UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

On "liberate Hong Kong":

the identities and visions of overseas Hong Kong activists after the 2019 demonstrations

Centre for East Asian Studies/Faculty of Social Science

Master's thesis

Author:
Wing Cheung CHUNG

20.4.2026

Turku

Master's thesis

Subject: Master in East Asian Studies
Author: Wing Cheung Chung
Title: On "liberate Hong Kong": the identities and visions of overseas Hong Kong activists after the 2019 demonstrations
Supervisor(s): Professor Lauri Paltemaa

Number of pages: 136 pages
Date: 20 April 2026

Abstract

This research examines the evolution of national identity and the long-term sustainability of the democracy movement among active Hong Kong dissidents in the UK, continental Europe, and Taiwan. Through 10 qualitative interviews, the study explores how "Hongkonger" identity has transitioned into a nationalist discourse—often exclusionist toward Chinese identity—following the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement. Drawing on theories by Gellner and Anderson, the author argues that the slogan "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" functions as a unifying "sacred language" that allows activists to project their longing for a restored sociopolitical order onto an imagined future community.

The findings reveal a movement characterised by "cultural trauma," where political upheaval has reinforced a sense of mission and religious-like devotion among activists. However, participants express cautious pessimism regarding the immediate future, citing a lack of centralized leadership, organizational fragmentation, and dwindling enthusiasm within the diaspora. The research further highlights a generational divide in the perceived duty to preserve Cantonese culture and values, proposing that the inheritance of identity depends not only on internal lifestyle preservation but also on how host societies perceive and validate the Hong Kong community. Ultimately, the study concludes that while overseas dissidents remain dedicated to advocacy and lobbying, the movement's survival rests on its ability to build global networks and strengthen civil capacity for a struggle that many anticipate will span decades.

Key words: Hong Kong diaspora, collective identity, social movement, national identity, localism, democracy movement, transnational activism

This research has utilised artificial intelligence (Sonix) in generating transcripts of interviews in Cantonese, (Chat GPT) in proofreading and translating some terms from Chinese and English and (Adobe AI Assistant) in extracting background information in literature review.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Professor Lauri Paltemaa at the University of Turku for his supervision and guidance; Yoko Demelius at the University of Turku for inspiration and guidance; Kamila Szczepanska, Hermann Aubié and Annamari Konttinen at the University of Turku for guidance and comment; Ari-Joonas Pitkänen at the University of Turku for inspiration and comment; and the fellow activists from Hong Kong across the world for the comment and pilot test on the interview, and their assistance in participating in and inviting informants for the research.

Table of contents

Acronym and abbreviations

ARCHK	Assembly of Citizens' Representatives, Hong Kong
BDTC	British Dependent Territory Citizen
BN(O)	British National (Overseas)
CAD	Chinese Alliance for Democracy
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CTA	Central Tibetan Administration
DDP	Democratic Progressive Party
FDC	Federation for Democratic China
HKPORI	Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HKUPOP	Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong
KMT	Kuomingtang, or Chinese Nationalist Party
NSL	National Security Law of Hong Kong
OCDM	overseas Chinese democracy movement
OCTS	One Country Two Systems
PRC	People’s Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
TUSRP	Tibetan U.S. Resettlement Project
WUC	World Uyghur Congress

1 Introduction

The slogan "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times " (光復香港，時代革命 [gwong fuk hoeng gong, si doi gaak ming]) first appeared in an election campaign of a localist candidate in 2016. This slogan was commonly used by protestors in the mass demonstrations in 2019, and finally outlawed by the Hong Kong Government for secession and subverting the state power (Hong Kong Government, 2020a). However, the meaning of "liberate Hong Kong" as a political goal varies for different people. In the discussions with fellow activists, I found the discrepancies of the visions of Hong Kong's future among us, even if we have shared the same slogan in the political movements for years. As I have become a dissident in exile since 2021 and a member of some diaspora organisations in Europe, I would like to know how my counterparts from Hong Kong in the overseas democracy movements interpret the goal of "liberate Hong Kong" we are still holding nowadays, how they think about our identities as overseas Hongkongers and how we can achieve this goal.

This research focuses on a particular group of migrants from Hong Kong, which are political dissidents who emigrated from Hong Kong or continue to live overseas after the political turmoil in 2019. The wave of emigration from Hong Kong due to political reasons since 2019 is not the first wave of the same kind in history. However, it is first time in history that a group of politicians, activists and protestors in Hong Kong seek refuge in other countries for the fear of political prosecutions. The research will be conducted in ethnographic approach, in which I will interview several dissidents who are living overseas and analyse their ideas of the above topics.

1.1 Background and research questions

In spring 2019, the Hong Kong Government proposed the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019 (known as the Extradition Bill) to the Legislative Council. The Extradition Bill authorised the law enforcement in Hong Kong to arrest and extradite any individuals in the territory once the Hong Kong Government receives requests of extradition of fugitives from other jurisdictions. Lots of Hong Kong people feared that they could be sent to Mainland China and convicted without fair trials. Demonstrations against the Extradition Bill began in March 2019 and up to two million people joined a march on 16 June. As the government refused to withdraw the Bill and the clashes between protestors and the police escalated where the protestors accused

the police of brutal suppression, the second half of 2019 saw hundreds of protests and continuous street violence. The massive demonstrations against the Hong Kong Government through mid-2020 is known as Anti-Extradition Bill Movement (Lo, 2020).

After one year of massive demonstrations in Hong Kong, the Chinese Central government responded with the enforcement of the National Security Law of Hong Kong (NSL) in June 2020 (Hong Kong Government, 2020b). The NSL bans certain activities that are deemed as subversion of the state authorities, secession of territories, collusion with foreign forces and terrorism (Hong Kong Government, 2020c). Subsequently, as of July 2023, 264 people have been arrested for national security crimes (Kellogg and Yeung, 2023). Amidst the political turmoil in Hong Kong, the UK Government introduce the BN(O) visa scheme in 2021 as a humanitarian route for British National (Overseas) passport holders and their dependents to migrate to the UK. As of the end of 2023, over 141,000 people have arrived in the UK through this scheme (Yu, 2024). Meanwhile, the Canadian Government also launched special immigration schemes in 2021 for Hong Kong residents to apply for permanent residence, which have attracted 3,122 Hongkongers to live in Canada as of April 2023 (Government of Canada, 2023). Among these hundreds of thousands of Hongkongers who have moved abroad since 2019, there are dissidents who sought asylum in other countries to flee political persecution, including myself. There are also few Hongkongers who have already lived abroad before 2019 and work with those left thereafter in political movements. Networks of overseas Hong Kong dissidents are established across the globe, as I am personally a part of such networks.

The emergence of dissidents in Hong Kong overseas diaspora community is a new phenomenon. Therefore, the studies in this particular group of people are rare. As an activist in Hong Kong for over a decade, I have witnessed the shifts in discourse in the opposition camp. A dichotomy of Hong Kong and Chinese identities emerged in the early 2010s. Young activists distinguished themselves from the older generations in that they demanded self-determination of Hong Kong and even independence. Some politicians suggested that the political developments of Hong Kong and Mainland China are separate matters that the political rights in Mainland are not Hongkongers' business (Cooper, 2018). Edward Leung, a young activist who demanded more autonomy from China and ran in the Legislative Council by-election in 2016, used the slogan of "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" in his campaign. This slogan was only popular to the localist supporters at that time. When the demonstrations against the government's proposal of the Extradition Bill took place in June

2019, this slogan became a common phrase for most protestors. Even the conventional democrats who used to have distinct national identities than the localist used this slogan in demonstrations and election campaigns in 2019.

However, when my previous employer, a member of District Council at that time, stood in the Legislative Council Election in 2020, I found that the discrepancies in the opposition camp did not disappear. Even when we used the same slogan, the discrepancies in our goals and strategies were still there. As lots of activists and politicians have moved abroad and continued to work on political issues of Hong Kong, I wonder how they perceive the questions over "liberate Hong Kong": what are the specific goals to achieve? What they think about the shared identities of the overseas Hongkongers? How they achieve the goals and sustain the movement?

The importance of the opinions of these experienced activists in social movements is that they have the leading roles in framing collective grievance in the society and mobilising the mass to solve the grievance. And the perceptions of collective identities of the Hong Kong diaspora population of these activists represent the collective identities of this community and influence the strategies of the social movements (Paltemaa, 2005). Therefore, their collective identities will shape the strategies of the future Hong Kong diaspora movement. To answer the questions in the paragraph above, the research delves into the following topics by obtaining the activists' opinions on:

a. the composition of the shared identity of Hongkongers as a national identity,
b. the relationship between the discourse of Hong Kong independence, nationhood and democracy movement,
c. "liberate Hong Kong" as a slogan and a goal of the democracy movement,
d. in what conditions Hong Kong is deemed "liberated",
e. the roles and tasks performed by the activists,
f. the current challenges in the overseas democracy movement and solutions, and
g. how to sustain the overseas democracy movement and inherit the value of Hongkonger identity and the democracy movement?

As mentioned at the beginning, the full slogan comprises of "liberate Hong Kong" and "revolution of our time". As the research focuses on the goal of the movement, it delves more into "liberate Hong Kong" as it literally refers to the goal. I perceive "revolution of our times" is more about the means to achieve "liberation". However, I would like the participants to

discuss more freely of how the goal to be achieved. Therefore, I do not wish the discussions of the means and strategies bounded too much, so “revolution of our times” is less discussed.

1.2 Identity politics and democracy movement in Hong Kong

The ever-changing identities of Hongkongers and in the discourse of social movement is a popular topic among academia and democracy activists in Hong Kong. Opinion polls conducted by the University of Hong Kong every six months since 1997 and other studies (Chan and Tang, 2019) show that the self-identification of ethnicity of Hong Kong people are diverse. People may identify themselves by nationalities and cultural heritage. The emergence of localism is a form of nationalism and cultural distinction in Hong Kong (Cheung, 2020). Meanwhile, as universal suffrage has never existed in Hong Kong, the political systems have been described as partial democracy (Kuan and Lau, 2002) or liberal authoritarian (Case, 2008). There used to be some features similar to democracy in the previous regimes, such as the guarantees of freedom of speech and assembly, the rule of law and regular competitive elections in the District Councils, while the administrations have never been popularly elected and only around half of the legislature was democratically elected from 1991 to 2020. The demand of universal suffrage, or fully free elections of the administration and the legislature has been the common ground of the opposition or pan-democratic camp and the democracy movement in Hong Kong since 1980s (Ma, 2018; Ortmann, 2020).

The identity politics in Hong Kong have several stages of development in the past decades. For both ordinary citizens and activists, their perceived ethnic or national identities have changed in different directions. Ma Ngok (2018) and Cheung Yuk-man (2020) introduce the transitions of these stages. Between the end of World War II and 1980, majority of the Hong Kong population was comprised of migrants from Mainland China. These migrants were mostly ethnic Chinese who fled to Hong Kong for political or livelihood reasons. As they were born in Mainland China and held a mentality of refugees, they did not have a strong sense of belonging to Hong Kong. While the residents born and grew up in Hong Kong in this period had a stronger sense of belonging to Hong Kong, they also upheld a strong Chinese national identity for the improvement of international status of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the 1970s. The student movements and social movements demanded the colonial government to resolve local social problems and address Chinese nationalist issues such as territorial dispute of Diaoyu Island. A residence-based identity of Hongkongers and ethnic-

based identity of Chinese co-existed among Hongkongers by the late 1970s. (Cheung, 2020: 316-318; Ma, 2018: 34-36)

When London and Beijing started negotiation for the future of Hong Kong in 1982, most residents in Hong Kong tend to support the remaining status quo of a British colony. Such hesitation to PRC rule was based on the cosmopolitan mindset and identity in Hongkongers developed in the 1960-70s. By the time of the Sino-British negotiations, Hong Kong was one of the strongest economies in Asia that most citizens approved the bloom in the 1970s. The level of freedom and rule of law in Hong Kong were also outstanding among its neighbours. In contrast, China just began to recover from the political upheaval and economic turmoil under Mao Zedong's rule. The PRC was still a one-party state and living standard there was far behind Hong Kong. Despite strong Chinese nationalist sentiment, they realised that they profited from the identity of Hongkonger and were doubtful about whether the freedom of prosperity they enjoyed would vanish after sovereignty change. Beijing then proposed the notions of "One Country, Two Systems" (OCTS), "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong" and "high autonomy" that existing freedoms and socio-economic system in Hong Kong would be preserved after the handover in 1997. As the population had a strong sense of Chinese nationalism and the young intellectuals, professionals and activists held an anti-colonial sentiment, they accepted Beijing's offer. The 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration determined the handover of Hong Kong to Beijing in 1997 and stipulated the above pledges of Beijing. The democrats, local activists who demanded democracy in Hong Kong under colonial rule, believed that Beijing would grant Hong Kong democracy after the handover as elections of the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive after 1997 were also stipulated in the Joint Declaration. (Cheung, 2020: 316-320; Ma, 2018: 34-37)

The 1989 Democracy Movement in China significantly changed the cause of politics in Hong Kong. The democrats who had supported handover and the protestors in the democracy movement became resistant to the CCP regime after the crackdown. The fear of Chinese rule drove massive emigrations from Hong Kong. However, most of the ordinary citizens and anti-Beijing activists did not question about their Chinese identity. Beijing accused the democrats' notion of defending autonomy and opposing Beijing intervention in Hong Kong as unpatriotic and contrary to the Chinese identity. In response, the democrats emphasised themselves patriots for fighting for democracy both in Hong Kong and Mainland China, opposed the authoritarian rule of Beijing. The democrats demanded universal suffrage to be implemented as stipulated in the Basic Law and insisted that the notion of the

democracy movement was peaceful reform rather than revolutionary (Ma, 2018: 37-39; Ortmann, 2020: 549-550). This notion remained the mainstream among the democrats or the opposition politicians up to the end of 2000s. Ma describes the democrats' notion as "pragmatic patriotism" (2018: 38-39). Meanwhile in society, cosmopolitan consciousness of boundary between Hong Kong and China continuously enhanced. The crackdown in 1989 consolidated a generally negative perception about the socialist Chinese society, in contrast to the image of civility and rationality inherited from the West of the capitalist Hong Kong among Hongkongers. Having experienced successive migrations for escaping from the repeated political repressions by Chinese authority, Hongkongers developed a survival, individualist and cosmopolitan mindset that national identity can be changed or chosen. (Cheung, 2020: 319-322)

After the handover, the transitions of Hongkongers' identity became more rapid. In the first few years, most citizens accepted that Hong Kong's value and Chinese identity could mutually exist. When the Hong Kong Government attempted to pass the National Security (Legislative Provisions) Bill as required in the Article 23 of the Basic Law in 2003, the civil society foresaw a severe curb of civil liberty. The bill was withdrawn after the mass demonstrations organised by the pan-democratic camp in July 2003 (Ma, 2018: 40-41; Ortmann, 2020: 550-551). The mass demonstrations in 2003 and 2004 over the legislation of Article 23 and universal suffrage raised Beijing’s concern that the Hong Kong public did not conform to the party-state. Therefore, Beijing implemented measures to speed up economic integration between Hong Kong and Mainland, such as permission of individual Mainland travellers to Hong Kong and programmes for cross-border investments and Hong Kong professionals to work in Mainland, in the name of boosting Hong Kong’s economy from the recession in 1997-2002 and the SARS pandemic in 2003. Meanwhile, Beijing also increased intervention in the governance of Hong Kong and in 2004 stipulated that the power of initiating and approving constitutional reforms in Hong Kong was held by the Central Government. The economic measures by Mainland did help in the recovery in Hong Kong in certain extent, while the dramatic economic development in China had positive impacts on Hongkongers’ view on China. The popularity of identification as Chinese citizens among Hongkongers reached its peak in 2008 for the economic integration, together with the Beijing Summer Olympics and the Sichuan Earthquake in 2008. In the public opinion poll conducted by the University of Hong Kong in 2008, 34.4% of Hongkongers identified themselves as Chinese, compared to 21% as Hongkonger, 29.8% Hongkonger in China and 13% Chinese in

Hong Kong. However, such Chinese nationalist sentiment declined for the exposure of human rights violations in China after the 2008 Beijing Olympics (see Appendix 1) (Cheung, 2020: 323; HKPORI, 2024; Ma, 2018: 40-43).

While the opposition to the government had dropped after 2004, new kind of social discontent emerged after mid-2000s. Some young activists called for preservation of local heritage and culture. The removal of Star Ferry and Queen's Piers in 2006 and 2007 for reclamation of Victoria Harbour resulted in protests against pro-redevelopment projects initiated by the government. The proposed destruction of Choi Yuen Village for the construction of the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Express Rail Link triggered mistrust on the authorities and the call for protecting local interests in protests. The public began to doubt whether the Hong Kong Government would sacrifice local interests for serving the interests of business elites and Mainland China. Simultaneously, the influx of pregnant women from Mainland to give births in Hong Kong hospitals and the inflation of property price due the inflow of Chinese capital led to the rise of anti-China sentiment particularly among young Hongkongers. The second constitutional reform in 2010 only made minor adjustments in the electoral system while the timetable for universal suffrage was not in the agenda. The proposal of the "Moral and National Education" in all primary and secondary schools by the Hong Kong Government in 2010 was accused by the civil society of brainwashing and promotion of positive image of the CCP regime. These incidents further exacerbated the opposition to Chinese identity among the younger generation that they were worried about the loss of the original way of life, erosion of liberty and integration into an authoritarian China. The idea of localism for preserving Hong Kong's values and identity and keeping distant from China hence emerged (Cheung, 2020: 322-323; Ma, 2018: 43-44; Ortmann, 2020: 551).

The democrats, who were the mainstream opposition camp through early 2010s, still embraced Chinese nationalism in certain extent, and were insensitive to the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment. New notions attacking Chinese nationalist value of the democrats and preserving the traditional values of Hong Kong flourished and gained attention in the early 2010s. The discourses of a Hong Kong-centric democracy movement and nation building were proposed by localist advocates, such as 1990-born writer Lewis Loud, German-trained ethnologist and linguist Chin Wen and some members of the Hong Kong University's Student Union. In 2013, the emphasis of patriotism as an element of Hong Kong's value by the democrats in the commemoration of the crackdown of the 1989 Democracy Movement led to criticism by young localists who saw China as another country (Cheung, 2020: 324-326; Ma,

2018: 44). After the 2014 Occupy Movement, the split of democrats and localists inside the opposition camp became definite. As another constitutional reform was anticipated under the new Chief Executive Leung Chung-Ying, a law professor Benny Tai initiated a mass civil disobedience "Occupy Central" proposal in early 2013 to pressure on the authority for universal suffrage. The activists from democratic and localist camps both participated in the Occupy Movement between September and December 2014. Young participants in the Occupy Movement were inspired by the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan[1] earlier that year and emphasised defending home and self-determination of political fate, which showed the inclination of localist value. As the Occupy Movement failed to achieve the goal of fighting for free candidate nomination in the electoral reform, the debates about strategies as to how to achieve democracy among localists and democrats led to a split. As the pledge of universal suffrage after handover to China was not fulfilled, the young participants and activists in the Occupy Movement viewed Chinese identity incompatible to their value of democracy and freedom. They perceived that democracy would not be possible if Hong Kong was under PRC's sovereignty and began to seek internal self-determination. The Legislation Council election in 2016 saw many young localist candidates. While many grassroot activists sought independence from China, most candidates only called for various kind of "self-determination", which included "sustaining the Basic Law" or building a "new Hong Kong nation" (Ma, 2018: 44-49; Ortmann, 2020: 552-554).

The rise of localism in the last decade has changed the dynamics and discourse of the opposition camp. Calling for preservation of Hong Kong's identity and autonomy, young politicians and activists have distinguished themselves from Chinese citizens in Mainland and developed a Hong Kong-centred nationalism. Anti-China sentiments among the younger generation have created notions such as Hong Kong independence, self-determination and "Hong Kong is not China", while the conventional pan-democrats in Hong Kong prior to 2019 supported OCTS and democratisation in both Hong Kong and Mainland China. Debates over identities became the centre inside in opposition camp in the past decade (Kwong, 2016; Chan, 2018; Cheung, 2020; Loo, 2020).

---

[1] In March 2014, the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) in Taiwan hastily approved the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) in the parliament. The approval of CSSTA was criticised as closed-door negotiations and the CSSTA for overreliance on Mainland China economically. Taiwanese students and civic groups staged protests against the KMT administration for the CSSTA and occupied the parliament from March to April. The protestors used sunflower as a symbol in the protests and therefore the demonstrations were described as the Sunflower Movement.

2 Central concept and existing literature

The research questions concern the concept of “liberate Hong Kong”, which is deemed a demand or a goal in the democracy movement. The democracy movement in Hong Kong used to focus on the reforms of the electoral system under PRC sovereign. However, the call for self-determination and independence in the opposition camp since the last decade indicate the variations of identities of pro-democracy supporters. The change in self-identification of ethnicities or nationalities may have profound influence on the direction of the democracy movement that there will be new elements concerning nationalism and nationhood in the movement. Such shift of ethnic identity can be regarded as the new development of the collective identity of participants in the social movement. After 2019, the democracy movement in Hong Kong has spread overseas along with the wave of emigration and exiles of dissidents. As the democracy movement continues abroad, an unprecedented diasporic social movement has emerged in Hongkonger communities around the globe. The changes in geographical locations and nationalities among Hong Kong diaspora may bring new challenges and other influences on the overseas democracy movement which are studied in this research. This chapter will introduce the relevant concepts in this research with existing literature.

2.1 "Liberate Hong Kong"

During the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, "liberate Hong Kong" (光復香港) was a common slogan used by protestors, as a demand for change in political system. This slogan was originally created as "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" (光復香港，時代革命) by the campaign team of Edward Leung in the Legislative Council by-election in 2016. Edward Leung, a member of localist political group Hong Kong Indigenous, called for greater autonomy and independence of Hong Kong from China (Leung, 2021). Apparently, the slogan meant to call for citizens to overthrow the existing regime. However, it did not have a close connection with the identity or nationality of Hongkongers. In a protest in July 2019 during the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, "liberate Hong Kong" was used again by the protestors. In the subsequent months, it was one of the most widely used slogans in demonstrations, even by the traditional democrats who did not seek Hong Kong independence (Cheung, 2020). “Liberate Hong Kong” deems to be a mantra to motivate and mobilise the mass to fight in concert against the state.

There are various English translations of "光復香港", even the protestors have made the translations on the flags for demonstrations, such as "Free Hong Kong" (Radio Free Asia, 2020). Shum (2023) suggests "liberation" or "restoration" of Hong Kong was the demand of the protestors in 2019. But "liberate Hong Kong" is used here as it is adopted in the Official Statement from the Hong Kong Government (2020) and some scholars also adopt this version (Cheung, 2020; Ku, 2020). In this research, “liberate Hong Kong” is used as it is the official version that is officially recognised and banned by the Hong Kong Government.

2.2 Identity and collectivity in social movement

2.2.1 Collective identity

Collective identity is a conceptual framework for understanding the emergence, motivation and impacts of social movements. Scholars apply this concept to explain the emergence of new social movements in the latter part of the twentieth century, where class-based movements were declining. The sociocultural changes in recent decades have fostered new social movements, which include environmentalism, gender equality, human rights and so on. Collective identities emerge from these sociocultural changes and new social movements. Class position of participants is not comprehensive enough in explaining this phenomenon. Collective identity theory fills the gaps in traditional resource mobilisation theory about how social movements emerge and sustain. It provides insight into why a movement emerge, how individuals are motivated to participate, and the strategic choices they adopt (Melucci, 1995; Snow 2001; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Chesters and Welsh, 2010). Apart from in social movements, collective identity is also used in studies on various topics, such as nationalism, religion, management, political culture, electoral behaviour, organizational theory and psychology (Flesher Fominaya, 2010).

Scholars have different interpretations of collective identity. Chesters and Welsh (2010: 55-57) define collective identity as an outcome of work conducted by actors in social movement for producing shared understandings of relevant issues, the terms for different actors (individuals, groups or networks) to work together, and the required actions for making change. Chesters and Welsh suggest that the production of collective identity could be the goal of a movement in some circumstances, depending on how the “I” (individual identity) becomes a “we” (collective identity) and the collective “we” recognises such identity. Or as Snow (2001) puts it, collective identity is a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ attached to real or imagined shared characteristics and experiences among those who incorporate the

collectivity. The shared and interactive sense of 'we-ness' and collective agency comprise a collective identity and can motivate collective action. Though the resultant product of developing a collective identity is also important, many scholars assert that the process is more crucial (Melucci, 1996; Snow, 2001; Flesher Fominaya, 2010).

Chesters and Welsh (2010: 55-57) explain that a collective identity can often be found among the actors in a social movement as they usually have a shared sense of political interests and experiences derived from a specific aspect of identity, such as race, gender, age and sexuality. But in some circumstances, the collective identity in a social movement emerges over a particular issue or just because of performing similar protest behaviours. Chesters and Welsh also suggest that collective identity is a complex construction that is dependent on a large extent of reflexive work by movement actors. The actors have to engage in a tripartite process of recognition that three parties are required for identification. First, the actors must identify themselves with their own agency and capacity to act, their commonality with other actors and a structure of opportunities for action. Certain phenomena occur during this recognition, namely "solidarity" (della Porta and Diani, 1999; Melucci, 1996; Tarrow, 1998), "communitas" (Turner, 1974) or "structures of feeling" (Hetherington, 1996, 1998).

Secondly, identification of adversaries is necessary, but they are not always fixed, and the process can be tough (della Porta and Diani, 1999). A series of collective actions are required for recognising various adversaries at different points during a confrontation. Adversaries can be the state apparatus, media, elites in different fields and even other social movements. Thirdly, a system or structure of power, which operates implicitly in the actors themselves and their adversaries. This system or structure is a field of conflict constituted by the social movement and its adversaries. Recognition of such system or structure can clarify the operation of power at heterogenous levels and creates an awareness of how power can traverse, produce and construct collective action. In the case of democracy movement in Hong Kong, while a collective identity of participants is constructed, the adversaries are obviously the administrations in Hong Kong and Beijing. The system or structure of power, in the context of Hong Kong, is the political regime of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the sovereign of the People's Republic of China, which was established pursuant to the Basic Law since the handover in 1997.

Polletta and Jasper (2001: 285) summarise that collective identity is an "individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than

experienced directly." It describes both imagined and concrete communities. Rather than solely driven by pre-existing interests, the emergence of social movements is also influenced by the construction of collective identities. Though collective identity can constitute part of a personal identity, it is distinct from personal identities. Polletta and Jasper (2001: 285-287) suggest that outsiders could have constructed a collective identity and enforce it on a group of individuals, but the validity of such identity depends on the acceptance of the group. Instead of a mere aggregation of individual identities, collective identity occurs from interactions with various audiences. Collective identities play a key role in recruitment and benefitting participants in social movements. The social bond and solidarity created by collective identities motivate individuals to join movements and counter free-rider problems. As people behave in a way as expected by others for building reputation in the community, assuming collective identities by participating in a social movement meets the need for such self-interest concern. Besides, network ties of participants are created through collective identities.

Other than social movements, some studies found that collective identities can rise out from cultural trauma (Kassen and Jackson, 2020; La Torre et al, 2022). The study of Covid-19 pandemic in Italy shows that a trauma in the community, such as disaster, can create a collective identity that also gives rise to collective responsibility for individuals. When such collective responsibility arises, individuals may surrender some personal interests and respond to the call for collective actions for common good. The study also found that mobilisation for collective action is more effective when the message for the call is clear and widely known. The solidarity through collective actions enables people to cope with and share their sufferings (La Torre et al, 2022).

Melucci has a similar understanding and profound elaboration of collective identity. When constructing a collective identity, people may have to distinguish themselves from the "other" and gain recognition by those "others" (Melucci, 1995). Simultaneously, collective identity in social movements is a process for the participants to define who they are and are not (Melucci, 1995; Flesher Fominaya, 2010). But he also suggests that identity is not static or fixed, but in continuous transition. Therefore, collective identity is a process of constructing an action system. This process requires active *identity work* (Melucci, 1996: 70). Identity work, as Snow (2001) notes, involves the activities individuals carry out to express and signify their collective identity. The activities can be both "latent" (day-to-day activities such as preparing protests, fundraising, gatherings for leisure) and "visible" mobilisations (protests and other activities that engaging with actors outside the movement) that foster reciprocal ties

of solidarity and commitment, clarify their understandings of who they are (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1995). This process involves cognitive definitions about ends, means and the field of action, and is given voice through a common language, and enacted through a set of rituals, practices, and cultural artefacts (Melucci, 1995). Or as some scholars illustrate, collective identity in social movements is often expressed in cultural materials such as names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals and clothing (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). These symbolic resources are important signifiers in movements, such as the black clothing worn by Women in Black (Helman and Rapoport 1997), the 'Black Bloc' in some anarchist or autonomous movements (Juris, 2005), or even other objects on other occasions such as balconies, national anthem and national flag (La Torre et al, 2022).

This cognitive framework may not be unified or coherent but is developed through interaction and incorporates different and even contradictory definitions. It implies that actors do not necessarily reach a complete consensus on ideologies, beliefs, interests or goal for working together and initiating collective action. This assertion clarifies the concept of what brings and keeps the actors together in a social movement (Melucci, 1995). Melucci describes this process of building collective identity as "identization" (Melucci, 1996: 77) which emphasises the orientation towards solidarity over solidity. He also stresses that it is an iterative process in social movements that negotiations repeat multiple times. In this process, self-reflexivity of social actors is involved for recognition of themselves and the field of opportunities and constraints in which they are situated and to adapt their practices accordingly. Similar to the reflexive work in the process of recognition suggested by Chesters and Welsh (2010: 55-57), during "identization", the identification of adversaries is necessary. Identifying an enemy in a social movement can help maintain momentum and a definite orientation (Melucci, 1996: 73; Polletta and Jasper, 2001).

The flexibility of identity in social movements is common. In Flesher Fominaya's studies (2007b; 2010), activists in autonomous movements have elastic and tolerant criteria for membership. Autonomous movements are organised in a horizontal network and on the basis of self-organisation principle, direct/participatory democracy, autonomy, diversity and direct action. A distinct political identity is created in the autonomous activists that they reject traditional ideologies and embrace a heterogeneous ideological base. The autonomous subject is multifaceted with multiple overlapping identities. A single definite political identity in a movement such as gay, black or worker is deemed static and limiting for autonomous activists. In their network, organisation and communication for integration and interaction of

multiple issues and identities are allowed, so as connection of actions at local, national and global levels.

Flesher Fominaya (2010) observes that in social movements, environmental movement for instance, groups form and dissolve regularly and they may only seek for coping with temporal contingency. Groups may be founded on practical purposes and can dissolve whenever they see fit. However, this kind of group formation does not have definite impacts on the development of a strong group collective identity within the activists. It may indicate that network or movement collective identity are more prevalent. The study of Gould (1998: 38) on the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion in Western Pennsylvania shows the fluidity of identity. The leaders of the Whiskey Rebellion played different roles in power shift between the farmers in the west and the establishment in the east. The case shows that network position affects one's identity.

Apart from collective identity, Snow (2001) notes that there are also personal and social identities, which all can be distinguished. Personal identities are self-designations and self-attributions as personal distinction by the individual oneself. Social identities are based on established roles and categories by the society. They can be professions, occupations or positions in the family. Meanwhile, Collective identity is distinct from personal and social identities, though they often overlap. Though these different identities can be distinguished, Snow emphasises that in reality, there are overlap and interaction between them.

Snow (2001) further points out that researchers often regard collective identity as if it automatically connects to the individuals within the group, without questioning how this connection actually happens. The problem is that people usually have multiple identities (e.g. family, work, religion) which importance vary depending on the situation. Snow raises the question about how a shared group identity becomes the most important identity for individuals in the group, which concerns the understanding of how personal identities align with collective identities. Snow suggests that there are two main ways for aligning personal and collective identities as part of a group or movement. The first one is identity convergence, which happens when a person's existing identity naturally fits with the collective identity. In this case, there is not necessity for the person to change much, and they simply connect their personal identity with the group. The second one is identity construction, which involves actively shaping or changing a person's identity for aligning with the collective identity. This process can range from making a small adjustment to completely transforming how someone sees themselves.

There are multiple levels, dimensions and types of collective identities in social movements (Snow, 2001; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Saunders, 2008). Saunders (2008) suggests that they could be divided into two levels of group and movement, and resultant collective identities are usually more influenced at group level rather than movement level. Activists may identify primarily with a movement organization, affinity group, style of protest, or degree of moderation or radicalism. Snow (2001) divided collective identities into three layers. First, the broadest layer exists in community or solidarity group that they are very inclusive like the large social category of "Black Americans" in civil rights movement. The second one, social movement layer, represents the collective identity of the movement itself, like the civil rights movement as a whole. Thirdly, organisational layer is the identity tied to specific organisations within the movement, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) or the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Snow points out that these layers can overlap and do not always align perfectly. For instance, an organisation within a movement might have its own identity that does not fully represent the broader movement. This can lead to conflicts or divisions within the collective identity. In different contexts, the manifestation of collective identities varies. They can range from small groups as sport fans or neighbourhoods to large categories like genders, religions and nations. For typologies, Jasper (1997) distinguishes collective identities among "activist," "organizational," and "tactical" identities. Activist identity involves the experience of political participation that usually beyond a specific movement. Organizational identity concerns loyalty to a particular organisation and its fellow members. Activists who have tactical identities may identify themselves as avant-garde or moderate, and can be proud of specific styles of action such as nonviolence or civil disobedience. Alternating in a complex way, these identities may co-exist with both movement identities and preexisting collective identities (Polletta and Jasper, 2001).

As collective identities that primarily emerge in group level are common in social movements, Saunders (2008) asserts that division and hostility between different organisations within a movement are created. Solidarity built within a group may foster a "we-them" dichotomy against non-members of the group that increase hostility between organisations and undermine the unity of broader movement. Similarly, Snow (2001) suggests that factionalisation is a feature of social movements because of the conflicts between identities in different layers. Gamson (1997) explains that division and factionalisation in social movements emerge as boundary work also takes place between challenger social

movement groups. Strong collective identities at group level lead to competition, for example, different environmental groups as they do against the dominant groups like a polluting multinational corporation. However, Saunders (2008) argues that division and strong identities at group level do not totally deter the formation of coalitions across groups in social movements. She suggests that there are groups with non-comprehensive collective identities which form for strategic reasons only but have little in common. Besides, the work of Rupp and Taylor (1999) shows that despite strong identities at the group level and fierce competition between groups, collective identities at the movement level can still exist.

Scholars believe that collective identities could help developing a sense of solidarity in social movements among actors at different levels (Saunders, 2008; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Snow, 2001; Flesher Fominaya, 2010). Apart from solidarity, collective identities play a key role in shaping strategies. Conventionally, resource mobilisation and political process accounts rely on rational model of decision making to explain that activists adapt strategies to environmental constraints and opportunities based on a cost-benefit calculus when choosing strategies, tactics, targets, organisational forms, and deliberative styles (Barkan 1979, Kitschelt 1986, McAdam et al 1996). Polletta and Jasper (2001) suggest that understanding the relationship between identity and tactical choices can enhance the effectiveness of social movements. They argue that the logic of decision making based on collective identity are often expressive rather than strategic. They summarise that making identity claims can be regarded as a protest strategy, and “instrumental calculation often depends on the collective identities that are widely associated with particular strategies, tactics, organizational forms, and even deliberative logics” (Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 292). Collective identities influence activists in selecting strategies and shape their approach to protest and engagement. Collective identities can guide activists in choosing strategies that resonate with their beliefs and values. The interplay between identity and strategy can lead to innovative forms of protest that reflect the group's collective identity. For example, the challengers to East German authority in 1989 framed themselves as “the people” to prevent the regime from linking itself to “the people” and attacking the challengers as outsiders. The identity of “the people” may have discouraged the police from strong repression as well (Pfaff, 1996).

Meanwhile, identity can also derive from tactical tastes (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Those protesters who apply direct actions and violence against law enforcement in Hong Kong may have a tendency of defying the authority and supporting Hong Kong independence. On the other hand, those activists who have a staunch Hongkonger identity and determination

in independence may be more open to applying force in the movement to achieve their goal. Tactical tastes can shape identity, while identity influences tactical choices. However, as Snow (2001) and Melucci (1995) mention, collective identities are not fixed and evolve along with sociocultural changes. Therefore, tactics and identities of movement actors can transform for the changes in social and political conditions. It also demonstrates how collective identity is a process since it is everchanging. On the other hand, as Rupp and Taylor (1999) highlight, rather than using the readymade collective identities available to the activists, the collective identities they usually apply strategically for public claims and demands are derived from movements. Meanwhile, readymade collective identities are used when widely accepted. It is debatable that whether any movement identities are taken as a given by activists (Flesher Fominaya, 2010).

Impacts of collective identities on social movements and participants may last long. The studies of Flesher Fominaya (2007a; 2010) shows that a positive emotional experience of movement participation can keep activists involved even when the group is not meeting its political goals, whereas a hostile environment can dissuade activist participation even when their commitment to the cause is strong. Emotional ties between activists can keep activists going through setbacks and help them overcome the effects of repression. Collective participation in protests and repression generate strong bonds and shared history that can last long. Flesher Fominaya (2010) argues that social movements and movement collective identity do not necessarily disappear with the dissolution of groups and organisations within the movements. The collective identity that forged in a movement can sustain even when a movement is inactive, and will be a foundation for mobilisation for the future waves of the movement. Polletta and Jasper (2001) also agree that “abeyance structures” are formed within small circles of like-minded people whose sense of self identity is shaped and influenced by collective identity in social movements. Such “abeyance structures” are critical for the potential revival of the movement when political opportunities are limited. Polletta and Jasper conclude that apart from cultural impacts of transforming activists’ biographies, there are also institutional impacts created by collective identities. Once a collective identity is formed in a movement, policymakers may have to consider the interests of this force. Social movements often create institutional structures such as caucuses, centres and support groups within mainstream institutions, or establish long-lasting organisations that continue to influence public policy and societal norms. The strategies, tactics and symbols that are associated with

identities in movements will also be used in future movements. Finally, strong movement identities can provoke backlash, leading to the formation of counter-movements.

2.2.2 Nationalism and Imagined communities

Similar to collective identity theory in social movement, imagined communities is a concept to explain the emergence of the abstract ideas about identity in society, particularly national and ethnic identities. Nowadays, nationhood building and independence have become one of the popular demands of the democracy activists from Hong Kong. The comprehension of ethnic identity and nationalism can help to clarify the nature of the democracy movement of Hongkongers nowadays. Profound analysis on nationalism can be found in Gellner's (1983) study. Gellner defines nationalism as "primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent." This theory concerns political legitimacy that ethnic boundaries within a given state should not divide the powerholders from the rest. Nationalism is also a sentiment or a movement triggered by anger when the principle of congruency of political and national unit is violated, or by satisfaction for its fulfilment. Such sentiment can actuate a national movement (1).

The violation of nationalist principle occurs in various forms. As Gellner (1983) suggests, it happens when the political boundary of a state does not include all the members of the appropriate nation, or it includes all the members but also some aliens, or it fails in both ways that some non-nationals are included while some nationals are not included. However, Gellner mentions that one form of violation is particularly sensitive to nationalist sentiment, which is "if the rulers of the political unit belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled" (1). For the nationalist, this breech of political propriety is extremely intolerable. It happens when a national territory is incorporated in a larger empire, or an alien group dominates the local society. For Hongkongers, if they deem the handover of Hong Kong to the PRC from the British Empire and the change in power structure in 1997 was a domination by another alien group, it can be seen as the trigger of arousal of nationalist sentiment.

Gellner further elaborates nationalism as a sentiment that the existence of nations and states are a contingency rather than a universal necessity, while "nationalism holds that they were destined for each other; that either without the other is incomplete, and constitutes a tragedy" (1983: 5). As Gellner describes, states and nations do not necessarily attribute to each other's emergence. He highlights the importance of culture and will as only and essential elements of a nation. For two persons to belong to the same nation, they must share the same

culture, which is “a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating”; and secondly, they recognise each other as belonging to the same nation (6). Loyalty, solidarity and mutual rights and duties exclusive to the members of a community are essential for the recognition of a nation, just like a common language and occupation of a given territory. Culture and will are intertwining factors to each other that the will for the population to identify themselves as a nation requires a well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified culture. The will of constituting a nation is demonstrated through the political unity of the population who share the same culture within themselves. Polities act as agents in nationalism for extending boundaries to the limits of their culture, and exertion of power for protection and imposition of their culture within the boundaries. Eventually, the development of polities which represent the will of the population for administering their culture form a nation state. Nevertheless, Gellner is concerned that nationalism endangers a nation through the use and transformation of culture. The selective use and radical transformation of pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth by some nationalists may distort the original culture (55-56).

Gellner categorises eight typologies of nationalism depending on three elements, including the presence of different cultures in the territory, access of power of individual cultures and access to education or a viable modern high culture of individual cultures (1983: 88-109). Based on Gellner's categorisation, the nationalism of Hong Kong's pro-democracy activists falls into the type of diaspora nationalism in the PRC context. In diaspora nationalism, there are at least two distinct cultures in the society, where the culture with access to political or social power does not have the access to education or a viable modern high culture, while the culture without access to power has the access to a viable modern high culture (101-109). In PRC context, the culture of Hongkongers is distinct from the one of residents in Mainland China, in which Hongkongers are used to capitalist economy, value human rights and personal freedom, and use English as secondary language in daily life; whereas the residents in Mainland China are used to more government intervention in the economy and personal life, and usually only use Chinese in daily activities. Hongkongers, as nationals of the PRC, have limited access to power in the country compared to the citizens in Mainland. Although there used to be partly free elections in Hong Kong and there have never been any free elections in Mainland, the administrations in Hong Kong have been appointed by the central government in practice. While it is possible for Hong Kong citizens to join the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), since the Chief Executive of Hong Kong is barred from

joining any political parties and the Politburo and its Central Standing Committee of the CCP which are the top decision-making bodies in China, it is highly unlikely for Hong Kong citizens to share the power of decision making in the central government. Also, as Hong Kong citizens are prohibited from joining the military forces in China, it is not possible for us to share the duties of national defence and possess any commanding roles in the military force, and therefore I suggest that Hong Kong citizens are not full Chinese citizens. However, Hong Kong citizens have the access to a viable modern high culture compared to the residents in Mainland. The financial elite in Hong Kong have better knowledge in operating a mature and internationally recognised financial system, which is crucial for the economic development of China. The high efficiency of bureaucracy, once renowned rule of law, the multilingual education system and work environment, free access to information in Hong Kong and more freedom of movement and the status of international financial centre create comparable advantages in maintaining higher living standards than in Mainland.

Although citizens in Hong Kong and Mainland are not very different ethnically and racially, the retention of economic and legal systems in Hong Kong after 1997 maintained segregation in political systems and variety of lifestyle that mark the differences in cultures. The linguistic difference also marks the distinction of cultures across the border that it is not likely for Cantonese speakers born in Hong Kong intelligible to Mandarin without learning Mandarin at school, so are Mainland-born Mandarin speakers for Cantonese. Gellner explains this segregation in power and citizenship with administrative and power perspectives. He suggests that in pre-industrial societies, some bureaucratic roles were too risky for free-born native citizens to play. Such roles may include religious, administrative, financial and military positions, which were delegated to priests, eunuchs, slaves or foreigners, who were emasculated socially or physically. The mentioned positions always involve specialty and power that may pose danger to the rulers, and therefore the bearers of these positions were denied the power of access to political office, transferring of legacy to family members or faced restrictions and discrimination in society (1983: 101-109). For the discrepancy in power between Hong Kong and Mainland citizens, apart from the prevention from Hongkongers for political access to the central government, I think it is more about a concession Beijing made for the sovereignty of Hong Kong. During the Sino-British negotiation for the status of Hong Kong in early 1980s, there was a widespread fear among Hongkongers that the economic and personal liberty under British colonial rule would be stripped once Hong Kong became part of the PRC. To appease the fear of Hongkongers, Beijing made the promise for granting a status

of Special Administrative Region (SAR), retaining the existing rights and systems under British rule until 2047, which is 50 years after the proposed year of handover and known as One Country Two Systems (OCTS). Consequently, while no significant improvements in civil and political rights occurred in Mainland, a distinct political culture which values personal freedom emerged in the PRC but only limited to a SAR when Hong Kong was handed to the PRC. As systemic assimilation in political value and lifestyle into Mainland has not been possible, the cultural differences eventually led to clashes and engendered the nationalism in Hong Kong against Beijing rule. Slightly different from the causes suggested by Gellner, the restrictions on access to power imposed by Beijing, as I understand, are not solely based on the discrimination against Hongkongers because the political and civil rights of ordinary Mainland citizens are far less than Hongkongers even nowadays. The existence of the unique Hong Kong culture and the clashes led to by such existence are the outcome of Beijing's guarantee of "50 years unchanged" (五十年不變) and the denial of political reform in Mainland. The rise of pro-independence nationalism in Hong Kong is inevitable as the cultural discrepancy has been present since the handover.

For minorities and diaspora, acquisition of actual territory as a base for nationhood is a big challenge. However, Gellner (1983: 106) found that foundation of a nation does not necessarily establish in the home countries or where they are majority. The Hellenic nationalism in modern times did not originate in modern time Greece or anywhere within the Ottoman Empire but in Romania, where the Hellenes were a minority. The foundation of Hellenic state in Greece was the result of the national movement from diaspora.

Responding to nationalism, another scholar Benedict Anderson (2006) introduced a concept of *imagined communities*. For Anderson, nations are imagined communities for several reasons. As political communities, the inherent limit and sovereignty of nations are created out of imagination. The sense of communion is implanted in the minds of each member of a nation although it is unlikely that they can know or meet most of the compatriots. The limits of nations are created out of imagination that no nations have ever incorporated all human beings in the world but set finite boundaries for their territories and populations. The concept of national sovereignty was introduced to replace the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic regimes, which were also created out of imagination. And finally, nations are imagined as communities for the deep and horizontal comradeship despite inequality and exploitation within them (5-7). Therefore, with a similar conclusion of Gellner (1983), Anderson asserts that nationality and nationalism are “cultural artefacts of a particular

kind" (4). In his opinion, nationalism is very distinct from other ideologies that it never produced prominent thinkers, like Hobbes, Tocqueville, Marx or Weber. Rather than classifying with ideologies like liberalism or fascism, Anderson thinks that nationalism is closer to kinship and religion.

Gellner (1983) also noticed the religious characteristics of nationalism and proposes that nationalism possesses the religious features of worship. Such worships occur in the nationalist age in society, where the population worship their own, instead of an imagined god. Similar to the religious worship, nationalists apply conceptual and ritual tools on affirmation of their values, continuity and solidarity as a social tradition. Driven by the faith of imagined unity, the specific cultural in the population is celebrated, and is imposed in entire society. The practice of faith and conceptual imagination in nationalism does not vary much from religion in nature (56-57). On the other hand, Anderson (2006) discusses the use of languages and scripts in religions and classical communities. Religions and great sacral cultures, including great civilisations such as Chinese civilisation, are always imagined through sacred languages and written scripts. Islam is a perfect example that classical Arabic is regarded as a sacred language and a set of shared ideographs by Muslims as it is used in the Quran, but very few of them are proficient in classical Arabic. However, the use of classical Arabic among Muslims from various nationalities is not for daily communication but practice and demonstration of faith in Islam. Anderson suggests that this kind of use of "dead language" is common in classical communities and the more obsolete the language is, the purer use of the signs. The use of the sacred signs in religions and classical communities is a collective behaviour exclusive among their members (12-19). Anderson also proposes the nature of *unisonance* of language that it is a medium for connecting people. Two strangers who use the same language naturally come up with the association that they have the same origin, or at least their ancestors. This is most obvious when people are singing national anthem, the chanters feel the unisonality that they belong to the same community (144-145).

The emergence of national consciousness, as Anderson suggests, are attributed to print-capitalism and use of vernacular languages in officialdom. Print-capitalism denotes the existence of printing press which operate in the market economy for seeking clients and making profit. Once the printing press are not monopolised by the authorities, either the administration or religious body, the languages used in the printing press market are not subject to control. And then the circulation of vernacular languages in the literate population outpaced those used in officialdom. A typical example is the Reformation period in Europe

that when publications printed in Dutch and German had become common in Northern and Western Europe in early 16th century, the Dutch and German speakers realised the distinctions from the Latin users in the Holy See. The use of vernacular languages in printing press was the foundation for rapid growth of Protestantism in Dutch and German speaking areas. Although nationalism was not conspicuous during Reformation, the awareness of breaking away from the rule of the Roman Catholic Church arose. Later, when Protestantism had been adopted by certain German states, German became the official language in these states for replacing Latin, the official language in Catholic states back then. Nowadays, apart from printed publication, there are multiple channels for vernacular languages to circulate in society. However, while vernacular languages are widely used in media, nationalism, or separatist ideas do not emerge without the use in officialdom. In the cases Anderson illustrates, the use of vernacular languages in printed materials indeed was limited to a few people because of the low literacy rates in Reformation period. The literate was mostly elite in society and had more access to power. Even though publications were used by only a few elites, the use of vernacular languages in officialdom marked a clear boundary that only the users of local languages, Dutch or German, could exercise sovereign and administrative power in the territories, rather than the Latin users from abroad (2006: 37-46).

Though separatist sentiment, or desire to resist the central administration in the periphery often result in creating new nations, Anderson found that such sentiment often comes out of the will of preservation of the old order, or the conventional way of life. One of the causes of the independence movement in Venezuela in late 18th century was Madrid's proposal for raising the living condition of slaves in New Spain, which triggered the resistance of slave owners in the colonies. The slave owners in Venezuela, who were creoles of Spanish descendants, worried that the proposed change by Madrid would affect local economy. The Venezuelan slave owners became nationalists to resist the rule by Madrid that did not seek to change the central administration in Madrid but demanded independence from metropolitan Spain. Glass ceiling, or the absence of opportunities for colonial pilgrimage, is another factor that cultivates separatist sentiment. As noted by Anderson, the blockage to power in the metropole prevents the people in colonies to develop a sense of unity with the metropole. Colonial pilgrimage, which denotes the people from the colonies to travel to the metropole, is important for the colonial subjects in access to power. If the colonial subjects can work in the bureaucracy in the metropole, they are more integrated into the metropolitan society and certain extent of sense of connection is developed between them. But if colonial

pilgrimage is limited, the colonial subjects perceive that they are not stakeholders in the metropolitan system and their attachment of the to the metropole is weak. Once clashes occur between them, the colonial subjects will demand separation as they are not hopeful in changing the decisions from the metropole. Independence movements in Spanish America is attributed to the blockage of colonial pilgrimage that the creoles could never gain any positions in metropolitan Spain (2006: 47-65).

Anderson suggests that attachment to a country cannot be created through simply redrawing political boundary, while cultural proximity has a strong effect. The Spanish colonies in America divided into different administrative units since the 16th century. Due to poor communication and geographical obstacles, exchanges between different colonies on the continent were rare. When these colonies were granted independence from Spain, they tried to form confederacies similar to the US. However, since unique cultural characteristics were developed for over two centuries in these former colonies, the people in the newly independent confederacies lacked the cohesion and were unable to build attachment to the new sovereigns. Soon after the formation of the confederacies, they were separated into various nations based on administrative units under Spanish rule (2006: 47-65).

2.3 Diaspora and political movement

The findings of Crocetti et al (2018) suggest that personal and social identities are strongly interconnected. Along with the continuous flow of interaction with the social context, as Crocetti et al denotes, individuals use and strengthen their personal and social identities to satisfy the main needs and motives in daily life. Given the changes of the political situation in Hong Kong, and the experience in activism and migration of the activists, it is possible that there are transitions of their identities, which may shape the direction and agenda of the diaspora movement. As people move from one locality to another, their identities may also change. The identities and citizenships of Hong Kong diaspora across the globe have been studied a lot over decades, such as post-1997 migrants to Taiwan (Chan & Fung, 2018), civic participation of Hong Kong immigrants in Canada (Preston, Valerie, et al, 2006) and the politico-religious dynamics of Hong Kong Christian diaspora in the UK (To & Chan, 2023). Some case studies were conducted on the Hong Kong immigrants who settled in England in 2021-22 (Ho, 2023). But the studies on Hong Kong dissidents in exile are rare. Similar to Hongkongers, lots of Tibetans have gone exile in other countries for the fear of political suppression by Beijing for several decades. There are more studies about Tibetan diaspora

movements, such as how Tibetan organisations maintain connections with Tibetan diaspora across the globe (Davies, 2012), the strategies of Tibetan Government-in-Exile (Kauffmann, 2015) and case studies of identities and citizenship of Tibetans in India and the US (Hess, 2020). The recent emergence of Uyghur diaspora also draws the attention among the academia (Lavička, 2020; NurMuhammad, Rizwangul, et al, 2016). Case studies on overseas women Uyghur activists are also conducted (Palmer, 2021). In comparison, there is an obvious gap of knowledge about Hong Kong diaspora movement.

The study of Han (2019) shows how that the definition of "homeland" among the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia changed during the Cold War. A group of Chinese diasporas in Northern Thailand from Yunnan Province used to be loyal to the Republic of China (ROC) under the rule of Kuomintang (KMT) as their ancestors were troops of the ROC and fled from the Communist rule in early 1950s. However, the emphasis of nationalism in the PRC, democratisation and indigenisation of identity in Taiwan and the shift of legitimacy of the PRC and the ROC as the representative of China have led to loosened the tie between these Yunnanese Thai and the ROC. The status of the diaspora and other geopolitical changes also contribute to the shift of the concept of "homeland."

The Tibetan nationhood

Tibetans in exile share similar situations with the overseas Hongkongers. Since the Tibetan uprising in the PRC in 1959, thousands of Tibetans followed the footsteps of Dalai Lama to go to exile abroad. The research of Choedon (2021) finds that the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), a government-in-exile for the Tibetan diaspora worldwide outside the PRC and overseas Tibetans are still mutually practising some traditional Tibetan customs. However, Choedon finds that certain customs practised by the CTA and the Tibetan diasporic communities vary from the traditions in many Tibetan tribes in the PRC. The practice of selecting some cultural elements and claims of authenticity of them as a shared culture by the Tibetan diasporic community, as Choedon asserts, is a construct to maintain its "neo-Tibetan" identity. This construct of this shared culture is a means to reinforce the social and territorial boundaries from the Chinese, which serves the political goals of a distinct national identity and independence from the PRC. Such construct of shared culture may be intentionally developed by the overseas Hong Kong activists as well. As in the Tibetan case, political goal plays a significant role in shaping the diasporic culture.

There is existing research on the identity of Tibetan diasporic community. Hess (2020) interviewed some Tibetans who have settled in other countries. Similar to the BN(O) Visa Scheme launched by the UK government for BN(O) passport holders from Hong Kong to settle in the UK, an immigration scheme for Tibetans, the Tibetan U.S. Resettlement Project (TUSRP) was offered by the US government in 1990. Exile Tibetans in India and Nepal are mostly stateless despite settling in the host countries for decades. The TUSRP provides fast track for 1,000 of those Tibetans in India and Nepal to move to the US and be granted US citizenship. The provision of the TUSRP was a result of years-long lobby by Dalai Lama to the US government. In Hess's interviews of the Tibetans in India and the US, despite some of those in India believe that it is proud to remain stateless in India, those who join the TUSRP do not see getting a US citizenship a loss of Tibetan identity and connection. Many Tibetans who have become naturalised in the US think that the resources they access to as US citizens can help them with achieving the political goals of independence. Therefore, for them a foreign citizenship is a means to maintain their identity, strengthening the community and continue the political movement.

As hundreds of thousands of Hongkongers have moved abroad recently, they are entitled to the citizenships in their host countries in the next few years. However, unlike those Tibetans who have bigger dangers when returning to China, most Hongkongers are free to return despite the tightening political space. Nowadays ordinary Hongkongers who move abroad share similar features of those in 1980s and 1990s for the handover of sovereignty in 1997 that enjoyed a "flexible citizenship" which enable them to maximise their personal gains through manipulating immigration regime, as proposed by Ong (1999). As these "flexible citizens" could return home freely while participation in some political activities is outlawed in Hong Kong, many of them may choose not to participate in the overseas democracy movement concerning Hong Kong. Therefore, the attitudes of overseas Hongkongers and activists towards having a new citizenship may differ from the Tibetans. The difference in attitudes towards new citizenships among diaspora community may lead to variation in strategies and development in the diasporic movement. Activists' view on the impacts of new citizenship on the diaspora movement is also studied in this research as a part of their opinions on inheritance of values and identity.

Overseas Chinese Democracy Movement (OCDM)

The overseas Chinese democracy movement (OCDM) is connected to the democracy movement in Hong Kong as the activists in Hong Kong since 1980s have been supporting the counterparts from Mainland. Nowadays activists from Hongkong and Mainland China are facing similar situations. Both groups of dissidents are ethnic Chinese who defy the rule of the CCP and have become exile after political upheavals and demonstrations at home. The studies of OCDM are not abundant in academic field. Chen Jie is one of the few researchers who focus on OCDM longitudinally. The studies of Chen analyse the new trend of OCDM in early 2010s (2014) and the challenges have been faced by overseas dissidents since the crackdown of the 1989 Democracy Movement (2018). The OCDM was initiated in December 1983 in New York by Wang Bingzhang, a medical graduate of McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Wang established the Chinese Alliance for Democracy (CAD) in the 1980s, which was the first overseas political opposition organization of persons of mainland Chinese background since 1949. OCDM gained momentum with CAD among Chinese students and migrants in the U.S. and offering support to underground pro-democracy activists in China. The movement peaked after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, with the formation of the Federation for Democratic China (FDC) and expanded global activism. By the early 1990s, the OCDM had a robust presence worldwide, interacting with Western governments, media, and social groups (Chen, 2014).

China's democracy movement in 1989 was a crisis for the CCP, but the CCP survived and even became stronger domestically and internationally. In contrast, having anticipated for changing the regime for three decades, Chinese dissidents in exile are struggling to sustain the overseas democracy movement as the goal appears to be unachievable in foreseeable future (Chen, 2018). The movement began to decline after a failed attempt in 1993 to merge FDC and CAD. Factionalism, personality conflicts, and the formation of numerous exile political parties fragmented the movement. Membership dwindled, and grassroots support weakened due to China's growing prosperity and closer ties with the West. Infighting, disputes over tactics, and reduced funding further hampered the movement's effectiveness. The influence of the OCDM has diminished over time (Chen, 2014). Around 2010, about 20 years after the Tiananmen crackdown, the members in OCDM reflected negative sentiments towards the movement. Against the backdrop of China's economic success, the movement was in downfall as its notion had lost the attractiveness. It was in demise in terms of membership, moral glamour and financial resources. Some of the veteran members in OCDM

even claimed that the movement was a total failure for delivering the goal. Challenges in the OCDM concern the roles of exile dissidents and the Chinese diaspora. The role of exile dissidents in the democracy movement has weakened. The Chinese government prohibits exile dissidents from visiting China, which make them difficult to exert influence on the homeland. Some of them have chosen to fade out from the movement after gaining citizenships abroad, and even started business in China. Moreover, the Chinese diaspora does not necessarily support to the democracy movement. Growing political and economic ties between China and the diaspora deter diasporic support to the movement. Chinese nationalism has gained ground in the diasporic communities so much so that some Chinese migrants are elected political offices in Western countries and defend China's foreign policy and human rights record (Chen, 2018).

The changes of political environment and polices in the US and Taiwan also attribute to the decline of OCDM. The shifts of US foreign policy have created a complex environment for overseas dissidents. While PRC's recent aggressive behaviours in East and South China Seas have heightened tension between China and the US, a comprehensive rivalry between the two countries is not guaranteed. Besides, for the US, the dissidents organisations and their leaders never have sufficient mandate at home and in the diaspora communities, and therefore lack the immediate geopolitical value (Chen, 2018: 114-116). On the other hand, the support from the ROC government in Taiwan has also seen a significant drop. The generous financial support from the Kuomingtang (KMT), Chinese Nationalist Party regime to exile Chinese dissidents in the 1980s diminished since mid-1990s when ideological rivalry was no longer a priority after democratisation and nativisation of Taiwanese politics. While the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) prioritises advocacy for Taiwan as an independent sovereignty from China over the democratisation in Mainland, the KMT has sought to improve its ties to Beijing in mid-2000s. Consequently, major parties in Taiwan have lost enthusiasm in offering aid to Chinese dissidents anymore (Chen, 2018: 116-120).

However, Chen (2014) refutes some of the criticisms of the downfall of the movement. First, the Chinese activists compared the achievements of their peaceful movement with the violent revolutions of Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong, which was unfair. Second, it was not reasonable for the overseas dissidents to maintain their influence in China by practical actions for improving the well-being of Chinese citizens. Third, the decline in membership was natural since the booming of the movement in 1989-1993 was a one-off

wonder because of the Tiananmen incident. And finally, many discussions over OCDM do not cover the current development in the movement which Chen delves into in his research.

Some overseas dissidents report positive comments on OCDM to Chen. First, international advocacy has influenced public opinion and policies of some foreign governments on human rights in China. Second, since the CCP prohibits public discussions on certain ideological and historical issues, OCDM provided platform for overseas Chinese to systematically discuss and published these topics. Third, OCDM is still relevant to the opposition in China by provision of information and money to support dissidents in China and their families. Chen agrees that the existence of OCDM is significant enough to impose pressure on the Chinese government. Chen also sees the new trends emerging in OCDM since the 2010s. First, the exile dissident has broadened their transnational networking and cooperation with INGOs, which includes the overseas Falun Gong movement. Second, they have adopted new tactics in support of the right defence, or *weiquan* (維權) movement in China. Third, they have gained new experience and solidarity with ethnic minorities, particularly the exile Tibetans, with the facilitation of emergence of a new kind of OCDM actors. The new kind of actors are not those who started exile and gained fame since the Democracy Wall or 1989 Democracy Movement, but the activists who were mere participants in political movements in China but have assumed more prominent roles after moving abroad. They are educated in the West, more adapted to the cultural and political environment in the West and Taiwan and are more realistic in extending their influence in lobbying and other political activities (Chen, 2014).

Chen acknowledges that OCDM remains significant as China's only political opposition and resembles the features of long-distance nationalism[2] that the diasporic activists endeavour to maintaining their connections to the home country, while working with international networks and depend on the diaspora communities as their supporting base (2018). Similarly, I think the overseas democracy movement of Hongkongers resembles some features of the exile Tibetans and Mainland Chinese. Although the paths of these movements vary, they face similar challenges and may have similar strategies due to cultural and political proximity. The proximity in cultural and political background of Hongkongers, affected by

[2] Long-distance nationalism is a type of nationalism that is “multidimensional and part of the process of reconnection with the homeland, reflecting a transnational agenda” (Berrebbah, 2021); or as a form of transnational activity and identity that related to migrants and exiles, and a practice and an ideology that establish a bond between the emigrated and those who stayed behind and shared cultural and national ties (Anderson, 1994; 1998).

internal and external factors, may lead to the adoption of similar strategies as Mainland Chines and Tibetans in the movement. The external factors, including the attitudes of host governments and the level of racial and ethnic discrimination in the host countries, affect the level of support and obstacles the diaspora movement has from the host countries. The internal factors, such as the size of the diaspora community, skills of the migrants, presence of local network and linkage to the host civil society, determine the capability of the diaspora community. The diasporic communities and activists who have the host governments supportive to their agenda, face less discrimination in the host societies, are larger in size and have better skills and networks would have more diverse options in choosing the strategies in the diaspora movement (Ho and Chen, 2024). Apart from these factors, I doubt if the identities and political ideals of the activists also affect the strategies they adopt. Therefore, the questions about what strategies the activists from Hong Kong adopt and the reasons behind would be asked.

Another scholar He Xiaoqing (2014) published her discussions with three exile Chinese dissidents and their life stories. Their discussions cover various topics, including their opinions on the OCDM and identities. These three dissidents, Yi Danxuan, Shen Tong and Wang Dan were leaders in the 1989 Democracy Movement and have been in exile in the United States since 1990s. After settling in the US for over a decade, all three dissidents still had strong attachment to China and had reluctance in integrating in American society in certain extent. Although they enjoyed the freedom from fear in the US, they felt China was still their homeland and, particularly Yi Danxuan and Wang Dan, intentionally stayed distant from the mainstream society in the US. They regarded themselves as outsiders in the US though having lived there for years. Shen Tong and Yi Danxuan chose to have a minimalist life that enabled them to be ready to return to China anytime. Despite the inconvenience in travelling abroad, Yi Danxuan and Wang Dan refused to apply for US citizenship although they were entitled to. While Shen Tong obtain US citizenship in 2000 and developed attachment to New York as his hometown, later he doubted his American identity for the US foreign policy after 911 Incident. Yi Danxuan explained that “identity is a choice” that he would gain something for choosing to take US citizenship while losing something else (160). He Xiaoqing noticed the contradictory ideas about identities in these dissidents that they would like to return to China, while also preferring the life in exile.

For the OCDM, Shen Tong had dramatic changes in his role in and opinions on it. Having been a leader in the movement for year, he experienced betrayals by fellow overseas

Chinese dissidents in late 1990s and had identity crisis. Eventually he chose to stand back from the leadership role and established a media business in the US (104-106). On the other hand, Shen Tong found that the opinions of former dissidents on the 1989 movement had changed when meeting another student leader who disappeared from public eye recently. In the conversation with Shen Tong, that student leader denied the value of the 1989 movement. Even though Shen was no longer very active in the OCDM and he admitted that the impact of the 1989 movement was limited, he found that the movement in Beijing was an experience and an experiment, and he could not stop working on democracy movement (106-108). Although the dissidents regarded the 1989 Democracy Movement which they devoted in should never be forgot, Wang Dan suggested that this movement should not be the only meaningful thing in life. Wang Dan was satisfied that participants in this movement explored other aspects in life, as long as not standing by the Chinese government in opposing the ideals of the movement (162). But in the discussion between He Xiaoqing, Yi Danxuan and Shen Tong, the dissidents found that their dream in 1989 was very abstract that they could only name freedom, democracy and a better China as shared ideals. And the dream in the current OCDM was constantly developing, being re-defined and revived, and varied among every dissident (158). The dissidents expressed concerns over the variations of values in Chinese society that their enthusiasm to freedom and democracy were not shared among the younger generation. They dissidents were worried about the growth of cynicism and nationalism in China since 1990s (156).

Taiwan democracy and independence movement

The democracy movement of Taiwanese is another comparable case for Hongkongers as they share lots of similarities. The majority of population in Hong Kong and Taiwan are descendants from Southern China. While these two territories have different political systems other than the one in Mainland, they were both used to be colonies from 19th to 20th century. As Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 to 1997, Taiwan was under Japanese rule from 1895 to 1945. When Japan surrendered all the colonies after the defeat in the Second World War in 1945, the ROC government, led by the KMT, took over the control of Taiwan from the Japanese. After 50 years of Japanese colonial rule, Taiwanese already developed a distinct lifestyle and social structure from Mainland China. Especially for the local elites, an autonomous mode under KMT rule would be preferable. Many Taiwanese saw themselves ethnic Chinese and did not consider the identity of Taiwanese would have any conflict to it. (Edmondson, 2002; Fell, 2018: 14-16)

However, economy and order in Taiwan deteriorated abruptly after ROC takeover. The local population found that the administration from Mainland as a failure and did not fit Taiwanese society. In February 1947, island-wide civil unrests broke out for dissatisfaction on the authority. These were followed by violent suppression with deployment of troops from Mainland, massive arrests, prosecutions, executions, crackdown of the civil society and the first implementation of the Martial Law in Taiwan. This event is known as 228 Incident. Soon after the crackdown, the survived dissents fled to Japan and the US. The brutal suppression triggered the resistance against the KMT Chinese nationalist discourse and integration to the Chinese nation; therefore the dissidents started to call for Taiwan independence from the ROC. The 228 Incident marked the beginning of the Taiwan Independence Movement. (Edmondson, 2002; Fell, 2018: 14-16; Fleischauer, 2007: 373-374;)

The political and civil rights in Taiwan further deteriorated because of the second implementation of the Martial Law and the settlement of the ROC central government in Taiwan in 1949. The ROC administration, led by the KMT, imposed restrictions on the everyday life of Taiwanese citizens after the defeat of the civil war in Mainland to prevent infiltrations by the CCP. Taiwan under ROC sovereignty became a one-party state as the KMT, whose members were mostly from Mainland, dominated Taiwanese politics, economy and society. The terms of the legislature were indefinitely extended. The party-state suspended registration of new political parties, controlled and monitored strictly the formation and operation of civil society organisations, monopolised media, imposed censorship on publication, promoted Chinese nationalism and banned the use of Taiwanese dialects. Dissidents were under persistent surveillance and were always at risks of imprisonment and even execution. With hundreds of thousands of refugees and elites moved along with the ROC central government to Taiwan, Taiwanese found themselves in an inferior position to the Mainland elites. The authoritarian rule from 1940s to 1980s by the KMT in Taiwan was described as “while terror”. The continuous authoritarian rule and Chinese nationalist to under the KMT throughout 1950-60s provided fuel for maintaining the momentum of resistance. Indeed, the discourse of Taiwan independence further developed. The independence advocates perceived that Taiwan was still a colony transferred from the Japanese to the Chinese. It was a frustrating situation for them that Taiwan was still undemocratic and colonial even after being returned to Chinese rule. (Edmondson, 2002; Fell, 2018: 13-26; Schubert, 2025: 45-47)

Despite repressive rule, the local population also developed an underground civil society to carry out the activities banned by the state. Besides, public offices under the provincial level were produced by elections, and therefore native elites were active in standing as independent candidates. When special elections for the supplementary seats in the Legislative Yuan were announced in 1969, opposition activists collaborated to organise the election campaign. These activists comprised of native Taiwanese and some immigrants from Mainland who were not satisfied with the KMT regime. Their ideologies and identities varied, which included socialism and liberal democracy, and divided views on ethnicity of Taiwanese and Taiwan independence. As non-alignment with the KMT was their common feature, their opposition movement was called the "outside the party" movement (黨外運動 *dang wai yun dong*), or the *Dangwai Movement*. Although independence was one of the discourses for many *dangwai* activists, they avoided mentioning it for safety concerns. Therefore, their demands were usually about improving governance, human rights and democracy in constitutional aspect. (Fell, 2018: 19-28; Lin, 2006) Although the term *dangwai* was first used for describing candidates outside of the KMT in the elections in the 1950s and 1960s, it was perceived as a movement only when the activists became more organised in campaigning in 1970s. (Fell, 2018: 27)

Meanwhile, the overseas Taiwanese, including the survivors of the 228 Incident, more explicitly and actively advocated Taiwan independence. As early as 1956, some exile Taiwanese established a few pro-independence organisations in Japan and the US (Fleischauer, 2007). The norm of Taiwanese students studying in universities in Japan since early 20th century continued under KMT rule. In the 1960s, then the number of Taiwanese students who studied in the US grew rapidly because of the availability of exchange funding. Taiwanese diaspora community in the US grew apparently as most of these students chose to stay in the US after graduation and migrations from Taiwan also increased. When the 228 Incident broke out in 1947, the students who studied in the US in the 1960s were still young children and could hardly know the details of the incident due to censorship. When studying abroad, they became critical to the KMT regime for learning more about the history and level of authoritarianism from a foreign perspective. Young intellectuals, usually Taiwan-born, organised a larger scale of opposition movement in the US. The information exchanges and discussions between the Taiwanese students in Japan and the US also facilitated the overseas independence movement. Throughout 1960s and 1970s, Taiwanese associations were formed across the US along with the growth of the Taiwanese diaspora. Some were formed for

pursuing Taiwan independence, such as the United Formosans in America for Independence (UFAI) and the World United Formosans for Independence (WUFI). The Taiwanese Association of America (TAA) was founded in 1970 as an umbrella organisation of the Taiwanese diaspora associations in the US, which turn more political after encountering repression from the KMT. (Fleischauer, 2007; Lin, 2006)

The criticisms of the Chinese nationalist discourse among Taiwanese mounted when the ROC withdrew from the UN in 1971, which also encouraged more public opposition to the KMT regime domestically. (Fell, 2018: 150-152; Hughes, 2025) The activists in Taiwan built connections with those abroad, and gained their support when facing suppression during Chung-li Incident in 1977[3] and Formosan Incident in 1979[4]. (Lin, 2006) The establishment of formal diplomatic relation between the US and PRC in 1979 further challenged the KMT narrative of Chinese nationhood (Hughes, 2025) and also created a crisis for the US Taiwanese communities because the annual immigration quota for ROC citizens would also be shared with PRC citizens. Then some activists contacted lawmakers and successfully gained a separate quota for Taiwan. After the effective lobbying, Taiwanese activists formed the Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) for the engagement with the US Congress for the interests of overseas Taiwanese and promoting Taiwan independence. With the lobby of the FAPA in the 1980s, the US Congress to pass a couple resolutions to press on the KMT to improve civil and political rights and set up funding for supporting democracy movement in Taiwan. Subsequently, some *dangwai* activists successfully registered the first opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) without state interference in 1986, and the Martial Law was lifted in 1987. The continuous overseas advocacy, more liberal domestic civil society and the rise of Lee Teng-hui as the President of the ROC further materialised the democratisation in the 1990s. However, some attempts for improving the international status of Taiwan such as campaign for Taiwan to rejoin the UN has not yet

[3] Chung-li Incident was a clash over the claim of election fraud. On the local elections on 19 November 1977, some voters were arrested after arguing with electoral officials in polling stations in Chung-li, Taoyuan County. The voters claimed that the ballots for Hsu Hsin-liang, a *dangwai* candidate of the Magistrate of Taoyuan County were smeared by electoral officials. People protested in front of a police station after learning about this news. The police tried to disperse the protestors, which resulted in casualty and further unrest. After a recount, Hsu Hsin-liang was declared victory. However, no electoral officials were prosecuted.

[4] Formosa Incident was a massive arrest and prosecution of *dangwai* dissidents. On 10 December 1979, a demonstration was held by Formosa Magazine, a *dangwai* publication in Kaohsiung for celebrating Human Rights Day. Clashes happened after the demonstrators were attacked by mobs and surrounded by the law enforcement. The ROC government denounced the protestors and arrested over 100 of them afterwards. 41 were sentenced to prison for rebellion and other charges.

succeeded due to lack of domestic and international support, and the pressure from the CCP and KMT. (Hughes, 2025; Lin, 2006)

The democracy movement of Taiwan is a good example for the counterpart from Hong Kong because of the similarities they share. Both territories used to be colonies and then returned to Chinese rule. The democracy activists in both territories are considered ethnic Chinese from the view of Chinese nationalism but some of them resist this narrative and try to construct a new national discourse. Both groups have experienced suppression of the party-state and called for democracy, while some dissents have exiled and organised diaspora communities for international lobbying. The overseas democracy movement of Taiwanese could be seen as a success that the Taiwanese communities could organise themselves and lobby the US Congress to exert pressure on the ROC government. The democratisation was gradually materialised in the 1980s and 1990s for the effort and collaboration of domestic resistance by the *dangwai* activists and international advocacy of the diaspora community.

However, as an independence movement, the outcome is questionable and is still ongoing. Taiwan is already a de facto country since almost all the territory and population the ROC government effectively rules are in Taiwan, and the PRC has never managed to practically own it. Besides, the majority of the Taiwanese population prefer a status quo, which means that Taiwan continues to exist under the sovereignty of the Republic of China, even for some supporters for “independence”. The pro-independence DPP has adopted a moderate narrative since late 1990s for adapting to the reality and public opinion. Nowadays, the independence movement is still dealing with overcoming Taiwan’s lack of international recognition, interpreting Taiwanese history and defining Taiwanese identity. Taiwan is often considered as a stateless polity because it is excluded from participating in many international organisations after the ROC withdrew from the UN in 1971. But the Taiwanese political elite and public have not reached consensus on in what name Taiwan should rejoin the UN, and the PRC opposition is difficult to overcome. National identity is another tedious issue for the independence movement. Polls in the last decade show that most residents in Taiwan identify themselves as Taiwanese and refuse to be incorporated into the PRC. But whether Chinese and Taiwanese are mutually exclusive identities and how to deal with the relation with the PRC are very controversial in Taiwanese society. Besides, the supporters of the KMT and DPP can hardly reach any consensus on the evaluation of the actors during the “white terror” period and the status of Taiwan in Chinese history. The Taiwanese diaspora communities also

share the same division, which is a huge challenge for the independence movement. (Fell, 2018: 150-170; Hughes, 2025; Lin 2006; Liu, 2021)

As a partly successful case of overseas political movement with similar background, the path of Taiwanese can make a good reference for Hongkonger activists in formulating goals and strategies, constructing national narratives, foreseeing and handling challenges, use of tactics and resources and adjusting expectations for the gap between reality and an imagined ideal nation.

3 Research design and field work

This chapter discusses the methodology and the process of the research. As a qualitative research, ethnography is applied in this research that in-depth interviews were conducted for data collection. The recruitment of participants was through my personal contacts and snowball samplings. A pilot interview was conducted before the actual interviews. The interviews were carried out in-person and through videoconferences that the content was recorded as audio files and by notetaking. The audio files were transcribed by online tools into texts. Thematic analysis was applied when analysing the content of the interviews.

3.1 Methodology

This research was inspired by the introduction of Dr Yoko Demelius to her study of "kimchi diplomacy" on a research methodology class in Spring 2024 and the master's thesis of Ari-Joonas Pitkänen on the national identity of the supporters of the third force political parties in Taiwan. For studying the role of kimchi in the cultural heritage of the ethnic Koreans in Japan and how they use kimchi for improving a minority's image, Dr Demelius employed ethnographic methods of observations of and conversations with female participants in a self-help organisation of Zainichi Koreans[5]. In Pitkänen's research, he interviewed 11 supporters of third force political parties and a member of parliament in Taiwan concerning their opinions on Taiwanese identity and Taiwan-China relation[6]. Upon learning that conversation is also a feasible method of collecting data in social research, I realised that similar methods could be applied for studying the overseas democracy movement I had been participating in. Semi-structured interview, an ethnographic method was applied for understanding the opinions of fellow activists. The data from the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis.

3.1.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is used in this research. As Emerson (1995) explains, the primary of ethnography is to immerse oneself in the everyday life and experience of people. Researchers

---

[5] The research of Dr Yoko Demelius titled "The Presentation of the Korean Self with Everyday Food: Negotiating 'Koreanness' through Kimchi Diplomacy in Contemporary Japan was published on *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 36, no. 1 (June 2023): 87–116, and accessible on https://doi.org/10.1353/seo.2023.a902135.
[6] The master's thesis of Pitkänen, Ari-Joonas titled *A Dichotomy Dismantled : Reflections on National Identity among Supporters of Third Force Political Parties in Taiwan* was published by the University of Turku on https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe201802073197.

applying ethnography have to go to the field, but stay distant from the field in certain extent, observe the people, record the observations, understand the deep meaning of what is observed and write about the observations and interpretations (Emerson, 1995; Harding & Kostera, 2021). Ethnography is a qualitative method for studying behaviours of individuals and groups that the meanings of those behaviours are difficult to quantify. It has the flexibility to cater the needs of collecting and analysing data with abstract concepts, which suits this research for the collection and analysis of in-depth thoughts of the overseas activists on self-identity and diasporic movement.

While the study of thoughts of the people is different from observation of behaviours in an uncontrolled setting, interview is an accepted method for collecting empirical data in ethnographic research. Interviews, as controlled conversations, enable researchers to understand the reality from others' experiences and perceptions. The testimonies of the interviewees are transcribed and analysed after the interviews (Kostera & Modzelewska, 2021). As this research aims at in-depth understanding of perceptions on specific topics, semi-structured interview is the most preferable. In a semi-structured interview, a list of questions is given to the interviewee before. Open questions are usually asked for the freely responses from the interviewees. Answers of different interviewees could be compared as they are responded based on the same questions.

3.1.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is used to analyse the data in the interviews. TA is flexible for analysing qualitative data and is used within most theoretical frameworks. Themes are the outcome developed through coding and analysis of the data. It is a subjective process to interpret the data. There are two broad categories of TA. Experiential orientations focus on the perspectives of the participants. It is assumed that the language the participants use merely reflects reality. Critical orientations question dominant patterns of meaning and perceive that the language participants use tend to create reality rather than mere reflection. (Willig & Rogers, 2017)

The phases of TA are 1) familiarisation with the data from during data collection, which requires being observant, attentive to patterns, asking questions and reading the data; 2) generating codes by immersing deeply into the whole dataset, noticing patterns and similarities across the data; 3) constructing themes by preparing various versions of drafts; 4) reviewing potential themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report. The

analysis process, content of the conversations in the interviews is categorised by coding. The codes generated through coding can be used for analysing the patterns of the conversations for comparison and categorising the data into different themes. A code is a word or a short phrase that acts as a symbolic attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The development of codes and themes can be done in two approaches, either inductively developing the codes from what is available in the data, or deductively using the existing theories or concepts to interpret the data. Coding can be carried out in two cycles. In the first cycle it focuses on the apparent meanings of the content of a sentence or a paragraph. In the second cycle it works on the patterns in the dataset and deeper meanings and theories across different pieces of data. Theme development is a selective process. After the second cycle of coding, some categories, themes, concepts or theories are produced (Willig & Rogers, 2017; Saldaña, 2009).

3.2 Field process

In the design stage, risks and positionality was considered to ensure the validity of the research and safety of the participants. A pilot test was conducted after the questionnaire had been drafted and some adjustments of the questions were made after that. The data of the research was collected through interviews. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed to texts with an online transcription programme. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

3.2.1 Risks and positionality

As some politically sensitive topics are studied in this research, there are political and legal risks for the researcher and participants. Some concepts studied in the research, such as "liberate Hong Kong", self-determination and independence of Hong Kong, ending one-party dictatorship and other political demands and notion of the dissidents are outlawed by the Hong Kong Government. Under the NSL in Hong Kong enacted in 2020, the publication of materials related to the above topics may be deemed incitement to subversion or secession (Hong Kong Government, 2020c). The publication of this research may also be subject to Safeguarding National Security Ordinance taken into effect in 2024 (Hong Kong Government, 2024).

Since some of the interviewees are high-profiled politicians and activists, the interviews conducted online, and the storage of interview data are at risks of interception by

Chinese state agents. The confidentiality of the research and the security of the researcher and participants would be jeopardised. Therefore, safety measures are necessary in conducting the research. Pseudonyms are used in naming the participants in the research article. The communication with the participants, particularly the online interviews, were conducted through secured and encrypted electronic channels. All the data collected in the interviews, including audio recordings and texts, was stored in the secured storage system provided by the university.

Before the interviews, all participants were given Participant Information Sheet and informed that their identities would not be disclosed in this paper, and instead pseudonyms would be used. However, all but one participant told me that they did not mind their real names to be shown in this paper. They commented that their daily activities were far riskier than this research. Some participants are wanted by the Hong Kong Government and have routine media exposure, and therefore they are used to being interviewed in various occasions and discussing politically sensitive topics in public. Some of them thought that it was not difficult to recognise their identities based on the information given in the interviews because they had repeated similar stories in public occasions. However, as planned and promised, pseudonyms are still used for all the participants in this paper.

As a dissident from Hong Kong myself, objectivity is maintained in the research. The research aims to analysing the self-identification of ethnicity and political views of dissidents rather than advocating changes in polities. Therefore, apart from risk concerns, the wordings of the thesis should be academic and objective enough not to encourage readers to engage in political activities and soliciting for any ideologies. As most of the participants are personal acquaintances to me, it was easy for me to gain access to them for interview. However, before collecting data, the purpose of the research and my position as researcher were well informed to the participants. Even though expressing my own opinions might facilitate the participants to talk more during the interview, expression of leading and biased opinions and dominating the interviews was avoided.

In the Findings chapters, “we” is used on some occasions. During the interviews, the interviewees discussed some experiences, issues and phenomena that the interviewees and I shared as activists and Hongkongers, for example the challenges that we commonly face in the democracy movement as activists. The use of “we” in these occasions do not affect the objectiveness of the research since it is used to repeat the wordings and meanings of the

participants and narrate the shared experiences. However, “I” is also used when narrating my thoughts and actions, and “they” is used for describing the interviewees. It denotes my role as researcher and them as participants in the research. My positionality as an activist gave me the convenience in terms of gaining their trust and understanding their ideas, for those who I was not familiar with. Some participants were more talkative to me than in public about their personal feelings and expressed more scepticism to the democracy movement since we were personally acquainted.

3.2.2 Design and pilot test

A list of questions was sent to the interviewees before the interview for their preparation. The questions covered different topics, including the background information of the interviewees (life situations, experience in social movements), identities (ethnic identities of the participants, collective identities of Hong Kong diaspora and identities of Hongkongers as a whole), goals and visions Hong Kong diaspora movements (the interpretation of “liberate Hong Kong" and specific goals of the movements) and development of diaspora community (integration in host countries and connection with Hongkonger community). The interviewees were allowed to express further opinions of the above topics, even if the content was not included in the questions. The interviews were mainly conducted in Cantonese, the mother tongue of most of the participants. Each interview was expected to last for 1.5 to 3 hours and separated into two sessions. Since the participants were geographically disperse, the interviews were conducted by videoconferencing on the internet. But for those interviewees who resided in the UK, in-person interviews were conducted. The list of questions was attached in Appendix I with original Chinese version and English translation.

A pilot test was conducted in November 2024 before the formal interviews. One activist with similar background was recruited for the pilot test to modify the questions in the interviews. In addition, the questions were also reviewed by another activist with academic background after the pilot test for adjusting the angles and wording of the questions.

3.2.3 Recruitment of interviewees and interviews

A list of potential interviewees was initially made for selection and invitations of interviewees. Most of the potential participants are my previous colleagues in workplace and partners in political campaigns, while the rest could be reached through friends. For constructing the conceptions of the identities and political views of overseas dissidents,

diversity was considered in the selection of participants. Individuals of different ages, genders, current countries of residence, experience and roles in political participation, positions in political spectrum and political affiliations were selected to enhance the representation. As I used to joined labour union, political parties and other civil organisations in Hong Kong and have become a member of a diaspora alliance in Europe, I tried to maintain the diversity based on my personal knowledge of the participants. The potential participants live in various regions, including the UK, Canada, the US, continental Europe and Taiwan.

As the in-person interviews in the UK were planned to carry out in December 2024, I started to invite participants from October 2024. As I considered that the video interviews were more flexible and I would make some adjustments on selecting participants after the interviews in the UK, the invitations for participants from other countries began only after the trip in the UK. Finally, four in-person interviews were arranged. and were conducted from late December 2024 to early January 2025. These four interviewees were known to me in different times and occasions. They were fellow member of a political party, my colleague in a labour organisation, volunteer with me in an election campaign and fellow member in a diaspora organisation. However, since they were not adolescents who were the most active protestors in 2019 demonstrations, I asked the interviewees to find younger activists for me. After the trip in the UK, two activists in their 20s were introduced to me by the previous interviewees in the UK. The interviews with these two younger activists were conducted in January 2025.

After completing the six interviews of participants from the UK, I found that two interviewees used to be members of Hong Kong Indigenous and volunteered for Edward Leung in his election campaign in February 2016, which I did not know before. The activist who assisted me in the pilot test was a member of Youngspiration, another political party that was supported by Hong Kong Indigenous when Edward Leung was banned from running the general election of Legislative Council in 2016. Youngspiration, as the interviewee in the pilot test told me, was regarded as the continuation of Hong Kong Indigenous, shared the same values and treated Edward Leung as their leader. Interviewing several members from the same political group would lead to bias in the data. Therefore, I realised that I should try to find interviewees who were less likely to be members of political parties as the previous interviewees. Still, there were three interviewees who used to volunteered for Edward Leung when the interviews were completed.

In January 2025, I began to invite participants from outside the UK. In February and March 2025, interviews of three participants from Norway, Taiwan and the Netherlands were conducted. These three participants were selected from my own network. In March 2025, thanks to the referral from one participant, a UK-based political commentator accepted my invitation and participated in the interview. These four interviewees were selected based on their diversity in profession, gender, country of residence and experience in social movement. Totally ten interviews were conducted in the research.

There were some more challenges regarding the interviews. During the recruitment stage, I found that my activist circle was mainly located in the UK and continental Europe, and it was difficult to reach potential interviewees in other locations by myself. The diversity of interviewees was difficult to maintain as well. I sent invitations to some potential participants in Canada and the United States, but they either did not respond or were not available. I also directly approached some former politicians from Hong Kong, but they declined for various reasons, such as availability and being less active in social movement nowadays. Consequently, the research was unable to involve participants in other countries with significant Hong Kong diaspora, including Canada, Australia and the US.

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling limited the variety of opinions obtained in the research. Activists from outside my personal network were hardly be reached. It is possible that the participants shared similar opinions over an issue due to the natural bias for personal networks. Activists from outside my circle, for example, the candidates who participated in the election of the Hong Kong Parliament[7]. The ages of participants were not diverse enough that they were mostly from early 30s to early 40s. The activists who have been participating in overseas political movements before 2019 were not involved in the research.

One observation from the composition of these interviewees is that, as I have been working international advocacy, it is also an important part of their participation in the democracy and diaspora movement. Their advocacy work always involves engagement with officials and decision makers in national or international level. However, as this kind of advocacy is only a part of the movement and is not common for the participants in the

[7] Hong Kong Parliament is a Canadian-based political organisation which self-proclaims as shadow legislature of Hongkongers. The first election of the Hong Kong Parliament took place online in May to June 2025 and 15 candidates from outside Hong Kong were elected. Upon its inauguration in July 2025, the Hong Kong Government issued arrest warrants and bounties for the individuals who arranged and participated in the election.

democracy movement. Many overseas activists focus on community organisation, participation in local politics, supporting protesters who are serving or have completed sentences in Hong Kong, and other activities other than advocacy. Even though one of the interviewees, Matthew, told me that many young street protestors no longer participate in activism after moving abroad, he accidentally showed me the recent activities of street protesters a few months after the interview. Through an online chat group, I met a young activist, Ken, who was discharged from prison in Hong Kong and fled to the UK recently. Matthew was the person who arranged the settlement of Ken in the UK and introduced Ken to me in the chat group. Occasionally, Ken told us that he was a member of another chat group of street activists who served their sentences in last two or three years. Members of this group are mostly still in Hong Kong, while a few have moved overseas like Ken. Ken is now an active member in Matthew's organisation in the UK, and serves as a bridge of information exchange between activities overseas and in Hong Kong. If not for joining that conversation, it is unlikely to learn about the network and operation of street protesters at home and abroad nowadays. This example demonstrates the diversity, and also fragmentation of activism that limit researcher's scope of knowledge.

Nevertheless, selecting participants from my personal network gave me some convenience. The activists who are personally connected to me were more readily to accept my invitations. And as said above, some were more talkative than usual. And since they were eager to share their thoughts and the atmosphere in the interviews was fine, most of the interviews were conducted without breaks. There were breaks only in two interviews because of time constraints. Durations of most interviews were about two hours, while a few last for 2.5 to three hours.

One of the aims of the research was to find out the weighing of nationalism and democracy in the movement. Originally, Question 19 was "how do you define the political movement overseas Hong Kong activists are now engaging in, is it more on democratic or nationalism?". However, in the first four interviews, I found that the interviewees either answered that democracy and nationalism are also equally important, or they defined the movement with their own interpretations of the question and perspectives. The weighing of nationalism and democracy in the movement in their perspective could be found in other parts of the conversations. In addition, some participants would like to comment on the general trend when talking about the direction of the movement. Therefore, since the fifth interview, I changed the question to "How do you define the political movement overseas Hong Kong

activists are now engaging in (democracy movement, national movement and/or others)? Which direction do you think should it develop?".

3.2.4 Data analysis and coding

After completion of data collection by interview, the data was analysed using thematic analysis. Codes were generated in the dataset for developing the themes. Before the actual analysis took place, the data had to be transcribed from audio recordings to texts. Data was recorded as audio files and notes. The total length of all the recordings is about 24 hours. The transcripts of the interviews were converted from audio recordings to texts by Sonix, an online transcription programme using artificial intelligence. Sonix was chosen because it was the best performance programme in transcribing Cantonese. When the transcription was made in the spring 2025, there were limited selections of transcription programmes in Cantonese available. Other services such as ElevenLabs, Notta and Google were tested, and their performance were far below satisfactory. The accuracy of ElevenLabs and Notta was around half, while more than 70% of the content was omitted in Google. Sonix had the best performance among all the tested programmes, though the accuracy was 80% at maximum. The reasons for the low accuracy in transcription were that slurring and the use of English terms are common in Cantonese speakers from Hong Kong. Since most of these programmes only converted one language each time, they identified the English terms in the conversations as Cantonese, which resulted in incorrect transcription. Therefore, after conversion, I had to read through all the texts while listening to the recordings for correcting them.

After the recordings were transcribed, codes were added to the texts. Codes were made depending on the topic of certain paragraphs or sentences. Meanwhile, some comments I made in the notes during the interviews were added to the codes. Several spreadsheets were created to group the content with the same codes of classification. A spreadsheet is created for each theme. The questionnaire was already separated into different parts by topics, which are ethnic identity and overseas democracy movement. Besides, the main themes of the research were already set in the research questions. Therefore, a deductive approach was used in developing codes and themes.

Sub-themes were also already developed when setting the questions. The sub-themes, which were marked as codes in the scripts, were listed on the first rows of every table. The first columns of each table are the names of the interviewees. When filling in the table on different spreadsheets with the content discussed by the interviewees, I could compare the

content of the same topics from the interviewees under each sub-theme. For example, there is a question about the challenges faced by the participants. Several of them referred to geopolitical situation when answering the question. After consolidating the content of the interviews with these table, I could group the content about geopolitical situation into one sub-section in this paper. When developing the themes, I mostly only focused on the literally meanings of the content, which I could rely on for analysis.

4 Findings

The following chapter introduces the findings of the interviews. The content of the interviews was coded and is presented in different themes.

4.1 The informants

The data was collected through interviews. The interviews were conducted from December 2024 to March 2025. Totally 10 interviewees from the UK, continental Europe and Taiwan participated in the research. Four of the interviews were conducted in person in the UK, while remaining six were interviewed through video meetings. Few days before the interviews, they were given the list of questions and participant information sheet (PIS). It is guaranteed in the PIS that their identity will not be disclosed. Although almost all participants responded that it was not necessary for them to be anonymous, they are still addressed with pseudonyms in this paper. The background information of the participants is listed below:

Name	Gender	Country of residence	Year of migration	Profession	Nationalities/ citizenships
Matthew	M	UK	2021	Catering worker, former District Councillor	HKSAR[8], BN(O)[9]
Frank	M	UK	2018	Surveyor	HKSAR, BN(O)
Chris	M	UK	2021	Labour unionist	HKSAR, BN(O)
Beto	M	UK	2021	PhD Student, former District Councillor	HKSAR, BN(O)
Hugh	M	UK	2020	Social worker, immigration advisor	HKSAR, BN(O)
Vivian	F	UK	2020	Assistant to member of parliament	HKSAR
Jenna	F	Norway	2013	Engineer, PhD student	HKSAR, BN(O), Norwegian
Harry	M	Taiwan	2021	Sport therapist, trainer	HKSAR
Lotta	F	The Netherlands	2018	Performance artist, teacher	HKSAR
Tony	M	UK	2021	Youtuber, political commentator	HKSAR, BN(O)

[8] HKSAR refers to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China. The passport Hong Kong citizens hold is distinct from the one of Chinese nationals who do not have the right of abode in Hong Kong.
[9] BN(O) refers to British National (Overseas). Previously, citizens of British Hong Kong were classified as British Dependent Territories Citizen (BDTC) as in all British colonies. In 1987, the UK government created BN(O) specifically for Hong Kong citizens. Those who wished to continue British nationality must register as BN(O) before 1 July 1997. For those who did not register as BN(O) and had no other nationalities, they are entitled as British Overseas Citizens (BOC). For Chinese descents in Hong Kong who did not register as BN(O), pursuant to the Nationality Law of China, they automatically became HKSAR citizens and lost the tie to the UK.

The informants who emigrated from Hong Kong before 2019 did so for studies or work, while all of those who emigrated after 2019 left for political reasons. Matthew was first elected member of District Council in November 2019. He started participation in social movements through the church in 2008. In summer 2021, expected that he would be disqualified by the government, he moved to the UK through BN(O) visa scheme. Upon settling in the UK, he founded a diaspora organisation for the area he resides and is active in advocacy for the wellbeing of the Hongkongers in the UK and the course of human rights in Hong Kong.

Frank is a surveyor who left Hong Kong for work in 2018. He first participated in social movement in 2012 against the introduction of national education as a student. Later, he became a supporter of localist movement and volunteered for a political party Hong Kong Indigenous. While living in the UK in 2019, Frank founded an advocacy organisation to support the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, organised online campaigns and connecting Hongkonger communities worldwide. Nowadays, he is still active in overseas advocacy sphere, organises cultural activities and engages with overseas Hongkonger organisations, governments and advocates around the globe.

Chris is a veteran labour unionist and worked in a labour organisation in Hong Kong. During the mass demonstrations in China in 1989, he organised activities to support the democracy movement as a secondary school student. When studying in university and taking part in student movement, he was exposed to Marxism. After graduation, he started to work in a labour organisation. In 2021, the organisation Chris worked in was disbanded under political pressure. Apart from losing the job, Chris was often inquired by the police after the promulgation of the National Security Law (NSL) in 2020. Under political pressure, he moved to the UK via BN(O) visa scheme. Now Chris is working in a labour organisation which focuses on the labour rights in Hong Kong.

Beto was also first elected member of District Council in 2019. His first exposure to social movement was responding to the call of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese to join the protest against the legislation of Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, or Article 23 of the Basic Law, in 2003. After that, he was very active in the civil society in Hong Kong, and he joined a pan-democratic political party and multiple civil society organisations. During the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in 2019, he was arrested once for organising illegal assembly but was not prosecuted. In July 2021, Beto was informed that he would be prosecuted for the

assembly in 2019. Therefore, he resigned from the office of District Council and fled to the UK for asylum. He was granted refugee status in 2022. Now Beto is a director of an advocacy organisation in the UK and active in engaging with politicians and academia internationally.

Hugh was a social worker in Hong Kong. Similar to Frank, Hugh was enlightened by the anti-national education movement in 2012 as a student and became a member of Hong Kong Indigenous. During the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, he was dedicated in street protests and was arrested. After serving a short sentence for participating in illegal assembly, he was warned that he might be arrested again for alleged violent activities. So, in winter 2020, Hugh sought asylum in the UK and was granted refugee status. While pending for decision for asylum claim, Hugh has already joined an organisation for supporting other protestors who seek asylum in the UK. Hugh obtained a licence of immigration advisor in the UK so to provide professional support to Hong Kong protestors and the diaspora.

Vivian was still a secondary school student when she joined the first rally on the Extradition Bill in the first half of 2019. Like many teenagers at that time, Vivian was an active street protestor. In November 2020, while organising anti-government activities in the university with fellow students, their plan was exposed to the university management and the police. Under the imminent danger of being arrested, she immediately fled to the UK for asylum. Vivian continued her studies in the UK, was granted asylum and now works as an assistant to a member of parliament.

Jenna is an engineer in Norway. After being brought by her family to the anti-Article 23 rally in 2003, she became a persistent supporter of the democracy movement in Hong Kong. Jenna joined the pro-democracy demonstrations on 1 July, the date of sovereign handover, the commemoration of June 4th Massacre every year and other social movements until she headed to Norway for studies in 2013. Before the anti-Extradition Bill demonstration of one million participants in June 2019, Jenna organised some events in Oslo to disseminate the situation of Hong Kong to her colleagues and the Norwegian public. Later that year, she engaged with Norwegian politicians and established an advocacy organisation in Norway, which is still functioning lately.

Harry had been a sport therapist and personal trainer in Hong Kong for years. His first experience in social movement was taking part in the mass protest in 2003, but did not follow social issues closely until the Occupy Movement in 2014. He spent most of the leisure time in the protest sites during the Occupy Movement. Later, like Frank, Harry became a supporter of

localism and a volunteer for Hong Kong Indigenous in 2016. During the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, he often rejected appointments from customers and dedicated himself to the street protests. However, since he was arrested in a protest in July 2019, he did not show up in the street so often after release on bail because of the proceedings of prosecution. Harry was first acquitted, but the prosecutor appealed to the High Court. Later he found that he was under police surveillance and his friends were allegedly harassed by the authority. While pending for hearings, he departed for Taiwan in July 2021. Now Harry is practicing his old professions in Taiwan, while spending most of his leisure time in organising events and engaging with Taiwanese public for the cause of Hong Kong.

Lotta is a performance artist in the Netherlands and used to work as an art teacher in Hong Kong. Like Jenna, Lotta took part in major demonstrations every year in Hong Kong since 2000s, but did not delve into social issues. In 2018, she pursued the dream of working as artist and began to study arts in Czechia. A few days before the demonstration of a million participants on 9 June, she made a debut of performing publicly in Prague for social issue in commemorating the crackdown of 1989 Democracy Movement in China. Soon after that, she connected several artists and art groups in Czechia and other European countries that were vocal in human rights. Motivated by the protests in Hong Kong and encouraged by fellow artists in Europe, Lotta continued public performance to disseminate the situation in Hong Kong and founded an NGO for art and humanitarian cause in Prague in 2021. After getting married in 2023, Lotta moved to the Netherlands with her husband and has been organising activities for art and dialogues between activists, artists, and politicians.

Tony has been a full-time political commentator that operates his YouTube channel since over a decade ago in Hong Kong. When studying politics in university in late 2000s, he started to listen to politics-related programmes on online radio channels. Then he volunteered in some radio channels and a left-progressive political party, the League of Social Democrat (LSD). Around 2013, Tony became a full-time YouTuber. After the outbreak of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, he and his family were harassed by the police because of his stance of supporting the protestors. In 2021, Tony moved to the UK with his family via BN(O) visa scheme. Now he is still operating the YouTube channel and volunteers in some diaspora groups in the UK.

4.2 Ethnic identity of Hongkongers

Ethnic identity of activists is the first topic to study in this research. A set of questions about their identity and ideologies were asked to understand their views on ethnic identity. They were all first asked with the typical question on their own national identity in the surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong (HKUPOP) since 1997, in which they had to choose one choice from Hongkonger, Chinese, Chinese in Hong Kong, Hongkonger in China or others (Chan and Tang, 2019). With no exception, all of them chose Hongkongers. Then they were further asked about the opinions on Chinese or other elements in their ethnic identity. This result is a sharp contrast to the last opinion poll conducted by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (HKPORI), the predecessor of HKUPOP in 2022. Among all the respondents in HKPORI's poll, only 32% address themselves as Hongkongers, which came second behind Hongkonger in China of 34.1% (HKPORI, 2024) (see Appendix 1).

The distance from Chinese identity

Similarly, all of them have negative views on Chinese identity. When being addressed as Chinese by others, almost all of them will immediately clarify that they are Hongkongers. Some would explain the differences between Hongkongers and Chinese in details. They have common reasons for resisting or rejecting Chinese identity, agreeing that the difference in values, or ideology is the major factor. For most of them, universal values, including democracy, freedom, respect for human rights and rule of law are important elements in Hongkonger identity. The lack of freedom, democracy and respect to human rights in Chinese nationalism promoted by the Chinese government, they argue, contradicts the values and identity of Hongkongers. For example, Frank, a surveyor in the UK, claims that his ideology is civic nationalism, and further believes that values are the most determinant factor to shape a person's identity.

Partial acceptance of Chinese identity or acceptance of Hong Kong is a part of Chinese nation did exist in some of these opposition activists. For localist activists like Frank, as well as Hugh and Harry, they felt fine for Hong Kong being a part of communion with China when they were young. But they began to lose faith in the political system between 2003 and 2010. As the hope of universal suffrage diminished and feeling Beijing was undermining Hong Kong's autonomy and freedom while China was still an authoritarian regime, the idea of totally break free from the Chinese nationhood emerged.

For these localists, the attachment to Chinese identity of some Hongkongers is incomprehensible. Vivian, a young activist who is now working as an assistant to a member of parliament in the UK, has a unique view on relationship between Hong Kong and China because of her family background. Her family has the heritage of Chinese Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT) that her grandparents held prominent positions in. Therefore, she was exposed to the knowledge about contemporary Chinese politics since childhood. She argues that Chinese politics is far removed from ordinary Hongkongers and much more complicated than they think. For the wish of democratisation in China, she thinks it a fantasy. Therefore, as she believes that it is not possible for Hongkongers to change Chinese polity, instead they should focus on Hong Kong's interests first. As China's affairs are outside her scope of change, she did not attend any events to commemorate June 4th massacre in Hong Kong. She could not develop any attachment to China because of her profound understanding of political difference between Hong Kong and China.

Apart from ideology, other factors such as social issues and personal impression also affect the acceptance of Chinese elements in identity. Hugh, a localist social worker born in early 90s, has negative feeling towards China since childhood. His impression of poor public safety in China deterred him from being proud of Chinese. Every time when travelling to Mainland with the family as a kid in 1990s, Hugh feared he would be kidnapped by human traffickers.

Even though all address their negative perception of Chinese identity, a few of them accept that they are ethnic Chinese as their ancestors were Chinese, or accept Chinese as their official nationality since they still hold HKSAR passport.

Alternatives to Hongkonger identity and nationalism

As all interviewees have lived in their host countries for at least three years and some have more than one nationality, I was interested in learning about the effect of the life abroad on their national identity. Most of them admit that their host countries have become a part of their national identity. For example, for those who live in the UK, they accept or at least do not deny that they are British in some extent. A few of them feel that the changes in lifestyle make their Hongkonger identity weaker than local identity. Vivian, who was born after the handover in 1997, feels Britishness is stronger than Hongkonger identity after living in the UK for a few years. Her sense of Britishness has developed since studying immigration law in the UK. After understanding the origin of the BN(O), she began to accept British heritage in

her identity. Now she has more British friends than Hongkonger friends. And because of the nature of her occupation, she engages with more native Britons than Hongkongers. The studies, social circle and work contribute to her British identity.

For those who have lived abroad longer, their local identities are more certain. Jenna, an engineer who started studying in Norway in 2013, has gradually believed that she has become Norwegian:

> "I am now studying in a PhD programme, so I meet many people of other nationalities who are also studying PhD here. We have lunch together, maybe there are some Norwegians sitting together with us, but not a lot, really very few. Real native Norwegians are a minority. Sometimes they (foreigners) talk about something, some questions about Norway, they ask native Norwegians. Then I think actually I am also Norwegian, on the paper. I feel, probably because I have already lived in Norway for a long time, and also obtained Norwegian citizenship, so I am indeed a Norwegian. Um.. but when I am among native Norwegians, I feel myself have a stronger identity as Hongkonger."

The case of Jenna indicates the flexibility and relativity of national identity. Citizenship, official documents and adaptation in the environment are important elements in building national identity. A few participants who have BN(O) passport admit that they accept British as part of their identities due to the possession of this document. The influence of these elements is also shown in Harry's case. A sport therapist and trainer now residing in Taiwan, Harry is the only exception of resisting a new local identity. He has followed the localist discourse of self-determination and even independence after the Occupy Movement in 2014. After he was arrested in a protest in 2019 and his case was pending for appeal in High Court, he fled to Taiwan in 2021. Since he never has a BN(O) passport and Taiwan is geographically proximate to Hong Kong, he chose Taiwan instead of the UK for protection. Because of the strong commitment to maintain Hongkonger identity, Harry refuses to apply for identity card in Taiwan. He thinks that his Hongkonger identity will be affected once he obtains the ID card. In his opinion, he is obliged to fully integrate in the Taiwanese society if he has a Taiwanese ID card, but it will contradict to his Hongkonger identity.

When asked about whether a new national identity has been developed, Lotta answers that she regards herself a Czech artist. Having studied and taught arts in Hong Kong, she found that there was not enough space for her to work as an artist there. After beginning her

studies in Czechia, she found the space to ideate what she wanted to create. Her artist identity was cultivated in Czechia instead of Hong Kong. Later, she moved to the Netherlands after getting married. Now she is learning Dutch and plans to become a Dutch citizen. She also feels physically European. She had suffered from allergic rhinitis since childhood in Hong Kong. After moving to Europe, the allergies vanished. She thinks that her body would prefer life in Europe.

Nonetheless, some informants disagree that nationality or nationalism is important to identity. Beto, a former member of District Council in Hong Kong and now a PhD student in the UK, chooses other identities when introducing himself to others. As a libertarian, Beto asserts that nationality is a label forcibly imposed on people on birth. Since he has lived in Yorkshire and Essex in England and enjoys the life there, he usually claims his origin is Yorkshire or Essex, depending on the occasions. In addition, he explains that he uses such introduction of origin because it is not polite for strangers to ask about one's ethnicity and nationality in the UK for racism concern.

Another interviewee, Chris, totally rejects nationalism. As a labour movement leader, he follows the Marxist idea of denying nationalism. Chinese nationalist narrative attracted him to participate in China's democracy movement in 1989. However, the subsequent experience in labour movement inspired him to think critically about nationalism from a leftist perspective. Chris's idea on identity is that it is not fixed, and there is a process to shape identity. The process of popular movement constructs a person's identity. Self-perception is also affected by others. It is difficult to set authoritative criteria to define one's national identity. Chris quotes Ramsey's argument (2023) that there is a competition of interpretations of identities. There could be a hegemony of cultural logic that the ruling class makes use of its power to disseminate an ideology that favours itself. Chris asserts that nationalism is a trap created by the regime to consolidate its power through manipulation in the nation. The Chinese Dream proposed by Xi Jinping is that trap and therefore we should be aware of the danger of nationalism in the democracy movement. Chris is concerned about the localist discourse in the movement:

> "I dare not say all, of course, a certain faction of localists is... it, if advocates a kind of xenophobic value, a value that Hong Kong people as the absolute priority, then somehow have fallen into the trap of another kind of nationalism. That is, when you oppose the nationalist discourse constructed by the dictatorship, you construct another

> kind of nationalist discourse, and this discourse, to some extent, you are advocating xenophobia that Hong Kong people are priority; or even what is sacrificed to achieve Hong Kong people as a priority, is the value of equality and freedom you pursue, then actually that is contradictory."

Elements of Hongkonger identity

When being asked about the elements in Hongkonger identity, or essential characteristics of a Hongkonger, there are similarities and differences among the informants. All of them agree that culture and experience are the part of the elements. Most of them accept that the use of Cantonese, practice of Hong Kong's lifestyle, and attachment are the required elements to be a Hongkonger. Other factors such as place of birth and nationality are considered elements of Hongkonger identity, but not essential. Meanwhile, none of them consider race is an element. When talking about immigrants in Hong Kong, some of them think that if the immigrants are willing to learn Cantonese, care about Hong Kong, contribute to the society and have the willingness to admit themselves are Hongkongers, then they are Hongkongers. As a proud indigenous inhabitant in the New Territories[10], Frank does not reject migrants of any origins to settle in Hong Kong. He even criticises xenophobic behaviours of some localists, such as calling Chinese immigrants and tourists as "locust". Lotta observed the changes in identity of immigrant students when teaching in secondary school in Hong Kong. The children from Mainland usually regarded themselves as patriotic Chinese when they began to living in Hong Kong. Some of them had prejudice towards Hongkongers and insisted on speaking Mandarin at school at the beginning. But interestingly, most of them became active protestors in 2019. After having received education in Hong Kong for a few years, they discovered that they loved Hong Kong. The origin of the love is their recognition of the value of Hong Kong. They recognised the rule of law and social mobility in Hong Kong and felt the need to protect them. Lotta thinks that identity is not fixed but changes along with time, experience and education. In her opinion, there is no clear boundary to define Hongkongers. Meanwhile, she recognises that the mindset of equal

[10] The New Territories comprises of the suburban and rural areas of Hong Kong that was leased to Britain in 1898. When taking over the New Territories, the colonial government granted special rights to the inhabitants in the area who settled before British annexation. These inhabitants and their descendants are defined as "indigenous inhabitants" by law. After the handover in 1997, part of the special rights, particularly about land use, are still valid and protected by law.

opportunity, rule of law, critical thinking and multiculturalism are the characteristics of Hongkongers.

Some of them think that ideology or universal values are essential elements in Hongkonger identity. Those who hold such thought, like Frank, consider universal values are the primary element in Hongkonger identity and regard those who oppose universal value are not Hongkongers. Jenna describes those who disagree with universal values as "new Hongkongers." In her opinion, Hongkongers enjoyed freedom in the past and agree that it is part of our values. Nowadays as freedom and human rights are being eroded, Hong Kong is approaching a new era. For those who accept the lack of freedom in Hong Kong, they uphold a new version of Hong Kong values, and therefore they are a new kind of Hongkongers.

There are different views about values in identity. While even not regarding language and universal values as essential or shared elements in identity, Beto argues that the common value of Hongkongers is attenuated utilitarian familism, while utilitarianism is dominant. He explains that utilitarian familism has been on attenuation because recent changes in population structure lead to the decline of familism. In 1980s migration required efforts of entire family, even extended family, in which tasks of making a living and taking care of children are divided to all family members. Nowadays efforts of the entire family are not required for migration. The feature of utilitarianism is indicated in the cultural activities hosted by Hongkonger organisations in the UK. Beto observes that these cultural activities are organised on the basis of profit making. If sponsorship from the first sector is not available, these activities may not be financially sustainable since ordinary Hongkongers are not willing to pay for such missionary activities. Beto concludes that utilitarianism is Hongkongers' "operating system."

Lotta has similar thoughts about the utilitarian characteristics of some Hongkongers. She acknowledges that there are lots of native Hongkongers who support the government. The core value of this group of people, she thinks, is benefit. They are loyal to whoever offers benefits to them. One example is the civil servants like former Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who served the Britons as her boss during the colonial period and became loyal to Beijing after the handover. Another example is some Hongkongers in Europe, which also is observed by Jenna. Lotta and Jenna spot that certain Hongkongers in Europe are blue-ribbons. [11]

[11] In September 2014, for the demand of universal suffrage, some pro-democracy activists and academia launched a civil disobedience movement "Occupy Central". The participants in this movement used yellow

However, when they find that their organisations have a great diaspora network, those blue-ribbons declare that they are yellow-ribbons to join their events and socialise with other Hongkongers. When there are interests for them, or even one day Hong Kong becomes democratic, this group of people will identify themselves as yellow-ribbons, Lotta asserts.

4.3 Define "liberate Hong Kong"

"Liberate Hong Kong" in the democracy movement

The slogan and the idea of "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" (光復香港，時代革命) is another important theme in the research. All the informants have been using this slogan, at least since 2019. For advocates of independence like Frank and Harry, they started using it since 2016. Both volunteered for Edward Leung and Hong Kong Indigenous in the Legislative Council by-election in February 2016, where they started to use the slogan. They think that the slogan conveys the idea of preserving the value of Hong Kong and fight for democracy, and thence they have attachment to the slogan and are glad to use it ever since. However, for another localist supporter, Hugh, the meaning of the slogan is slightly different. Hugh also volunteered for Edward Leung and Hong Kong Indigenous in 2016 but then he rarely used it in the 2019 demonstrations because it recalled the painful memory of political suppression since 2016. The disqualification of candidacies of Edward Leung and other candidates in the Legislative Council election in September 2016 was a heavy setback for the localist movement, and the political charges for the clash in February 2016 led to the sacrifice and loss of freedom of his fellows. Only after arriving in the UK, Hugh began to use this slogan again. He observed that no other slogans could draw the response from Hongkongers like "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" in political activities in the UK.

Ambiguity of definition and variations of "liberate Hong Kong"

All the informants agree that since the slogan is banned in Hong Kong, it represents the spirit of resistance and is effective in uniting overseas Hongkongers. For these activists, the slogan carries the memory of resistance in 2019 and the hope of better Hong Kong. On the other hand, most of them notice that the interpretation of "liberate Hong Kong" are different

---

ribbons as their symbol. Then the pro-government organisations which opposed this movement used blue ribbons for a counter campaign. Since then, the term "yellow-ribbons" has been used to describe supporters of pan-democracy camp or anti-government activists, while "blue-ribbons" refers to government supporters.

in everyone's mind. Some of them did not think deeply about its connotation, which will be discussed in the later part. Matthew, a former member of District Council in Hong Kong now working in catering industry in the UK, finds that people use the slogan like repeating prayers in the church. In Matthew's experience, the slogan was very helpful to publicise himself during the election campaign in 2019, but neither himself nor his supporters truly understood its connotation. Nonetheless, Matthew thinks the ambiguity of the slogan facilitates its use by people with different ideas. As the background of the slogan is well known among Hongkongers, Matthew thinks it is also useful to identify like-minded compatriots abroad, and use of the slogan demonstrates Hongkonger identity of the users.

Another former member of District Council, Beto, is still using the slogan but for other purposes. Apart from using it in overseas demonstrations, Beto uses the slogan to make fun of other people who use it because they do not understand the definition of the slogan, or it is ill-defined. The second reason for him to make fun of it is that he thinks many activists and supporter of the democracy movement talk a lot but do not take actual action. Thirdly, he believes that, ironically, if the leaders of the democracy movement take charge of Hong Kong after liberation, the social structure and system would further collapse.

Besides, although Beto agrees the effectiveness of uniting diaspora, there are other problems about the slogan. It is less used now in the diaspora community because demonstrations have become less frequent. Secondly, it is not in English that the locals cannot understand. Thirdly, even if there are English versions, we must discuss which version is preferable. Other interviewees also report the variation of the use of the slogan. The organisation Jenna joins in Norway adopted the English version of "free Hong Kong" because it sounds softer and more universal. It resembles "free Tibet", "free Uyghurs" and "free China" by activists of other ethnicities. Vivian finds that when engaging with foreign politicians, it is easier for her to explain her work with the term "democracy movement", rather than "free Hong Kong."

The making of "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times"

Beto's scepticism on "liberate Hong Kong" is partly based on its background story as he has understood it. Beto is also a localist and he advocated independence in Hong Kong for almost a decade. Therefore, he engaged with many localist activists and heard of the story of origin of the slogan. The whole slogan is "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times", which was created for Edward Leung's election campaign in February 2016. The campaign

team came up with the idea of “liberate Hong Kong,” which sounded an expanded version of “liberate Sheung Shui” or “liberate Tuen Mun”, the campaigns against Chinese tourists, parallel traders and smugglers. As they were thinking about the second half of the slogan, the aide of Edward Leung, Baggio Leung, who was later elected member of Legislative Council in September 2016, casually added “revolution of our times.” Therefore, “revolution of our times” did not mean anything originally. Coincidentally, this slogan became viral after the clash between civilians and the police in Mongkok on the Lunar New Year in 2016. This is the version that Beto does not accept. Beto could not agree with the rhetorics of the campaigns against Chinese tourists and parallel traders and thinks the first half and the second half or the slogan sounded contradictory to each other.

Frank and Chris also noticed the contradiction of the meaning in the slogan. They perceive that “liberate” refers to return to the glorious time in the past, while “revolution of our times” deems breaking off with the past. As a veteran localist, Frank has interpretation of each part of the slogan. In the original Chinese version, “our” does not exist. Therefore, Frank explains only “liberate”, “Hong Kong”, “time” and “revolution.” “Liberate” is to reclaim homeland from authoritarian regime like Baltic states and Poland in Cold War. “Hong Kong” means both the people and the place. Frank disagrees with the concept some fellow activists quote from the Marvel films, “where are the people, where is Asgard”, which means the Hong Kong nation can continue solely with the people and without the place. He thinks that people from around the world come to Hong Kong since the beginning of British rule to contribute to the prosperity of the city, therefore they are the essential part of Hong Kong. However, we do not have a shared religion like Tibetans and Uyghurs. If we lose the city, Frank argues, then we will lose the anchor and connection of the citizens. The Chinese version of “time” is 時代, which is often translated to “era” in English. Frank explains that the connotation of “time” or “era” was initially associated to a popular Japanese anime *Digimon Adventure*. The protagonists in *Digimon Adventure* are always described as “the kids chosen by the era” in the story. When the slogan began to be used by young localist activists, many of whom used to watch *Digimon Adventure* as kids in late 1990s and early 2000s, they often quoted the anime to describe themselves as the youngsters “chosen by the era,” which sounds a bit naïve for Frank. However, Frank suggests that it was not the “era” chose these youngsters to change the society; instead, it was the people of different generations choose to change the future together in this era. “Revolution”, rather than simply destructing the system, Frank thinks that it emphasises the construction of a new democratic system. If the activists only topple the

current regime while keeping authoritarian rule, the movement cannot be regarded as revolution.

Imaginations of the "liberated Hong Kong"

For young activists like Vivian, "liberate Hong Kong" is her ultimate goal as a Hongkonger and of the democracy movement. However, considering the ambiguity of the slogan and the diverse ideologies among the activists, I came up with some questions: what specific goals we wish to achieve? What should the status of Hong Kong be when it is declared liberated? These are the core questions of the democracy movement and this research.

As expected, answers from the interviewees are diverse. And again, a few of them have never considered these questions profoundly before the interviews. The common understanding of "liberate" or "free" by these activists is that it refers to return to a better state in the past. For a better state, almost all of them agree that there was a certain period when One Country Two System (OCTS) and Basic Law were honoured, and freedom and human rights of Hongkongers were respected, at least nominally. Even though universal suffrage has never existed in Hong Kong, they are satisfied if universal suffrage is on the political agenda. The answers of which period or before which point of time was satisfactory enough vary. They include before the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in 2019, before the Occupy Movement in 2014, the period of Tung Chee-hwa administration from 1997 to 2005, before the first attempt of the legislation of Safeguarding National Security Ordinance in 2003 and before the handover in 1997.

Chris is the exception from all others that he never treats this slogan as the goal of the democracy movement. He guesses that the slogan means Hong Kong could return to the glorious time as British colony before 1997. But he could not find any point of time Hong Kong was glorious. Chris thinks that Hong Kong was repressed by the colonial government. Even when we enjoyed a large extent of freedom, there was no democracy. If the slogan suggests that Hong Kong returns to the state where Beijing had not widely intervened Hong Kong's affairs, say before Moral and National Education was introduced, it was still not an ideal state. Because without democracy and autonomy from China, the impartiality of the judiciary, rule of law and press freedom were never guaranteed. The absence of democracy and autonomy in history is why we are facing the current situation, he notes. Besides, Chris does not think there is an end goal, or a "liberated" state to pursue in the society because

democracy can decay. He suggests that a vibrant civil society with active participation by citizens is necessary to monitor the authority all the time. He takes the coup d'etat in South Korea in December 2024 as an example. A democratically elected president abused power and issued a martial law without public consent, endangered the democracy that Koreans fought for decades. Therefore, Chris concludes, democracy is not an end, but a system requires attention and maintenance by the people.

All these activists are therefore pushing for regime change. Then, I wonder, what the status of the polity of Hong Kong, especially the relation to China, should be to reclaim freedom and autonomy? This is another question that I asked the interviewees. Because of the distrust on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime, they suggest that it is not likely that Hong Kong is granted freedom and autonomy again under the CCP. Therefore, logically, independence is the answer of the majority. Those who have been localists before the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement are particularly keen to seek independence. Hugh was one of the localists who advocates this, but it was not the only solution for him for the future of Hong Kong. While admitting the difficulty of independence, he argues that democracy under the rule of Beijing is identically unlikely. For Hugh, democracy under OCTS is still a desirable option, if possible; but now since OCTS deems infeasible, independence is the only alternative.

> "Whether we can return to OCTS, it's a matter of timeline. In the past, I believed that there would be democracy in Hong Kong under OCTS. But after the suppression by the CCP for years, at this point of the timeline, I no longer believe that OCTS works. We just can't go back to that point. If now the CCP grants us democracy, and honours Hongkongers' autonomy, I'd shut up. But I don't think it's possible."

For the similar feasibilities of retaining OCTS and fighting for independence, Hugh justifies his independence discourse:

> "For me, returning to one country two systems and fighting for independence are both tough. But why don't we work harder at the beginning, so in the long run, to get rid of the constraints and gain real autonomy?"

Lotta is unique among these activists that she is the only one who was not very interested in politics when living in Hong Kong. While supporting democracy, she was hesitant to the idea of independence that it probably attributes to Beijing's effort to demonise

it. After the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, she reflected on why Hongkongers were defined as a part of the Chinese nationhood. As she noticed the obvious distinction in ideology and thinking pattern between Hongkongers and Chinese, she disagrees that the two communities are the same nation and has had a stronger attachment to Hong Kong. Therefore, she thinks that Hongkongers deserve the right to self-determination. The process of self-determination is the most important for her. She would accept the results of the referendum even if the majority of Hongkongers choose to return to China.

While Frank says that he has not perceived disagreement in Hong Kong independence among the overseas activists he has met, some of the informants, despite strong Hongkonger identity, do not view independence is the only path, or even have negative views on independence for its plausibility. As supporters of moderate democrats in Hong Kong, Matthew and Jenna have never advocated independence, while not ruling out the possibility. Both question the plausibility of independence. Another long-term supporter of the democratic camp, Tony, a political commentator who operates his own YouTube channel, has strong scepticism on the idea of independence. While agreeing that independence is ideal, he still holds the opinion since the last decade that the explicit advocacy of independence by localists draw stronger suppression from Beijing. The reason for CY Leung, former Chief Executive to criticise *Hong Kong Nationalism*, a publication by the Hong Kong University's Student Union was that he wanted to incite conflicts. These conflicts gave Beijing the legitimacy to further intervene Hong Kong's affairs. International geopolitics, Tony asserts, from a realist perspective, is the most significant factor in whether Hong Kong will be independent. He believes that the possibility of independence depends on the level of external sovereignty Hongkongers gain. Support from Western countries is crucial for Hong Kong independence, but such support is unlikely:

> "If Hong Kong wishes to be an independent country, is there support at the international level? The main source of sympathy to Hong Kong is Western countries. For them is it attractive? Any advantages? Any use? They prefer Hong Kong, as a part of China, to influence China, or even instigate colour revolutions, right? It means to make Mainland also has the same change, rather than you physically, independent, as a country. In such a place of Hong Kong, there are games, so to say, international games, of two parties. China wants to influence Hong Kong, annex Hong Kong, make it totally a part of China. But for Western countries, they wish Hong Kong as a part of China, influences China as much as possible… that's why I say if you want

independence, a democratic Hong Kong, first you are difficult to survive; second, for the international society, it's not attractive. The world is realistic. It depends on how you leverage. What effect do you make, for what purpose? What's your strategic function? Why is Hong Kong always internationalised? It's the game between China and the West, a site for the game. As an independent Hong Kong, does it have a role? It's never a role. It's a place for mutual use, which is a platform."

4.4 Opinions on the overseas democracy movement and challenges

4.4.1 Direction of the Overseas Democracy Movement

As active members in the democracy movement, the opinions on the movement of the participants of this research are important in evaluating and formulating the direction and strategies of the movement. Therefore, I asked several questions about their opinions on the overseas democracy movement and the diaspora community. When being asked the question "how do you define the political movement overseas Hong Kong activists are now engaging in (democracy movement, national movement and/or others)? Which direction do you think should it develop?" Some of the participants did not give answers about whether democracy or nationalism is weighed more in the movement at the first place. While for those who answered this question, they all agreed that democracy is more important as a goal of the movement, while the localists replied that construction of national identity is a secondary goal.

After the fifth interview, I realised that based on other parts of their testimonies, I could determine whether democracy or nationalism is a stronger element in the movement for the informants. Also, some of them focused more on the outcomes and prospect of the movement, for example, how they think about the outcomes of campaigns organised by other activists. Therefore, when I asked this question later from the sixth interview onward, I altered the wordings of the first half so the boundary of their opinions on the movement is lifted. The question became "how do you define the political movement overseas Hong Kong activists are now engaging in (e.g. is it more democratic or nationalist, or the direction of our work, etc.)?" Apart from ideological aspect, most of the comments on the direction of the movement were "unclear." Similar to the definition of "liberate Hong Kong", they found that the movement lacks common goals, overarching strategies and a vision to Hong Kong's future. All these activists have participated in meetings to discuss the future of the movement.

Particularly in the UK, many of them attended several symposiums and UK-Hong Kong Summits organised by Hongkonger advocacy groups. A few of them complain that even though they have participated several conferences of this kind and there is more space for discussions abroad, not any specific common goals were agreed upon. They envisage that without an overarching goal, the movement will not make significant progress in the next few years. Some think the impacts of activities we have been conducting are not satisfactory. Frank acknowledges that although the movement has developed lots of tactics in the last few years, there are not consistent objectives. Many attributes this problem to the status of the community of overseas activities, the cleavage among activities which has existed for years. While they describe the status of fellow activists with the phrase "each act in their own ways," Beto adds "an army in disarray" before it.

Matthew observes that many overseas politicians and activists did not gain much experience in social movement when living in Hong Kong. When taking part in political discussions, Matthew says, they have not thought clearly beforehand. They are not on the same page during the discussions and therefore consensus can hardly be reached. In the last few years, groups in the UK have spent lots of resources on campaigns but the outcomes are not satisfactory. These groups make a lot of statements and organise numerous demonstrations, but most fail to change the course of politics in the UK. Matthew says he has not seen anyone who have strong determination to unite Hongkongers around the world in the movement. And therefore, he asserts, the movement is in a withering direction.

Beto shares similar opinions as Matthew. Beto attributes the loss of direction in the movement to the sources of resources and agenda setting. He argues that most advocacy organisations work under the agenda of Western politicians and donors, instead of the interests of people who suffer in Hong Kong. The lack of consensus of direction among these organisations is the result of the inability to set their own agenda. They are competing for financial resources since subsidies from Western governments are diminishing. As they follow the agenda set by others, the issues that these organisations focus on cannot serve the interests of Hongkongers. For example, many organisations engage with MPs for collecting contributions to the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF), a retirement fund for the working population in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government denies emigrants under the BN(O) Visa Scheme from withdrawing the fund because they are not granted permanent residence in the UK yet. However, they will become permanent residents in the UK five years after arrival. As they will be able to withdraw sooner or later, the campaign for immediate withdrawal does

not help much. Furthermore, these organisations try to replicate what has been done in the US but do not consider the details. The campaign of demand for shutting down the overseas Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices (HKETOs) was successful in the US because it matched Washington's foreign policy. But this hostile attitude towards Beijing or Hong Kong does not exist in other governments.

Some interviewees understand the difficulties in formulating a strategy. Chris thinks it is difficult to replicate previous strategies and knowledge in the current situation. While new strategies are needed, it must go through lots of trials and errors. Tony also agrees that movement has lost its direction, and it is ideal to have a clear plan for the movement. But he thinks the future is too unpredictable and hence it is unlikely to formulate and implement a clear plan. "If anyone can come up with such a plan, he would be the founding father of the nation," Tony added.

Indeed, since a clear direction is absent, most of them express the desire of clear goals and plans. Some wish a clear goal and timetable for better outputs, while it is necessary for the activists around the world to act in concert. Jenna hopes that the transnational campaigns are more organised with more consistent messages so to make lobbying more effective. Some informants hope that there will be a centralised platform for cooperation. They even suggest that forming armed force is a right and necessary fight against the CCP, though acknowledging the risk of stronger crackdown. Apart from a centralised institution for advocacy, possible a government-in-exile, they suggests young Hongkongers overseas should be provided with military training. As they all agree that any material changes of political status in Hong Kong will not take place soon, they all mention preparation for future opportunities, which will be discussed in detailed later. Some find activist community experienced an exhaustive period in the last few years, and therefore feel that a break and focus on personal needs are necessary. Many of them think the needs and rights of diaspora should be a major concern in the movement now. As an assistant to a member of parliament, Vivian recommends that we should work on local social issues, not necessarily very political. Matthew advocates the rights of Hongkongers in the UK, for which he has already several campaigns. Hugh and Harry, who have connections with numerous protestors who sought refuge abroad, wish that these fellows are not forgotten and are taken good care of.

There are few positive sides in the movement, as some of the interviewees present. Compared to the level of participation in civil society in Hong Kong, Matthew finds that

diaspora in the UK is more active. In some of the campaigns that take place in the UK, Matthew observes that the enthusiasm of Hongkongers in participation in demonstrations and signing petitions is enormous. Despite unsatisfactory outcomes, he thinks the current trend of influencing local politics for the interests of Hongkongers is right. Frank and Jenna are slightly optimistic about the current situation because of the bloom of diaspora organisations worldwide and how their actions are responded by the international society. Lotta recognises the success in disseminating to the international society what Hong Kong is, not to confuse Hong Kong with China or other nations. She also appreciates that Hongkongers in different locations and fields are doing all kinds of work, research, culture, advocacy, participation in local politics and discussions.

4.4.2 Transnational platform and collaboration

As I have participated in the democracy movement for almost two decades, I have heard of multiple discussions on whether establishing a collectivised or centralised platform for strengthening the power of the democracy movement over years. Whilst the democracy movement has dispersed along with emigration, the idea of establishment of government-in-exile in Tibetan or Uyghur styles has joined the discussions. As at the date of publication of this paper, a self-proclaimed shadow legislature of Hongkongers, the Hong Kong Parliament, has already been in operation for a few months. While the Hong Kong Parliament was in making when this research was conducted, I sought the opinions on the centralised platforms of this kind in the overseas democracy movement from the interviewees.

For the establishment of government-in-exile, the participants had diverse responses. Hugh and Jenna are open to this idea and think that a government-in-exile would be good for international lobbying. Frank suggests that if such a government-in-exile to be established, the approach of World Uyghur Congress (WUC) would be more preferrable than the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). Frank explains that a more loosen alliance for facilitation of collaboration of diasporic organisations and international advocacy as WUC does is more applicable than administering the Tibetan diaspora by CTA for Hongkongers. Harry is also open to this idea, but emphasised “high standard” once in execution. Harry explains that strong mandate is essential for overseas Hongkongers when establishing a government-in-exile because it is difficult for the diaspora to get involved in the affairs inside Hong Kong. He is concerned that a government-in-exile would be monopolised by a few elites, and therefore extensive participation by diasporic population is essential to maintain high

transparency, fairness and inclusiveness. Nevertheless, Beto and Tony oppose this idea for the lack of resources and absence of common faith among Hongkongers.

During the interviews, even though I only used the examples of Tibetans and Uyghurs in the questions, some informants mentioned the Hong Kong Parliament in their responses. Those all who mentioned the Hong Kong Parliament have negative view to it. They all question the mandate and necessity of this "shadow legislature." Lotta criticises that the decision of formation lacks representativeness and consensus among diaspora, opinions other than the organisers were not included and the goals were not clear, and therefore its formation is premature. Chris and Tony doubt the logic of the organisers and necessity of the Hong Kong Parliament. They question that if it is established with the logic of a government, the actual power and function of a government and territory and population for governance are all absent. They think it is a waste of time to organise an authority that lacks public recognition and representativeness. Tony comments that if the purpose of the Hong Kong Parliament is to voice for Hongkongers, the existing platforms, such as diaspora organisations and media channels, are already sufficient.

Even not for government-in-exile, the interviewees can hardly reach a consensus on the formation any kind of centralised platforms. For those who oppose centralised collaboration, flexibility for local groups is the priority. They prefer issue-based collaboration between groups rather than establishing a permanent organisation or mechanism across borders. Vivian acknowledges the necessity of unity and coordination in the movement, but she holds that the decision of participation in coordination should depend on willingness and interests of individual groups. While she describes that social movement is "organic" that interactions between players occur freely when needed as other activities in society, she suggests that a centralised institution is not suitable for the movement. Vivian is also worried about queries among activists when discussing the development of a permanent mechanism. Beto is more concerned about the lack of funds for the operation of a centralised platform. Having participated in symposiums and UK-Hong Kong Summits in the last few years, he found that organisations in different countries still work on their own and there is not a public fund raised to support our activities across the globe. Chris raises the question about leadership in the movement. As centralised organisations have been abandoned since the Occupy Movement, he recommends continuous reflection and evaluation of organisers for preventing the replication of previous mistakes. Another reason for Chris to oppose centralised organisations is the infiltration by the state apparatus. He is alerted of the risk of

being collectively eliminated as happened to many organisations in Hong Kong after the stipulation of the NSL in 2020.

Some are open to a centralised platform while not actively advocating it. Matthew says he never opposes such idea, and he is one of the most active former District Councillors in collaborating with his diasporic colleagues worldwide. He sees the opaque agenda setting and positioning in previous discussions are the challenges of establishing a centralised platform. Matthew observes that communication between participants and organisations in the "be water" model movement in 2019 was effective but it no longer works nowadays. He also comments that the lack of leadership in coordinating different parties results the difficulties in resolving conflicts, finding direction and overcoming powerlessness. Though very sceptical to the Hong Kong Parliament, Lotta still hopes that a safe transnational platform could help leading a direction for the movement, which is the most crucial role of this platform. She argues that we should not deny a transnational platform only because of past controversies and a collective platform should not be a taboo.

Those who advocate for a transnational platform have some concerns as well. Frank and Hugh, who used to object to the "main stage" in the Occupy Movement and now expecting a platform for coordinating Hong Kong activists across the globe, are aware of the centralisation of power. In Frank's conception, a transnational alliance, once being formed, should be a bottom-up formation by different organisations across the world, rather than being led by a few elites. Hugh has similar thoughts and suggests that diversity is essential in the platform.

Even with divided opinions on the formation of a centralised and transnational platform, the interviewees mostly agree that no matter such platform will be available or not, the existing groups should continue to work on different fronts and their specialties. A few of them mention that former District Councillor elected in 2019 are the most suitable for having a leading role in coordinating the overseas democracy movement as they were the last democratically elected representatives. Some also mention that the Public Opinion Research Project for Domestic and Overseas Hongkongers led by an exile scholar Chung Kim Wah is helpful in collecting opinions of Hongkongers and will contribute to the set up of a transnational platform.

4.4.3 Challenges in Overseas Democracy Movement

For achieving any goals in the movement, big as international advocacy or small as connecting diaspora in local communities, there are challenges to overcome. Answers regarding the question of challenges in the democracy movement are abundant and diverse.

Division and practices among activists

The weaknesses in activists are inevitable challenges in social movements. Lotta is a new activist compared other participants. She learnt a lesson from establishing her first NGO in Prague. Due to the lack of experience, Lotta found herself too committed in the first year in her art and community group founded in 2021, which resulted in running out of money and burnout. And as other participants, she finds the division among activists annoying. She realises that the previous conflicts between various groups in Hong Kong re-emerge overseas. Lotta feels angry with the dishonesty and suspicion between each other, and doubts that the unity in 2019 was temporary.

As Beto describes chasm between ideologies is certain that they will not and cannot be integrated. This phenomenon can be seen from Chris and Harry, who have strong faith in their political ideals. They are not afraid to confront with others who express political views that they disagree with. For Chris, it is necessary to refute the opinions that he perceives as wrong, even from the counterparts in the same camp. In Matthew's opinion, the division and discrepancy on political discourses in the past Lotta mentions were often driven by elections and involved personal grievance. It was a common tactic in the Legislative Council elections in SAR era before the electoral system changed in 2021. Matthew explains that under the proportional representation system, candidates always had to distinguish themselves from all other competitors. There were always new political discourses in every election. But those discourses did not necessarily have big discrepancies from each other. The competition within the same camp ended up division between groups. He comments that some activists and supporters of politicians take the division in political discourse too serious and personal, and it is a culture that could not be erased by moving abroad.

Frank has similar thoughts as Matthew that he attributes the current division partly to the lack of resources. As the global economy is weak, it is difficult for organisations to raise fund from the public. He also thinks that since many Hongkongers in the UK are struggling with livelihood hardship, the operation of diaspora organisations is a means for some to

maintain livelihood. For those who organise activities for personal interests, they would think that other organisations are working for the same purpose and therefore regard others as rivals in competing resources. Besides, since personal interests is the priority, Frank thinks that it is the reason the social impacts of activities are low. He is discontent with the suspicion and jealousy among activists and diaspora.

Tony propounds that interpersonal issues are inevitable and tricky in social movements. He explains that in not-for-profit activities, interpersonal problems and queries can be worse than at workplaces. Since participants in social movements are mostly volunteers, they often think that they contribute selflessly, and so they are always right. When people are too persistent in their own opinions, division emerges. Therefore, Tony suggests, we should be open and respect each other, not be hostile for the differences in political courses.

Hugh raises a concern about the integrity of fellow activists. He wishes that bad practice in the overseas Chinese activists will not occur in Hongkonger's movement. Hugh finds the actions of some Chinese activists are ceremonial without actual outcomes. He is also aware of cases where some Chinese paid overseas activists to falsify proof to apply for refugee status. Though there are not yet serious scandals among Hongkonger activists exposed or confirmed, he is afraid that this will happen one day and damage the movement.

Regarding the divisions within activists, some of the interviewees emphasise the importance of communication, openness and empathy, as what Tony suggests. Vivian recalls the memory of participating in street protests in 2019. Having grown up in a middle-class family, she describes the environment in her childhood was well protected from the outside world. When situating in the protest sites in 2019, Vivian understood more about the thoughts of the frontline protestors of various backgrounds. In this process, she learnt that it is valuable to go out of circle, engage with different parties and listen to their voices. Harry, on the other hand, understood more about the importance of different roles in the social movement. Influenced by the failure of the Occupy Movement in 2014, he used to believe that peaceful protests were no longer useful, and democracy could only be achieved through more radical actions. However, after being arrested in 2019, he was forced to step back from the frontline, worked with various experts such as lawyers and found new roles in the movement. Then he realised that each role and task had their values in the social movement and became more open to other opinions. As Harry has been organising exhibitions, assemblies and other

activities in Taiwan, his tips for seeking partners for collaboration is making the other parties recognise the action is mutually beneficial, which achieve a win-win outcome. Hugh, whose ideology and experience like Harry's, share similar feelings:

> "Based on the past experience of failure, we will find a space for collaboration with less friction, and will not choose to cut off your communication or your cooperation. But if there was no such experience, indeed, without this experience of the past resistance, I guess it is likely that I would still have a dichotomic mindset that everything is either black or white. Then I wouldn't work like now, collaborate across the political spectrum."

Despite the thought of ineffectiveness in previous political discussions, Matthew still suggests that more discussions should take place in the future, with more sincerity, for reaching a common vision:

> "We hope that apart from constructing a shared imagination, a shared imagination of the future, a candid, a real, a … able to be … yes candid and truthful conversations between groups. It is very important that we let go of some of, of the past, maybe some of this … burden? These are the burden between the groups, some of the past prejudices. As mentioned earlier, in some of the collaborative platforms, [people] are not able to have sincere dialogues, and then have some more ... when there are some truthful exchanges, I believe the situation of the subsequent movement will be better…
>
> "Because we feel that these overseas groups have a sense of alienation. The alienation comes from the fact that people don't know each other well enough, they don't trust each other, and they exclude each other... which makes these movements... these human rights movements, democracy movements in extremely big obstacles!"

Adaptation of diaspora population on foreign soil

While the core actors in the social movements, the activists, are the driving force, the Hong Kong diaspora are the fuel to support the momentum of the movement in terms of mandate, money and mobilisation in demonstrations. Nowadays, all these activists admit that the decline of enthusiasm in the democracy movement among the diaspora is a difficult and inevitable problem. It is reflected in the decline of donations and participation in political activities. An agreed and comprehensible reason for the decline of from the diasporic

communities by these activists is settlement and livelihood. They admit that they could not expect lots of support, or the “massive irrational commitment as in 2019” as Beto describes, from the members of diaspora. When everyone is dealing with issues in settling in a new country, it is too demanding to ask for active participation, especially when the global economy has not fully recovered from Covid pandemic. Most of the participants think we should accept the decline of enthusiasm and taking care of livelihood is always before politics.

Even though there are around 200,000 Hongkongers settled in the UK, some participants in the UK the diaspora communities there are not strong enough. Based on the experience in organising campaigns concerning the rights of Hongkongers in the UK, Matthew thinks the power the diaspora is not yet sufficient to influence the course of politics there despite large population. For those who in the rest of Europe and Taiwan, disperse populations of Hongkongers are even harder for developing a close community and influence local society.

Regarding settlement, integration, and power and influence in the UK, Beto analyses the situation in two dimensions. In the first dimension, if the settled overseas Hongkongers with higher socio-economic status could care less about personal benefits and think more about democracy and freedom of Hong Kong, they would make different decisions. They would help newcomers to settle, unite the community, make good use of donations instead of exploiting the support and sympathy of overseas Hongkongers to the leaders and their organisations in the democracy movement. The second dimension is preventing settling in declining cities. Some immigration advisors and real estate agents mislead the newcomers and persuade them to purchase properties in declining regions, which have been in “managed decline” since the Thatcher era. The opportunities for these families to elevate their socio-economic status are then sacrificed. Besides, this pattern of settlement makes the Hongkonger population disperse. Since the Hongkongers immigrated through the BN(O) visa scheme have the right to vote upon arrival, they could influence local politics. However, since the population is dispersed, Hongkongers could not effectively concentrate to influence the politics in the communities, or the election results in certain constituencies.

Tony believes that Hongkongers are strong in adapting to new environments and therefore have the capacity to strengthen the diaspora communities particularly in the UK. He suggests that Hongkongers should learn from the Indian and Jewish diaspora in the UK.

Beside taking care of each other, he says, the Indian and Jewish communities maintain affluent life by building connections for business. And importantly, the Indians and Jews in the UK are active in participating in the civil society and politics and eventually influence the society. Tony thinks the successful path of Indian and Jewish diaspora is what Hongkongers should follow.

Sentiments and political culture

All the participants admit that the current sentiment in the overseas democracy movement is not positive. Powerlessness and exhaustion are also common sentiments among Hongkongers, as well as some activists. For many who took part in the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, it was the first time of involvement in social movement. Having witnessed the crackdown and deterioration of freedom and rule of law after months of intensive protests, it was a trauma for these new participants in social movements to face such failure. Most interviewees always engage with emigrants from Hong Kong who used to support the democracy movement, financially and participating activities in person. These supporters of the movement often express powerlessness, or they do not know what they could contribute nowadays. Some interviewees find it frustrating when some members of diaspora doubt the effectiveness and meaning of the democracy movement.

Powerlessness and exhaustion among activists are also reflected in my process of searching for interviewees in this research. In 2019, teenagers and youngsters in their 20s were the most active protestors. But it was very difficult for me to find interviewees in this age group. As Matthew and Hugh report, there are a few hundreds of activists from Hong Kong who were granted refugee status in the UK, in which young protestors account for a large proportion. Nonetheless, most of these youngsters are no longer active in social movements nowadays. Many of these young dissents, as Matthew explains, apart from political ideals, did not have much understanding in politics. During the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, they believed that they could change the course of politics by spending days and nights on the streets and disturbing social order. Many of them did not complete secondary education when leaving Hong Kong. Therefore, when they could no longer fight the police on the streets, they did not know what roles they could have in the democracy movement. Besides, these youngsters are exhausted by the trauma of failure in achieving their ideals after physical damage, fear of persecution, torment of legal proceedings after arrests during the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement. Those young protestors whom Matthew helped settling in

the UK now rarely participate in political activities. But, as mentioned in Chapter 3, I have to admit the bias in sampling of this research. There are still a few young protestors who were charged by the Hong Kong Government and continue activism abroad. As the Hong Kong activist communities are highly fragmented and some members engage in violent actions, it is not necessary for all the activists to be visible. It explains why Vivian is the only participant in this research who was a teenager in 2019. And indeed, in my opinion, fragmentation and limits of activities abroad may affect willingness of continuing participation in the democracy movement. Vivian's capability and desire to pursue knowledge is a reason she found the role in continuing the participation in social movements. Even veteran politicians are affected by powerlessness. Some former members of district councils who have settled in the UK, as Matthew says, feel lost in the democracy movement and could not contribute as much as when living in Hong Kong.

Low political literacy of Hongkongers is another obstacle for the movement. Matthew sometimes feels frustrated with the fact that Hongkongers' knowledge about politics and universal values is insufficient, even for active supporters of the democracy movement. Many who migrated through the BN(O) Visa Scheme have no idea about the nationality of a BN(O) passport holder, which is Chinese citizen who has partial citizenship in the UK. So, many Hongkongers do not understand the meaning of Matthew's campaign for extension of the rights of BN(O) in the UK. Matthew argues that most Hongkongers in the UK only have a rough understanding about universal value and democracy. Despite having taken part in the movement, many Hongkongers were superficial as he was in early years. The lack of knowledge in how politics work in Western democracies and concept of human rights among the diaspora makes it difficult for them to participate in local politics. Vivian finds that the political culture of Hongkongers is a challenge. She observes that the characteristics of East Asian culture that those in the lower classes in society tend to conform to the authority, which is prevalent in Hong Kong. Besides, Jenna and Vivian are concerned about the rise of populism and polarisation that are intensified by the queries about US president Donald Trump. Vivian is worried about the strong support of Donald Trump among Hongkongers. The lack of international vision and understanding in democratic value, as she argues, leads to social division. The ignorance about human rights and the strong mindset of classes among the public create a difference between the population and the activists.

Some informants have other critical comments on the political culture and values of Hongkongers. Vivian and Beto think utilitarianism and political apathy, especially among the

middle class, are disadvantages for the movement. The professionals who live abroad are important resources for the movement, in knowledge and financial support. However, while having the ability and financial resources to support the movement, many of them choose to ignore it. While Beto laughs about abundance of criticisms on the authority and social movements but few actions from Hongkongers, Lotta is mad at it. All three of them assert that the characteristic of seeking for short returns among Hongkongers is harmful to the movement, for democracy and building nationhood. Lotta thinks that construction of nationhood is a long process and requires development over generations. She disagrees with the thought of some fellow activists that the Tibetan movement is a lost cause. She has engaged with some young Tibetans born overseas. From her experience of interactions with young Tibetan activists, she feels that their love to Tibet is not weaker than the first-generation diaspora. Here she points out the weakness of Hongkongers:

> "I think Hongkongers are quite… the national characteristics, or perhaps a weakness, is that we are too impatient. Or perhaps you heard what I just mentioned, that lost-cause guy said that liberation must be done in 10 years; if we fail to liberate, we are done! Well… still what I said, yea, if we hold this attitude, we don't deserve to be a nation, not deserve! Because if a nation… and corny saying, some nations could return to homeland after over a thousand years. Are you not strong enough to be a nation? If you're not strong enough, you must return in ten years, then you don't deserve to be a nation. You don't have the resilience to be a nation. So, don't tell me you are a nation!"

As Beto puts it, Hongkongers in the course of democracy and independence movement are wandering in the wilderness as the Israelites did for 40 years because of the loss of faith as recorded in *Book of Numbers*[12]. He foresees that Hongkongers will spend more time than the Israelites in wandering.

Regarding the attitude and sentiment of the overseas democracy movement, most of the participants suggest that we should adjust the expectations and attitudes. When accepting the movement is a long-term struggle, we can adjust workload and expectation to prevent burnout and disappointment. Hugh finds that for many protestors, hatred to the regime is a

---

[12] In *Book of Numbers* of the Old Testament, after the Israelites leave Egypt and head for the "Promised Land" of Canaan, God is angry because they disobey his instruction to enter Canaan. So, God punishes the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for 40 years for their loss of faith.

fuel to maintain the momentum in the movement. But he thinks that anything driven by hatred could not last long. Frank shares with others his stoic approach of dealing with daily life, which is not to overthink about issues outside the circle of control. He guesses that the state oppression during the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement has left painful memories to many Hongkongers, and the defence mechanism arisen from these memories has caused mental repression in the diaspora communities, which lead to low tide of the movement nowadays. But Frank believes that Hongkongers will recover and be energised one day. Chris remarks that there is still resistance in Hong Kong and the dissents there have not given up. So, instead of declaring the civil society in Hong Kong is dead, we should understand the new form of resistance in Hong Kong, which is in a smaller scale, underground, and a satirical approach. Others agree that taking a break from activism is necessary sometimes. Harry has found his way of balancing life and activism. He suggests that the sense of success should be sought from other areas in life, such as hobbies, rather than social movements. When feeling frustrated and exhausted in politics, Harry always finds happiness from photography and activities concerning animal rights. Also, he has close contact with Hongkonger activists and friends from around the world, including those who live in Hong Kong. He notices that majority of his friends are frustrated about the situation in Hong Kong and do not understand the democracy movement, then he uses different approaches to ease their negative emotions and misunderstanding. For those who are concerned about Hong Kong but feel powerless and doubt the value of the democracy movements, Harry tells them what achievements we have and the movement requires long-term contribution; for those who live in Hong Kong and feel hopeless because of the environment, Harry spends time to hang out with them without discussing politics when they visit him in Taiwan; for activists who have radical discourse and attitude, such as advocating armed revolution in the short time as the only solution, Harry advises them to think from others' perspective in order to gain wider support. Tony has other advice on easing trauma, which is not to always look back to the past, otherwise we will always live in the frustrating past.

For the political literacy and culture of Hongkongers, the informants remark that Hongkongers need education, and these activists have already been working on it. As an experienced unionist, Chris continues disseminating labour rights to the Hongkongers in the UK, like what the used to do in the past three decades. Many diaspora organisations invite Chris and his local colleagues to introduce labour laws in the UK because of Hongkongers' needs in understanding labour rights in the new country. By continuing his YouTube channel,

Tony keeps sharing the concept of universal value and information on social issues in Hong Kong, the UK and around the world. Nowadays, Tony has an audience base of Hongkongers from Hong Kong, the UK and other countries with Hongkonger communities. Others organise campaigns and other activities for raising Hongkongers' awareness in local and international politics and encourage their participation. These activities range from demonstrations, signing petitions to governments, seminars in person and online to exhibitions, film screenings and regular gatherings. Those activists in the UK organise events for the new immigrants to engage their MPs and councillors. Hugh is concerned about the education of young refugees from Hong Kong. His organisation searches for suitable schools and courses for continuing their studies. Hugh suggests that empowerment and upskilling the young activists and diaspora population are important for their career and the social movement in the long run.

Connections

Suppression from the state plays a role in the decline of the overseas democracy movement. The two laws on national security outlaw certain activities, such as advocacy of demanding foreign governments to intervene Hong Kong's affairs and financial transactions with individuals and entities who violate the NSL. Meanwhile, unlike overseas Tibetans and Uyghurs, most Hongkongers could still return to home country freely. Frank and Beto assert that as long as the emigrants have the desire for visiting their families in Hong Kong, most of them would not take the risk of joining political activities held by overseas activists. For many emigrants, it is risky even to sign a petition on the online platform provided by the UK parliament, Matthew reports. Many of the members of the diaspora do not want to have any connections to political activities about Hong Kong. The widespread white horror among the diaspora deems unsolvable, as many participants say.

As these activists realise, one of the main purposes of the NSL is to sever the connections between activists abroad and people in Hong Kong. Chris and Frank infer that the issuance of bounties for several overseas dissidents by the Hong Kong Government is a means for intimidating the people in Hong Kong from communicating with activists abroad and isolating those who are wanted. As most informants are concerned, the severance of connections undermines the mutual understanding between Hongkongers at home and abroad, and the mandate of overseas activists in representing the opinions of Hongkongers in advocacy. When communication is obstructed, it becomes difficult for overseas activists to understand the needs of those in Hong Kong. Vivian finds that some of her friends in Hong

Kong do not understand what overseas activists are working on and show political apathy. Sometimes she is uncertain about whether she is representing the opinions of Hongkongers.

Apart from state intervention for political purposes, connections between diaspora and those in Hong Kong are weakened due to geographical barrier. Tony observes that the mutual understanding between people is diminishing. He witnesses that some immigrants in the UK simplify the problems of those who stay in Hong Kong. They think that those who do not migrate deserve to suffer. This kind of thoughts broaden the estrangement between people, Tony concludes.

But these activists do not give up the maintenance of connections with people in Hong Kong. Vivian emphasises the importance of connections with friends in Hong Kong, whether they are concerned about politics or not. Chris has regular online meetings with his colleagues in Hong Kong so that he can reflect the labour conditions in Hong Kong to the counterparts in international labour movement. Tony thinks that the diaspora should continue to care about Hong Kong and his YouTube channel, which is accessible in Hong Kong, serves as a platform for information exchange for maintaining the care for Hong Kong. Frank advocates that connection is the core part of the democracy movement and therefore not only maintain the connections with those in Hong Kong, but we should also extend connections and networks internationally. Frank suggests that it is a struggle between connections and disconnection. Since the authorities' intention is to undermine the power of the democracy movement by disconnecting our communication with people in Hong Kong, he proposes, we should connect with like-minded people, including other groups who are also repressed by Beijing, to overcome Beijing's effort to disconnect. Indeed, all the participants are working on the path Frank suggests. All the interviewees have been working with Hongkonger organisations, governments, politicians and civil society in their host countries in personal or organisational capacity. Apart from the public engagement activities mentioned above, they all involved in advocacy to certain extent. As representatives of diaspora organisations, they engage with politicians, in their host countries. In the communications with the politician, the interviewees reflect the needs of diaspora and Hongkongers at home. Those needs include the state of human rights in Hong Kong, transnational repression by the Hong Kong Government, the rights and interests of the diaspora and even domestic issues in host countries. Lotta says she is specialised in art and culture and not capable or interested in advocacy. However, she often hosts art events that concern human rights and Hong Kong, in which she invites politicians and members of civil society to attend. Sometimes Lotta works as a host in the

roundtable dialogues in these events. Harry finds his identity a bit awkward for engaging in politics in Taiwan since he is not an official Taiwanese resident. Though he could not contact Taiwanese politicians and political parties formally, he is active in engaging with native grassroot activists. In addition, some Taiwanese officials occasionally invite Harry for informal meetings for understanding the situation of Hongkongers at home and in Taiwan. These participants also build international networks and advocate Hong Kong issues at international level. Chris constantly monitors the situation of Hong Kong and participates in meetings with international labour organisations for reflecting the state of labour right in Hong Kong. Frank travel in different countries for building connections between diaspora organisations and advocacy at international level. Working with local and diaspora organisations, the activists in the UK submit opinions to the UK government and UN organisations for reflecting the situation of Hongkongers in Hong Kong and the UK. Jenna is active in advocacy in Norway, while her organisation also joins other diaspora groups in Europe for advocacy at the EU level. Apart from politics, the diaspora organisations they join often organise leisure gatherings with members of diaspora. Jenna remarks that we should not only engage with people in a small circle, but also people in the wider community.

Resources and geopolitics

For all the participants in this research, the lack of resources is a huge obstacle in the democracy movement. The scarcity of resources occurs in individual diaspora organisations and the movement as a whole. These activists observe that the overall resources available for mobilisation for activist organisations, especially financial, has been apparently declining. For Hugh, the independence movement is unachievable anytime soon due to the lack of resources to build armed forces. For some others, the continuation of their own organisations and activities are questionable. As a media personality, Tony finds that even online media have difficulties in surviving. Subscriptions to online media is risky to people in Hong Kong due to the national security legislations and therefore their incomes are dropping. The national security legislations outlaws financial support to subversive individuals and organisations, which intimidate lots of Hongkongers, at home or abroad, from donating to overseas social movement organisations.

Apart from political and legal risks, the interviewees concede that the global economic situation is unfavourable to the democracy movement. Global economy has not yet recovered from the Covid pandemic, while the war in Ukraine stalls the recovery. For Hongkongers who

have emigrated in the last few years, settlement in the new countries and coping with the weak job markets deter them from strong financial contributions to activist organisations. While understanding the financial hardship everyone faces, Harry grumbles that mobilisation of other resources from Hongkongers nowadays is much more difficult than in 2019. While living as an alien in Taiwan, he often finds himself not influential enough to draw attention and support from the local community. But when he tried to seek support from Hongkongers again, he found that he could no longer achieve the astounding results in 2019. He recalls that during the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, fundraising was extremely efficient that any calls for publishing advertisements on foreign newspapers could draw hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong dollars in a few days. Harry noticed that such success was not merely contributed by the financial support from the public, but also the time and expertise from individual citizens for liaising media, online publicity and accounting. However, as he made this comment during the interview I reminded him that it was an extraordinary situation during the movement that could not be replicated nowadays. As Harry mentioned earlier, he often cancelled appointments of clients in his workplace for participating in demonstrations in 2019. I reminded him that quite many individual activists who engaged in various campaigns in 2019 may have worked like him, used the time and resources in their workplace for the movement. Without the sense of urgency and enthusiasm back then, it is now difficult to mobilise massive ordinary citizens for their contributions in money, time and expertise.

As mentioned above by Beto, many advocacy organisations rely on the support from Western donors. Some interviewees also notice the problems of reliance on Western donors. As Tony observed, since the beginning of this year, survival of international advocacy organisations has shown red lights. Particularly after Donald Trump was elected again last November, the most supportive force to the democracy movement at the international level, the US, as Tony describes, was lost. Merely sanctions against officials and judges in Hong Kong could not stop them from persecuting Hongkongers. Tony suggests that the US used to be supportive to the voice of democracy and sponsored the Chinese dissents for years. Now support to dissidents of all nationalities from the US is cut.

Other activists also realise that such obstacle is tied to the current geopolitical and global economic situation. Some interviewees admit that international attention to Hong Kong declines along with time or is diverted to other more pressing issues such as the wars in Ukraine and Palestine. The recent geopolitical development has deepened their worries in international support. Some of them are worried that the fundamental support in the

democracy movement is being undermined for worldwide democracy deficit and rise of populism. Tony and Harry argue that the withdrawal of financial support from Washington is primarily attributable to the decline of democracy in the US, more than economic reasons. Tony assumes that the faith in universal values is shaken even in the US and the UK, and we will no longer have audience if the international society believes in survival of the fittess, as what Russia and China do. As a resident in Taiwan, Harry is concerned that whether the Taiwanese society could resist the infiltration from Beijing if the international society doubts the value of democracy and reduces its support to Taiwan. Others are concerned with the growing international influence of China that may deter other countries from supporting Hongkongers. They suggest that economic incentives and propaganda from China now penetrate everyday life of people around the globe and people in Hong Kong are subject to cultural assimilation and therefore support to the democracy movement from the international society and Hongkongers will continue to diminish. Those in the UK are not hopeful that the UK Government could genuinely do anything in supporting Hongkongers in political issues. Some describe the UK as a "declined empire" and has no stake to bargain with China; Beto asserts that even if London had the will to stand up for Hongkongers, the current international order and atmosphere do not allow it to interfere with the affairs of a former colony by military means, and thus no practical actions can be taken.

The interviewees do not have a lot of suggestions in solving the scarcity of resources and lack of international support. Harry proposes that if each of the Hongkongers could contribute a little bit more, impacts would be made. Indeed, some of the activists do contribute more personally. Matthew dedicates more time on the diaspora community and political activities than seeking a permanent job. Meanwhile, Frank has been working in part-time jobs for extra incomes, which eventually sponsor the expenses of the campaigns he participates in. Though Beto has some ideas about financing political movements, he does not feel hopeful with these possible solutions. Referring to the revolutionaries in late Qing Dynasty and Taiwanese Independence Movement during Cold War, he finds that financial support from diaspora businesses were essential. However, the utilitarian personality of Hongkongers and legal restrictions would deter overseas Hong Kong businesses from sponsoring the democracy movement. On the other hand, Beto realises that politicians in exile are capable in attracting foreign donations but only limited to former members of the Legislative Council. Since most of those former lawmakers still have close connections with colleagues of the same parties in Hong Kong, they would not risk the safety of their

colleagues for fundraising. The second option for international fundraising is by the former members of District Councils. But there is a disadvantage of these local councillors, as Beto suggests, that they are less known even for Hongkongers and have limited mandate compared to former lawmakers. Beto further puts that if a platform is established by these former District Councillors, in which dozens of them have already emigrated, there will be sufficient appeal to the public. There is already a similar group formed by those former councillors, whose name is Assembly of Citizens' Representatives, Hong Kong (ARCHK). While Beto is a member of ARCHK, nonetheless, he tells me that it is not yet a registered organisation and mainly for those former councillors to exchange information. The third suggestion of Beto is what some renowned activists are doing, which is raising funds from online media channels such as YouTube and Patreon. However, he cannot find any incentives for these activist-turned-influencers to share their profits for setting up a fund pool for the democracy movement. Based on Beto's response, there are solutions to the lack of resources, but new challenges arise when adopting the solutions.

4.5 Inheritance of Hongkonger identity and political values

In the thesis, the sustainability of the democracy movement is one of my major concerns. The advocacy for higher autonomy to Tibet has lasted for six decades, which is more than two generations of exile Tibetans and has yet to succeed. It is possible that the democracy movement of Hong Kong may not succeed in our generation and will have to pass on to the next generation as the exile Tibetans have done. Therefore, I sought opinions from the participants about the changes and inheritance of the identity of Hongkongers and the values of democracy movement in the diaspora population.

Attitude to the changes in identity and political values

Most of the activists are not worried about the maintenance of identity and ideals of the movement in the first-generation emigrants. Matthew notices that since many Hongkongers have left only for a few years, the changes in identity are limited. Not many have developed a British identity, and the diasporic community is still living with the cultural heritage. Matthew asserts that mother tongue, life experience and habits accumulated in Hong Kong will not change or diminish easily.

Frank is not very pessimistic about the change of identity or political values. He recalls the wave of emigration to Canada in the 1980s-90s when many of these migrants left

Hong Kong for the fear of communist rule; but later, they became supportive to the Chinese Government years after living abroad. He explains that this transformation of political stance was influenced by mainstream media. Since those Hongkongers in Canada still had the attachment to Hong Kong, they kept watching TV programmes and reading publications from Hong Kong. While the mainstream media turned supportive to Beijing, those migrants followed the turn. However, Frank argues that this transformation in political values of migrants is not likely nowadays as the influence of mainstream media has declined. He suggests that digital and social media have more audience and are more accessible to the diaspora, and therefore we could help preserving the culture by ourselves. He does not mind the changes in individual's ethnic identity. For Frank, identity is always a matter of percentage or proportion that everyone has their own combinations of identities. What he is concerned about is that the overseas Hongkongers no longer care about Hong Kong. He hopes that when they settle in the new countries, they will have more capacity in participation in the movement.

Vivian found that the uniqueness of Hongkonger identity helps maintain cohesion. The most obvious example is the situation of BN(O) holders that the special feature of BN(O) is only comprehensible to Hongkongers and reinforce our identity. She is positive about the changes of identity and political values of the diaspora. Vivian acknowledges that Hongkonger identity is a blend of Chinese and Western culture. While Chinese culture is infiltrating in every aspect in Hong Kong, living abroad and exposure to various cultures could help maintaining current Hongkonger characteristics. She thinks that the migration of hundreds of thousands of Hongkongers to western countries is beneficial to the diaspora politically. Having lived in western democracies for years, the overseas Hongkongers will learn more about universal value and hence will become better citizens. This assumption came from her personal experience. Vivian was shocked when she started to study in the UK. The broader academic space allowed her to think about different issues in the society. She has realised that some issues, like women's rights, LGBT issues and labour rights, are important to the society. She assumes that most overseas Hongkongers will undergo such transformation in political value.

From a culture perspective, Harry feels pessimistic for the diasporic community in ethnic identity. He thinks that most Hongkongers have a low sense of identity and do not care about culture. Harry suggests that Hongkonger culture is easily affected by Chinese and foreign influence, and therefore, extra efforts to conserve culture and identity are necessary.

He is concerned that those in Hong Kong have been culturally diluted and the diaspora must integrate in other countries. If a consensus in the direction of Hongkonger identity and democracy movement is not reached in the diaspora in three years, Harry estimates, the identity will dissipate, and it will be difficult for the next generation to maintain the original culture. He would be sad if the descendants of emigrants deny Hongkonger identity, but he respects their freedom of choice. The bottom-line for him is that Hongkongers and their descendants should never harm the freedom of Hong Kong. Harry does not have specific idea about the change in political value.

However, Jenna has opposite opinion of the prospect of preservation of identity and culture. Unlike Harry, she thinks that emigrants in this generation preserve the most precious spirit and culture of Hong Kong in other countries, without being affected by new influence from China. Even if the identity and culture of the diaspora change, Jenna proposes that it shows the flexibility of Hongkongers to adapt to life in new environment, which is encouraging. However, Jenna is also concerned about the negative impacts of Western political culture on Hongkongers. She found that, for example, political division arisen from the support and opposition of US president Donald Trump may divide the democracy movement.

Similar to the suggestion of Harry, Hugh also agrees that a government-in-exile is necessary to handle the work of identity inheritance and promote international recognition of Hongkonger as an ethnicity. For Hugh, the preservation of culture and identity is more important than the value of democracy movement. He thinks that human memory is unreliable, therefore it is necessary to take more effort if we want to preserve of our culture and memory. Besides, he found that Hongkonger identity has been reinforced when living abroad, both for him and other Hongkongers.

But Beto has opposite views and questions the need to maintain Hongkonger identity. Meanwhile, Beto highlights the importance of the connections between people. He remarks that the diaspora community and advocacy organisations should act for the people, particular for wellbeing and rights. He says we can continue the activities that unite people, for example commemoration of the June 4th massacre and writing letters to political prisoners. To sustain the movement, Beto suggests that it is essential to gain financial support from the businesspeople who support our values. All the political movements, revolutions or coup

d'etats, as Beto understands, require money. Therefore, these organisations should maintain a friendly relationship to people in different trades.

Chris also feels indifferent about the change of ethnic identity, which is consistent to his view on nationalism. He believes that integration is a natural process, and integration does not necessarily mean exclusion of Hongkonger identity. But for the democracy movement, Chris thinks that naturalisation is beneficial. When obtaining the power to influence local society and resources, Chris suggests, we could provide more support once a crisis or social movement emerge in Hong Kong.

Lotta has a Hongkonger-oriented view on the changes in political value. She argues that the value of Hongkongers depends more on the majority of Hongkongers and the development of Hong Kong. While we think that the value of Hongkongers has moved abroad with us, the value of Hongkongers who stay in Hong Kong continues to evolve. If one day the diaspora return to Hong Kong, perhaps we will no longer be regarded Hongkongers. What can be understood from Lotta's testimony is that even though she does not agree with the political value of supporting the authority, she agrees that this kind of political view in certain extent represents the political values of Hongkongers. For her, the centre of Hongkonger's identity and values lie on the Hongkongers at home. She does not exclude people of different political opinions from being Hongkongers and regards the cosmopolitan Hong Kong is the core part of the identity and political value of Hongkongers, regardless of political situation. Meanwhile, she agrees that it is necessary to inherit the original identity and universal value to the next generation.

In general, the interviewees do not have high expectations on the next generation on inheritance of ethnic identity and political value. Tony estimates that since the younger generation does not have strong attachment to Hong Kong and clear memories about the political events after living abroad for a few years, it is not guaranteed that they will care about Hong Kong. Tony comments that whether continuing the democracy movement abroad or not, it is up to the will of the younger generation. Others also have similar estimation because the younger generation did not experience the political upheaval like us. Jenna remarks that the next generation diaspora does not necessarily have the responsibility to inherit our identity and value. She suggests that the younger generation will be curious about their origin, and therefore the adults at present have the responsibility to tell the stories.

The means and paths of inheritance

The interviewees were asked about the means of inheritance of Hongkongers' identity and political values. For the value of democracy, most of them mention political participation in host countries. Political activities such as demonstrations and encouraging participation in local politics are the means to unit supporters of the democracy movement and educate the diaspora. Matthew further suggests that the practice of democratic value in daily life is essential to the movement. Apart from encouraging Hongkongers to vote in elections, he advocates democracy in diasporic organisations by enhancing transparency and accountability.

For Hongkonger identity and culture, maintenance of lifestyle is one fundamental way of inheritance for these activists. In individual level, they think that maintaining the habits from Hong Kong counts, such as speaking Cantonese and replicating Hong Kong-style food at home. They believe that ordinary actions in our own positions do contribute. As Lotta remarks, "even merely giving birth is already very helpful." To maintain the cohesion in the diaspora community and Hongkonger identity, as soft approach as Frank suggests and many agree, teaching Cantonese, cultural activities and gatherings are the routine and effective means they have been carried out. Having learnt from the experience of the overseas Tibetans and worked as a teacher, Lotta asserts that inheritance is not effective through pushing hard or coercion. She suggests that promoting popular culture is a vivid way to keep the culture living in our life, for example, creating Canto pops about the life overseas.

Many of them mention that family is another essential medium of inheritance. The activities such as teaching Cantonese to children, making food and celebrating festivals from Hong Kong can be carried out at home. Some like Frank and Jenna emphasise the role and responsibility of parents, while Hugh, Beto and Lotta doubt that parents are not enough and may not lead to a desired result. The story of Vivian proves their doubt valid. As she describes, they are typical middle-class in Hong Kong that emphasise the benefits of economic opportunities in the city while staying politically apathetic. The parents of Vivian chose to move to Hong Kong because they wanted to keep distant from political engagement in their family who have a KMT background. When she was younger, her father tried to educate her to be politically apathetic: she was told that the colonial rule was "the borrowed time" for Hong Kong, and the role of Hong Kong is a "white glove" as a financing hub for different parties; wherever you can gain money, stand in that side. This is a typical utilitarian

value in Hong Kong, as mentioned by Beto and Vivian. Although Vivian grew up with these messages from her father, she never agrees with them and eventually became an activist. This case proves that the transfer of values by parents does not always achieve its purpose.

Beto argues that external force is more effective in maintaining our identity in socialisation. To the second generation, as he says, it is easier to obtain a stronger sense of identity and understanding of their origin and the reasons for living outside Hong Kong when being told by others. The messages obtained from the social atmosphere are more persuasive than what the parents tell. “One sentence from those in the street is stronger than ten from me to my daughter,” says Beto. Both Hugh and Beto mention the educational resource available in the UK for dissemination of Hong Kong’s culture. Nowadays, public funds are available to publish children’s books about the story of Hongkonger community. Beto argues that Hongkongers in school age will have a stronger sense of ethnic belonging when their classmates address them as Hongkongers. Hugh mentions that the history of Hong Kong is already available in the curriculum in the UK, which indeed enhances the visibility of Hongkonger as an ethnicity.

Tony agrees that the policy in the UK encourages citizens to understand immigrants of different backgrounds and ethnic minorities to preserve their cultures. Once again, he takes the Indians in the UK as an example. Tony says that apart from the strong cohesion in the Indian community, the Indians also welcome other ethnic groups to engage with them. Besides, the senior officials even celebrate Indian festivals. Therefore, there are space, resources and successful cases in the UK. Tony encourages Hongkongers to learn from Indian diaspora to preserve our own culture, “as other ethnicities succeed in the UK, Hongkongers should not self-deprecate but take the efforts.”

Lastly, as some informants worried that the identity of Hongkonger will vanish one day, Lotta provides the answer to their question. She learnt from other diasporic groups that inheritance of identity is not straightforward but possible. Some years ago, Lotta met a few Moluccans, an ethnic group from the Maluku Islands in Indonesia. One of the Maluccans shared his stories with her. The grandmother of the Moluccan moved to the Netherlands after Indonesia was granted independence. Because his grandmother did not want to pass the history of repression by the Indonesian government, she decided to be silent and not to talk about it with his father. She thought that his father would not know anything about it and so would he. Nevertheless, it did not stop his father to be interested in their origin. His father

became a linguist and visited Maluku Islands to learn their culture. This Moluccan, the friend of Lotta, even became a professor to study the history of Moluccans. Similar stories happened to the Hongkonger diaspora in the Netherlands as well. In her opinion, inheritance of identity, culture and value is not straightforward, and the formation of identity and value is organic. The second generation will naturally reflect on and explore their identity when growing up. Therefore, there will be successors to pass on our identity, culture and value in future generations, Lotta concludes.

5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the ethnic identity of Hongkonger as a collective identity, the roles of overseas activists, “liberate Hong Kong” as a shared imagined goal and a slogan in the movement, and the prospects of the overseas democracy movement.

5.1 Collective identity of the overseas democracy movement

As mentioned earlier, the samples of this research cannot reflect the general opinions of the activists in the overseas democracy movement. However, the findings can still show the tendency of activists’ views on the ethnic identity of Hongkongers. There are apparent similarities in this regard from my informants that I can generalise a collective ethnic identity for them. Besides, while understanding the tasks and roles performed by the interviewees, I found a strong religious trait in them for the sense of mission driven by the faith in universal values and autonomy from China. Therefore, the overseas democracy movement can be described as a Crusader movement and the activists are playing some religious roles.

Flexible Hong Kong citizen (non-Chinese)

In the last poll on national identity conducted by HKPORI in December 2022, only 32% of respondents claimed themselves Hongkonger, second to Hongkonger in China (34.1%, see Appendix 1). The last survey did not reflect the usual distribution of national identities of residents in Hong Kong as Hongkonger always topped since 2013. Even in summer 2022, Hongkonger was still top at 39.1%, compared to 31.4% of Hongkonger in China. The changes in the survey in 2022 may attribute to the structural change of population due to emigration. However, it is clear that the finding of this research varies conspicuously from the responses from general residents in the surveys by HKPORI. All the participants in the research, without exception, respond that they are Hongkongers and refuse the label of Chinese in their ethnic identity. Even if the samples of this research are biased, it is likely that these responses account for majority of the pro-democracy activists. For pro-democracy activists, Hongkonger identity associates strongly to democracy. It is also reflected in the HKPORI surveys that the preferences of national identity tie to the rhythm of the democracy movement. As localism began to rise, respondents who reported their identity as Hongkonger exceeded 40% for the first time in June 2011 for 43.8% since 1999. Except dropping back to 27.2% in December 2012, Hongkonger always accounted for more than 34% among all the options. Usually, more respondents reported themselves as Hongkongers when there were

major contentious political incidents before the survey, such as the controversy of the Moral and National Education (45.6%, Jun 2012), the civil disobedience movement of Occupy Central (42.3%, Dec 2014) and the disappearance of staff of Causeway Bay Books and the rise of pro-independence party Hong Kong Indigenous (41.9%, Jun 2016). After the onset of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, more than half of the respondents claimed themselves Hongkongers in the surveys from June 2019 to June 2020. So, I could conclude that most supporters of the democracy movement tend to regard themselves as Hongkongers.

As discussed in Chapter 1.2, the distinction between Hongkongers and Mainland citizens emerged long before the rise of localism in 2010s. By the late 1970s, the majority of population in Hong Kong comprised of Chinese refugees who had fled from disasters and political repressions in Mainland and their offsprings. They acknowledged the differences in ideology and living standards between Hong Kong and Mainland, while accepting Chinese ethnicity and the label of Hongkonger under the umbrella of Chinese nation. The socioeconomic and ideological differences deepened along with the economic bloom in Hong Kong in the 1980s and the crackdown of the Chinese Democracy Movement in 1989. Even in the 2010s, two decades after the handover, the variations of lifestyle and mindsets across the borders were still apparent (Cheung, 2020; Ma, 2018). In my opinion, the Hongkonger identity is unwillingly and continuously shaped and maintained by Beijing. The adoption of "one country two systems" already determined the distinction of Hongkongers from the rest of the Chinese. The political, economic and social regime in Hong Kong is still apparently different from Mainland. The creations of Hong Kong SAR passport, continuation of border control between Hong Kong and Mainland and Home Visit Permit for Hongkongers to travel in Mainland were decided by Beijing before the handover have kept the label of Hongkonger strongly adhered to us. From culturally and constitutional perspectives, full integration between Hongkongers and Mainlanders is unlikely.

Although Flesher Fominaya (2010) is not sure about whether any movement identity is taken as a given by activists, the participants in this research are certain that the identity of Hongkonger, which is readymade and bound to them on birth, is taken for granted. Many of them are even taking their political values as essential components in this identity. The definitions of Hongkonger among activists are similar. Despite a diversity of ideologies among overseas activists, they all have a strong sense of Hongkonger identity and pursuit for universal values. Most of them agree that the faith in universal values and attachment constitute sufficient and essential elements of Hongkonger.

Even if there are disagreements on the definition of Hongkonger among activists, many of them are flexible. For these activists, the willingness to recognise oneself as Hongkonger is almost equally important to political values and more than language and lifestyle. The essence of willingness and political values as a culture for these activists correspond to what Gellner (1983: 55-56) concludes about the elements of nationalism. The nationalist trait of these activists and the democracy movement is demonstrated from their attitude towards Chinese identity. Their awareness of distinction from Chinese and the denial to Chinese identity are clear. For them, Hongkonger and Chinese are two incompatible and mutually exclusive identities. The democracy movement with participants across political spectrum, especially since 2019, has demonstrated that it is the antagonism of Hongkongers versus the Chinese state authority and its brokers in Hong Kong. The activists do not only fight for the reform of the political system in Hong Kong but also attempting to alter the relationship between Mainland China and Hong Kong. They regard Chinese government as an outsider who intervenes in the internal affairs of Hong Kong, and are trying to extricate it from Beijing's interference by gaining independence. This experience is similar to the Taiwanese in since mid-1940s as mentioned in Chapter 2.3. The Taiwanese population generally did not deny Chinese ethnicity when the KMT took over Taiwan from Japan in 1945. Many admitted themselves as both Chinese and Taiwanese. But the mismanagement, forced implementation of Chinese nationalism and brutal suppression in 228 Incident in 1947 led to the rejection of Chinese identity and administration, which eventually facilitated Taiwan independence discourse. (Edmondson, 2002; Fell, 2018: 14-16) Similarly, some participants in this research recalled that they accepted Chinese as part of their identity until late 2000s. They started to doubt the Chinese nationalist narrative after years of CCP administration as the promise of universal suffrage was not fulfilled and clashes happened for the social and economic integration with Mainland. The cases in Taiwan and Hong Kong match Anderson's conclusion that the rise of nationalism and separatism is always fostered by the change of conventional way of life in the peripheral parts of a country (2006: 47-65).

As some interviewees define, some Hong Kong citizens are not qualified as "Hongkonger" due to ideology. As the activists frame Hongkongers as defenders of freedom and democracy, those who support the government or deny universal values are deemed non-Hongkonger. Jenna uses the term "new Hongkonger" to describe those blue-ribbons. All these sentiments of attachment to Hongkonger identity, denial of Chineseness and exclusion of pro-Beijing citizens from being Hongkonger are intensified along the democracy movement,

especially after 2019. The repression by the authorities since 2019 has resulted in collective trauma among the participants in the democracy movement. This shared trauma is the catalyst of shaping the identity of the democracy advocates. I think that the recognition of Hongkongers' identity is irreversible for the population, given that the trauma during the movement is impactful to all Hongkongers across political spectrum.

For many informants, use of Cantonese is a criterion to become Hongkonger, though not necessary. They accept that citizens who were not raised locally may not use Cantonese fluently. Their responses match Anderson's suggestion that the diversity of languages creates a possibility of imagined communities (2006: 37-46). However, I argue that in practice actual boundaries are set when a local tongue dominates in the administration in a territory. Some informants emphasise that a Hongkonger should care about the city and participate in public affairs. However, the command of languages used in officialdom is essential in participating in public affairs. When the knowledge of a local language becomes essential skill, non-speakers are excluded from participation. If participation in public affairs is an essential element to become a member in society as many interviewees in this research claim, the knowledge of Cantonese is another essential criterion to become a Hongkonger. Linguistically, distinction between Hong Kong and Mainland China is also attributed to written texts. Traditional Chinese is still the most used texts in Hong Kong, while Simplified Chinese is the official texts in Mainland. In officialdom and daily life for Hongkongers, English is the alternative to Traditional Chinese, if English is not the working language as in many public institutions and business sector. The barrier for Mainland citizens to participate in public affairs and daily life in Hong Kong is high since Cantonese, Traditional Chinese and English are not familiar to most of them. Even for the Cantonese speaking population in Guangdong and Guangxi provinces who are always exposed to information and popular culture in Hong Kong, communication with Hongkongers is not absolutely fluent because of the variations of accents, terms and Hongkongers' habit of mingling English vocabulary in Cantonese conversations. Likewise, it is natural for Hongkongers to feel estranged in Mainland for being surrounded by Mandarin and Simplified Chinese. Frictions occur in the integration between Hong Kong and Mainland since communication between two communities is obstructed, so that the citizens in two territories face hurdles when attempting to participate in each other's affairs. Therefore, as many of the interviewees assert, language is practically an essential element for full integration, and a cause of Hong Kong independence.

Even if there are cultural differences, Anderson adds, attachment and cohesion can be built if two communities have similar religious values (2006: 47-65). But unfortunately, similarities in religious values, or faiths, can hardly be found between Hongkongers and Mainland citizens. As Hong Kong and Mainland China are rather secular societies, there is not dominant religion in both territories. When we turn to worldview or political value, there are more discrepancies. As the informants hold, some values such as freedom of speech and respect of civil rights are core values in Hong Kong, and the nationalist discourse of the CCP clashes with the value of these Hongkongers. While democracy supporters in Hong Kong discern the discrepancies in political values between the two territories, they tend to develop stronger attachment to the hometown where they can find fellows in the democracy movement. And after having participated in the democracy movement, as some activists like Hugh and Vivian report, their self-recognition as Hongkonger have been reinforced while Chineseness has declined. This is a process of identity work in social movements that they define who they are and are not (Melucci, 1995; Flesher Fominaya, 2010).

These activists rule out Chinese nationality in their identity, while none of them had attachment to the UK, our former metropolitan country before leaving Hong Kong. They are rather indifferent than negative towards British nationality. Only those who migrated to the UK have accepted British as part of their national identity. It can be explained by Anderson's (2006) narrative on colonial pilgrimage. During the colonial period, the administration did not strongly promote British attachment in education and social practice, while preserving certain local customs, such as land appropriation in the New Territories as mentioned in the last chapter. Most importantly, local elite faced glass ceiling even in the colonial administration. The systematic recruitment of civil servants from local Chinese population only started in 1950s. However, most senior positions in the bureaucracy were still appointed from the UK until late 1980s. Local population were restricted from the participation in local governance in most of the colonial history, and did not have any opportunities for serving in any positions in metropolitan Britain. As Anderson mentions, the absence of colonial pilgrimage results in a sense of segregation from metropolitan country in colonial population. Hongkongers were barred from participating in British politics, and therefore never developed strong sense of Britishness. Another issue is about the entitlement of British nationality. While not granting the right to self-determination and barring Hongkongers from participating in the Sino-British negotiation for the future of Hong Kong in 1980s, the UK Government neither granted Hongkongers British citizenship nor right of abode in the UK, nor any citizenships

comparable to those in other British colonies. The British National (Overseas) citizenship was created particularly for Hong Kong citizens. In contrast to the British Dependent Territory Citizen (BDTC) also created in 1980s which can be applied retrospectively, there was a deadline for application for BN(O) that those who were entitled before 1997 would lose their connection to the UK if they did not apply before that. To general Hongkongers, the distance from metropolitan Britain is felt through the high thresholds of access to Britain and its citizenship. The lack of British attachment among the interviewees is also demonstrated in their projection of a liberated Hong Kong. Most of them talk about independence or self-determination, some do not mind Hong Kong continuing as a part of China if high autonomy is respected, while none of them deem returning to British rule is a preferable future. They enjoyed the way of life in Hong Kong developed during the British rule, while understanding that the British always keep Hong Kong and its citizens distant.

Compared to the exile Chinese dissidents interviewed by He Xiaoqing (2014) and some exile Tibetans in India and Nepal (Hess, 2020), the participants in this research generally show higher flexibility in their ethnic identities. Apart from Harry, all interviewees have embraced new national identities after settling overseas. While these activists from Hong Kong firmly hold Hongkonger identity and exclude Chineseness, they are open to other nationalities in their identities. Therefore, "flexible citizenship" suggested by Ong (1999) or the cosmopolitan view on nationality and ethnicity mentioned by Cheung (2020) are still prevalent among this generation of activists. Like the Hongkongers who emigrated in the 1980-90s, the activists do not bound ethnicity and citizenship strictly that they feel natural to have multiple citizenships. As some of the informants argue that Hongkongers have a utilitarian character, it is reflected in the attitude towards citizenship. Some informants suggest that a new citizenship will help Hongkongers to settle abroad, participate in local politics and exert their influence in the host country, which will finally gather more resources for the democracy movement, like those Tibetans who were granted US citizenship through TUSRP (Hess, 2020). These activists do not avoid expressing their intention to capitalise the new citizenships for the democracy movement. It could be regarded a tradition for Hongkongers to maximise their interests in the "borrowed place, borrowed time[13]." Like the

[13] "Borrowed place, borrowed time" is a phrase to describe the history and recognition of identity in Hong Kong. It was first used in a fiction *A Many-Splendoured Thing* by Han Suyin, and became more widely known for the book *Hong Kong: borrowed place, borrowed time* by Richard Hughes. This phrase is used for describing the mentality of Hongkongers migrated from Mainland China, who viewed themselves as guests in the British colony and the prosperity and stability are "borrowed", so that they lacked a sense of belonging to Hong Kong.

Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong since 1940s, these activists regard their migration to other countries as a temporary measure and that they might leave one day; however, for surviving on a foreign soil and maximising their interests, they are willing to fulfil all requirements for naturalisation. Besides, these activists acknowledge that "liberating Hong Kong" would be a cross-generation mission that inevitably they and their offspring must acquire new citizenships for staying in the host countries. A few interviewees mention that flexibility and open-mindedness are common elements of Hongkongers, and I could further conclude that the flexibility in citizenship and ethnic identity is also a common feature of Hongkongers based on the findings on this theme. Therefore, these core democracy activists are Hong Kong citizens with flexible attitude towards citizenship while rejecting Chineseness, as indicated in the topic of this sub-section.

Crusader for restoring homeland

The democracy movement in Hong Kong was driven by a strong faith in domestic democratisation since 1980s. Since the rise of localism in 2010s, especially after the Occupy Movement in 2014, division based on political opinions and national identity recognition emerged in the society. The orientation to the democratisation in Hong Kong has been backed by differentiated national identity discourses. A separatist sentiment which advocates a new nationhood has become rampant element in the narrative of the democracy movement. This research demonstrates that liberal democracy is generally regarded as national characteristic of Hongkongers by pro-democracy activists. While these activists have moved abroad and are still trying to restore their homeland, it can be described that it is practically a "crusader movement." The overseas democracy movement is driven by the faith in liberal democracy, aims at restoring homeland and traditional way of living, and constructing a new nation. For those who pursue independence from China, they aim at removing Chinese administration and influence in Hong Kong. It resembles the features of Crusaders who tried to restore Iberia from Muslim control in the Middle Ages.

Such sense of mission, as scholars suggest, can also be explained by the cultural traumas Hongkongers have encountered (Kassen and Jackson, 2020; La Torre et al, 2022). The bloodsheds across China in suppressing the 1989 Democracy Movement stimulated the citizens in the British colony to pursue democracy in Hong Kong and China. The feeling of loss due to the unfulfilled promise of universal suffrage after handover cultivated a new generation of activists who were more sceptical to the establishment and the intrinsic

recognition of Chinese nationality. The failure of the 2014 Occupy Movement in fighting for universal suffrage underpinned the momentum of the cause of self-determination and independence of Hong Kong. The prosecution of Edward Leung and disqualification of localist candidates in Legislative Council election in 2016 embittered localist supporters toward the authority. And the introduction of the National Security Law (NSL) in 2020 were the breaking points for pro-democracy and localist camps that they have officially become the enemy of the state, as the previously ordinary practices of organising demonstrations and demand of ending the one-party state are now offences. These incidents are deemed defeats in the democracy movement, or erosion of freedom and autonomy of Hongkongers. Each of these incidents shaped the direction of the opposition movements in Hong Kong, and facilitated new discourses in the opposition camp. Along with the occurrence of these setbacks, the emerging discourses are increasingly radical. The newcomers of each stage of the democracy movement were influenced by the new discourses. These discourses define identities of Hongkongers and revise the direction of the democracy movement. As La Torre et al (2022) suggests, collective identity and responsibility are developed when encountering cultural traumas, I find that the stronger trauma make stronger impacts that last longer on the participants in the democracy movement. The 1989 Democracy Movement and the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement are the most impactful among all the incidents in the democracy movement. Both created overwhelming fear in the society that drove hundreds of thousands of citizens to emigrate. After the suppression of the 1989 Democracy Movement, the hope of political reform in China was almost extinguished, and China has become a “lost motherland” for many democracy activists in Hong Kong. The public commemorations of the massacre on 4th June, lighting candles in Victoria Park are an annual rite of conscience for many Hongkongers. Some localist activists, as I personally encountered, used to criticise the commemoration as promotion of Chinese nationalism. However, nowadays they describe that the commemoration is a “cultural heritage” of Hong Kong after they have gone exile in the last few years.

Now Hongkongers are going through what happened to the Chinese dissidents three decades ago, “losing home” and exile. A new generation of activists who advocate Hong Kong independence abroad are produced. The longevity of this new wave of democracy movement is subject to examination of time. Nonetheless, as this research reveals, the resolution of pursuing self-determination and independence among core activists have grown stronger after the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement. The direct repression on Hongkongers

from Beijing since 2019 consolidates the discourse of Hong Kong nationhood. In the interviews, all my informants express a strong will of preserving the culture of Hong Kong, even if some of them do not advocate independence. The cases of repressions in these two movements indicate how tremendous cultural traumas can have long lasting and huge impacts on collective identity, responsibility and behaviour. People may adopt or reinforce discourses on collective identity and nationhood, start repetition of performing certain rites and pursue political ideals as a lifelong mission and responsibility after experiencing such political trauma. Preservation of the cultural heritage of Hongkongers is a creed for some activists as restoring Jerusalem for Crusaders. All these features match the argument of Gellner (1983) on the religious characteristics of nationalism.

Another common feature I notice from the research is activists' opinions towards the group with opposite opinions. As some interviewees acknowledge that the recognition to liberal democracy is an essential element to become a Hongkonger, they regard those who deny this political value non-Hongkongers, notwithstanding them being born and having lived for a long time in Hong Kong. Even though the questions about how to deal with pro-Beijing politicians and their supporters after "liberation" were not discussed, I could summarise that these activists are not very tolerant toward them. I did not hear it from my interviewees, but from other participants in the protests that a "purge" would be necessary once Hong Kong was liberated. It may not be a popular idea among democracy supporters, but I heard of the discourse of deporting government supporters or those who identify themselves as Chinese. Even though the promulgation of the NSL was already more than five years ago, political division in Hongkongers remains intense. When ideology is internalised in the identity of each citizen in society, political opinions are labels to determine "friends" and "enemies". For those who have strong revolutionary sentiment, I will not be surprised that their antagonistic attitude toward "blue ribbons" is not less than those between Christians and Muslims during the Crusader era.

Missionaries

In practice, the social movement these activists engage in is not a military campaign driven by faith like the Crusades. Although a few of the informants mention the possibility of using armed forces to confront the authority, they all admit the risk and challenges of using force. Even for those who used to dedicate in direct actions back in 2019, overthrowing the CCP regime by force is not their primary means to achieve "liberation". As Frank explains his

idea of "revolution of our times", the ultimate goal of the democracy movement is to establish a democratic and autonomous nation of Hongkongers. While building an imagined community of Hongkongers for democracy abroad, the activists engage in promoting democracy and provision of assistance in the diaspora communities, building networks and narratives of nationhood and lobbying foreign politicians. These activities resemble what missionaries carry out for preaching and developing religious communities.

Nation building and diaspora services based on ideology is like running a church. As an imagined community, the construction of Hong Kong nationhood is similar to founding a new religion. The advocates of independence are creating a new doctrine to distinct themselves from the original community. It is not merely a split within a belief system, such as Protestants split from Catholics during Reformation who still believed in the same God. The creation of a Hong Kong nationhood is closer to the emergence of monotheistic Islamism in the polytheistic Arabia and new belief system that does not share the same root as the old one, and the followers of two faiths worship different targets. The independence advocates are constructing a new Hongkonger identity with distinct culture, ideology and other characteristics from Chinese. Universal values, capitalism, use of Cantonese and English, westernised lifestyle and the rejection of Chinese nationalism are all the elements that these advocates define as cultural criteria, or everyday rituals of Hongkongers.

As founding members of the new nationhood, the independence advocates are active in promoting their ideas to their own clans and those who are outside. As Harry describes his role in the democracy movement, he is a storyteller and preserver of Hongkongers' culture and value. This is similar to faith dissemination of missionaries. To overseas Hongkongers, these advocates reinforce the idea of democracy and remind them about the loss of freedom in homeland by hosting political assemblies and community gatherings. To foreign politicians and public, the activists endeavour to gaining their support through lobbying and cultural engagements such as exhibitions and film screenings. "Liberate Hong Kong" through the exertion of international pressure on Beijing is the ultimate goal of these activists. Meanwhile, for the independence advocates, what they want the foreigners to believe also include the concept of Hongkonger as a nationality of democracy fighters. This is the message they are spreading for gaining international recognition of Hong Kong as a new nation.

The mentality of some interviewees is similar to passionate pastors. Especially the localists like Vivian, Harry, Hugh and Frank, who place the pursuit of democracy and

independence of Hong Kong as the mission of their life. The persistence of their political values is almost comparable to missionaries and monks who vow to sacrifice personal life for faith. Even for those who are not enthusiastic in the construction of nationhood, such as Chris as a veteran labour rights advocate, many of them have been participating in the democracy movement for over a decade and continue despite the risk of persecution by the state. Their actions reflect the strong adherence to their political values which drives them to keep contributing to the democracy movement. This persistence of promoting ideas regardless of danger is similar to the Western missionaries who spread their faith in 19th century China and Korea where the state did not welcome foreign ideas and may exert physical repression.

While an imagined community, a nation or a religious organisation, is founded with a common belief, tangible support from its followers is crucial to keep it survive. Therefore, apart from spreading the belief in the imagined community, the activists develop the diaspora community with substantial and social support to the members of the community in needs. The diaspora organisations in local communities provide information and financial support to immigrants to ease their settlement in the new homes. The gatherings and other leisure activities hosted by these organisations satisfy the social needs of compatriots. Many of them are also active in reflecting the needs and opinions of Hongkongers to the governments in their host countries. The non-political services provided by the organisations operated by these activists are crucial in building membership of the diaspora communities. Similar to religious organisations, the supporters and participants in their activities do not necessarily agree with their beliefs, but the non-believer participants can be seen as a tool of building reputations and networks as both parties find the relationship of service providers and receivers as mutually beneficial. The action of sharing is important for the cohesion and unity in the community and building a positive image of the organisations, so to conduce to spreading their messages. This is similar to the charitable and community works of Western missionaries in China from the 19th century. To gain the trust from the local population, the churches always aid the underprivileged even though they are not followers. Food distribution, education and medical assistance are the tangible tools to build a benevolent image of the church, which is helpful in recruiting followers. Merely preaching is not the most effective way to persuade those apathetic or with different opinions to follow the ideas of missionaries and advocates. This is why the activists devote lots of resources in community engagement. Jenna does not mind that some pro-Beijing Hongkongers participate in her organisation's activities as she understands the mutually beneficial relationship. Those who

have experiences in church or community work such as Hugh, Matthew and Beto already applied this approach in their professional and political life in Hong Kong.

5.2 "Liberate Hong Kong" as a slogan and an imagination

The use of "liberate Hong Kong" resembles the use of sacred languages or mantra in religions. As Anderson (2006) suggests, the applications of the sacred languages are not about practical communications, but as badges for showing the faith and membership to certain communities. The lack of comprehension to classical Arabic does not affect the loyalty of non-Arabic speaking Muslims. Similarly, the democracy movement of Hong Kong shares some features of a religious community. As Matthew describes, "liberate Hong Kong" has been used as a scripture repeated by supporters in various occasions. The slogan serves the functions of a sacred phrase in an imagined community. For its users, the comprehension of the slogan does not matter. The identification of Hongkongers who have faith in democracy and the demonstration of this faith are the primary function of the slogan. The more ambiguous it is, the more space there is for the members of this community for imagination.

The use of slogans has similar effects as singing national anthem. Not only the use of "liberate Hong Kong", but also the song "Glory to Hong Kong" (願榮光歸香港)[14] was widely used by demonstrators during the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement. A sense of connection arises when the people use of the same language in the form of slogans or chant the same songs in a crowd. This is the effect of *unisonance* suggested by Anderson (2006: 144-145) on how an imagined shared identity is created. Therefore, as all informants agree, "liberate Hong Kong" is effective for building solidarity and cohesion in like-minded Hongkongers. The demonstration of solidarity from the use of this slogan is important for continuing the democracy movement. While the end of the path is too far to be seen, and the sense of solidarity as a positive emotion keeps the followers participate in the movement (Flesher Fominaya, 2007a, 2010). The action of using this slogan is also a ritual for the members of a community to construct a collective identity in a social movement (Melucci,

[14] "Glory to Hong Kong" (願榮光歸香港) is a song started circulation on the internet and protests from August 2019. The song was composed by an anonymous composer and lyrics by netizens. The lyrics are about the grievance toward the proposal of the Extradition Bill and the desire for democracy. The song was repeatedly used in protests, and some protestors described it as a de facto anthem of Hong Kong. In June 2023, the Hong Kong Government filed in injunction to ban the song for seditious role pursuant to the National Security Law. The adaptation and circulation of the melody and lyrics on any occasions are offences.

1995; Polletta and Jasper, 2001) and affirm values, continuity and solidarity as self-worship in nationalism (Gellner, 1983).

In 2019, the use of “liberate Hong Kong” by many protesters in Hong Kong may attribute for convenience as it was already a well-known slogan in anti-government actions. But as the democracy movement have migrated along with the exodus of the activists after the enforcement of the NSL, “liberate Hong Kong” becomes the most suitable slogan for appealing the followers around the world. The recognition of “loss” of homeland is more concrete nowadays as many are forced to leave Hong Kong for political reasons. For the followers in the democracy movement who have moved abroad, it is not merely some undesirable alien influence has invaded homeland, but they are also physically separated from their home when the alien influence becomes unbearable. The emergence of the NSL and the exodus of activists make the target of “liberation” clearer. While there are various versions of the slogan in English, “liberate” is the most accurate term for the original word of 光復 [gwong fuk]. “Liberate” is a stronger word with the meaning of “setting something free”, which can be applied to a political movement of freeing a territory where the civil and political freedoms are infringed. Meanwhile, “restore” is still appropriate as the democracy movement aims to restoring the old social and political order in Hong Kong.

For the activists from Hong Kong, the preservation of the original way of life is important. Many interviewees admit that they did not resist the rule by Beijing if the civil liberty that Hongkongers enjoy did not shrink. The vision of a "liberated Hong Kong", for most interviewees, is merely an older version of Hong Kong where people were still confident in the state in respecting civil liberty, free economy and political future, and with less interference from Mainland China. When delving carefully into the image of a “liberated Hong Kong”, I found that the interviewees are not necessarily seeking to building a nation with direct democracy, at least not a minimum requirement for achieving “liberation”. Their desired state of liberation is the era between 1980s and 2000s, when the level of political and civil peaked, economic prosperity was bright enough to create hope for everyone and the difference between Hong Kong and Mainland was largest. Most informants admit that it is not the perfect state they are pursuing, but an acceptable and still memorable model. The political systems in that period were only partly democratic. The selection of the head of administration, the governor before handover or chief executive afterwards, is de facto appointment by London and Beijing; only half of the seats in the Legislative Council were popularly elected, while the fully democratically elected District Councils could only decide

how to use the budgets set by the government. Hong Kong was a highly liberal but undemocratic society in that period. For most of the informants, full democracy is ideal and a means to protect the freedom and rights, which preserves the way of living they adept to. If civil liberty we enjoyed are restored, a flawed democracy is still acceptable. Even though the room for imagination of the "liberated Hong Kong" is spacious, it is not totally abstract nor made up of fantasy because they are attempting to replicate what actually happened.

If pushing further, the goal of the democracy activists pursue is an ideally democratic and liberal polity, with unprecedented level of autonomy, whether independent or not. Many informants believe that the pursuit for universal value is a virtue of Hongkongers, and it seems to be a national characteristic once Hong Kong is widely recognised as a nation. However, as I raised out in Chapter 1 and also found in this research, political values vary for every individual. The activists in this study may have similar persistence in universal values, but they have different ideas in economic and social aspects. Assumed that most democracy supporters from Hong Kong are pursuing a similar form of democracy, their idea can hardly be applied to most of the population as a national virtue. At the height of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, the opposition camp received 58% votes in the District Council elections in November 2019. Though it was the majority, the proportion of 42% voters supporting pro-Beijing and other candidates cannot be ignored. HKPORI's polls on ethnic identity also show that the highest proportion of citizens who identified themselves as Hongkonger was 55.4% in December 2019 (HKPORI, 2024). It suggests that at least 44.6% citizens do not exclude Chinese as their ethnic identity. Chinese nationalism, rule under the PRC and forms of government other than Western democracy still have abundant audience in Hong Kong. Against this backdrop, most of the interviewees in this research advocate nation building or independence under the flag of universal value and denial of Chinese ethnicity. It does not mean that they ignore other opinions but shows the romantic side of nationalism. Besides, their responses to the question of what should a "liberated Hong Kong" be demonstrate how nation is an imagined community. Out of all informants, Chris is the only one refuses to return to the past because of the social inequality that was never resolved. In contrast, those who are the most persistent on independence have the best impression of the glorious past of Hong Kong. Anderson's description on "nations are imagined as communities for the deep and horizontal comradeship despite inequality and exploitation within them" (2006: 5-7) applies to the enthusiastic imagination of these activists.

The most imaginative part is reverting political reality against the will of CCP and building a nationhood. For Anderson, an inherent limit and sovereignty of a nation is already an imaginative concept (2006: 5), then creating a national identity is even more imaginative. As the informants perceive that such liberty cannot be restored under the rule of CCP, they seek independence from China. The evolution of the Hong Kong independence discourse is a typical development of nationalism as Anderson (2006: 47-65) analyses the cases of independence movements in the United States and Venezuela. As a former colony of a gigantic empire, Hong Kong was in a peripheral position in the British Empire, enjoyed high autonomy from London and practised its own customs. It was similar to the British colonies in North America and Spanish New Granada in South America. When Hong Kong was handed to China in 1997, it was not incorporated into the "PRC proper" as the British system was retained, and hence I consider Hong Kong is still a colony after sovereign change. The triggers of nationalism were all about the interventions of colonial affairs from the metropoles. London's levy of new taxes after the Seven Years War in North America resulted in grievance in the thirteen colonies, while Madrid's attempt to abolish slavery in New Granada stimulated resistance from slaveowners. The discourse of Hong Kong independence emerged for the clashes derived from social and economic integration Mainland China in early 2010s, and became widely accepted in the democracy movement when the risk of extraditions of Hong Kong citizens to Mainland was exposed. Since Hong Kong has never had its own sovereignty and Hongkongers were traditionally regarded as ethnic Chinese, the discourse of claiming Hongkonger as an ethnicity or national identity is what imagined by these activists. There is not a detailed notion on Hong Kong nationhood that widely accepted by democracy supporters. I think that it may not be a negative situation that a clear notion is absent because the people still need the room for imagination, especially as the end of the independence movement is still far away from our sight. But I argue that it is the responsibility of the leaders in the movement to set a framework for such a notion, otherwise there will not be a practical way to achieve the goal.

5.3 Prospect of the overseas democracy movement

Inheritance of identity and political values

The identity of Hongkongers is reinforced by the widespread knowledge about the difference between Hong Kong and Mainland China. As suggested by Polletta and Jasper (2001), collective identity can be constructed by outsiders. The outsiders of the democracy

movement of Hong Kong are Western governments and media whose actions and comments about Hong Kong and media coverage have been playing a role in this reinforcement of identity. Nonetheless, while Western governments and media facilitate the emergence of Hongkonger identity, they have not been providing substantial support for the independence of Hong Kong or building nationhood, namely financial support and official recognition. Therefore, the independence movement was ignited without sufficient fuel for moving forward. The overseas Hongkong activists and our supporters from the West portray Hongkongers as defenders of democracy and freedom, and associate Hongkonger identity with universal values. Although there is a certain portion of Hongkongers at home and abroad are politically apathic or supportive to Beijing, those who live abroad and are exposed to western media in everyday life, the value of democracy and freedom would be internalised as a part of these Hongkongers' identity. Meanwhile, the ideological difference with the Chinese state is the main rationale for the Hong Kong activists to distinguish Hongkongers from the Chinese nation. If the authoritarian rule of the PRC does not transform to democracy while the overseas democracy movement in Hong Kong diaspora continues, the sense of distinction among Hong Kong diaspora from the Chinese nation will persist and intensify, even if there is no major achievement in the democracy or independence movement.

Western governments and media are not the only outsiders in constructing the identity of Hongkongers. Beijing's outreach of diaspora policy may affect the offsprings of Hongkonger migrants. Han's study on the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia shows that Beijing endeavours in organising Chinese diaspora networks under its influence (2019). During the Cold War, the PRC and the government of Republic of China (ROC) in Taipei competed for garnering support from Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia. The rivalry between Beijing and ROC government in overseas Chinese networks was a competition in ideology and legitimacy, as well to prevent the rival from building an overseas network for subverting itself. For extending influence, maintaining connections and even constructing a sense of belonging to the PRC among overseas Chinese, Beijing has been investing in propaganda, providing resources in education and business opportunities to the diaspora. In 2000s, it was apparent that the investment of Beijing in diaspora communities in Southeast Asia paid off as they had developed closer ties to Beijing. Considering the promotion of Chinese nationalism and suppression of separatism, I estimate that Beijing will allocate more resources for the overseas Hongkonger networks, either for building pro-Beijing networks or dividing the pro-democracy networks. The PRC outreach will potentially try to reinforce the sense of

belonging to the Chinese nation and undermine the sense of uniqueness among overseas Hongkongers. For the young emigrants and the offsprings of the first-generation emigrants who are curious about their cultural roots and have less attachment to Hong Kong, it is possible that they are more affected by the notion of Chinese nationalism. After all, the development of Hong Kong diaspora identity is highly subject to the competition between the outsiders from Beijing and the West.

Some interviewees are aware of linkage between the Hongkonger identity and the democracy movement. As a strategy, Jenna's suggestions on branding Hongkongers as defenders of democracy is a way to shape the movement and maintain its momentum. When Hongkongers are perceived as possessing such identity, they will see themselves obliged to participate in the movement. This is a strategy of using collective identity developed through cultural trauma raised by La Torre et al (2022) and identity work by Melucci (1996: 70) to unite and mobilise Hongkongers and sustain the movement. Those in the UK report that the story of recent wave of immigration from Hong Kong is now in the curriculum of elementary education and public funds are available for diaspora organisations to produce educational materials and hosting events for engaging with local population. Although some informants are worried that Hongkonger's identity and value in the diaspora will diminish in one or two generations, the theory and environment suggest that it is not too pessimistic.

Momentum and direction of the overseas democracy movement

As all the interviewees agree, the momentum of the democracy movement is declining. Some factors, such as shift of international support due to geopolitical reasons, are force majeure for the movement. Since the international attention to the issues of Hong Kong is diminishing, Beto describes that the democracy movement is "decaying gracefully" because the plight in Hong Kong has become a past when more pressing international issues emerge. Secondly, as mentioned above, the enthusiasm of overseas Hongkongers in the movement is attenuating, particularly after obtaining permanent residency or citizenship abroad. They will no longer regard Hong Kong matters to them for utilitarian personality. Those who are repressed in Hong Kong are forgotten by both the international society and overseas Hongkongers. The national security legislations restrict the space for resistance. The connection between us and those behind bars is lost and the way for us to support them is limited. This is why the movement is decaying. But why "gracefully"? As Beto explains, we

are always on the moral high ground. Whenever we introduce ourselves in the international arena, we can always represent the ideals of freedom and democracy.

But decline does not equate vanish. As discussed above, elimination of Hongkonger identity is unlikely as its cultural foundations are strong and statutory distinction still exists. If the diaspora population who used to participate in the demonstrations in 2019 still uphold democracy, the movement will continue even with a very low level of participation. As many of my friends and other participants in the demonstrations in June 2019 describe, we were very astonished with the scale of the demonstrations when seeing over one million citizens on the street. When the Civil Human Rights Front, the organiser of the demonstrations announced their plan for the march on 9th June, many people were pessimistic about the number of participants. After a series of oppressions of localists politicians and organisations in 2016, supporters of the democracy movement felt hopeless and their motivation declined. It was shown in the by-elections of the Legislative Council in 2018 that the pan-democracy camp unexpectedly lost two seats. It seemed that pan-democracy camp was losing ground, so as the discourses of democracy and self-determination. However, as Flesher Fominaya (2007a, 2010) argues, the impacts of collective identity on participants in social movement can be long lasting. Those who participated in the Occupy Movement in 2014 and localist movement since early 2010s do not necessarily abandoned their collective roles in the society as activists for democracy, self-determination or independence after the movements and organisations became inactive. When social grievance reached a critical point or there are other windows of opportunity, the people will spontaneously mobilise themselves. This is a perspective to interpret the “organic” nature of social movements as suggested by Vivian during the interview.

Though upholding the belief in an imagined community, the interviewees are pragmatic to the future of the democracy movement. Some are satisfied with the unprecedented development of civil society abroad, which is an overspill of the exodus of activists and community organisers. Meanwhile, they are aware of the constraints on the movement and not over-optimistic with their own experience and the knowledge of the counterparts from Tibet, Uyghur region and Mainland China. The practicalities in the democracy movement cannot be ignored if it should succeed. While complaining about the lack of direction and overarching strategy, some informants are eager to see the establishment of a centralised platform and cooperation mechanism of Hongkongers across the globe. However, some do not see it as a practical or feasible idea. As of I am writing this section, the

Hong Kong Parliament, self-proclaimed shadow government abroad was already convened for more than half a year. But it has not been reported any important engagement with the diaspora or foreign governments yet. Some activists like Frank have been meeting with Hongkongers and foreign politician in multiple countries for several years for constructing an international network. Despite their personal dedication of time and effort, there is not yet significant progression. It shows the difficulty of building authority and reaching consensus in our circle. It would be easy to mobilise followers to participate in a demonstration for a crisis, but reaching agreement in a long-term strategy or goal may involve an unlikely compromise.

The informants admit and are concerned about the level of division in the movement. Nevertheless, as Jasper (1997) and Snow (2001) argue, divisions in social movements are natural and inevitable. As Jasper suggests, activists may develop their own identities in different levels, depending on the experience of political participation as activists, loyalty to the organisations and fellow members, and their tactics and styles. Personally, I do not view division is necessarily negative. In a liberal society, diversity of ideas is normal. It is certainly common for dissidents who are persistent to their beliefs and dare to express their disagreement with each other. However, the key issue is about the balance between our own identities and public interests. As I have observed in the last two decades, many conflicts in the pro-democracy camp always concern political ideals, preference on tactics and personal and organisational interests. If we could make decisions impartially behind the *veil of ignorance* (Rawls, 1971), without the consideration of our own background, social status and personal characters, or at least do not take politics too personal, division would be minimised in such level of objectivity despite differences in opinions. However, in reality, especially in the polarising world, it seems improbable for most political leaders to act without personal bias. Even though some of the activists in this research hope that our peers could forgo prejudice, it is still a bad habit which everyone of us can hardly quit. In addition, irrational unity usually leads to worse outcomes. The groupthink and lack of check and balance always result in poor decision making and hinder effectiveness, which I witnessed in some social movements and organisations I joined. Moreover, the lack of resources is always the cause of conflicts between organisations. As some of the dissidents admit, the disputes over political opinions are the rationale to eliminate competitors for resources. Therefore, in my opinion, division in social movements is like a weakness in personality which can hardly change. The democracy movement will move on while division is carried forward.

The activists are trying to overcome the challenges and produce solutions for the democracy movement. However, many of these challenges are external factors that they could only adapt to, rather than completely solve. The scarcity of resources is unavoidable because of the global economic situation. Donations from individuals are limited as many overseas Hongkongers must deal with the huge expenses and uncertainty for settling abroad. Hongkongers at home face the risk of being sanctioned by the authority for supporting dissents. Sponsorships from the West, especially the US, are dramatically axed as a response to deficit in public finance and demand from electorate to cut the support to overseas development. The decline of international attention to Hong Kong is certain that new geopolitical and humanitarian crisis emerge across the globe from time to time. Even without my personal experience of engagement with politicians and officials in Europe, it is understandable that the governments in Europe can hardly divert their resources and attention from domestic issues and security threat from Russia. Fellow activists in this research accept the unfavourable situation and that they cannot demand too much from outsiders.

Some of my informants are concerned about the loss of connection between Hongkongers at home and abroad. Indeed, a community will disintegrate when communication among members is severed. But from a technical perspective, this is not an enormous challenge. The advancement of logistics in the last decades facilitate communication between long distance. As long as access to internet is still free in Hong Kong, there would not be a huge information gap for geographical distance. Except for the minority of activists like me, most emigrants are free to visit our origin homeland. Annual visit of family in Hong Kong is much more affordable than in the 80s. Therefore, those who have moved abroad can always acquire information and opinions from Hong Kong if they are willing to. The real challenge is probably the attitudes of overseas activists. I am not worried about my interviewees at the moment since they have the awareness of maintaining the connection. However, failure in communication is common cause of the fall in social movements and politics. It is nothing strange for political leaders lose the touch with commoners and then their support. It is comparable to division in social movements, a common failure regardless of culture and circumstances. This is an issue as a part of challenges concerning sentiments and political culture of Hongkongers. Some informants are concerned that the lack of political literacy and the growth of populism in Hongkongers may undermine the democracy movement. Their concern takes me back to the question in the Introduction: are we pursuing the same goal? Among my interviewees, it seems that their

differences are not too large. But some of them already notice that even the supporters of the movement may not have the identical understanding and value to the society. I also notice that though most of the interviewees are less conservative and more critical to the authority, even the governments that supposedly supporting the democracy movement, than common participants in the democracy movement. It is undeniable that veteran activists have varied opinions for deeper understanding in how politics work. Many Hongkongers perceive that Donald Trump is an adversary to Beijing for his apparent hawkish foreign policy and therefore are supportive to him. However, most do not see how the cut of support in overseas development affects democracy advocates. On the other hand, even within activists ourselves, the shape of an ideal Hong Kong is debatable. In this research, I do not delve into the details of the political system, different scenarios about referendum and the relations with China in the "liberated Hong Kong". Some informants are now persistent on independence, while others could accept PRC's sovereignty in Hong Kong. More differences will likely be found if going into details. Again, it is back to the question of dealing with division. I do not expect a remedy to the gap in cognition within and between leaders and followers in the democracy movement, as it has been developed since years ago and affected by the international interactions in political culture and geopolitics. Some informants like Vivian, Harry and Hugh emphasise continuous education on democracy for Hongkongers. But it is an uphill battle against the trend in the polarised media ecosystem. If significant amelioration is not made, we should expect an extended path to democracy.

Although it is too arduous to cope with the circumstances and construct overarching goals and strategies for the movement, the activists are finding rooms to manoeuvre. Many of them mention "preparation for future opportunities", which may infer a wide range of work for the democracy movement. Although the civil society in Hong Kong is being dismantled by the authority, the activists are rebuilding the civil society for Hongkongers abroad. Many of them already had experience in operating civil society organisations, advocacy and hosting events back in Hong Kong, which they are applying on the diaspora community. All the efforts on building grassroot organisations across the globe are contributing to the maintenance of Hongkongers' identity and cohesion. Since contentious politics in Hong Kong are not the top concern for the diaspora, and out of our area of control, many diaspora organisations focus on the rights and interests of overseas Hongkongers. The assistance and services provided to overseas Hongkongers are strengthening the resilience of individuals and the community. The networks with fellow activists from various background, politicians and

the civil society abroad may not immediately strengthen the democracy movement, but they are important social capital for seeking resources and extending influence, which is helpful in the long run. A few informants emphasise the necessity of learning, including skills and from experience of others. Tony proposes to learn about the success of Jewish and Indian diaspora in the UK, while other activists often exchange knowledge with dissidents from other nations. They also value the education of themselves and other Hongkongers. Apart from politics, they appreciate all kinds of enhancement in knowledge for career and personal interests. In the absence of a common strategy, the development of the democracy movement and diaspora community is similar how Deng Xiaoping described China's economic reform, "crossing river by touching the stones". If the argument of Harry and Lotta is true, every little step in the abovementioned work by each Hongkonger is beneficial to the democracy movement.

Similar to the OCDM, it will be too harsh to appraise Hongkonger's movement by whether or not the goal of regime change is delivered. No two democracy or national movement share the same path. Although dissidents from Mainland China, Tibet, Taiwan and Hong Kong share a common feature of defying the central authority of China and highly subject to the events in China, we do not share an identical situation and fate. The democracy movement in Taiwan is a successful case. From the onset of the 228 Incident in 1947 to the first complete re-election of the legislature in 1992, it took 45 years for Taiwanese to abolish the authoritarian system. However, as an independence movement, the way to a Taiwan-based constitution and international recognition of Taiwan as a country is still long (Fell, 2018; Hughes, 2025; Lin 2006; Liu, 2021). The national movement of Tibetans survives with an unknown future. The CTA based in India has been serving overseas Tibetans with the guidance from Dalai Lama for over 60 years, but it can hardly intervene the affairs in Tibet. There is no sign of resuming the high autonomy in Tibet as in the 1950s (Choedon, 2021). The OCDM used to receive massive international support right had had strong momentum after the 1989 Democracy Movement. However, the overseas Chinese dissidents are highly scattered and face various challenges in organising actions to influence the people and regime in China (Chen, 2014, 2018; He, 2014). The democracy movement of Hongkongers may face similar challenges as the counterpart do, but the development and outcome will not be the same. Fortuity is certain in social movements that not a single party can deliver the result it wishes to. It may be true for what Tony describes during the interview, a plan for founding the state of Hong Kong is an impossible task. It could succeed in the way like how the Greek diaspora established the foundation of the modern state of Greece as mentioned by Gellner

(1983: 106), or the democratisation in Taiwan prompted by overseas Taiwanese and the US Government. Or the overseas Hongkongers may find the homeland is still occupied by an alien regime several decades later. Lastly, it may be an inconvenient truth for some fellow dissidents that the fate of a nation is not always determined by the will of its people. A nation cannot be born without their will, but it is not a sufficient criterion. The birth of Hong Kong was a result of clashes between two empires, and its development is always subject to the international circumstances as its economy. Even if there is a regime change in Hong Kong or Beijing, whether it is a direct result of the democracy movement, there is guarantee that the future polity will be as democratic and autonomous as we imagine.

6 Conclusion

In Autumn 2021, while my asylum claim was still pending for the first interview, I was assigned by the Finnish Immigration Service to stay in Kajaani, a town some 400 km north or a 6-hour train ride from Helsinki. One Sunday afternoon, after some grocery shopping at Prisma near Kajaani Train Station, I sat on a bench outside the checkouts. A local middle-aged man sat next to me, greeted me and began a conversation in simple Finnish:

"Mistä sinä kotoisin? (Where are you from?)" the man asked. Considering it was a small town, and people may not have exposed to international affairs often, I thought China would be easier for him to understand. "Olen kotoisin Kiinasta (I am from China)," I answered.

"Minkä kaupunki? (which city?)" the man showed his curiosity of my origin by keeping on asking. "Hongkongista (from Hong Kong)," I tried to practise Finnish skill by using the case learnt from the basic Finnish course. "Hong Kong? Ei Kiinaa. (Hong Kong? Not China.)" The man commented with a little laughter. I was rather astonished by his comment, but did not ask why he made it, partly because of my limited Finnish proficiency.

Out of my expectation, a common resident in a remote town in Finland defined me as non-Chinese upon knowing my hometown. Indeed, since late 2019, for several times people from the West have told me that they do not regard Hongkongers identical to Chinese. Some even enthusiastically told me that they support Hong Kong independence. Personally, though Hongkonger is my most preferable national identity, I do not exclude Chinese, British or Finnish if being described. All these elements are part of my life history that I do not erase them for my political preference. However, if others repeatedly tell me that I am not Chinese, will there be any variations in my opinion on national identity? According to Polletta and Jasper (2001), the repetition of this discourse probably solidifies the identity of overseas Hongkongers, and perhaps makes some impacts on the democracy movement.

To find out the opinions on national identity of fellow dissidents from Hong Kong who are still active abroad, 10 interviews were conducted for activists from the UK, continental Europe and Taiwan in this research. The research also aims to study the role "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" as a slogan and goal of the democracy movement of Hongkongers, as well as the interviewees' opinions on this movement, which has been taking place abroad following the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in 2019. This study finds that the growth of demand for secession from China and nationhood of

Hongkonger in the democracy movement is triggered by the change of social and political order after the handover to China in 1997. The emergence of this discourse localism in Hong Kong is a typical case of nationalism grows out of threat of a dominant group to a peripheral in a country and the use of "liberate Hong Kong" shares the trait of nationalism in self-worship (Gellner, 1983).

Since 1997, the Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong (HKUPOP) had conducted surveys on ethnic identity among residents in Hong Kong, which was then succeeded by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (HKPORI) from 2019 to 2022. In the HKUPOP/HKPORI surveys, respondents were asked to choose their own ethnic identity from the four options of Hongkonger, Hongkonger in China, Chinese in Hong Kong and Chinese. The surveys found that Hongkonger was usually the most chosen identity of more than 34% since early 2010s. The results reflect the rise of localism, a political discourse of maintaining high autonomy and even secession of Hong Kong from China (Chan and Tang, 2019; HKPORI, 2024). However, in my research, all the pro-democracy activists identify themselves as Hongkonger without exception. When being asked about whether they would accept Chinese as part of their national identity, these interviewees overwhelming express rejection and denial. Although the sampling of this research is not statistically reliable in reflecting the exact traits of overseas activists from Hong Kong, the findings show that active participants in the overseas democracy movement nowadays have strong attachment to Hongkonger and exclusion of Chinese in their national identity. Since these activists have lived abroad for a few years, most of them accept the nationality of their current country of residence as part of their national identity. They agree that obtaining new citizenships will be beneficial for settling in the new countries and acquiring resources for the democracy movement. This attitude towards multiple citizenships is more flexible and cosmopolitan than the Chinese dissidents during the 1989 Democracy Movement who have been exiled (He, 2014), is a demonstration of flexible citizenship as Ong describes the culture of transnationality of overseas Chinese in 1990s (1999) and share the same rationales of some exile Tibetans dissidents in acquiring new citizenships (Hess, 2020). However, for the interviewees who moved to the UK, none of them used to have attachment to British identity prior to migration, though being British subjects before 1997 and appreciate the social and political system built by Britons. The lack of recognition to British and exclusion of Chinese identities can be explained by the Anderson's theory of colonial pilgrimage (2006) that

Hongkongers, as citizens in the colony, have been barred from access to the core of power of our metropoles in London and Beijing.

Most informants consider willingness and culture as definitions and criteria of being a Hongkonger, which matches Gellner's definition on elements of nationalism (1983). Specifically, the culture these activists mention refers to the use of Cantonese, or at least the willingness to learn for immigrants, the lifestyle of Hongkongers such as food and popular culture, and universal value of freedom, democracy and rule of law; meanwhile, the care for Hong Kong can be regarded as part of willingness to become Hongkonger. For most of them, language and lifestyle are sufficient but not essential criteria, while willingness and political view are essential. On the other hand, they all rule out place of birth and race in defining Hongkonger. Their argument of Hongkongers must pursue universal value raise a question of whether the residents of Hong Kong who reject Western democracy or loyal to the Chinese party-state are still "Hongkongers". Some informants suggest that those who support authoritarianism are not "Hongkongers", while some define them as "new Hongkongers" who accept the value instilled by Beijing to replace our "conventional value". This mindset is common in social movements in which participants identify adversaries when shaping their own collective identity (della Porta and Diani, 1999) and demonstrates the revolutionary nature of the democracy movement of overturning the opponent camp.

The notion of revolution is associated with the slogan "liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" which has been used by pro-democracy activists in the last few years. This slogan was first invented for an election campaign of a young localist candidate Edward Leung in 2016. Later in the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in 2019, the slogan was widely adopted by the entire pro-democracy camp, including the politicians and activists who used to disagree with the localist discourse of Hong Kong independence or self-determination. In this research, the informants are asked about their opinions on the role of the slogan and meaning of "liberate Hong Kong". Most of them find the slogan appealing in mobilising people to participate in protests and voting in election, and effective in uniting Hongkongers abroad. The activists perceive that "liberate Hong Kong" refers to restoring the old social and political orders in the glorious past. Meanwhile, they admit that the slogan is ambiguous and may have various interpretations, but the ambiguity of "liberate Hong Kong" offers rooms for participants to imagine and which is positive in uniting Hongkongers. The slogan resembles sacred languages in religions that the lower level of comprehension works better for identifying its users as members in a community and uniting them (Anderson, 2006).

The interviewees are further asked about their opinion on “liberate Hong Kong” as a goal of the democracy movement and definition of a “liberated Hong Kong”. With one exception, all of them treat “liberation” as a goal of the movement and for some even a life-long mission. But the periods of glorious past they perceive vary, from the final years of British rule in 1990s to the early stage as a Special Administrative Region of China and even right before the onset of the Anti-Extradition Movement in 2019. The common feature is that they memorise the level of freedom, a government that honoured rule of law and human rights, high autonomy from China, economic prosperity and longing for democracy. While they acknowledge that there was never full democracy in Hong Kong, they are satisfied when the above requirements are fulfilled even without universal suffrage. Democracy is the means to safeguard the old social and political order for them, so as independence and self-determination some of them pursue. For some localists who advocate secession from China, they started to accept this discourse when feeling the erosion of the old order since 2010s. Imagined if the CCP honoured the promise of high autonomy of Hong Kong, they would not disgust CCP’s notion of Chinese nationalism and would not consider nationhood of Hongkonger. Though realising the difficulty of independence, they hold such discourse as they lost confidence to the rule of Beijing. But some informants have reservation on independence and nationhood for feasibility and the utilitarian character of Hongkongers.

Generally, the activists are not very optimistic to the overseas democracy movement. They envisage that it may take decades and even generations for materialising democracy and nationhood in Hong Kong. All of them agree that the movement and Hong Kong diaspora lacks an overarching goal and strategy and organisations across the globe are often working on their own. Some feel anxious about the lack of leadership and a mechanism of cooperation in the diaspora and support a centralised international platform for the movement. While some doubt the necessity of such centralised platform, the supporters are concerned about representation and practice of some contenders of centralised organisations. The informants also notice other challenges in the democracy movement, including division, the decline of support from the diaspora for their difficulties in settling abroad and drop of enthusiasm, political illiteracy, utilitarianism and populism in Hongkongers, severance of connection among Hongkongers, lack of resources and geopolitical factors. The informants find these challenges complicated and the means of coping with them are limited. They propose some approaches to overcome some of the problems, including maintaining communication and mutual help between fellow activists and ordinary Hongkongers, building networks with like-

minded people around the world, adjusting expectations, participation in civil society in host countries, educating ourselves and Hongkongers and learning from the success of other diaspora and activists. They highlight the importance of strengthening capacity for future opportunities in the later stages of the movement.

In addition, this research explores activists' opinions and ways over the inheritance of Hongkonger's identity and the value of the democracy movement. The views on the necessity of maintaining the identity and value are divided. Some are worried that the identity and original culture of Hongkongers in diaspora will attenuate in one or two generations, others are indifferent to the changes of ethnic identity and political values of the next generations. There are also worries about the influence of culture and value from China in Hong Kong. For those who value ethnic identity and culture, they highlight responsibility of this generation to preserve and pass them to next generations. But all of them understand that the younger generations did not experience the political upheaval we witnessed and therefore think that the youngers do not necessarily share the same responsibility. The measures of inheritance proposed range from keeping the lifestyle from Hong Kong such as Cantonese, food culture, popular culture and celebrations to responses to new situations like acquiring public resources for education. Some activists notice that identity is usually shaped by the environment and outsiders of the community. Hence the targets of disseminating Hongkonger's identity and stories should be the local population of the host countries so that the next generations will effectively accept the collective identity we define when the non-Hongkongers can accurately tell them. The validity of this approach is supported by Polletta and Jasper (2001).

Finally, driven by the faith in democracy and autonomy, the overseas dissidents in this research are engaging in various positions and functions in the democracy movement. To restore the lost homeland, they devote their time and fortune in running diaspora and advocacy organisations, spreading the discourse of the democracy movement to fellow Hongkongers and the international community, providing support to protestors at home and compatriots abroad and lobbying governments and institutions in different countries. With the strong determination of safeguarding their values, confronting what they deem wrong and building an imagined ideal community, I agree with Gellner (1983) that the nationalist trait in them resemble religious enthusiasts, just like crusaders in combats and missionaries in creating the realm of heaven on earth. Many of the informants were already proud as Hongkonger and dedicated in the democracy movement when they lived in Hong Kong. Their sense of belonging to being Hongkonger and the roles they are performing in the movement

have been reinforced after moving abroad. The reinforcement of collective identities and sense of mission are attributed to the theory of cultural trauma by Kassen and Jackson (2020) and La Torre et al (2022) that the dissidents respond to the political upheaval with self-mobilisation for collective actions.

As a member of the democracy movement of Hongkongers, I conducted this research for understanding and clarifying ourselves and the aim of the movement. If possible, I wish this research will inspire positive development of democracy of Hongkongers and people of all nationalities. To be fair, my positionality as an activist and the sampling of research may lead to bias in presenting the views and truths about the democracy movement. As an example, my own indifference in ethnic identity and nationhood apparently varies from my informants. Hopefully, at least this research serves as a record of political memory in this age of the democracy movement of Hongkongers.

References

Anderson, Benedict. 1994. “Exodus.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 2: 314–27. https://doi.org/10.1086/448713.

Anderson, Benedict. 1998. *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. Verso.

Anderson, Benedict. 2006. *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed., Verso.

Barkan, Steven E. 1979. “Strategic, Tactical and Organizational Dilemmas of the Protest Movement against Nuclear Power.” *Social Problems (Berkeley, Calif.)*, vol. 27, no. 1: 19–37. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.1979.27.1.03a00030.

Berrebbah, Ishak. 2021. “The Mosaics of National Identity in the Arab American Diaspora: Exploring Long-Distance Nationalism in Diana Abu-Jaber’s Crescent.” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics*, vol. 15, no. 2: 187–209. https://doi.org/10.2478/ jnmlp-2021-0001.

Carla Willig, and Wendy Stainton Rogers. 2017. The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Case, William. 2008. “Hybrid politics and new competitiveness: Hong Kong’s 2007 chief executive election”, *East Asia*, Vol. 25 No. 4: 365-388.

Chan, Chi Kit, and Gary Tang. 2019. “Contested Citizenship in Global City: Global Citizenship, National Identities and Local Identity in Post-Handover Hong Kong.” *Social Transformations in Chinese Societies*, vol. 15, no. 2: 129–144. https://doi.org/10.1108/STICS-01-2019-0001.

Chan, Yuk Wah, and Heidi Fung. 2018. “Life ‘Offshored’: New Migrations to Taiwan from Post-1997 Hong Kong.” *New Chinese Migrations*, 1st ed., Routledge: 128–143. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315163239-9.

Chen, Jie. 2014. “The Overseas Chinese Democracy Movement after Thirty Years: New Trends at Low Tide.” *Asian Survey*, vol. 54, no. 3: 445–470. https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2014.54.3.445.

Chen, Jie. 2018. “The Chinese Political Opposition in Exile: A Chequered Development.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 70, no. 1: 108–129. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1418297.

Cheung, Yuk Man. 2020. “‘Liberate Hong Kong, the Revolution of Our Times’: The Birth of the First Orient Nation in the Twenty-First Century.” In *Research Handbook on Nationalism*, edited by Liah Greenfeld and Zeying Wu. Edward Elgar Publishing: 312–333. https://doi.org/10.4337/ 9781789903447.00036.

Chesters, Graeme, and Ian Welsh. 2011. *Social Movements: The Key Concepts*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203840689.

Choedon, Pema. 2021. “The Nechung Oracle and the Construction of Identity in the Tibetan Diaspora.” *Asian Ethnology*, vol. 80, no. 2: 391–412.

Cooper, Luke. 2018. “"You have to fight on your own' Self-alienation and the new Hong Kong nationalism." *Citizenship, Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong:*

Localism after the Umbrella Movement. 1st ed., Routledge: 94-113. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315207971.

Crocetti, Elisabetta, et al. 2018. "The Interplay of Personal and Social Identity." *European Psychologist*, vol. 23, no. 4: 300–310. https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000336.

Davies, Andrew D. 2012. "Assemblage and Social Movements: Tibet Support Groups and the Spatialities of Political Organisation." *Transactions - Institute of British Geographers (1965)*, vol. 37, no. 2: 273–286. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00462.x.

Della Porta, Donatella, and Mario Diani. 2006. *Social Movements : An Introduction*. 2nd ed., Blackwell Publishing.

Edmondson, Richard. 2002. "The February 28 Incident and National Identity." In *Memories of the Future: national identity issues and the search for a new Taiwan*, 1st ed., edited by Stéphane Corcuff. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315291338-3.

Emerson, Robert M., et al. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press.

Fell, Dafydd. 2018. *Government and Politics in Taiwan*. Second edition. Routledge.

Fleischauer, Stefan. 2007. "The 228 Incident and the Taiwan Independence Movement's Construction of a Taiwanese Identity." *China Information* (London, England) 21, no. 3: 373–401. https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X07083320.

Flesher Fominaya, Cristina. 2007a. "The Role of Humour in the Process of Collective Identity Formation in Autonomous Social Movement Groups in Contemporary Madrid." *International Review of Social History*, vol. 52, no. S15: 243–258. https://doi.org/10.1017/ S0020859007003227.

Flesher Fominaya, Cristina. 2007b. "Autonomous Movements and the Institutional Left: Two Approaches in Tension in Madrid's Anti-Globalization Network." *South European Society & Politics*, vol. 12, no. 3: 335–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360874070 1495202.

Flesher Fominaya, Cristina. 2010. "Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates." *Sociology Compass*, vol. 4, no. 6: 393–404. https://doi.org/10.1111/ j.1751-9020.2010.00287.x.

Gamson, Joshua. 1997. "Messages of Exclusion: Gender, Movements, and Symbolic Boundaries." *Gender & Society*, vol. 11, no. 2: 178–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/ 089124397011002003.

Gellner, Ernest. 1993. *Nations and Nationalism*. Blackwell.

Gold, Thomas B, 2025. Retrocession and authoritarian KMT rule (1945-1987). In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Taiwan*. Second edition. Edited by Gunter Schubert. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003389910.

Gould, Roger V. et al. 1998. "Political Networks and the Local/National Boundary in the Whiskey Rebellion." *Challenging Authority*, NED-New edition, University of Minnesota Press: 36.

Government of Canada. 2023. Canada makes it easier for Hong Kongers to stay and work in Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2023/07/ canada-makes-it-easier-for-hong-kongers-to-stay-and-work-in-canada.html.

Han, Enze. 2019. “Bifurcated Homeland and Diaspora Politics in China and Taiwan towards the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2019: 577–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1409172.

Harding, Nancy, and Monika Kostera. 2021. "Chapter 1: Doing ethnography: introduction". *Organizational Ethnography*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786438102.00005.

He, Rowena Xiaoqing, and Perry Link. 2014. *Tiananmen Exiles / : Voices of the Struggle for Democracy in China*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Helman, Sara, and Tamar Rapoport. 1997. “Women in Black: Challenging Israel’s Gender and Socio-Political Orders.” *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 48, no. 4: 681–700. https://doi.org/10.2307/591603.

Hess, Julia Meredith. 2020. “Tibet in Diaspora: Locating the Homeland from the Margins of Exile.” *Immigrant Ambassadors*, Stanford University Press: 17–25. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804776318-005.

Hetherington, Kevin. 1996. “Identity Formation, Space and Social Centrality.” *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 13, no. 4: 33–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276496013004002.

Hetherington, Kevin. 1998. *Expressions of Identity : Space, Performance, Politics*. Sage.

HKPORI (Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute). 2024. “Categorical Ethnic Identity.” https://www.pori.hk/research-result/q001.

Ho, Ming-sho, and Wei An Chen. 2024. “Tactical Choices of Diaspora Movements: Comparing Hong Konger, Thai, Burmese, and Ukrainian Mobilizations in Taiwan.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies:* 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870. 2024.2372041.

Ho, Wing Chung. 2023. “The Settling Experience of Hongkongers in London: Another Case of Reluctant Migration in Fear of Beijing’s Takeover.” *China Review (Hong Kong, China : 1991)*, vol. 23, no. 3: 245–72.

Hong Kong Government. 2020a. Government Statement. https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202007/02/P2020070200869.htm.

Hong Kong Government. 2020b. Speech by CE at reception in celebration of 23rd anniversary of establishment of HKSAR (with photos/video). https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202007/01/P2020070100213.htm.

Hong Kong Government. 2020c. The Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/fwddoc/hk/a406/eng_translation_(a406)_en.pdf.

Hong Kong Government. 2024. Safeguarding National Security Ordinance. https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/A305.

Hughes, Christopher R. 2025. National Identity. In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Taiwan*. Second edition. Edited by Gunter Schubert. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003389910.

Jasper, James M. *The Art of Moral Protest*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Juris, Jeffrey S. 2005. “Violence Performed and Imagined: Militant Action, the Black Bloc and the Mass Media in Genoa.” *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 4: 413–432. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X05058657.

Kauffmann, Thomas. 2022. “Reception of the Tibetan Agendas in the West: Constitution of the Global Tibet Movement.” *The Agendas of Tibetan Refugees*, vol. 33, Berghahn Books: 111–130. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782382836-008.

Kellogg, Thomas, and Yeung, Charlotte. 2023. Three Years in, Hong Kong’s National Security Law Has Entrenched a New Status Quo. https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/three-years-hong-kongs-national-security-law-has-entrenched-new-status.

Kitschelt, Herbert P. 1986. “Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies.” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 16, no. 1: 57–85. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712340000380X.

Kostera, Monika, and Anna Modzelewska. 2021. "Chapter 6: To look at the world from the Others point of view: interview". *Organizational Ethnography*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786438102.00010.

Ku, Agnes S. 2020. “New Forms of Youth Activism - Hong Kong’s Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in the Local-National-Global Nexus.” *Space & Polity*, vol. 24, no. 1: 111–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2020.1732201.

Kuan, H.-C.K. and Lau, S.-K. 2002. “Between liberal autocracy and democracy: democratic legitimacy in Hong Kong”, Democratization, Vol. 9 No. 4: 58-76.

Kwong, Ying-Ho. 2016. "The Growth of "Localism" in Hong Kong." *China Perspectives*, no. 3: 63-68. *ProQuest*. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/growth-localism-hong-kong/docview/1832576872/se-2.

La Torre, Matteo, et al. 2022. “Calculative Practices, Social Movements and the Rise of Collective Identity: How #istayathome Mobilised a Nation.” *ACCOUNTING AUDITING & ACCOUNTABILITY JOURNAL*, vol. 35, no. 9: 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-08-2020-4819.

Lavička, Martin. 2020. “The Uyghur Community: Diaspora, Identity and Geopolitics.” *Asian Ethnicity*, vol. 21, no. 2, Taylor & Francis Ltd: 337–340. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2019.1576502.

Leung, Hillary. 2019. “EMBODYING A MOVEMENT: EDWARD LEUNG | 28.” *Time (Chicago, Ill.)*, vol. 194, no. 22/23, Time Incorporated: 69.

Lin, Catherine Kai-Ping. 2006. “Taiwan’s Overseas Opposition Movement and Grassroots Diplomacy in the United States: The Case of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs.” *The Journal of Contemporary China* (Abingdon) 15, no. 46 (2006): 133–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560500331799.

Liu, Wen. 2021. “From Independence to Interdependence: Taiwan Independence as Critique, Strategy, and Method toward Decoloniality.” *American Quarterly* (BALTIMORE) 73, no. 2 (2021): 371–77. https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2021.0018.

Lo, Catherine. 2020. “Fulfilling the ‘Chinese Dream’: The Hong Kong Theater and the New Cold War.” *Atlantisch Perspectief 3*: 14–19.

Loo, Jeff H. 2020. "The Myth of “Hong Kong Nationalism”." *Asian Education and Development Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4: 535-545. https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-10-2018-0161.

Ma, Ngok. 2018. “Changing Identity Politics: The Democracy Movement in Hong Kong.” *Citizenship, Identity and Social Movements in the New Hong Kong*, 1st ed., Routledge: 34–50. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315207971-3.

McAdam, Doug, et al. 1996. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements : Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. Cambridge University Press.

Melucci, Alberto. 1995. “The Process of Collective Identity.” *SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND CULTURE:* 41–63.

Melucci, Alberto. 1996. *Challenging Codes : Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge University Press.

Ng, Vitrierat Sophia. 2021. “Dual-Identity Incompatibility as a Cause of Radicalization: A Case Study of Hong Kong.” *Issues and Studies - Institute of International Relations*, vol. 57, no. 1: 1–34. https://doi.org/10.1142/S10132.51121500041.

NurMuhammad, Rizwangul, et al. 2016. “Uyghur Transnational Identity on Facebook: On the Development of a Young Diaspora.” *Identities (Yverdon, Switzerland)*, vol. 23, no. 4: 485–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2015.1024126.

Ong, Aihwa. 1999. *Flexible Citizenship : The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Duke University Press.

Ortmann, Stephan. 2020. “Contentious Politics and Democratization in Hong Kong: Explaining Growing Demands for Self-Determination.” *Asian Education and Development Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4: 547–557. https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-03-2018-0064.

Palmer, Susan J., et al. 2021. “Women in the Uyghur Advocacy Movement in Canada: The Making of a Political “Activist.” *Journal of the Council for Research on Religion*, vol. 3, no. 1: 13–44. https://doi.org/10.26443/jcreor.v3i1.69.

Paltemaa, Lauri. 2005. *In the Vanguard of History : The Beijing Democracy Wall Movement 1978-1981 and Social Mobilisation of Former Red Guard Dissent*. University of Turku.

Pfaff, Steven. 1996. “Collective Identity and Informal Groups in Revolutionary Mobilization: East Germany in 1989.” *Social Forces*, vol. 75, no. 1: 91–117. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/75.1.91.

Polletta, Francesca, and James M. Jasper. 2001. “Collective Identity and Social Movements.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 27, no. 1: 283–305. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.283.

Preston, Valerie, et al. 2006. “Transnationalism, Gender, and Civic Participation: Canadian Case Studies of Hong Kong Immigrants.” *Environment and Planning. A*, vol. 38, no. 9: 1633–51. https://doi.org/10.1068/a37410.

Radio Free Asia. 2020. Hong Kong Protest Slogans Break China's New Security Law: Government. Translated and edited by Luisetta Mudie. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/hongkong-slogans-07022020140755.html.

Ramsey, Blake. 2023. “Why I’m a Marxist.” *University Wire*, Uloop, Inc.

Rawls, John. 1971. A Theory of Justice. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Rupp, Leila J., and Verta Taylor. 1999. “Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth-Century Feminism.” *Signs:*

Journal of Women in Culture and Society, vol. 24, no. 2: 363–386. https://doi.org/10.1086/495344.

Saldaña, Johnny. 2009. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE Publications.

Saunders, Clare. 2008. "Double-Edged Swords? Collective Identity and Solidarity in the Environment Movement." *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 59, no. 2: 227–253. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2008.00191.x.

Shu, Wei-der. 2002. "Who Joined the Clandestine Political Organization?: Some Preliminary Evidence from the Overseas Taiwan Independence Movement." In *Memories of the Future: national identity issues and the search for a new Taiwan*, 1st ed., edited by Stéphane Corcuff. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315291338-4.

Shum, Maggie. 2023. "Transnational Activism During Movement Abeyance: Examining the International Frontline of Hong Kong's 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement." *Journal of Asian and African Studies (Leiden)*, vol. 58, no. 1: 143–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221125918.

Snow, David. 2001. *Collective Identity and Expressive Forms*. eScholarship, University of California.

Tarrow, Sidney G. 2022. *Power in Movement : Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Revised and Updated fourth edition., Cambridge University Press.

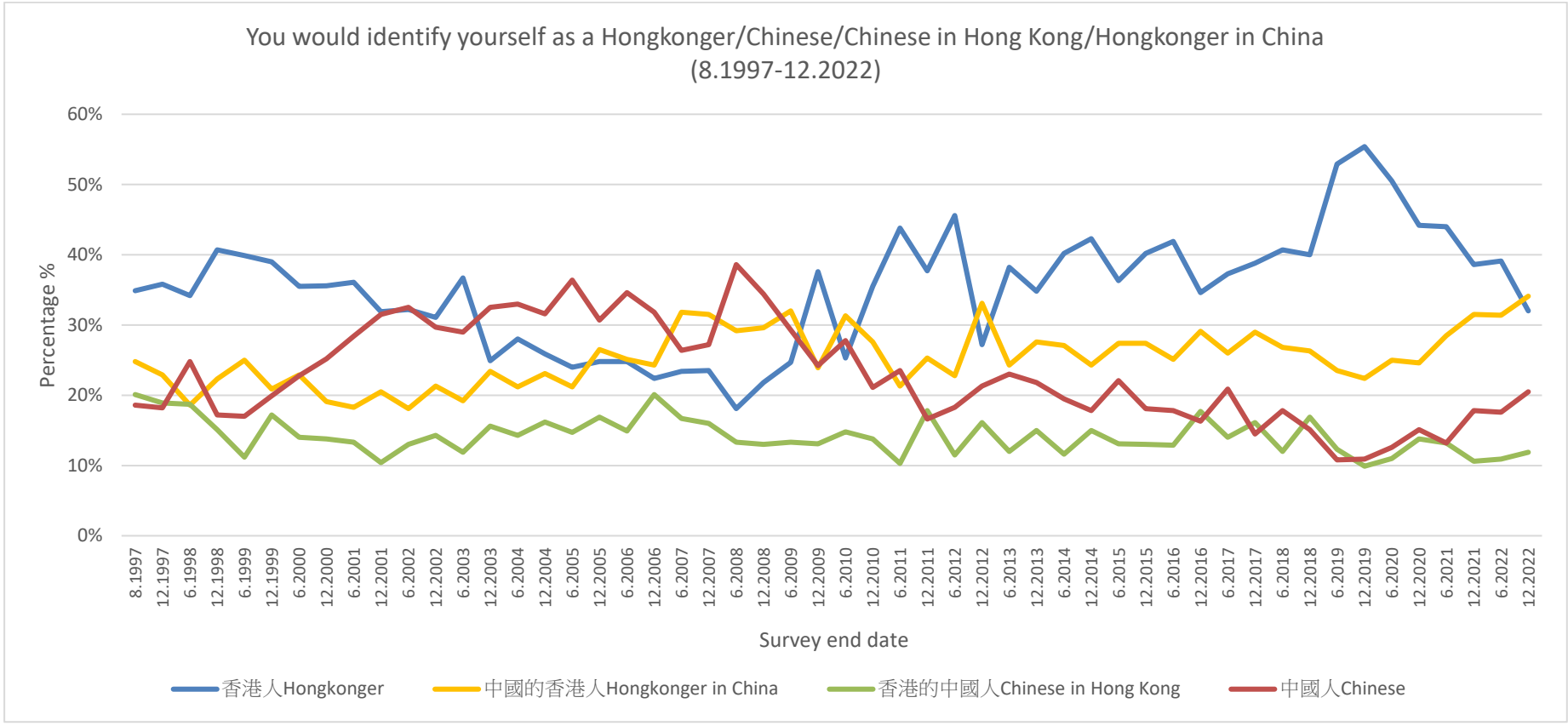
To, Yvette, and Yuk Wah Chan. 2023. "Same God but Different? Politico-Religious Dynamics and the New Hong Kong Christian Diaspora in the United Kingdom." *The American Behavioral Scientist (Beverly Hills).* https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642231194189.

Turner, Victor W. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors : Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Cornell U. P.

Yu, Yiran. 2024. Brain Drain and Brain Gain in Hong Kong's Population Shuffle. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/hong-kong-migration-shuffle.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Table 1 Poll on ethnic identity by HKUPOP/HKPORI



Source: HKPORI (Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute). 2024. “Categorical Ethnic Identity.” https://www.pori.hk/research-result/q001

Appendix 2: Interview questions

背景資料 Background information

1. 你的專業是（職業/專業資格）？
   What is your profession (occupation/professional qualification)?
2. 目前你居住在哪個國家？
   What is your current country of residence?
3. 你何時移居至目前居住的國家？你當初移居海外的理由是甚麼？
   When did you move to the current country of residence? What were the original reasons you moved abroad?
4. 你擁有幾多個及甚麼國籍？
   How many and what nationalities do you have?
5. 你認為自己的政治價值觀和意識形態是甚麼？（香港/中國民族主義、經濟左翼/右翼、社會自由主義/保守主義 等）
   What political values and ideologies do you uphold? (HK/Chinese nationalism, economic right/left, social liberal/conservative, etc.)
6. 你可以講解最初為何參與社會或政治運動嗎？（甚麼議題/事件令你參與）
   Can you describe why you participated in social or political movements in the first place? (What issue/incident made you get involved?)
7. 你參與政治或社會運動有多長時間？
   How long have you been participating in politics or social movements?
8. 你以前及現在參與過甚麼政治或公民社會組織？
   What political or civil society organisations have you participated in the past and now?
9. 你在參與政治和社會運動時，由開始到現在擔當過甚麼角色？
   What roles have you had throughout your political participation and social movement, from the beginning until now?

關於身份認同 On self-identity

10. 你如何界定自己的身份，如香港人、中國人、中國的香港人、香港的中國人或其他？（你是否抗拒中國作為自己身份的一部分，或接受其他元素為你身份的一部分，如你目前居住的國家？）
    What identity do you identify yourself, Hong Konger, Chinese, Chinese in Hong Kong, Hong Konger in China or others? (do you deny Chinese as an element in your own identity, or admit other elements in your own identity, e.g. your current country of residence?)

11. 你認為甚麼元素構成香港人的身分？（種族、國籍、文化、語言、意識形態 等）
    What elements do you think constitute the identity of Hong Konger? (race, nationality, culture, language, ideology, etc.)
12. 在你參與政治及社會運動的過程中，你的 i) 意識形態/政治理念 及 ii) 身份認同有沒有任何變化？
    Are there any changes in i) your ideology/political ideal and ii) your self-identity throughout your engagement in politics and social movement?
13. 你對於來自香港的在野政治人物及社運人士在政治目的、方法、意識形態及身份認同上的分歧有何看法？（香港獨立和回復一國兩制、與中國區隔和推動中國民主、發揚香港民族主義和視香港為中國一部分）
    What do you think about the discrepancy in political goals, means, ideologies and self-identity among opposition politicians and activists from Hong Kong (Hong Kong independence vs restoring one-country-two-system as ultimate goal, isolation from China vs promoting democracy in China, development of Hong Kong nationalism vs regarding Hong Kong a part of China)?
14. 很多香港人有多重國籍，而現時數以十萬計香港人居於不同國家。當香港僑民融入其他社會及認為自己的身份包含其他國籍時，你認為會對維持香港人身份及民主運動屬正面或負面？ 個人而言，你對海外港人的身份轉變有甚麼意見？
    Many Hong Kongers have multiple nationalities and nowadays hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers reside in different countries. When Hong Kong diaspora integrate in other societies and identify themselves with other citizenships, do you think it is positive or negative for maintaining the identity of Hong Konger and the democracy movement? Personally, what do you think about the transitions of identities of the overseas Hong Kongers?

關於「光復香港」及僑民和社會運動

On "Liberate Hong Kong" and diasporic and social movement

15. 你有沒有在參與任何政治活動時用過「光復香港」這口號？在甚麼場合用？
    Have you used the slogan "liberate Hong Kong" in any of the political activities you have engaged in? On what occasions?
16. 現在你是否認同「光復香港」這口號？你是否認為「光復香港」對香港的社運人士及海外社會運動重要？為甚麼？
    Do you agree with the slogan "liberate Hong Kong" now? Do you think "liberate Hong Kong" is an important slogan or idea for Hong Kong activists and social movement overseas? Why?
17. 你認為在甚麼條件下為之達到「光復香港」這目標？
    In what conditions you think the goal of "liberate Hong Kong" is fulfilled?

18. 除上述你所定義「光復香港」的目標外，你還對香港和中國的政治體制變化有甚麼倡議？（公民權利、勞工權利、性別平等、中國民主 等）
    Apart from the goal of "liberate Hong Kong" as you defined above, what changes in political regime regarding Hong Kong and China are you advocating? (civil rights, labour rights, gender equality, democracy in China, etc.)
19. 你如何定義目前海外香港社運人士從事的政治運動（民主運動、民族運動 和/或 其他？）你認為應該向哪個方向發展？
    How do you define the political movement overseas Hong Kong activists are now engaging in (democracy movement, national movement and/or others)? Which direction do you think should it develop?
20. 在達到「光復香港」的目的時有甚麼挑戰？可以如何處理這些挑戰？
    What challenges are there in achieving the goal of "liberate Hong Kong"? How can the challenges be dealt with?
21. 若短期內（如十年內）未能達到「光復香港」的目的，如何維持散居海外僑民的香港人共同身份及民主運動的價值？
    If, in the near future, (e.g. in one decade) the goal of "liberate Hong Kong" cannot be achieved, how can the common identity of Hong Konger and the value of the democracy movement be maintained among the disperse diaspora population?
22. 現在你用甚麼方法和參與甚麼活動以達成你的政治理想？
    Now what means do you take and what activities are you engaging for achieving your political ideals?
23. 在為了達到「光復香港」和政治理想而參與的活動中，誰是你的主要目標受眾？
    Who are the main target audience of the activities you are participating in to achieve "liberate Hong Kong" and your other political ideals?
24. 現在你如何影響香港政府及其他與香港政治局勢相關的人士？
    Currently how do you influence the Hong Kong Government and other stakeholders in the political situation in Hong Kong?
25. 很多香港人群體和組織分布於世界各地。你認為是否有需要協調或團結這些群體及組織，例如建立類似海外藏人或維吾爾人的流亡政權或跨國聯盟，以達成一個共同的政治目的？為甚麼？
    There are numerous Hong Konger communities and organisations dispersed worldwide. Do you think it is necessary to coordinate or unify these communities and organisations, e.g. establishing a government-in-exile or transnational association of the overseas Tibetans or Uyghur, for achieving a common political goal? Why?
26. 從過往的社會運動中（如 2014 年佔領運動、2019 年反修例運動等），有甚麼經驗對現時的海外民主運動是有用的？
    What lessons learned in the previous social movements (e.g. 2014 Occupy Movement,

2019 Anti-Extradition Movement, etc.) are useful for the overseas democracy movement nowadays?

27. 你對目前香港人的海外民主運動還有甚麼看法？

What other opinions do you have about the overseas democratic/national movement of Hong Kongers at the moment?

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Research title: On "liberate Hong Kong": the identities and visions of overseas Hong Kong activists after the 2019 demonstrations
Name of researcher: Chung Wing Cheung
Institution: Centre for East Asian Studies, University of Turku, Finland
After the promulgation of the National Security Law in 2020, many activists have fled from Hong Kong but continue to participate in social movements overseas. Compared to Tibetans, Uyghurs and the dissidents from Mainland China, the emergence of activist community with Hong Kong origin is a new phenomenon in history. The identity and nature of the social movements of overseas Hong Kong activists is an interesting topic with only a few existing research.
The researcher is an activist who participated in social movements in Hong Kong for more than a decade. Now the researcher is granted refugee status in Finland and participating in Hong Kong diaspora movement. For better understanding of peer activists and formulating strategies for the future diaspora movement, it is important to understand the self-identities of overseas Hong Kong activists, and their goals and strategies in social movements concerning Hong Kong and the Hong Kong diaspora community, which is the aim of the research.
The research is conducted in ethnography. A few selected overseas Hong Kong activists who are currently participating in Hong Kong diaspora movements are invited to participate in in-depth interviews. A set of questions about the abovesaid theme are distributed to the interviewees before the interview. The interviews are conducted in Cantonese or English, subject to the interviewees. Each interview lasts for 2 to 3 hours. The researcher will record the content of the interviews in audio form and take notes during the interview; for interviews conducted online, a secured video-meeting channel provided by the University of Turku is used and the video footage are also recorded. The identities of the interviewees will not be published in the research paper and disclosed to any third parties. During the interviews, the interviewees have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. In this case, the interview will stop immediately, and all the data collected in that interview will be deleted in the soonest possible time. The research will be published in a Master Thesis.
The data collected in the interviews will be used for analysis in the research for the abovesaid aim. The audio recordings will be transcribed into texts for analysis purposes. During the research stage, the data collected during the interviews will be saved on the secured cloud drive provided by the University of Turku and the laptop of the researcher and will not be shared to any persons. After the research is completed, the data collected in the interviews will only be saved on the secured cloud drive provided by the University of Turku and an external hard drive of the researcher.

Consent for participation in research

Research title: On "liberate Hong Kong": the identities and visions of overseas Hong Kong activists after the 2019 demonstrations

Name of researcher: Chung Wing Cheung

Institution: Centre for East Asian Studies, University of Turku, Finland
I have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research.

I have read and understood the participant information sheet and the privacy policy. I understand that participating in the research is voluntary and that I can at any point withdraw from participating in the research without giving any reason or cancel my consent without any negative consequences. The information collected of me until the withdrawal and cancellation of consent cannot be used as part of the research data.

I have received sufficient information about the research and how my personal data is processed. I have had the opportunity to ask questions from the researchers. With my signature, I give consent for participating in the research.

I consent that my interview can be recorded for research purposes, but it has to be modified in the research results and publications so that I cannot be recognised from it.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent that the anonymised research data can be archived and opened to the use of other researchers.
Yes ☐ No ☐

Verification

Signature of participant:

Date:

Contact information
Chung Wing Cheung
+358 45******* (redacted)
wcchun@utu.fi