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The transforming Hong Kong polarized cultural identities: the cultural dynamic and relocation of Hong Kong cultural production

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ABSTRACT

The view that national and local identical dichotomy in Hong Kong puts into sharp focus is revealed in the deep division of self-identification of Hong Kong citizen after the world-known Umbrella Movement. This paper connects this diverse identity formation to the relocation of Hong Kong cultural production and claims it as a logical consequence of the latter. This paper takes Hong Kong local comics as an example of cultural production for the analysis and suggest the possibility that such cultural products, as the reflection of Hong Kong society, are polarized to extreme Chinese-versus-Hong Kong base. When Hong Kong audience read the contemporary Hong Kong comics, the issues of cultural dynamic, conflict, and struggle of identity as HongKongese or Chinese would be expected. Based on the empirical data from textual analysis of 2 local comics and 10 in-depth interviews of comics artists, publishers, analysts, and comics company managers in 2015, this paper maps out the cultural image of people from Hong Kong and the mainland Chinese in contemporary comics texts. This paper will also shed light on cultural resistance and negotiation between Hong Kong and Chinese culture, and the resultant cultural hybridization in Hong Kong in relation to the transformation of local cultural identities.

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Background

The Hong Kong society has again retrieved the global spotlight after the ever-increasing pressure from the Chinese authorities in Hong Kong extradition bill and The Hong Kong national security law in the past two years. When the world is weighting nationalism over globalism in the case of economic conservative policies or trade tax, national security of TikTok or the pandemic under the threat of COVID-19, the rise of populism and protectionism could be seen. Hong Kong presents a very similar notion of localism and homogeneity that separate HongKongese from Chinese. This localism proclaims to against the current condition of Hong Kong democratic system and capitalism, which are seen to survive only if the autonomy could be thoroughly in renunciation. The localists seek to shut the influence from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and commonly triggers quarrel with pro-Beijing citizen in Hong Kong. It evolves into more a theoretical question

of such identity struggle: how/when the notion of localism provokes and people in Hong Kong resists and negotiate their local cultural identity with national identity under Hong Kong's specific context? It is believable that there are numbers of theoretical reasons in different paradigms attributing to the current situation, and this paper aims to propose two classic Hong Kong cultural representative products as a cultural documentation and interpretation which implicitly portray the current cultural situation in Hong Kong.

The review of Hong Kong identity

From the point of view of an identity struggle in Hong Kong, the commencement and end-point of Umbrella movement and anti-extradition bill movement were neither the start nor the end. It is more seen as a stage of transition in which that the local crash with the national. The issue of the Hong Kong cultural identity has long been the area of scrutiny in local society (e.g.: Ma & Fung, 1999, 2007; Fung, 2008; Ma, 2006) before and after Hong Kong returned to China. A series of social and cultural conflicts have occurred due to the intervention of Chinese government for education in 2012, parallel scheme for tourism in 2008, scarcity of resources like the shortage of baby formula powder in 2009 and political controversies since the retrieval of sovereignty in 1997. Among all these conflicts, the issue of Chinese identity has always been raised in debate, and a common question of positioning of individuals to reconsider their acceptance of Chinese national identities has been widely addressed with in-depth discussion. Pessimistic viewpoint worrying the high vulnerability of Hong Kong local culture from the 'threat' of China cultural implantation has been getting common in these days, which returns to Abbas (1997) idea of the fear of 'disappearance of Hong Kong' after decolonized.

Such worry and suspect may be reasonable as the following policies in Hong Kong could be critically evaluated as the sign of how the Chinese cultural identification has been unconsciously in progress. For example, the increasing societal and cultural interaction between the Chinese and Hong Kong people after the large influx of tourist and migration policy in the last ten years enhance the cultural intimacy and understanding between the two. At the same time, media events, such as the Beijing Olympics and successful China's spaceship program, or other general communication means, for instance, television drama, promote the national pride and dilute the pre-existing stereotyping images of superior Hong Kong and uncivilized Chinese identity which had been overtly portrayed in the past (Fung & Shum, 2012; Ma, 1999, 1998; Ng & Cheung, 2001). These new formed 'positive' images of Chinese are contradictory but co-existing with the negative discourse in Hong Kong formed in the past.

Under this situation, Hong Kong people are overtly prone to be agitated for being unreservedly accepted to China or sceptical of China, it resulted in a Hong Kong-Chinese hybridized identity (Fung, 2001, 2004; Ma & Fung, 1999, 2007; Ma et al., 2010). Hong Kong, which could be understood as a post-colonized global city with the diasporic nature, is prone to a specific divergent cultural preference in individual level due to its cultural hybridization of the East and West. Stanfill and Valdivia (2016)'s research on immigrant about how they 'prefer' their origin nation or residence nation more during conflict suggested an attenuated, complex notion called 'transnational affinity' could results in the confusion of the identification due to the globalization, and could be found in any hybridized and globalized cities like Hong Kong.

The review of Hong Kong comics as suitable cultural product in textual analysis

After the discussion of Hong Kong ambiguous identity, the importance of Hong Kong would be elaborated in this part to explain why this cultural product is chosen, and how textual analysis is taken place to reflect the cultural phenomenon embedded in the media content.

(a) Comics as a cultural production with cultural reflection

Examining means of production of local culture could elucidate the cultural identity of a place. Cultural product usually carries images and memories of local identity. Jenkins (2004) mentioned about the commonality of various identities pursuit in same cultural population and identical formation of individuals could be attributed and traced back to different cultural or institutional variables such as education (Suwaed & Ali, 2016), government policy (Kobayashi, 2015), and so forth. This research attempts to adopt the similar theoretical perspective to that of Oakley and O'Brien's research (2015) or Hesmondhalgh's idea in cultural policy and cultural industry (2002), which both addresses the saliency of cultural coherence in cultural policy, cultural production, and cultural identification formation. It is believed that the popular culture produced always reflect the cultural identities of the locale (e.g. Gauntlett, 2002). The mapping of the relationship between cultural identity and cultural production could be also traced back to the idea of circuit of culture by Hall et al. (1997), which insinuate that cultural identity, cultural production, and cultural consumption have mutual and bilateral relationship for another one.

Such linking between cultural identity, cultural production, and cultural consumption is not limited in theoretical discussion but could be also practically applied in the daily context. The research of Philips and Strobl (2013) is a typical example justifying this approach as it shows the capability of comics to contribute to the larger popular discourse on crime and justice, based on the data extracted from 200 popular comics in the US. The appearance of popular celebrities like ex-President Obama and President Trump in the comics content indicates how comics could reflect the latest societal, cultural and even political aspects. Lent's study on local comics also reveals that comics capture the poor living condition of Hong Kong people in 1960s including the threat of corrupted polices and bullying of the triad. The heroes like Tiger and Dragon Wong, the major characters in 'Little Rascals', become the saviours of the people in imagination to relieve from the pressure and threat in daily life (2010, 1995).

(a) Hong Kong comics as the typical cultural product revealing the polarization of cultural production

A historical review would be first given here to explain the important role of Hong Kong comics in the city. According to Chew et al. (2016), Hong Kong comics, to be the specific the *Lianhuantu*, is a specific genre of comic strip category. Different famous comic series like 'Dragon gate' 'Teddy Boy' are the dominant genre in Hong Kong local comic market. *Lianhuantu* was one of the major cultural industry in the 1960s Hong Kong (Wong, 2006). It was a traditional entertainment in Hong Kong which started catch people's attention, especially

to youngsters and the lower working class without high education since pirated Japanese manga were imported to Hong Kong (Lent, 2010). Even though the popularity of Hong Kong comics is, however, being gradually faded away due to the emergence of other globalized Japanese manga, its cultural influence on theme selection (the 'triad vs police' or 'kung fu' genre) and the Hong Kong stereotype in cultural production still remains. The cultural value and representativeness of Hong Kong comic were preserved since its production and context retained in their traditional theme and style: depicting the localized context with kung-fu or triad genre in the detail drawing (Chew et al., 2016). This reluctance, however, could be regarded as a valuable empirical data to capture the taste and culture of Hong Kong localist cultural product.

Another reason which Hong Kong comics is chosen as research object is that it provides a very concrete and strong comparison of local cultural product *Lianhuantu* and the comics from China-relocated Hong Kong publishing companies. Given to the fact that lots of Hong Kong comics companies relocating their business to China for the emerging Chinese market under the more open cultural policy of Hong Kong business investment in China, another taste and genre of Hong Kong comic is produced. This taste and genre of comics would be more prone to Chinese distinctive characteristics, discourse and even the ideologies in order to pass the censorship of the PRC government, as well as get into the market in China. This genre of comic would be expected to be more pro-Beijing and nationalist, and through comparing to the local comics targeting Hong Kong market, two different dialectics (the localist and nationalist) could be seen in these two genre comics.

Unlike other major cultural industries like popular song, Hong Kong movie and Hong Kong Television drama, Hong Kong comics is more sensitive to political issue due to its traditional style since 1960s, and under business concern, the China-relocated comics is a cultural product being politicalized. Such extreme of theme in cultural production is relatively rare in Hong Kong cultural product market, especially the three other industries suggesting co-production with China. This gives a proper reason to justify the selection of the samples and follow the rein of research on Hong Kong-made comics and animation (Chan et al., 2009), unlike other researches discussing other forms of cultural products (for instance, Television (Ma & Fung, 1999), film (Curtin, 1998), lyrics (Chu, 1998), or Cantopop (Fung, 2009)) about the semantic meaning of Hong Kong cultural identities.

(a) Selection of text

In this paper, the local comics is studied in textual analysis to reveal the identity polarization depicted in the cultural text. The famous comics issued in the last 10 years from Hong Kong local and China-relocated companies were considered. In the list of total 126 comics, 'McDull' and 'Teddy Boy' were selected due to their best fit of the two extremes of cultural spectrum, the localistic and the nationalistic. 'McDull' shows its activeness of delocalization in order to fit in the Chinese context. It was distinctive from its richness of local culture and reflection of the local identities (Ng, 2006), but its content was to a large extent deviated from its original style and become pro-Beijing after the publishing workshop relocated to China since 2009. On the other hand, another comics, 'Teddy Boy' was characterized by its hardcore description of local and social event like Umbrella Movement. It also forms a partnership with 'Civic Passion', one of the most active political

group in Hong Kong localist parties. We could believe that reading 'Teddy Boy' could help to extract the brief ideas and cultural context of the localism and its new fraction of Hong Kong identity.

The textual analysis of the two comics would focus on the connotative meaning of the content, and how much that reflects the cultural meaning on the social context in Hong Kong. The textual analysis covers the material issued in the last 10 years. For 'Teddy Boy', the analysis covered total 764 volume from the 1280th issue (released on 22 March 2010) to the 2044th issue (released on 17 July 2017). For McDull, we captured the three comic storybooks converted from its animation series ('McDull, Kung Fu Kindergarten', 'McDull, The Pork of Music' and 'McDull: Rise of the Rice Cooker' released on 2009, 2013 and 2016 respectively). The total 10 persons from comics authors and experts were conducted in-depth interview to further elaborate the finding from the textual analysis.

The juxtaposition of Hong Kong comics in China and Hong Kong

The logic of this research is to at first revealing the polarization of cultural context of the Hong Kong comics published by local and China-relocated companies. The characteristics of the two comics marketing Hong Kong local and Chinese audience respectively would be compared, so as to elaborate how the cultural identity in Hong Kong is varied.

Nationalized Hong Kong comics

(a) Adoption of Chinese illustrative style in comics

When cultural products move across boundaries, it is expected that delocalization of original context would take place in order to adopt a new 'culture'. For Hong Kong comics to be imported to China, then the case will be that the Hong Kong local comics must be nationalized to maximize the national cultural preference. For example, the usage of characters will be changed from traditional Chinese used in Hong Kong to simplified Chinese. The language used in casting would be changed from Cantonese to Mandarin. In certain extent, illustration styles of some comics were even changed from typical Hong Kong Meticulously detailed drawing style (Chew et al., 2016)¹ to the overtly 'cartoonized' drawing style, the style that Chinese industry heavily adopt from the Japan one (Ng, 2003).² This mimicked Japanese drawing technique is generally common in China as the cute character image in comics could follow the state's approach of maintaining peacefulness and social harmony, at the same time to minimize the social negative stereotyping of comics as bad example of violence to the children. This change could be captured by the below comparison of comics:

(a) Adoption through politically 're-Sinicization to China'

Not just the adoption of the Chinese drawing approach, the more important is the ideological change of nationalized comics so that this cultural product could be allowed in publication. The adoption of Chinese ideology could be found in McDull, the case study of this subject.

This adoption of Chinese ideology after relocation could be seen by the contrast of two series context in different time phases. Before relocation, McDull comics and animation prior series depicted Hong Kong culture including the 'speed eating culture' and 'the Hong Kong style flexibility' and offered a rich representation of Hong Kong elements of everyday life, including, among others, food, popular culture, entertainment, arts, festivals, transportation, and schooling. In contrast, when McDull entered the Chinese market with the animation movie 'McDull, Kung Fu Kindergarten' in 2009, the local context of McDull vanished, and was suddenly replaced by Chinese context pinpointing the Chinese virtue, culture and religious ideologies.

The story of 'McDull, Kung Fu Kindergarten' in 2009, is about McDull's failure in Hong Kong primary school due to his poor academic performance and behavioural conduct. Instead of sending the child to training camp or foreign boarding schools like what the Hong Kong local parents do, McDull's mom (Mrs. Mc hereafter) send McDull to the boarding Taoist martial art school in WuDang Mountain, a famous martial art and Taoism origin in China. At the same time, she plans to leave their home and seeks fortune in the mainland.

The Hong Kong people in the story plot (McDull and Mrs Mc) seeking fortune and learning the traditional Chinese culture 'Taoism' in China could be interpreted in semantics as the degenerating Hong Kong and the rising 'moral' and 'economic' China such that the people in failure in Hong Kong could revitalize in China. In addition, the migration of the McDull family not only reflects the politico-social-economic condition of Hong Kong vis-à-vis China (as there is unique to see a family sending the kids to China for boarding school for learning Chinese martial art), but McDull's representation as a passionate disciple of traditional culture also constitutes a discourse equivalent to a palpable eulogy of Chinese culture.

Another plot about Mak-zi, the ancestor of McDull and the famous ancient Chinese philosopher also reinforce the notion that China is the origin of Hong Kong people. In the beginning, the story mentioned an artefact about Mak-zi was found in an archaeological site in Yangtze River, representing the sharing origin of Chinese and Hong Kong's. In other words, being the Chinese or HongKongese have no cultural difference under the backdrop of the sharing of the same bloodline. The Taoism and its ideologies from Lao-zi was recited, mimicked, and captured in the comics. The sentence 'man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven' introduces the Chinese ideology of the collaboration and coherence of individual, fate and nature. These scenic plots, by the comment of the comics experts, could be conceived as the way of nationalistic promotion and education in the means of the entertainment for the youth, which was commonly found in other Chinese comics.

Localized Hong Kong comics

(a) Depiction of Hong Kong local culture

Conversely, localized comics retain the traditional drawing style and its focus on Hong Kong context. There is a major difference between the localized and nationalized comics camps in terms of the characters, plots, stories, and ideologies embedded in the

comics. Using 'Teddy Boy' as illustration, this comics show richness of Hong Kong cultural characters in the downtown like the classic vehicles (Tram), food (Yum Cha), cultural events (firework for the Lunar new year), cultural habitus (filial piety), entertainment (horse racing, gambling in mah-jong), housing (Tong House), and so forth. All of this represents the specific mixture of the Western and Chinese culture in the colonial period.

(a) Depiction of traditional Chinese culture rooted in Hong Kong

Rooted from the Chinese culture, Hong Kong culture also shares a similar virtue system with Chinese culture, and in localized Hong Kong comics, we could see that under the West and East cultural hybrid setting. Take filial piety (*xiao*) as the example to illustrate the hybrid Hong Kong culture and virtues found in the local comics. *Xiao* is a typical Chinese virtue of respect for one's father, elders, and even ancestors, is one of the major Chinese ideological concepts highlighted in the triad comics. The idea of filial piety is driven from Chinese famous moral education chapter series, namely *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars (Ershi-si xiao)*. *Xiao* and its meaning to retrospect the origin of oneself were specifically transformed to be the core virtues in Hong Kong triad society since 1960s (Ter haar, 1998). Strict hierarchical system by aging is the side-product of the operation in filial piety, which means the older always has the higher authority than the younger. In 'Teddy Boy', when Ar Wu, a young triad member, is summoned to headquarter of the triad society, he is ordered to stand still while the seniors are seated, even there are lots of empty chairs available. This plot shows the necessity to respect and absolutely obey the seniors and their ruling in the triad hierarchy, so as in the traditional local cultural setting in Hong Kong society in reality.

(a) Depiction of political struggle against the North

What draws the difference between Hong Kong comics and China-relocated comics is the selection of theme. Unlike the China-based Hong Kong comics praising of Chinese government favourite ideologies like social harmony, the local comics in Hong Kong serves purely *entertainment and commercial function* (Cowman, the director of *Concord Publishing Ltd*, interview on 9 September 2015). They used to do social/political parody for drawing audience attention, and satirize the social and political affairs. Many examples of comic parody, for instance 'Defectors from the North' composed by Hong Kong local comics artist Cheng Kin Wo, have been issued in Hong Kong to 'uphold just and the righteousness' for the audience. 'Defectors from the North' is a comic chronicles an isolated and authoritarian state named 'Northland', and there is a train number zero departs daily from 'Northland' to the 'Land of Freedom' in the South. In the story, there is a poor stowaway aiming to go to the South for freedom but at the end he finds out the South has been manipulated by the rich and authority from 'Northland' already. This story has been interpreted as a parody in geographical sense, satirizing that Hong Kong ('Land of Freedom') has been degenerates and already become the lands for the rich and authority in China ('Northland'). It critically reflects the anti-China social discourse from Hong Kong, especially by the so-called Hong Kong localists, on the issue of Hong Kong-Mainland conflict in Hong Kong.

Such political and societal satire is not coincident but intentionally planned by the comic artist. Cowman, the comics artist of local comics 'Teddy Boy' comments:

I was used to live in Nan Tan (A downtown of residential region in Hong Kong) tentative residential area when I was small. The living environment enriches my imagination and I decide to depict this environment as my story background since I am familiar with it.

The early childhood life experience and daily interaction enriches people's mind-set, the drawing of a local comics artist therefore implicitly could reflect the Hong Kong local context and local value. This Hong Kong downtown and grass-root living characteristics are strongly pinpointed by the comics artists as the distinctiveness of Hong Kong local comics.

(a) Depiction of righteousness and its reflection in Umbrella movement

The idea of Hong Kong local comic is not just revering the traditional local and downtown culture in Hong Kong, it involves a specific justice system, *yi* (righteousness), to fight for their wish in any cost. In 'Teddy Boy', *yi* was portrayed as 'to do the right things at any cost' and 'sacrifice of self to achieve a universal goal'. In this comic, the pursuit of freedom was recognized as the major goal as those triad protagonist Chan Ho Nam decides to secure the freedom of Hong Kong (ultimate goal) by self-sacrifice (Fulfilling *yi*). A similar scene in 'Teddy Boy' depicts the belief of freedom. In the 1573rd issue, there is a plot about a pro-democracy localist organization 'the Passion Time' publishing an article of news column in the newspaper organized by Chan to recall of protecting the civil right. One day, Chan received a threat from anonymous stating that he will be 'punished' if he kept running the political newspaper business. After investigation, Chan discovered that Communist party in China instigated other Hong Kong triad societies to interfere his newspaper by arson. At the end, Chan decided to continue his 'justice' even he worried of losing his business if he kept running a political media against the powerful behind the screen. He left a comment in the comics as below:

Chan: I have thought clearly. The key reason is that Hong Kong is a place where people can enjoy freedom of speech. Isn't it possible to publish a newspaper that does not fit to the taste of the centre (implied PRC)? Up to this point, I think I should keep doing this (publishing political paper to show the freedom) for Hong Kong.

Wong (the politician): Good! That is why people say Chan Ho Nam is a brave man with 'guts'.

Chan: That is not about 'gut' but my heart to Hong Kong!

The insistence of Chan Ho Nam triumphs the ideas that 'evil never wins if one persists justice', and it also echoes the possibility of 'street hero' that everyone could be a hero from saving others to protecting the global value and justice. This comic is therefore in a hit during the Umbrella movement as it depicts the triad hero Chan Ho Nam standing by the protestors and helping them out from the threat of the 'villain'. Being as other grass-root hero in the Western movie like 'Spiderman' or 'Kick-Ass', people can sustain their senses of justice by resistance or even rebellion. That echoes the political notion of Hong Kong Localism, and the social movement and civic engagement observed in the last few years.

The polarization of Hong Kong identity in cultural production

After mentioning the distinctive difference between the Hong Kong local and China-relocated comics in terms of image, contexts and idea, the following discussion would move to would be further analysed in this paragraph. In the following part, this paper will examine how this distinction reflect the polarization of Hong Kong's cultural identities in long term, based on the theoretical framework 'circuit of culture' proposed by Hall and his colleagues (1997).

Circuit of culture indicates a strong and mutual relationship between the identity, production and cultural consumption. Culture is seen as a social practice rather than a thing or a state of being. Within a group, meaning is produced and exchanged through the practice of social interaction by different means like image or language. The total five components (the identity, production, consumption, regulation and representation) in the circuit indicate how the symbolic meaning of specific cultural content or artefact is formed, how individual socially interact, consume and produce the meaning of culture. The individual's cultural consumption experience provides cultural reference in identification and the construction of symbolic meaning for identity formation. This modal can be understood easily that the one who usually live and interact in a local Hong Kong cultural background (cultural consumption), s/he would normally identify the one-self as a member in community (Hall et al., 1997). In this case, the meaning given by consumption helps individuals re-think their role and becomes a reference in identification, to understand who they are and which culture they belong to. At the same time, the production of such cultural product or cultural meaning enhance the solidarity of that cultural group. Such identification results to the sense of differentiation and sense of similarity, and provoke the idea of in-group and out-group (Hall et al., 1997).

Based on the aforementioned theoretical modal, we shall assume that the distinction of comics content in 'McDull' and 'Teddy Boy' (cultural production) indicates the two different groups of producer/audience with polarized taste, and such divergence remarks the tendency of polarization of Hong Kong cultural preference. On the one hand, the 'McDull' praises of the social harmony and triumph the return of Chinese culture, which totally adopts the Chinese cultural setting. On the other hand, the localized 'Teddy Boy' celebrates and re-values the local life and local value. The binary opposition of these two trends of Hong Kong comics shares the similar oppositional nature in characteristics with the binary opposition of cultural nationalization and cultural localization of Hong Kong.

The strong opposition in cultural production and cultural consumption leads to the discussion of polarized identity. The comments of Cowman, the comic producer of 'Teddy Boy', addressed *the idea of 'local' and 'Hong Kong elements' is an ambiguous and abstract idea which is more than the geographical and cultural factor*: it should be conceived as the collective ideologies that are constructed and experienced by the local from diversifying others. The others, including the Chinese immigrants, Chinese visitors, and even the local born Hong Kong people starting business in China or having a nationalized mind-set, would not be counted as part of Hong Kong but directly part of China. The remarkable separation of 'us' and 'others', according to the cultural identity theory (e.g. Calhoun, 1994; Hall & du Gay, 1996), indicates a strong opposition between the two groups: identity is no longer just a preference but the right negotiating for interest and resource, and the

sense of belonging to specific community. A typical example is the clear opposition of pro-Beijing and pro-government conservatives versus the Hong Kong localism advocates suggesting rebellion (Chen & Szeto, 2015). The polarization of two mutually exclusive Hong Kong identities can be concluded as the two extreme: the 'instrumental' nationalized identity (Ma & Fung, 2007) which focuses Chinese context, praising of harmony, prosperousness and social union for maximizing the economic benefit; the 'sustainable' localized identity which focuses in local issue and being politicalized. People are treasuring traditional Hong Kong value, for instance Cantonese, and resisting against the nationalization of China in order to reaffirm their Hong Kong identity. Such resistance recalls our memories about the worry of Hong Kong people for the gradual disappearance of local culture and incoming Chinese ideologies (Abbas, 1997). It also reminds us the national identification of Hong Kong citizens has not yet finished.

Discussion: the role of cultural policy

By reviewing how these two binaural opposite cultural readings in the same place reflect the polarization of identity, this paper provides a novel theoretical argument to questions the cultural industry theory of Hesmondhalgh (2002) by using the theoretical model of circuit of culture.

Cultural policy was thought as one of the most vital elements in catalysing the development of cultural industry (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). In other words, the cultural consumption, production and identification would be highly correlated with the existence and efficiency of the cultural policy in a place/country.

China: the vital and strong cultural policy in industry development

The mutation of Hong Kong local comics after China relocation is attributed to the booming Chinese market and the implementation of Cultural Policies 'the National 12th Five-Year Plan' in China, which allows Hong Kong comics companies to enter the market and alter their content to target a larger pool of potential audience in China (HKSAR, 2013). This engagement was reinforced by the succeed of the experimental 'Cultural Industrial Park', which was established by the implementation of the national policy under the Cultural Bureau referring to the 'Beijing 11th Fiver Year Plan for the Development of Creative and Cultural Industries' in 2006. With the aid of the establishment of cultural clusters in China with financial supports like subsidies, the chain-line production is designed with the support of the PRC government to set up a collaborative hub for cultural industry. Such cultural cluster welcome investment of different companies outside China, and the well-established production environment, low wages and sufficient labor influx attract local Hong Kong comics business relocate for fortune-seeking.

There are lots of examples of relocated Hong Kong comics companies which enjoy the diverse cultural policies suggested by the PRC. For example, the formation of specific cultural bureau, Beijing Cultural Creative Industry Promotion Centre was established to manage and stabilize the cultural clusters at institutional level (Fung & Erni, 2013). With the funding, stable job supply and subsidies provided by the state, the gate of accessibility of the comics/animation industry in China is lowered for the domestic newcomer and foreign professionals. The relatively open policy of China in cultural industry enhances

the private creative industries, also with the development of the national cultural economy and soft power.

However, there are some drawbacks found in this mutation. The incentive given by the Chinese government, which was originally as a benefit to Hong Kong cultural industries and companies, ironically turns out to have a negative consequence to Hong Kong identity as it diverges Hong Kong people in opposition in the sense of cultural consumption. This occurs commonly in the young age who refuse to accept and consume any cultural products from the Mainland China and claim the ‘threat of China’ vanishing their local culture. Such refusal of consumption, in certain extent, may explain the identity conflict of Hong Kong contemporary society.

Hong Kong: the absence of strong policy intervention in industry

Contrast to the activeness of PRC in development cultural industries, the financial and substantial issues for the cultural production in Hong Kong comics industry remain vital in the HKSAR government. Unlike the Chinese PRC government, The Hong Kong government has no subsidies and platform of publication provided to the production companies. The Hong Kong-born comic producers of ‘AI Football GGO’, one of the experts interviewed, pinpointed that the absence of practical cultural policy in Hong Kong is a typical reason for them to relocate in China:

The major reason why my directing animation would broadcast in China but not Hong Kong is because of the license fee. In China, I will receive a certain amount of money from the broadcasting companies which air my animation, while in Hong Kong there is only one TV broadcasting company with asking for a unreasonable charging if I would like my animation airing in that Hong Kong TV channel. It really does not make sense to me. (Gordon Chin, The director of Puzzle Animation, interview on 8 December 2014)

Different from the policies implemented in China that opens and creates more platform for comics artists to display their work with sustainable subsidies provided, Hong Kong governmental cultural policies seems ignore the positive effect of the intervention of local TV and publishing market, as a result the contracting comics market industry and the relocation of comics business to China. According to Chin, the company’s relocation decision to China is more than purely commercial or nationalized. The decision is driven by the ‘attractive’ cultural policy of China which appreciates the influx of foreign potential creative talent, at the same time by the disgraceful cultural policy of Hong Kong which lets the cultural habitat degenerating. In his interview, he expressed his anger and frustration of ‘paying money to the TV channel to air his animation in Hong Kong (Gordon Chin, the comic/animation producer, interview on 8 Decembe, 2014)’, it is rather unreasonable to him especially he operates his comics and animation business successfully in China with receiving large amount of license fee from the broadcasting TV channel. The more welcoming cultural policy in China provoke the relocation of Hong Kong comics, in other words Hong Kong comics being relocated in China and nationalized could be therefore conceived as the only solution for sustaining and developing in comics industries.

In the case of Hong Kong, without the strong leading role of the local cultural industry, the plurality of cultural products existing in Hong Kong cultural market may lead to the high variety of and non-unified cultural identity, which reverts the principle of cultural

policy for promoting cultural solidarity and reunion. This critique, echoing to O'Connor (2010)'s question of the feasibility difficulty of cultural public policy to cultural industry, addresses the question on the overwhelming role of cultural industry and cultural policy in cultural identity formation hypothesized in Hesmondhalgh and Pratt's argument (2005). The implementation of governmental cultural policy, such as the free market or non-intervening approached policies, or the nature of wide range of various geographic and disciplinary cultural industries (e.g. the Chinese cultural industries exercise its national cultural strategy to promote Chinese soft power (Edney, 2015)), contradicting with the abolishment of UK film council as the deconstruction of cultural Policy there (Schlesinger, 2015) may vary the function and exercise of ideologies in cultural industry. This issue becomes more complicated when, under active audience paradigm, audiences consume and decode the meanings behind the two different imaginary identities spontaneously. In Hong Kong, the gradual nationalization and the relocation of business of local cultural industry triggers the fear of disappearance of local culture in the public, at the same time the development of the localism and the transformation of local comics provoke as the localists audience raise their concern on conserving local culture, which in the end to become more local, marginalized and subcultural. From plurality to polarization of Hong Kong comics, the failure of Hong Kong cultural policy and its malfunction in cultural identification indicate the possible risk of overwhelming the role of cultural policy in cultural identification. In this paper, it suggests that room of amendment and improvement of Hong Kong governmental cultural policy, so as provides an alternative understanding to the recent identity struggle in Hong Kong, for example Umbrella Movement. The identity struggle in Hong Kong here could be examined as a novel induction in theory 'circuit of culture' which the binary opposition identities may happen when two polarized cultural products are popular in the same society. This requires more investigation and data to establish its theoretical ground in future study.

Implication and contribution

The major significance of this research lies in locating and describing the changing contours of Hong Kong identities in relation to the consumption of cultural creations produced in China. Currently, there is an academic study boom in Hong Kong culture examining the rise of localism (e.g. Chan, 2015; Chen & Szeto, 2015; Cheung, 2015) in ideological perspective or the effect of public media (Tang, 2015) and social media (Lee et al., 2015) in the constitution of this insurgent public sphere and civil disobedience (Erni, 2015), still a more culturally feasible and concrete approach for Hong Kong identity analysis in cultural perspective has not yet been proceeded or addressed. This paper may serve the need of the field.

At this particular historical juncture, Hong Kong media covers various issues including the national security law, local cultural heritage, ownership of the British citizenship for the Hong Kong people in British colonial period, Hong Kong cultural identities form the essence of various discussions. An empirical study that grounds the identities on the consumption and production of cultural products – which are regarded as hard facts and forming memories of Hong Kong's values and identities – is crucial at this moment to provide basic and objective data for the public and for academic inquiry.

Besides this, as a theoretical inquiry, the study of the interpretation of cultural production reveals the relationship and contradictions among cultural production, creative workers, and cultural identities, which are all central to the study of cultural industries nowadays. This paper illustrates how the failure of cultural policy or a weak cultural industry provokes the juxtaposition of two binary opposite identities and cultural readings. The struggle of nationalization and localization, in certain extent, attributed to the role of cultural policy. It indicates a theoretical extension explaining the role of cultural policy in cultural identification; at the same time explore an uncharted area of cultural policy and cultural production in the wider global context.

Conclusion

In this study, after examining the special significance on the values, culture and ideologies of the cultural products created by artists – creative workers willingly or unwillingly relocated to China – and the cultural texts as a consequence of the new production environment, this paper investigates how these artists (and their creativity) and products (and the ideologies) are shaped, benefit, or constrained by the politics, market, economic environment, and their personal political agenda. The formation of cultural clusters in China, following the implementation of several cultural policies suggested by the PRC government, encourages the Hong Kong local comics to relocate in China with the considerable subsidy and market potential. Hong Kong local artists now choose to work in and for production houses in Guangzhou, Hangzhou and Beijing and nourish their blossom of the creativity in China. The life experience in the big cities of China provides a cultural impact to the comics creators, at the same time inspires their creativity with the Chinese ideologies. On the contrary, with opposite political stance or marketing concern, local comics artists further locally contextualize and politicalize their cultural products. The content of the comics produced by these China-based Hong Kong comics companies could differ from the local comics operated in Hong Kong.

This difference, according to what implies in the theoretical framework of ‘circuit of culture’ (Hall et al., 1997), triggers the difference of identity formed in cultural identification, cultural production and consumption. This paper examines the nationalized comics and localized comics and how these two opposite ideological cultural products formed the opposite binary cultural identity, which is matching to the current cultural identity conflict in Hong Kong. The role of cultural policy towards the cultural industry is further examined and questioned at the end of this paper by applying the case of Hong Kong cultural products, implying the risk of underestimating the role of cultural policy in cultural identification under the globalized context.

Notes

1. This illustration style mentioned is characteristic in physiological accurateness and the richness of stroke to elaborate the detail. This Hong Kong typical drawing style best match with its kung-fu genre, and the detailed muscle highlight and even exaggerate the power of heroes and villains and legitimize the fantastic violent and fierce effect portrayed in the comics (Chew et al., 2016).
2. This style is characterized in Japan for exclaiming the fantasy of virtual world inside the story; it implicitly highlights the underlying cultural and societal meaning throughout the historical

change. This style highlights the cuteness of the character, particularly, in human features such as big eyes, cute figure to depict activities and emotions (Ng, 2003).

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