrace that identification highly depends on the situation, and Wendy provided a typical illustration:

> Naturally, one has been inscribed on a local identity since one was born. The main reason is to identify others. It would be weird if I insist that I am Chinese. In daily life, I would tell others that I am from Suzhou, which would help others know me. If I am abroad, I will call myself Chinese. (Wendy)

Following the same logic, Wendy elaborated on what she thinks on Hong Kongese:

> If I meet one person who calls oneself "Hong Kongese," it is totally ok for me. But it becomes unacceptable to me when it happens abroad. To some extent, I would see him or her as an independentist

On the same issue, Noah offered another discourse that strategically reduces the "Chineseness" to a legal concept:

> You know, I think being a Chinese represents some traditional values. It is hard to figure out what exactly they are, so we can put them aside. But at least, being a Chinese represents one's nationality, so anyone who was born in a specific country does not have a choice for that identity. After all, you cannot complain to God why he let you be born in this country, instead of the other.

Despite the ostensible differences, both accounts are based on the premise that Hong Kongnese is never a category that can rival against Chinese, but always should be a subcategory under Chinese or pan-Chinese identity (cf. Li 2016). However, it is not to suggest that they regard one from Hong Kong and the other from the Mainland as identical. On the contrary, all respondents infer some differences from "one country, two systems," like the degree of market development, the means of redistribution, etc. Apart from those, some respondents specified divergences in education:

> We are quite different from Hong Kong people. What I learned in high school was national education, while they do not have to. I studied socialist economics, while they embrace the capitalist one. Perhaps, the language of the textbook differs, Mine is Chinese, while theirs are English. (Yvonne)
>
> Education really represents something. Beyond any doubt, the general education level of Hong Kong people is higher than us. (Noah)

Beyond apparent differences located at the objectified forms or social boundaries, Zoey expressed her feeling of alienation:

> We are culturally distant to Hong Kong. I do not know how Hong Kongese youths spend their leisure time. Do they read the same comics that I do? Do they play Honor of Kings [a popular mobile game in Mainland China]? Honestly, I have no idea. That makes me sad.

That the border divides the territories is one level of abstraction of "boundary" (Barth 2000). However, given the differences brought by the border, it is not to suggest that there is a boundary. It is noteworthy that the boundary refers to the ways of seeing the world coincided with the ways of acting in the world. Lisa illustrated how she would treat Hong Kongese:

> Of course, I know that some Hong Kongese reject being Chinese. It is up to them. But I am more than welcome to treat them as Chinese. For those who claim they are Chinese, there is no problem. (Lisa)

Most respondents agreed on that treatment of Hong Kongese, which is not others. To be sure, it implicitly involves the negotiation process. On the one hand, each respondent did realize that Hong Kongese is different from us in specific aspects. But, on the other hand, the dominant discourse of the state apparatus makes them prioritizes the national interest, and it has already been part of top-level schemas, which are relatively fixed (Brubaker, 2004). Among those respondents, the institutional order and their perceived differences reach an equilibrium, driving them to implicitly adopt the strategy of "expansion" by emphasizing a higher-level category that intends "to convince or force minorities to accept it as a category of self-description" (Wimmer 2008b: 1035). Additionally, the shared cultural origin makes them more likely to embrace that boundary expansion.

Including Hong Kongnese into the category of Chinese is not an ongoing process, but a settling strategy formed in the bygone interplay between the sense of alienation and "nation first" within the Mainland context. As that strategy is mostly shaped by "nation first," it implies that the realpolitik or exogenous shift in the field may change that expansion strategy.

# 6 Through the Lens of Event

In comparison to most happenings that reproduce social structures, events may be "that relatively rare subclass of happenings that could significantly transform structures" (Sewell 1996: 262). If the outbreak of the Umbrella Movement surprised everyone and needs to be studied under the eventful approach (Lee & Sing, 2019), what took place in 2019 surpassed everyone's expectation that nobody had predicted the strength of the protests. The crux of that event to the Mainland is the rediscovery of Hong Kong, an exogenous shift that may transform the previous evaluation practices. I will focus on their practices during the protests, elaborate on how they evaluate the protests, and lastly see the boundary-making strategies.

## 6.1 Social Narrative

With regard to protests, the central government kept silent during June. The bulk of questions of protests were raised on Foreign Ministry's Regular Press Conference in June, but spokespersons repeatedly refused to provide specific remarks, for Hong Kong affairs are purely China's internal affairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2019). Similar to what happened in the Umbrella Movement, lots of keywords and images were blocked or deleted by Weibo and WeChat. Yet, after mid-June, several articles were circulated on social media. One article ("Whether Hong Kong can be saved") received hundreds of thousand views. It was an agitated article with lots of false points by H. Zhao (2019) who had studied in Hong Kong:

> As I studied in Hong Kong before, I wrote many articles about Hong Kong for eliminating the bias about Hong Kong young people. I say it many times that they are not bad, but stupid…Hong Kong is always under the impact of western values. Ordinary people are deluded and gain false satisfaction from participating in the protest.

Zhao attributes this phenomenon to the structural reasons– education inequality and "housing hegemony." Henceforth, a series of online articles seriously or sarcastically discussed the social inequalities, treating them as the ultimate reason for Hong Kong's dilemma. Other than commentaries, there were lots of accounts aiming at disclosing the "evilness" of the protests, The typical one is from "the Soul of Police" (a WeChat account) that constantly propagated.

Until 2 July, the next day of HKSAR Establishment day, HMO responded and strongly condemned the storming of the Legislative Council. Thereafter, it periodically released announcements or held a press conference to take its stand on protests. The state's logic is clear. To close the loophole of the legal system, the administration put up with an amendment, the divergences of which, in turn, triggered a series of protests. As the amendment had been *de facto* withdrawn, the real reason for the continuous protests was that it aimed at the central government. Following that path, HMO reiterated "one country, two systems" and reasserted that "one country" is the bedrock to all:

> There are three unchallengeable baselines. The first is not to allow any action that threatens sovereignty, and the second is not allowed to challenge the power of the

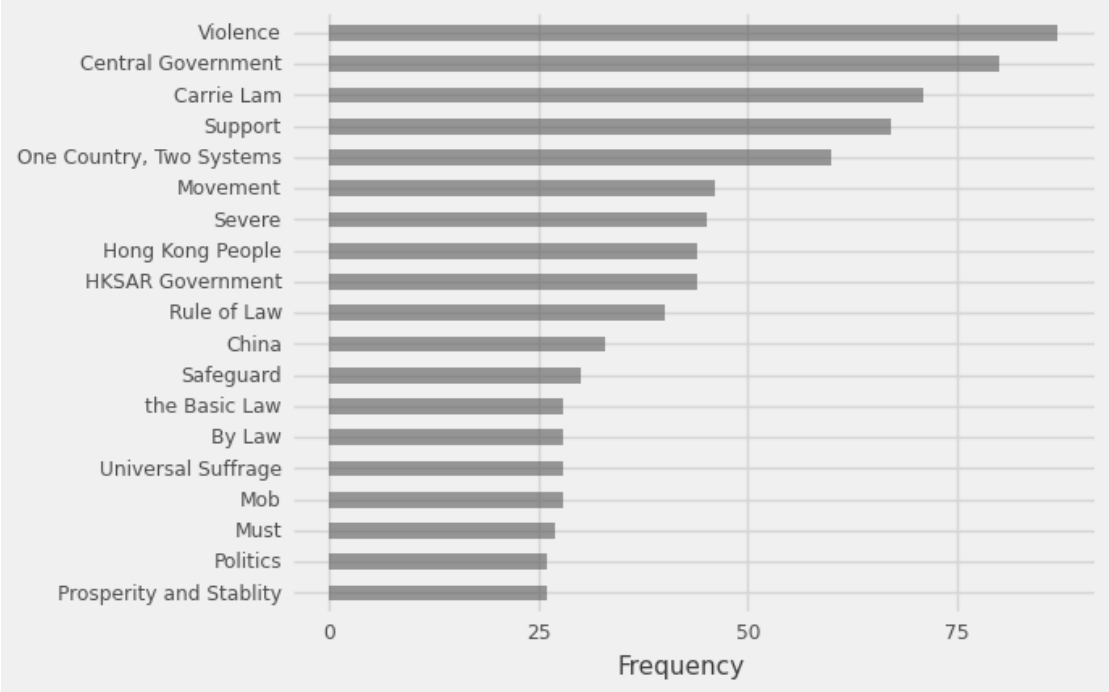


Figure 1: The Top Frequency of HMO'S Press Release from July 2 to September 3

> central government and the authority of the Basic Law, and the third is not allowed to use Hong Kong as the basis to infiltrate the Mainland.

Beyond these criteria, the urgent matter for Hong Kong was to deter violence and restore the order. Although lots of young people walking on the street participated in protests, they are not the main culprit:

> We are heartbroken to find young faces in the protests. Any person can see that they are incited by a handful of people who plan to undermine Hong Kong... Also, we realize a problem that young people are in the formation of values but generally short of national education, which ought to be the first class in their school.

That is to say, young people were somewhat innocent and brainwashed by people with malicious intentions. Still, their prospects would be promising, once they devote themselves to the country's development. The state attempted to justify the deterrence of violence from two aspects. First, violent acts made by protestors were the immediate erosion of "the rule of law," the core value in which Hong Kong always takes pride. Then, the real focus should be the development:

> The hope is that Hong Kong society can step out of the social chaos and concentrate on the economy and people's livelihood. Development is the foundation of Hong Kong and the panacea to resolve all problems.

Not surprisingly, along with the violation, the state appraised the police force which played an important role in maintaining the social order. Naturally, any crimes against the police officers would be labeled. Specifically, on 14 August, HMO denounced the violations of the airport that hurt the feelings of the Mainland people.

In brief, sovereignty forms the basic standpoint of the state discourses. The state strategically set up a "straw man" to avoid denouncing the young people. In concert with the emphasis on "the rule of law," discourses of development destructed the political goal of protests.

## 6.2 Practices

The image of Hong Kong was stiff owing to the limited information and the dominant discourse of the unification. To be sure, protests did break the previous cycle, acting as a prism for the respondents to re-learn Hong Kong:

> I knew little about Hong Kong. I have to admit that I lacked the stimuli since what happens in Hong Kong is distant to our life. Nobody would discuss Hong Kong in your life. I usually discuss some issues that are close to my life, like campus or entertainment news. But for this time, Hong Kong really becomes an "issue." (Zoey)

That effect was particularly significant to Wendy, who just finished her journey to Gaokao in early June. It should come to no doubt that:

> Before June, I did not have time to spend on anything other than studying, since I was about to attend Gaokao. After Gaokao, I had a bunch of time. Without exaggeration, information about Hong Kong came into my hand automatically. (Wendy)

Beyond question, a series of protests and the escalation of force successfully attracted attention from the Mainland from July. Suddenly, everyone started to talk about Hong Kong. Instead of following the protests all the time, a series of symbolic events constitutes their perception. However, what they received was partial and predominantly negative. Each respondent can more or less list the "villainy" of the protestor. That kind of perception gave credit to social media sites where lots of articles, images, and videos were reposted. All respondents claimed that they derived information from social media:

> As you know, sometimes, you do not need to actively search what happens in Hong Kong. We have a WeChat group for our dormitory, and it is frequent that one might repost something within that group. Generally, it is the video of what happened when protestors confronted the police. (Elm)

Even though they may share the information via social media, they scarcely discussed it with each other. In the beginning, they might have a passion for discussions which may subsequently turn to the routine practices that one merely forwards some information with a few words. Also, it also depends on whom you frequently interact with:

> As you know, not everyone has an interest in discussing what happened to Hong Kong. If he is not interested, he may just echo with some other to say some platitudes, like how brutal their acts might be or how impossible their demands are, and then we end the discussion. (Elm)

Generally, most people would lose their interest at certain points of such a prolonged event. However, political sensitivity did matter here. Most respondents only discussed with those who trusted, including family members and familiar friends, because they were fearful of letting what they said out.

## 6.3 The Perception of the Event

Regarding the content, the prolonged protests did attract people's attention and overwrite the previous image of Hong Kong. As shown above, they were situated in the context consisted of numerous negative images, but it is not equivalent to how they perceive the event. In unveiling

their perception, I mainly focus on their judgment on Five Demands and which events attract more attention and why.

Surprisingly, universal suffrage was not an unacceptable demand or received specific attention for respondents. Only two relatively conservative respondents talked about that demand, and neither of them directly reject it:

> Rather than judging each demand, I usually measure the possibility of success on each demand. Realistically, universal suffrage could make the central government lose its control in Hong Kong, so that demand is a daydream. (Elm)
>
> In Hong Kong, young people are zealous about democracy. I highly suspect whether they really understand what it is. I am not saying democracy is something bad, but it needs to be critically reflected. (Noah)

By contrast, the demand for "release and exoneration of arrested protestors" was the most controversial one. The crux is whether one can exempt from the punishment when one takes illegal acts. The answer is no. Dylan, who agreed to the other four demands, rejected that one:

> The only demand that I cannot accept is to release the arrested protestors. If you did something illegal, you are infringing on the rights of the silent majority. (Dylan)

Other than that, the perception of violence shaped a basic understanding of the protests. Given the escalation of the force, most respondents expressed reservations on whether violence could be an acceptable means to meet a good end. Many of them also raised doubts about whether protests still followed what they pursued in the beginning or are simply driven by the emotion. Elm, a law student, discussed the theory of justice concerning the adoption of violence:

> I know civil disobedience. Nobody can waive the exoneration before the trial, and even Rawls reminds that one should have some expectations of the punishment. It is contrary to my understanding of the rule of law. (Elm)

Accompanied by the violence, the police is an often-mentioned subject. Most respondents accepted that the role of the police is to maintain the social order, so it is unavoidable to use force. Concurrently, nobody had the idea why the police should operate proportionately or under the minimum force, even for the law students. Thus, they often show sympathy to the police:

> I do feel pitiful for the Hong Kong Police. They had to maintain the social order, while they received lots of abuses from the public. I can remember an event where one policeman's finger was bitten by the protester. (Yvonne)

Naturally, the event would leave a deep impression to respondents when it comes down to the Mainland. Often, the evaluation was not the sole product deduced from the belief but often involves the emotion. The inky national emblem was such an event:

> I kind of know what they intended to achieve from splashing the ink to the national emblem. It does not suggest that I can tolerate such conduct. I do think they are dumb. (Yvonne)

Instead of being filled with anger, Zoey was curious about why we and they differ so much on that symbol:

> I can still remember the image of the inky national emblem. Honestly, I was not that angry. Except for "little pinks," I think that lots of people were taken aback by that

> news. Take myself as an example, I do not feel that respect to the emblem, but I won't mar it. It is difficult to visualize how much hatred and where it came from, driving them to splash the ink to the national emblem so easily. (Zoey)

Further, several events targeted at the Mainlanders not only mobilized their emotion but also made them query on why Hong Kong people hold such hostility to the Mainlanders:

> I do believe that the Mainland offers a whole train of policy benefits. I do not know why they are hostile to us. I remember another incident where a Mainlander was punched by the protester at the gateway of an office building [J.P.Morgan] in Central. I do not know what happened to them, but it is not civil. (John)

Fu Guohao being beaten at the airport was another important event. Among all respondents, the standing point is not uniform. Some respondents suspected Fu deliberately provoke the incident, but others held reservations on that conspiracy theory. It then causes two arguments that one attempts to rationalize the protesters' act, while the other strongly condemns the violence against a Mainlander. However, they both agree that protestors should not beat Fu, as one thinks protestors should not swallow the bite, and the others emphasize it is morally wrong and they felt anger. To be clear, only one respondent (Dylan) agrees on the conspiracy theory, and others are inclined to the "morally wrong" one, varying from different degrees.

When an event did not involve extraordinary violence or the Mainland, they merely kept minimum attention, and passively received the information. In Wendy's terms, it was just like "watching an opera." As a result, one would not bother to verify the validity of whether the information is accurate, even if they were aware that what they received could be edited or only the clip of the full video. Noah illustrated clearly:

> I took a communication class before. I know what agenda-setting and framing are. Despite the fact that I know that the video could be clipped, I would not use Virtual Private Networks (VPN) to check the Hong Kong news for balancing my viewpoint. Doing so is troublesome, especially the situation is none of my business. Instead, I would spend the same time following some celebrities on Instagram. (Noah)

Everyone possessed the censor invading technology, yet except Dylan, others were apathetic to find out what the other side story might be. In a nutshell, the perception is rarely connected to the Color revolution but predominantly centers on "violence," such as the legitimacy of protesters' violence. Not surprisingly, being a Mainlander, events concerning the Mainland will attract more attention. Those events were negative, and they, on the one hand, provoked some emotions but might remind the differences ignored before. In other respects, they were less concerned about what happened due to the prolonged protests and irrelevance of normal life.

# 7 Devaluation

The event slightly opens the closed window that was barred by the border and the short and abstract descriptions from the textbook. Despite the principally negative impressions, it did invite the respondents to reflect on "one country, two systems":

> You know what happened. How could one say that "one country, two systems" is still successful? I'd say that the central government should be also responsible for that event. (Wendy)

Along with the same process, they clearly felt a further sense of alienation, which, however, is not sufficient for them to reject Hong Kongese as Chinese. The undisputed premise is that the Mainland cannot exclude Hong Kong as long as Hong Kong de jure is part of China. In other words, sovereignty always prevails. But they experienced a reinterpretation process that breaks the previous strategy of expansion. The perceived differences and emotional isolation have gained power from several symbolic events within the protests.

As Wimmer (2008: 1037) suggests, "transvaluation strategies try to re-interpret or change the normative principles of stratified ethnic systems." However, it is neither to reverse the existing rank order nor to establish moral and political equality. Precisely, they implicitly "devalue" the previous vague but a relatively positive image:

> Just before the protest, I was a junior student and had to consider where to pursue my postgraduate studies. EduHK is an option, as you know they are famous in education. After the happenings of such an event, I was persuaded by my parents not to study in Hong Kong due to the danger. By the way, living costs and career aspirations are other considerations. During the protest, I started to find how expensive renting a house is and how enlarged the disparity is. (Zoey)

As all respondents hold a mild position in left or right, that "devaluation" is less evident for them in comparison to those who are "little pinks" or suspicious of "democracy." Elm described what he observed in Weibo:

> I admit that I am a little conservative. However, I would be deemed as liberal within the ideology spectrum of Weibo. If you say any good words of Hong Kong, you would be flamed by those "little pinks." In their eyes, you do not sit at the right chair [position]. What they wish is to liberate [send PLA to] Hong Kong tomorrow. It is impossible to communicate with them. (Elm)

In the social narrative, a typical discourse of "devaluation" is to compare Hong Kong's GDP to China, which declined from 18% in 1997 to less than 3% in 2018. Hong Kong is no longer in its glittering days, and it is merely a mediocre city to Shenzhen. During the protests, such accounts were prevalent, and a whole train of articles seriously or sarcastically talked about whether Hong Kong is doomed.

Being an exogenous shift, the event has not fully broken the previous consensus. Rather than an immediate bankruptcy, the perception of Hong Kong could continue devaluating in the foreseeable future. Any social movements will produce cumulative effects of devaluation on "Hong Kongness" until the structural exclusion.

# 8 Conclusion and Discussion

This article contributes to the field of Hong Kong-Mainland by (1) challenging the taken-for-granted view of Mainlanders treating Hong Kongese as Chinese, (2) highlighting the importance of "the nation" to Mainlanders in their schema, (3) revealing the strategy of "devaluation" when Mainlanders have to make a comprise between "national unity" and the increasing perception of cleavages. To put solely on the negotiation between "national unity" and the feeling of alienation, my finding confirms the "symbolic violence" in Bourdieu's terms, especially under such an authoritarian state that holds the sufficient capacity to shape one's social and political belief and to release information selectively, both of which has impactful implications for understanding the agency.

Although my study is based on a small number of interviews and limited content analysis, it is intended to be a launching point for understanding how Mainlanders deal with Hong Kongese after the handover. As the design of "one country, two systems" cut off the most interactions between Hong Kong and the Mainland, it raises an interesting question on how they perceive the "integrity" of the Chinese nation. Moreover, it suggests that future studies on Hong Kong identity should actively include the Mainland factor. In a relational sense, Hong Kong identity is not an entity with solid essence, and it can be affirmed through the comparison of that in 1970 and that in today. Similarly, rather than assuming that Hong Kongese is hostile to the Mainland, future research could shed light on how they interact with their Mainland friends or how they think of "Chineseness" from a microlevel.

The intent was not to reflect on how Hong Kong and Mainland interact with each other and shape the meaning of Chinese, but rather to shed light on how the Mainland may perceive "Hong Kongness" from their own side. Instead of being taken for granted, the Mainland's categorization of Hong Kongese is a negotiated product between the perceived differences and the social narrative. However, it raises interesting questions: what about Mainlanders in Hong Kong? Do they similarly adopt the devaluation?

These questions, of course, require another study to answer. Deriving from my study, I may provide some preliminary suppositions for further studies. For those who come to Hong Kong after high school education, they begin with the preexisting cognition that Hong Kongnese is Chinese. Yet, their strategies of boundary-making could be different, depending on their social position and what they cognize from everyday interactions. It is possible that Hong Kongese and Mainlanders may reach an encompassing and symmetrical consensus, but there is no guarantee that all people from both sides agree on that boundary. It seems that contraction, which emphasizes being a Mainlander, instead of Chinese, is a prevalent one, and the other is individual boundary-crossing (positional move), namely, trying to be assimilated into Hong Kong society.

The lens of the event is important to understand how an exogenous shift influences their perception of Hong Kongness and then decides their strategy. Unlike others who could act as a "remote observer," they are the stakeholder in protests. The protests may bring them lots of troubles in a material way, like the suspension of public transport. Or, they may involve emotionally, especially under the increasing tensions between Hong Kong and the Mainland. The devaluation could be examined through the operationalization: considering the protest, whether one wants to continue living in Hong Kong or decides to leave Hong Kong. Although devaluation might not fully capture the dynamics, it is a useful aspect to consider.

Turning back to the findings, several points need to be considered. First, due to the filter of that civic education project, respondents are more suspicious of the institutional discourses than the other. Without exaggeration, what they locate in today's China ideology spectrum may be more liberal than the majority. Owing to that, I may provide a less comprehensive image of the boundary-making process. For whom I interviewed, they generally devaluate specific practices. However, at a broader level, whether that devaluation is accompanied by the stigmatization remains unclear. The narrative of social media does reflect certain inclinations, and such statements are clear in Zhao Haoxiang's article that Hong Kongese are brainwashed by western values or they lack the basic knowledge.

Second, the expansion strategy is largely derived from the proposition that people realize the differences and appeal to a higher goal to justify the action of treating Hong Kongese as Chinese continually. However, for those who are not aware of the differences, they naturally believe "Hong Kongese is Chinese." It is a syllogism from the given two premises that "Hong Kong is

part of China," and "people of a country will definitely acquire the membership (citizenship)."

Third, the emotion may form a basis for evaluation. For those "little pinks" who support the central government to "liberate" Hong Kong, it is necessary to think the definition of protestors in their eyes. "Enemy" perhaps outweighs "compatriot," however, as this study did not cover such kind of respondents, it is hard to figure out the exact reason. The loyalty to the nation and anger to whoever harm the national interest may provide an explanation. Future studies could refine the respondents to make clear the underlying mechanisms.

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