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# Audience Engagement with Ten Years and the Imagination of Hong Kong Identity

Between Text, Context, and Audience

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In December 2015, a low-budget independent Hong Kong film entitled Ten Years (Ng et al., 2015) topped the domestic box office sales and unexpectedly provoked widespread of attention across the city. The film envisions a dystopian future of a Beijing-ruled Hong Kong in ten years ahead. Reflecting upon its popularity, this dissertation explores the significance of Ten Years in the cultural particularities of Hong Kong context. This research is approached from audience research under the concept of audience engagement (Takahashi, 2010) but also refers to Hong Kong cultural studies and the concept of imagined community (Anderson, 1983). Through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 14 domestic Hong Kong audiences, the research findings illustrate that the cultural significance of Ten Year relates to perception of threat, collective responses, and community building. With wider implications for audience research, the results support the argument that the audience reception and usage of text, conditioned by the sociocultural context, should be analyzed as a whole. In this sense, the convergence approach to audience studies allow flexibility and variations relative to the context and objectives of the research.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

It was a rainy night when I went with my brother to watch *Ten Years* at the 2016 New York Asian Film Festival. We headed to the venue a few hours earlier to secure the tickets and to my surprise, there was already a line waiting in front of the theater. As we were queuing in the rain with our cold kebabs in hand, I overheard a mixture of Cantonese and fluent American-English conversations; some seemed to be tourists from abroad or elsewhere in America and some were local New Yorkers. We were diverse in the sense that we all came from different background and places, but by standing in a physical line for hours together, I felt a sense of togetherness connected by our shared determination.

The Hong Kong commercial film industry has faltered since its 1980s heyday. Its rich heritage is unquestioned but gone are the days of “Hollywood of the Far East”. What then, were the factors that audiences, including myself, find *Ten Years* so compelling? *Ten Years*’ appeal triggered an interest to examine its meaning within the cultural community—however such community is understood and recognized. In this respect, research in Hong Kong cinema still primarily focuses on textual analysis (Chang, 2000; Rehling, 2015). The lack of inquiry in audience research is troubling when considering the presumed media effect in imposing Hong Kong identity (Yue, 2012; Cheung, 2016). Andrew Choi, the executive producer of *Ten Years*, remarked in his acceptance speech of the Best Picture award, “*Ten Years* has transcended being a film, this award shows that Hong Kong actually has hope. It tells us that we need to keep working hard. Thanks to all the Hong Kong viewers. This award belongs to you all.” (Lau and Leng, 2016) His speech and the discussions around *Ten Years* have made apparent that an exclusively text-based analysis is not adequate to capture the complexity of its meanings. Indeed, what are the hopes and dreams embodied in *Ten Years* and how does the audience actually make sense the film?

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There are two objectives in response to Gough *et al.*, (2003)'s criteria point of "why this study now?" Firstly, the theoretical aim is to capture the tri-relationship between text, context, and audience—each no more prioritized than the other—asking: How do socially and culturally located individuals interact with the representation? Without discrediting the importance of text, I take on an audience approach to text as meaning does not exist without an individual to recognize and interpret it.

At the same time that I inquire the interpretive processes, I hope to bring out the cultural relevance of *Ten Years*. I write at a time of the post-Umbrella movement, a time of social unrest and deep despondency as many have termed "an abyss of helplessness" (Law, 2015). In this respect, the second objective is driven by my reflexive positioning as a Hong Konger, hoping to co-explore with my informants the possibilities of creating alternative imaginations of who we are and what we could become in face of the pervasive helplessness that so haunts our perception of the future.

As audience research is shaped by the context within it is conducted (Takahashi, 2010:7), it is crucial to address the relevant contextual factors that define the audience engagement. Such a discussion becomes more entangled and complicated in the postcolonial landscape of Hong Kong. To avoid dwelling on various political issues that might distract from the present discussion of cultural meaning and *Ten Years*, the historical background is summarized first, after which an overview of Hong Kong cultural identity is provided. The chapter then concludes with a brief summary of *Ten Years*.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND - HONG KONG IDENTITY

Any discussion of Hong Kong culture must consider its colonial past. However, colonialism in Hong Kong also has a number of factors unique to its history. Hong Kong's colonial history is the only

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history it has known and such past has distinguished Hong Kong culturally and politically from Mainland China (Ruhlig, 2016:59). In a special sense, Hong Kong's post-coloniality precedes decolonization (Abbas, 1997:6); the handover of Hong Kong sovereignty to China was never simply a return of Chinese territory to the Chinese.

Hong Kong has been termed as "a borrowed place on borrowed time" (Hughes, 1968: xi)—what is borrowed must be returned by the end of 2047, when the One Country, Two Systems model expires (see Appendix A). This phrase precisely points to the struggle for Hong Kong people to go beyond such historical determination by developing its own version of time and place (Abbas, 1997:143). As a former colony, Hong Kong has evolved a quasi-state existence where Hong Kong people have developed a unity that could be described in terms of a national consciousness (Thomas, 1999:41). In a June 2017 survey of Hong Kong people's ethnic identity conducted by the University of Hong Kong, the proportion of self-identified "Hong Konger" outnumbered "Chinese" by 28% (HKU, 2017). In this complication, two groups of people separated in a common ethnicity is ultimately relative and unsettling.

Understanding such a re-nationalizing process from a British colony to a Chinese Special Administration Region brings into focus the negotiation and resistance of Hong Kong identity. In Abbas' influential publication of *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), he argues that a countdown notion of disappearance by the end of 50 years autonomy under the One Country, Two Systems model is explicit to the fragility and uncertainty of Hong Kong's future. Hong Kong's incomplete postcolonial process situating between the imminent pre-1997 period and re-nationalization of post-1997 era has enabled a discursive imagination of its golden past and the uncertain future. What more is to come in the next decades? Will Hong Kong as we know it wither as it succumbs to the dominant pattern of "Chineseness" (Matthews, 2001:312)? As Abbas observes

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(1997:4), to piece together a sense of belonging in Hong Kong is not an attempt to restore the prior native-ness, but the sense of resistance in response to political exigencies.

## 1.2 TEN YEARS

*Ten Years* is a series of five shorts independently directed by five filmmakers envisioning Hong Kong in ten years ahead as a place of unrest: false flag violence to justify the passage of National Security Law; Chinese cultural revolution style youth guards vandalizing a local neighborhood; Mandarin displacing Cantonese as the official language; and extreme protests involving self-immolation (see Appendix D). With a low-budget of USD 64,000, *Ten Years* topped the domestic box office sales and grossed more than USD 770,000 (van der Horst, 2016). Despite the sweeping success, the film was taken off from commercial cinemas shortly after the state paper *Global Times* denounced *Ten Years* for spreading “virus of the mind” and desperation (Yau, 2015). When the film won the Best Picture at the 2016 Hong Kong Film Awards, the ceremony was censored in Mainland China. Phrases containing the words “ten years” and “Best Picture” were prohibited online and hence, the film was also known as “the non-existent Best Picture” (Ryan, 2016; Lee, 2017). Against this background, the widespread of *Ten Years* was inseparable from grassroots collaboration with the production crew in organizing public screenings across local districts and at international film festivals.



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## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that structures the study. It first reviews theories of cultural identity and three main audience research traditions. It then proposes the necessity of convergence in audience research and presents the concept of “audience engagement” (Takahashi, 2001). This chapter concludes with an outline of research objectives and the conceptual framework.

### 2.1 CULTURAL IDENTITY

There are two main theoretical positions in defining cultural identity. First, an essentialist concept of identity is conceived in terms of individuals as a “coherent sense of common self” with shared historical experience and cultural norms (Wheeler, 1958:19). A second non-essentialist position views cultural identity as a construction of “becoming” and “being”, a “production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1990:222).

According to Thompson’s concept of self-creation, identity formation involves individuals to “develop a sense of themselves and others, of their history, their place in the world and the social groups to which they belong” (Thompson, 1995:8). In this sense, the imagination of self refers to the capacity of how social actors “see in and think about something as that which it is not” (Castoriadis, 1987). Taylor (2002) highlights the moral force of imagination as a sense of moral order under which certain beliefs and ideas attain the status of “right” and “normal”. This capacity of imagination is intertwined with the symbolic resources available to individuals, which can be both lived experienced and mediated experience of media representation (Thompson, 1990).

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## 2.1.1 Media and Imagined Community

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) offers a pivotal entry to understand the relationship between media and identity construction. Writing on nationalism and print media, Anderson argues that mediated communication and media capitalism allow nationalist creations to be simultaneously shared by those who feel connected despite knowing one another in person (1983:24). Because it is near impossible to determine all members of the community, for Anderson, it is the imagination of a nation's existence, a communion, and a deep horizontal comradeship developed in the minds of the people that is important.

Anderson makes an important point that through media text, a sense of belongingness between people is constituted and disseminated. His formulation is similar to the claims made by Zicree (1982) and Hodges (2003) which describe television spectatorship as a collective experience that unifies viewers by mediating an affirmative connection. As Fiske and Hartley also observe, "television spectatorship reassures viewers that other members of the culture share our ways of seeing" (1978:129). The imagined community is nourished by collective cultural representation (Boltanski, 1999:50; Hjort and Mackenzie, 2000:8), situated within the sociocultural communicative spaces; and hence, cinematic works forge and sustain the imagining of unified collectivities. For instance, Oh observes that, "a primary means of policing the borders of 'Koreanness' is to define their ethnic identity through knowledge of Korean popular culture" (2012:267). The common scheme of knowledge share by members of the community as common sense serves to sustain identity as well as to differentiate in-group "us" and out-group "them" (Hayward, 1993:x). In this respect, cultural identity originates in the collective consciousness, the imagination of a "coherent sense of common self" (Wheelis, 1958:19).

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## 2.2 Hong Kong Media Research and Imagined Community

Studies on print and broadcast media are useful to understand the role of media in constructing Hong Kong identity. It is argued that Hong Kong identity is largely a mediated construction (Cheung, 2001:565), strongly associated with a sense of dissociation from the social and cultural community of Mainland China (Fung, 2004:401). Cinematic representation of cultural identity has transformed “Chinese cultural particulars in Hong Kong, articulated local experiences and concern, and crystallized images of a distinct Hong Kong ‘way of life’” (Ma and Fung, 1999:500).

Previous studies on cultural identity in Hong Kong cinema have relied on textual analysis of representation (Pang, 2007; Chang, 2000; Rehling, 2015). In Pang’s (2007) case study of the local star Ronald Cheng, she highlights the emergence of distinctively Hong Kong stories and local cultural sensitivities in Ronald’s work and the contemporary Hong Kong cultural products. Pang also asserts that the rise of Ronald’s popularity in 2003 is a by-product of the demonstration against Article 23 legislation at the time, where his song “Guru”, ridiculing the then chief executive Tung Chee-Hwa, has served as the coherence of the local community.

Chang (2000)’s content analysis of 13 Hong Kong blockbusters examines the representation of Hong Kong cultural identity and how collective consciousness is enunciated through Hong Kong cinema since the handover in 1997. The findings reveal the construct of “us” the Hong Kong people in contrast to “what [them] the Mainland Chinese are not” (Chang, 2000:23). As Chang acknowledges the problematic status of discussing nationhood and Hong Kong identity, he aligns with Brennan’s definition of nations as “imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fiction in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (1990:49; cited in Chang, 2000:23). Hence, Chang argues that Hong Kong cinema crucially embodies consciousness that contributes the self-image of Hong Kong subjectivity.

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Anderson's "imagined community" and previous studies on media representation provided the concept for this paper. But it is crucially important to address how audience make sense of their cultural identities through their engagement with the text. As Hobsbawm argues, "[national identities are] constructed essentially from above, but cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people" (1992:10; cited in Mak, 2013:52). The emphasis of textual analysis in existing literature in Hong Kong overlooks the key importance of how actual audience interacts with the representation. As Lo (2001) argues in the context of Taiwanese cinema, identity formation is a conjunctural mediating process between textual representation and audience reception. Using methodological triangulation of combining quantitative and qualitative analysis of media representation on two Taiwan nationalistic films as well as in-depth interview with 19 viewing families, Lo's findings indicate that narrative structure in media text has the power to suggest the denotative level of content; but the audience also have power to use textual resources and cultural knowledge to interpret the text at the connotative level (2001:194). Thus, both media power and audience active meaning-making co-exist and affect each other over time.

Conceptualizing identity as a constructed notion, this study examines how Hong Kong identity is constructed from the "bottom up" by individuals through their engagement with the text. The following section shall review works on audience research.

## **2.3 APPROACH TO AUDIENCE STUDIES**

This section presents an overview of three main audience research traditions: effects research, uses and gratification studies, and reception studies. By attuning to the limits and merits of each tradition, I aim to highlight the necessity of a convergence approach to address the complexity of audiences

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under Takahashi's (2001) convergence model of "audience engagement". This section concludes by presenting an outline of the research objectives and conceptual framework.

## **2.3.1 Effects Studies**

Media effect traditions stem from notions of mass communication's impact on society (McQuail, 1983). The body of effects studies is voluminous, combining output of research ranging from the hypodermic needle model of direct effect (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) to agenda-setting of the media (McCombs and Weaver, 1985), each with diverse notions about the strength of strong effects to weak effects (Mahle, 1986; Rosengren, 1988). According to McQuail (1983), mass communication study is based on the premise that the media imposes some sort of effect, though what precisely the effect mean and by which it can be measured remains the core of debate. The basis of effects research, according to Lowery and DeFleur (1995), is to examine "what do mass communications actually do to us, both individually and collectively?". Effects research, although under the criticism of overlooking audience agency (Barker and Petley, 2001), has provided valuable insights to address how media is socially meaningful (O'Neill, 2011:320). As Hartmann and Husband argue, "to look for effects in terms of simple changes of attitude may be to look in the wrong place" (1972:439). This dissertation approaches the subject of effect as the power of text, which exist to an extent of guiding textual interpretation but such power is diffused by various determinate factors (Eco, 1979; Takahashi, 2010:174).

## **2.3.2 Uses and Gratification**

In contrast to effect studies, uses and gratification studies devote attention to what individual do with the media (Katz, 1980) for what purpose (Herzog, 1940). The body of studies has established that individuals ritually attend to media to satisfy individual and social needs such as personal relation,

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pleasure, and identification (McQuail, Blumler, and Brown, 1972). Uses and gratification has made valuable contribution to the idea that audience are not impotent to the strong powerful media but are actively using media to serve their own interest (Swanson, 1992:306). The approach makes little connection to the text and focuses the analysis on audience's gratification-seeking motivations. As a result, the approach has been criticized for overemphasizing audience agency (Livingstone, 1990:35; Elliott, 1974). If, following the optimistic accounts of uses and gratification studies, audience activity is entirely shaped by individual psychological perspective, there is no need to set up broadcasting policies. Nonetheless, the approach is noteworthy for highlighting the motivations associated with media usage and how audience use media in ways that media producers had not intended (Kaufman, 1944).

### 2.3.3 2.3.3 Reception Studies

Reception studies regard meaning as a joint product of text and audience, shaped by the situational context of reading (Schroeder *et al.*, 2003:125). Following the tradition of cultural studies, reception analysis conceives media meaning as culturally coded discourses and audience as active agents of meaning production. What characterizes reception studies is the insistence of both textual structure and interpretive structure of audience in addressing the question of "what [text] means—and what it might mean...in the different social production of meaning" (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990:229). The approach has sought to account the bases of divergent interpretation of media message yet refute the notion that variation in interpretation is entirely personal (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2008; Hall, 1980).

One influential approach to reception studies is Hall's (1980) encoding and decoding model. The cyclic model conceives meaning as encoded with discursive codes of the dominant ideology and is then released through broadcasting structures to the public and decoded by the audience. Hall focuses on the discursive codes in both the predetermines of textual structure and the reception of

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audience. The model represents a break from the prior conception of audience as the victim of ideological hegemony, but it also rejects the idea of indeterminacy of textual meaning, which is the central idea of uses and gratification studies.

Extending from Hall's decoding model, Morley (1980) provides an empirical study to examine the socially specific positions of decoding news. He considers meaning production through both semiotics and sociological perspectives under three interpretative decoding positions as hypothesized by Hall earlier: preferred reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading. From the findings of the focus group interviews, Morley argues that decoding position correlates to audience's socio-economic background such as class and subcultures where audience decodes the text from the discursive codes given by their belonging subgroups.

Overall, the contribution of reception studies is the emphasis on sociocultural and historical contextual of all interpretations. The concepts of "interpretative communities" (Fish, 1980) and "interpretive repertoire" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) highlight the relationship between meaning production and audience's sociocultural environment, enabling the analysis to address both discursively and socially specific meanings. The challenge for reception studies is the limitations of literary model of audience interpretation (Couldry, 2000:9), which oversimplifies the complexity of audience engagement with media and what individuals actually do with text (Buckingham, 1987). Beyond simply "reading" of textual content, audience engagement also involves ritualistic and participatory functions that reception tradition fails to address.

## **2.3.4 Convergence Approach and Audience Engagement**

As discussed, each tradition neglects dimensions of audience that other perspective postulates as important. At present, there is no unified conceptual schema that adequately offers a comprehensive

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account of audience and media relationship (Michelle, Davis, and Vladica, 2012:106). The resulted fragmentation in the field of audience research and the need for a unified theoretical and methodological conception of audience has been widely acknowledged (Blumler, 1985; Livingstone, 1990; Press and Livingstone, 2006). The solution that Swanson offered was the linkage of uses and gratification and media effects by incorporating audience's interpretive processes. He suggested that within the textual constraints of media message, audience member may interpret messages to serve their particular gratifications (Swanson, 1992: 320). Thus, the message effect depends on the interpretive process to a certain extent while audience's gratification-seeking practices also structure media exposure and influence interpretive decisions.

The perspective of each disciplinary tradition, although diverge in aims and objectives, complements to different audience-text encounters (Michelle, Davis, and Vladica, 2012:109). Hence, the convergence of approaches would enable a more cohesive understanding of meaning production and audience responses. As audience study is shaped by the context of study, the notion of convergence does not seek to fix audience theory and traditions of communication studies. Rather, convergence of distinct audience traditions is an interdisciplinary approach of combining methodological and theoretical advantages of distinct traditions to study the current social and historical context (Press and Livingstone, 2006; Takahashi, 2010).

Previous studies adopting the convergence approach have proved productive; Gillespie (1995) and Mankekar (1999) investigate the role media plays in everyday life by integrating both reception and uses of media text; Livingstone's study of audience perception on the representation of characters in two popular British soap operas notes that the overall interpretation arises from the intersection between the text, the viewer, and the historical context of production and reception (1988:105). Convergence is needed, as Livingstone argues, to move beyond dualism between active and passive



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audience, or powerful and less powerful media, which synthesizes questions of media and individual within “diverse kinds of power relations between media and audiences” (1997:15).

Takahashi proposes the convergence model of “audience engagement” to investigate how varied ways of Japanese people’s engagement with media in contemporary Japanese everyday life “create and recreate both their senses of self and the social groups to which they belong” (Takahashi, 2002;2010). Audience engagement encompasses ideas across active audience theories, drawing from the concept of selectivity from uses and gratification studies, social context from audience reception studies, and Japanese information activities from Joho studies. Bringing together multiple dimensions of audience activities, Takahashi aims to situate the complexity of engagement within the social interaction between Japanese individuals, social groups, and Japanese culture. In her study, Takahashi identifies nine dimensions of audience engagement and points out that the most significant engagement is intrapersonal interactivity (information-seeking) and interpersonal interactivity (connectivity and para-social interaction). The study highlights the social function of media to facilitate social intimacy and community formation as individual engages with other individuals through media activities (Takahashi, 2010:170).

Overall, the convergence approach avoids reducing the complexity of audience to active-passive dichotomy or singular level of audience activity. Adopting a convergence approach, my primary objective is not to illustrate in great detail a comprehensive, complete account of audience engagement with *Ten Years*; indeed, the limitation of this study is the absence of rich details of textual and discourse analysis. Rather, I use the convergence approach to position meanings production in aspects of textual constraints, interpretative processes, and media usage without privileging one or the other. The following section shall further outline the research questions and conceptual framework used in this study.

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## 2.4 RESEARCH QUESTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The dissertation focuses on meaning-making emerged through audience engagement with *Ten Years*, exploring the following research question: *What is the cultural significance of Ten Years?*

By significance, the central question does not concern a “yes” or “no” answer but explores the dynamism of meaning production. Two research sub-questions helped operationalize the central research question:

SQ1: How does the audience respond to *Ten Years*?

SQ2: What is the significance that audience attached to their engagement with *Ten Years*?

The first question on responses concerns questions of textual interpretation and usage with and through the film. Building from the descriptive details of audience responses, the second question relates to how and why does engagement matter to audiences. Audiences in this study were asked to recall their engagement with the film and as the findings reveal, the reconstructive nature of memories have added details to the original experience. However, I do not intend to inquire deeper into the accuracy of their memories, but I seek to make sense of what details they remember and the significance of the style of recollection.

To understand the cultural significance of *Ten Years*, this study is framed by a convergence approach. As Takahashi argues, “for variation and dynamism relative to the particular context and aim of the research... a convergence of diverse and divergent audience theories must be orchestrated” (2002:25). I share with Takahashi’s convergence model of audience engagement as a starting point but takes a different course by situating the model in the Hong Kong context. The term “audience” is used in this dissertation to refer to individuals and groups as engager with media text. It seeks to understand how

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audience interpreted, used, and participated with and through *Ten Years* contextualized within the Hong Kong social and political context.

The starting point of the argument is that audience are active agents in their interpretation and usage of media text. However, the audience studies approach is not to overlook power of textual influences or to suggest that a text has an infinite number of interpretations. This dissertation acknowledges the power of media representation and its power “in producing certain ‘truth effects’, while rendering other illegitimate, deviant and false” (Orgad, 2012:28). While focusing on media audience, I will refer to media power to inquire the role of *Ten Years* as an interpretive frame.

Following Takahashi’s formulation of audience engagement, my focus is not to isolate audience in certain aspects by looking just at how audience decodes the encoded meaning or at the motivation and usage of media. Rather, I aim to address meaning production as a holistic whole of interpretation, situational context, textual discourses, and usage of media that are inextricably intertwined in audience engagement with media. I have borrowed concepts of meanings from the following audience theories: textual structures from effects research; the concept of utility from uses and gratification studies; and interpretative strategies and sociocultural context from reception studies.

In addition to forms of engagement, I also draw on theories of cultural identity and imagined community (Anderson, 1983) to consider the broader question of identity and participation emerged from audience engagement. I believe the advantage of incorporating identity studies in the approach to audience research is the scope to situate audience as collective embedded in the broader sociocultural context of Hong Kong. If collective identity is conceived as an imagined community, it would be interesting to examine what is being imagined and how is the imagining taking place. Specifically, how individual audience recognizes the representations in *Ten Years* and how shared engagement with the film fosters an understanding of who “we” are.

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## 3 METHODOLOGY

The following section first outlines the rationale for the chosen methodology and then proceeds to discuss the research design in detail. The chapter ends with ethical precautions undertaken throughout the research and the discussion on reflexivity.

### 3.1 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To inquire how meanings of the text relate to the personal and the wider social context, this dissertation adopts an audience-centered and qualitative semi-structured interview approach. Research interview has two key advantages: 1) it uncovers factual details of participation like a questionnaire-based method; and 2) it provides more in-depth inquiry of how the film matters to the individual (Guest *et al.*, 2013). The rationale of utilizing in-depth interview over focus group is to avoid group pressure and consensus responses (Schroeder *et al.*, 2013:154). I am interested in the significance of the differences and similarities in how individuals interpret their engagement with and through *Ten Years*. Additionally, I hope to understand the individual's personal perspectives, emotion, and expectations as a whole rather than discrete topics to be discussed amongst the group (Nunakoosing, 2005:703; Diccico-Bloom and Crabtree, 2016:316). Crucial in the context here is to examine what and how interviewees recollected their engagement experiences with *Ten Years* in 2015 without the presumption of significance. The flexibility of semi-structure interview enabled the interview section to tailor the ordering of questions and to develop points raised by the interviewees, granting interviewees considerable power to shape the agenda (Kumar, 2014; Schroeder *et al.*, 2003).

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### 3.1.1 Sampling and Recruitment

I conducted face-to-face interview in Cantonese with 14 individuals (6 females and 8 males) between March and April of 2018. Their level of engagement with *Ten Years* ranged from promoting the film on social media to organizing public screenings. The interviewees were between 19 and 53 years of age and varied in education and professional background. All interviewees were ethnically Chinese (summarized in Appendix E).

For this research, a pilot study was conducted with three London-based Hong Kong audience. It became clear the participants' spatial distance from Hong Kong added an additional layer of significance to *Ten Years*—how viewership “here” in London was related to declaring their belonging to “there” in Hong Kong. Their transnational background imbricated a significance of diasporic media, which departs from the intention of the present study.

Considering the insights from the pilot study, the sampling frame utilized the inclusion criteria holding control for geographical homogeneity of audience based in Hong Kong and those who claim a Hong Kong identity. As Hong Kong studies scholars submit, Hong Kong identity encapsulates aspects of regional, cosmopolitan, and post-colonial identities (Mak, 2013:25; White and Cheng, 1993:154). I acknowledge that these aspects of variants are not mutually exclusive; the Hong Kong audience were recruited as they have self-declared their cultural identity. Given the consumption context of *Ten Years*, the temporary coming-together of audience transcended age group, professional, and education affiliations. To sought as much demographic variation as possible in the sample, I utilized two recruitment method: 9 participants were recruited via snowball sampling and 5 participants via random sampling from *Ten Years*' official Facebook page. Facebook is relevant to *Ten Years* as the film was largely circulated and promoted via the platform (Sant, 2016). Recruitment

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through Facebook yielded technically active and enthusiastic participants while personal referral yielded participants of similar political proposition.

## 3.2 3.1.2 Topic Guide

This dissertation is conceived under the audience research tradition using the concept of audience engagement (Takahashi, 2001) to acknowledge the multidimensional interaction between media text, context, and audience. Taking Diccico-Bloom and Crabtree's guideline (2016), I begun the interview section with a casual conversation on the interviewee's background and ideological proposition. Having an overall understanding of the interviewee helped the analysis to understand what individuated the individuals—how their very personal background influenced their responses and perception of the film—and hence the extent of patterned responses. Interviewees were then asked about five main dimensions in relation to the research question: motivation, viewing experience, content interpretation, perception of “future” in film, and perception of Hong Kong. I framed the questions in an open-ended manner with further follow-up probing to allow in-depth elaboration of perspectives and to reduce the feeling that the interview was a memory test (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). The overarching goal was to encourage participants to discuss their engagement with *Ten Years* in their own words without imposing preset frameworks.

## 3.2.1 3.1.3 Analytical Strategy

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed in a denaturalized approach. The transcribed conversation was analyzed through thematic analysis, adopted from Esfehni (2016) and Walters (2016)'s six-phrase model with two-step translation—initial reading, coding, translating, developing basic theme, organizing, deriving thematic network, analyzing network, and translating. Themes

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were identified using both deductive theory-driven codes based on the pilot study and inductive data-driven codes.

I first pre-coded the original transcript in Chinese to determine initial concepts and phrases for coding. The transcription was then translated for repeated coding. Codes derived from both English and Chinese transcripts were repeatedly reviewed, compared, and clustered into thirteen categories, which were further organized into four meta categories: participatory responses, interpretation of content, perception of the film, perception of Hong Kong. These categories and the subcategories were assembled into networks, enabling the analysis on the interrelationship arrangements and the emerging themes from the linked component. The final translation step deployed a reflexive review on the word choice to convey the interviewees' perspectives.

## **3.3 3.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND REFLEXIVITY**

I have thoroughly explained the research aims, obtained signed consent forms, and ensured the interviewees' rights of withdrawal before the interview. All interviewees mentioned in this dissertation are shown in pseudonyms. Where recordings might be intrusive to confidentiality and privacy, all recordings have been kept securely and interviewees were informed of the measures taken.

In the discussion of Hong Kong identity with ethnically Chinese Hong Kong audience, potential unintended contribution to the homogenization of cultural identity was difficult to avoid. Noting the sensitive of this topic, I stress that the goal of this dissertation is not to essentialize cultural identity. However, I do hope to present the participants' genuine concerns and viewpoints with the respect they deserve.

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My identity as an ethnically Chinese Hong Konger studying Hong Kong identity presented advantages and limitations. The insider status aided in access to sampling and in understanding the sociocultural context for data analysis. However, this identity casts inevitably an increased risk of projecting researcher bias. As audience research and thematic analysis is fundamentally shaped by the researcher's interpretation of people's interpretation of their own relationship with media (Schroeder *et al.*, 2003:30), it is imperative that I develop data-driven codes for analysis (Pilcher and Eade, 2016:31) and incorporate as many audience voices as often to describe their own perception.

My dual role as a researcher/translator may add an additional layer of subjectivity (Hennink, 2008:26). To minimize the risk of misrepresentation, both Chinese and English transcripts were presented to the participants for feedback and in doing so, I hope, could prevent skew translation (Zhu, Duncan, and Tucker, 2017:4). Taking Boyatzis' advice (1998), I have coherently translated the original transcript with consistent phrasings. For instance, phrases such as 抗爭 was consistently translated as "resist", 無力感 as "helplessness", 預言 as "prediction" or "prophetic" depending on the conversation context. Where phrases are ambiguous, the original phrasing in Chinese is also included in this study for readers to evaluate.

## 3.4 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

As a case study, this dissertation has obvious limitations for producing generalized findings to all forms of text-reader interaction. A small-scale qualitative research cannot capture the complexity of media experiences. I also cannot claim representativeness of the meanings attributed to *Ten Years* by the interviews of this study. As my study made clear, the participants were atypical of the general Hong Kong public in that they already exhibited high level of concern about Hong Kong current affairs before choosing to engage with the film on such topic. Additionally, the study is only of ethnically Chinese audience's engagement.



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The interpretative power of thematic coding is limited to produce patterns across dataset; unlike discourses analysis, it cannot make claims on the language use (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:2) and as translation was involved in the analysis, interviewee's language use can get lost.

I have not conducted textual analysis as part of this study. As discussed in the previous chapter, I decided to focus on meaning-making process by the audience. Nevertheless, I have incorporated the findings of Carrico's (2017) textual analysis of *Ten Years* in the topic guide and coding framework.

The following chapter first presents three emergent themes from the qualitative analysis. It then discusses the interrelationship between the themes against the conceptual framework and relevant literature.

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## 4 FINDINGS

The findings of the qualitative data shall be discussed in two parts. The following chapter first presents the three emergent themes of significance separately. The proceeding chapter then discusses the interrelationship between each theme in the context of the research question and conceptual framework. All quotes are translation of the original Cantonese responses.

### 4.1 PERCEPTION OF THREAT

In Abbas's influential publication, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), Hong Kong is described in reference to the determined fate of "disappearance". With British colonial government largely out of the picture in the post-1997 situation, Hong Kong subjectivity is inseparable from the speedy changed and changing space. The political destiny of 2047 is settled. However, the politics of administration and experience of cultural identity is ever more unsettling. Considering the changing faces of Chinese nationalism and the remaining days of the One Country, Two Systems model, a pressing sense of racing against time is uprising (Abbas, 1997:142).

As Hong Kong studies suggest, the incomplete postcolonial progression towards 2047 has enabled a discursive position of incorporating the past to imagine an unsettling future (Erni, 2001:390). *Ten Years* illustrates a dystopian vision of Hong Kong future (Carrico, 2017:3). Interpreting such illustration as a credible prediction, interviewees perceived the future in terms of gradual deterioration and decline. Such process of change, from the experienced "now" to the illustrated "future", encapsulates the threat of losing distinction, losing familiarity, and losing security. As plainly expressed by interviewee Jacky (aged 19), "Things are different from the way they used to be." Things are not only different; things are changing in a negative and speedy light, "falling backwards" (Shun, aged 46),

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“washing out” (Ho, 43), “downfalling” (Tsang, 37) and more significantly, “everything has Mainlandized” (Patti, 22).

The perception of threat is centered around the concerns over local livelihood. However, “the China factor” is certainly core to the perception of threat. As interviewee Wing (54) discussed his fear after watching *Ten Year*, “Hong Kong is currently heavily influenced by China, in terms of its politics and livelihood, at every level.” Many interviewees of the older generation noted the transition in their attitude towards Hong Kong affairs before and after 1997. Interviewee Ho (43), for instance, admitted, “Having born and raised during the colonial period, I was absolutely apathetic towards politics before 1997. It’s true that we didn’t have democratic freedom back then, but we didn’t need it and we were happy with our lives [pause] everything is not the same after 1997, we can no longer remain silent.” The difference between “then” during the colonial period and “now” in the post-1997 Hong Kong is the presence of Chinese nationalism and the imposition of re-nationalism at the level of Hong Kong culture. If the appearance of Hong Kong culture is forged through binary differences (Lamb, 1984), the risk of blurring distinction between Chinese and Hong Kong culture is seemingly threatening. As expressed by interviewee Jacky (19), “When we lose our character, we lose our value. We will only become the most ordinary coastal city.”

There is no simple explanation for the sense of imminent disappearance and threat underlying a substantial portion of respondents’ interpretation towards *Ten Years*’ scenarios. However, the perception of threat commonly begun with personal resonance with *Ten Years*, varied in accordance to personal background and experience. What each interviewee took from the film can be quite disparate. They also recalled the film in incomplete sections, emphasizing particular details that they find significant. For instance, the most memorable scene for Akane (24) was “Dialect”. Rather than focusing on a specific scenario of the film section, she broadly described “Dialect” as the tension

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between Mandarin and Cantonese speakers whilst cross-referencing the changing environment in Mongkok, a local youth district that she frequently hung out with her friends during middle school. “Honestly, Mongkok has Mainlandized...Back then the alleys were full of Mongkok guys and girls, all you could hear was Cantonese and swear words [laugh] but now all Mongkok has left are suitcases, Mandarin, and languages that you don’t understand at all. Isn’t this what ‘Dialect’ has illustrated?” (Akane, 24). Exemplified in Akane’s account, the interviewees commonly incorporated extra-textual details to the descriptions of the scenarios. Patterns of ambivalent commentaries such as, “I remember that scene, but I don’t remember the rest [pause] I remember the granny scene [pause] also the yellow umbrella and the pepper spray” (Jane, 25) are typical of other interviewees.

What unites the interviewees’ recollection of *Ten Years* is their common perception of authenticity and realism. Despite their awareness that *Ten Years* is fictional, interviewees described the film in terms of “documentary” (Wan, 30), “documentation” (Melody, 23), and “historical record” (Jane, 25). When I asked them to explain, they commonly made explicit connections between the “now” in reality and the “future” in *Ten Years*. Tiffany, for instance, interpreted *Ten Years* in terms of what is going to happen and what has “already become a reality” (Tiffany, 24). Such cross-referencing to the everyday reality highlights the sense of realism and the perception that “things depicted in *Ten Years* is happening right by your side.” (Jacky, 19) As deep-rooted conflicts continue to surface in everyday experience—whether disqualifying pro-democracy legislators, imposing co-location arrangements to allow Mainland immigration officers to exercise jurisdiction in the West Kowloon terminal, or the rising housing prices and ineffective regulatory policies—these social issues and the lived experience of disappointments and frustrations in everyday reality have alarmingly reassured the grim depictions in *Ten Years*.

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### 4.2 RESPONSES AND PARTICIPATION

Interviewees readily recognized their engagement as a form of participation. This was associated with their awareness of the Chinese government's criticism and the censorship of *Ten Years* in Hong Kong mainstream cinemas. In addition to the significance of the textual representation, participation through viewership served an important function of civic resistance. When interviewees were asked about their motivation to watch *Ten Years*, they explicitly explained in reasons unrelated to the text such as, "it was oppressed" (Ho, 43) or "because it challenged the Chinese authority" (Pahko, 37). The banning of *Ten Years* was perceived as a form of political intervention from the Chinese government, as interviewee Ho stated, "It was really difficult to get hold of the film. The government intervention was too obvious. How ridiculous, what's the use of One Country, Two Systems then?" (Ho, 43)

Given the perception of political oppression, the act of viewing *Ten Years* signifies more than mere consumption. For the interviewees, *Ten Years* was a matter of participatory, crowd-sourced affair. For instance, Pahko (37) was one of the organizers for community screenings in the Wanchai district. He explained his motivation for organizing the screening event, "Screening [*Ten Years*] was probably an alternative way to reach both the citizens and the government." The perception of government intervention resonated with the interviewees' initial distrust towards Chinese and Hong Kong government. Interviewees aligned their support for the film with their political propositions. This alignment is reflected in the separation between the commentary to the film and the very act of participation. Shun, a local film director, critically evaluated the film's aesthetics and technical arrangements as he critiqued, "There was actually nothing special about the film itself. It was a very mediocre production." He further added, "Had the Chinese government ignored the film *Ten Years*

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would have been quickly forgotten...It was more than a movie. It inspired the Hong Kong collectives (香港群眾) to express their support.”

In terms of expressing support, each interviewee has participated differently, ranging from paying to watch the film at the cinema to organizing public screenings. Each mode of participation differed according to what the interviewees perceived as helpful. For example, in contrast to the community organizer Pahko (37), who perceived public screenings as an effective way to aggregate a crowd, interviewees who worked in the media industry thought financial contribution such as paying to watch the film at the cinema was more supportive. Yet, despite the difference in the interviewees' responses and way of participation, they all shared the enthusiasm for engagement. Akane (24), who claimed to be disinterested in movies, vividly recalled, “I traveled all the way to Hong Kong island at night for *Ten Years*. I will never forget that night, because it was only 4 degrees!” The manifold obstacles involved in participation implies that engagement was required of a certain degree of effort and determination which in turn, added an additional layer of meaning to the engagement.

### 4.3 COMMUNITY BUILDING

Another theme identified is related to community building. Community becomes apparent as a theme across dataset, although the phrase was not explicitly used. Online communities such as Facebook groups of friends with similar political propositions, explain the widespread of *Ten Years* without securing mainstream distribution network. The ways in which Facebook creates information echo-chamber have been noted by media scholars (Jacobson, Myung, and Johnson, 2016:875; Gromping, 2014: 39) and are well observed in the accounts of interviewees. All interviewees in this study were first introduced to the film through Facebook post from friends and they have then repost to “liked-minded friends and family” (志向相同). Interviewee Wing (54) asserted that, “I told *Ten Years* to liked-minded friends and family because I am sure only those who share similar concerns

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would be interested.” Patterns of homogenizing interaction within the existing social communities of in-group interaction are also presented in Tsang (37)’s account. Tsang was an active participant of the 2014 Umbrella Movement and in response to the question of whether he has mentioned *Ten Years* to anyone, he said, “Yes, I shared the screening event on Facebook and tagged a group of comrades (同志). I knew they would be interested in *Ten Years* because we share the same belief and we were fighting together at the front line during Umbrella Movement.” The echo-chamber effect has reinforced a sense of coherence defined by political beliefs and viewpoints.

Interviewees often use phrases like “everyone”(大家) or “we”(我哋) to describe the subject of participation, speaking from a position of the larger collective community. An interesting point was that, their initial imagined “everyone” was confined by their existing imagination of those “who are like me”. For instance, when asked about their understanding of the target audience of *Ten Years*, young interviewees commonly replied “young people” (Patti, 22; Jacky, 19; Chelsea, 24). Yet, the generational aspect of community was challenged through their interaction with the visible audience community. Tiffany, a self-identified active student activist, noted her surprise at the cinema, “I was surprised to see how most of the audience were middle age people. I didn’t think older people would also be interested [in *Ten Years*].” In reference to the surprise discovery, she noted a similar surprise at the scenario in “Self-Immolator”, “I was really shock to find out that the self-immolator was actually an old granny. It was the same feeling I had when I saw the middle-age audience members and that there is actually a silent group of older activists in Hong Kong.” The accounts of surprises show that engagement with *Ten Years* was a matter of re-discovering who “we” are.

Both younger and older interviewees mentioned that *Ten Years* was made for “Hong Kong people”. Consistently, the discussion of target audience, victims/enemy characters, and definitions of Hong Kong people are characterized according to political propositions. Victims of *Ten Years* were not only

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defined in terms of the characters in the film (the grocer, the self-immolator, the Cantonese taxi driver) but were also linked to a complex range of “poorest people in Hong Kong” (Tsang, 37) to people who oppose the Chinese government (Melody, 23)— described in terms of “we” the victim under the current government. Hence, a shared perception of the “enemy” was discussed by the interviewees less in terms of a definite character role in the text but as those whom they perceived as “enemy” in real life (in this case, the Chinese and Hong Kong government). Interviewee Melody (23) raised an interesting insight, “I wouldn’t comment whether a character is good or evil because it really depends on which position you are speaking from. But maybe because I think the Mainland has invaded Hong Kong so it makes them evil.” The cross-reference between the relationship in text and reality reveals the complex interaction between the interviewees’ identification with the victims in the film and the projection of victimhood understandings to their interpretation of the film.

## 5 DISCUSSION

Behind the questions about cultural significance are broader questions about meaning-making processes and identity construction. The qualitative findings suggest that the cultural significance of *Ten Years* relates to shared perception of threat, responses of resistance and participation, and the construction of a knowable community. In this section, I discuss the interrelationship between three emergent themes against the background of literature and conclude with the implications in the field of audience studies. I shall first address the central research question by relating the findings to the two sub-questions of response and the significance attributed to engagement.



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## 5.1 INTERPRETATION AND RESPONSES

Addressing the question of how audience responded to *Ten Years*, meanings of significance are shown to emerge from a complex contextual interaction between the audience and the text. Contrary to the argument that media text can mean anything, the role of text, conceived as media power, is certainly relevant to the present study of *Ten Years*. As discussed in the conceptual framework, media power is not measured by the ideological output, but rather as Couldry (2000:13) defines, “how the media affect what kind of things become ‘social facts’”. Again, the premise here is that meaning is located in the interaction between textual structure and audience and that both are neither entirely arbitrary nor determined (Allen, 1985:63). The audience in this study frequently appropriated textual resources to comment on the social and political landscape in Hong Kong; but the text also has power to structure audience comprehension (Condit, 1989). With regards to the interviewees’ discussions on Hong Kong’s circumstances, *Ten Years* has set limits on the range of topics: from languages (“Dialect”), to cultural heritage (“Season of the End”, “Local eggs”), to umbrella movement and social protest (“Self-immolator”), to hegemonic forces (“Extra”). According to Kitzinger’s notion of media template, “media is instrumental in shaping narratives around particular social problems, guiding public discussion not only about the past, but also the present and the future” (2000:61). Similar to the way discursive frames of media “locate, perceive, identify, label” (Goffman, 1974:21) social events, *Ten Years* provided a handful of narrative frameworks around which the interviewees offered their social commentaries.

As Springer argues, “the virtual realities created by the screens in our lives for many, become more real than the experience of unmediated reality” (1999:206). Issues of authenticity were significant to textual interpretation, although authenticity was not directly discussed during the interview. Many interviewees perceived *Ten Years* as “a documentary” (Jane, 25) or “a historical factual piece” (Wan,

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30). Even with the awareness of the fictive genre, Patti (22), for example, was ambivalent about the difference between the represented “future” in *Ten Years* and the experienced “now” in the real world, asking, “What is the difference between future and present? How is it different?” When asked to clarify, she explained, “Because it is happening now. You can see the future now.” (Patti, 22) From the way Patti described the illustrated future as “now” points to *Ten Years*’ authenticity, where her perception of a grim future for Hong Kong based on her personal experience of “what is happening now” resonated with the textual representations.

The meaning of the text was partially the product of textual narratives yet audience in this study assigned extra-textual meanings to the interpretation. Following the encoding/decoding model, meanings of the text are seen to be encoded in discursive symbols of one culture where as “message reaches the culture where it is to be decoded, it undergoes a transformation in which the influence of the decoding culture becomes a part of the message meaning” (Porter and Samovar, 1988:21). As illustrated in Akane’s account, “The so-called 50 years of no change, 20 years have already passed. The next ten years makes it 30 years. And maybe till then, Hong Kong will just be like the movie. Maybe 40 and 50 years later, it will be completely the same as China.” Audience interpretation of the text has been re-contextualized within structure and ideology (Kuhn, 2002:9); In this case, the interpretive frames of the “countdown to 2047” cultural mentality (Ren, 2010:43; see Appendix B), the year when “One Country, Two Systems” model expires.

In the logic of encoding/decoding model, meaning is generated according to discursive codes encoded in the text and interpreted by the decoder (Hall, 1973). However, as Howarth also argues, “communication involves the double movement of containment and resistance that invites and contests different versions of reality through the interconnected social psychological processes of representation and identification” (2011:168). An important extra-textual factor presented in the

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accounts was the changed and changing landscape in Hong Kong. As of this study, three years have passed since the interviewees' initial encounter with *Ten Years*. The everyday lived experience of social, cultural, and political crisis since 2015 has influenced the recalled memories and the interviewees' current perception of *Ten Years*. For instance, in the discussion of the "future" in *Ten Years*, Pahko described an increasing apprehension since watching *Ten Years* three years ago, "We thought those were things that would only happen ten years later but it has only been three years. Many issues that concerns our values have already happened." He further recalled his initial reaction when he thought *Ten Years* was too cynical. In retrospection, with manifold controversial incidents such as the disqualification of the student activist Agnes Chow from running for the Legislative Council, he said, "When Agnes Chow got disqualified, I posted on Facebook with a reference to *Ten Years*, 'Ten years? Were we too cynical or too optimistic?'" (Pahko, 37). His response poses important questions about the ability of text to constrain pre-given meanings (Livingstone, 1998:5). As Mankekar argues, interpretative process is "grounded in social, material, and historical relationships, conditions and context" (1999:225). Here *Ten Years* has provided the boundary for imagining what is possible in the future, but the ultimate produced meaning is embedded to the changing personal and social context.

Writing on the role of Hong Kong cinema in constructing Hong Kong identity, Hong Kong studies scholar Ackbar Abbas notes the prevalence of negativity in post-1997 Hong Kong films where pessimistic representations serve to "make us ask what it is that we are not seeing in what we see, what it is that is not captured in official statistics, narratives, and economic indicators" (2001:624). As such, the audience in this study believed in the authority of *Ten Years*' representation and has taken its discourses to evaluate the present and the future. This echoes the findings in Geraghty's audience study of *Star Trek* fandom in America, where she notes that fans have used the utopian visions in *Star Trek* as a comparison to criticize the existing social issues (2005:178). *Ten Years* has also served this

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purpose, providing the narratives around which audiences can form their commentaries and criticism.

## 5.2 5.2 ATTACHED SIGNIFICANCE

Drawing on the notion of imagined community (Anderson, 1983), the communal belonging is shaped by the content of the film as well as by the collective participatory experiences. In Wilkins and Siegenthaler's (1997:511) quantitative study surveying Hong Kong media consumption, they note that those who consume media in Cantonese Chinese are more likely to identify themselves as Hong Kong people, without specific reference to the term "Chinese". Similarly, interviewees commonly asserted that *Ten Years* was produced for "Hong Kong people". However, when asked to clarify their definition of "Hong Kong people", they were unable to articulate a coherent definition, rambling on with responses such as, "Are those with five stars on their Hong Kong ID card Hong Kong people?" (Wan, 30); "Does this include the one million new migrants?" (Pahko, 37). Despite their ambivalence towards the boundary of Hong Kong identity, essentialist assumptions of an unadulterated culture were fundamental to the imagined community.

In this respect, the communal solidarity was created through two levels of engagement: the media participation with *Ten Years'* screening and the social participation initiated by the threatening vision of *Ten Years*. On the first level, collective resistance to the censorship imposed to the film reinforced an imagined community crystallized around the identity of "Hong Kong people" and the others. Firstly, their engagement begun with social networking platforms and invitations from like-minded friends. Ho (43), a self-identified pro-democracy activist, explained that he did not invite friends of the opposite political proposition because "there's no room for discussion." Unintended by the

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recruitment criteria of this study, it is striking that most interviewees have participated in the Umbrella Movement. Jane (25) argued that, "*Ten Years* did not intentionally target a specific type of audience, but it has attracted those who genuinely care about Hong Kong politics." Although the temporary engagement has not permanently eliminated the separation of different social groups within the viewing community, they shared a common distrust towards the government. Shun (46), a local movie director, offered a sophisticated analysis of how *Ten Years*' victim/enemy relationship linked with the understanding of "us" versus "them" in the real world: "There isn't a pin-pointing of 'This is the enemy!' in the film. But there is a clear sense of who is the enemy and who is the victim. Even those in power clearly knew that 'You are coming right at me!'"

In many accounts, *Ten Years* was remembered as a collective experience; "By watching the same issue, listening to the same narrative, we could sit together" (Pahko, 37). Interviewees often speak from a position of the collective "we", a reference to the larger social and cultural community. Interestingly, the "we" was also used by individuals who watched the film on their own. More importantly, the prior imaginative communion has made visible through participation, allowing both definition and re-definition of the identity boundary. As mentioned, interviewees were surprised in discovering "others" who also share their concerns with the threatening vision of *Ten Years*. The discovery of a "silent group", as Tiffany (24) called it, provoked the hope and empowerment that the community might actually be larger than they have initially imagined. In this respect, the "we" used in the description of *Ten Years* seems to grow from existing social groups to include other people—a mixing of various social groups united by a shared concern and viewing experience. The trust for communion with others was quenched through the imagination of "we" who perceived *Ten Years* as authentic in contrast to "they [who] see the film as really a just movie." (Jacky, 19) Described by interviewee Pahko, "In the absence of commercial promotion and advertisement, it was fate (緣分) that brought

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us together.” The formation of the community rests on the imagination of a shared affective engagement regardless of age, class, or gender.

The community, as Anderson notes, exists “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991:6). The conception of communion, however, is fundamentally an essentialized cultural identity within a restricted and presupposed homogenized boundary (Yao, 2009:261). It is worth highlighting an insight offered by interviewee Chou, who distinguished the compassionate “Hong Kong people” at times of social demonstrations and the impatient “Hong Kong people” she interacted with in everyday life. She unapologetically remarked, “Hong Kong people are really hard to cope with [laugh]... I still can’t believe Hong Kong people could be so nice during the community screenings or the Umbrella Movement.” The communion is as Abbas notes, “a kind of first-line defense against total political absorption” (1997:142) and more generally a survival strategy against the perceived threat (Calhoun, 1994; Richardson, 2017:11). As Chou explained the unity during Umbrella Movement, “We had to keep close to each other. Any dispute between us would give an excuse for the government to split us apart.” She further critiqued the upheld ideals of the Hong Kong culture, noting, “Nobody talks about core values in everyday life [laugh], maybe only we are criticizing the Mainlanders.” Returning to Anderson’s argument that the community is not distinguished by their falsity/genuineness but by the way they are imagined (1983:15), an imagined cohesion was forged in defense of the external threat of Mainlandization. Chou’s insight challenges the reality of the imagined community and through the difference between the discursive imagination and the lived reality, it also suggests the power of *Ten Years* in highlighting a shared threat that conjured up the sense of unity (Roach, 1993:43).

According to Morris’ (1998) concept of the “future fear”, fear for a worsen reality in the future stimulates individual’s desire for local identity and collective agency. Hence, through the collective

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identification with the “future fear” presented in *Ten Years*, a second level of social engagement was mobilized. Pahko explained his motivation for organizing community screenings in Wan Chai district after watching the film, “We have foreseen Hong Kong in ten years...a frightening depiction thus triggers a question: Hong Kong will be like this, what are we going to do now?” (Pahko, 37) As interviewees were commonly confronted with the future fear, collective agency was required to respond to the enacted “realities” seen through the screen.

The dynamics involved in the modes of participation resonate with the question posed by Livingstone, “Is the goal to participate in media per se or to participate in society through media?” (2012:274). As Livingstone argues, these goals are increasingly converging in the mediatized society. Livingstone’s insight, although addressing new media research, is helpful to understand the converging relationship between interpretation and utility in this case. *Ten Years* was released at a time when Umbrella Movement ended without achieving universal suffrage and actual political reforms. As such, the interviewees believed *Ten Years*’ dystopian vision is an accurate illustration of Hong Kong’s future. This interpretation posed the urgency to reflect upon the predicted future and to implement social change. The concept of civic agency is core to the reason they find engagement meaningful. Interviewees talked about the political usage of engagement, evaluating the effectiveness of the collective act in terms of political progression. Using phrases such as “successful” and “powerful”, Patti, for example, commented, “It’s hard to define success. The film did spread a fearful warning. But everything depends on we respond to it.”

In retrospect, the interviewees’ responses typically involved the combination of empowerment, frustration, and helplessness, as highlighted in the following selected responses:

*Perhaps engaging with Ten Years was a way for us to pay attention to Hong Kong. But so what if we pay attention, what can we actually do? (Melody, 23)*

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*You can say that no actual progress has resulted despite the uproar caused by Ten Years...[But] we must never give up the opportunity to trigger any impact. (Shun, 46)*

Revealingly, throughout the discussion about *Ten Years*, no one stated that *Ten Years* was special for its art form; far more important was its symbolic meaning. As interviewee Jane described, “I really thought was mediocre.” It was only after the screening Q&A section that she changed her perspective, “Maybe that is why *Ten Years* seems more like a campaign. The function of this film is surely greater than its actual content.” Here, Jane’s critique clearly distinguished *Ten Years* as a “campaign” from an art form.

In the discussion of the political economy of Hong Kong film industry, Pang notes the influence of Mainland-Hong Kong co-production model since the signing of CEPA deal in 2003 (Pang, 2007:416; see Appendix C). She argues that co-productions imply that “images and narratives could no longer be easily assumed to be ‘local’ ...in which the films of Hong Kong supposedly assert the identity of the Hong Kong people against a certain hegemonic other” (2007:423). Pang’s argument shows that cultural product in Hong Kong is celebrated more often as what it represents. Against this background of the Mainlandization of Hong Kong film industry (Szeto and Chen, 2012:120), *Ten Years* was praised for its “intimacy” (Chelsea, 24) and plainly being “unlike other Mainland invested Hong Kong films” (Patti, 22). Wan, for example, commented that, “Many Hong Kong films are Mainland co-productions but this movie is closely related to our everyday life.” (Wan, 30) This echoes with Pahko’s viewpoint, describing what he perceived extraordinary of *Ten Years* as “a grassroot Hong Kong movie produced by ordinary people...who dare to say things that those with power dare not to.” (Pahko, 37) Most interviewees could not retain specific details of the film content, but all interviewees explicitly mentioned the criticism from Chinese state outlets and the time *Ten Years* was pulled from commercial screenings. Commentaries from the interviews referred to the censorship of *Ten Years* as stark evidence of threat from the Hong Kong and Chinese government to “Hong Kong



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values". Thus, the stress on supporting *Ten Years* became the mobilizing rhetoric of "David versus Goliath" battle with the perceived hegemonic forces.

### 5.3 5.3 IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In conclusion, the findings have indicated that the cultural significance of *Ten Years* has extended beyond its textual narratives, where the produced meanings include aspects of resistance, participation, and fluctuations of interpretation. The insight complicates theories of effect research by highlighting both textual and extra-textual interpretations, conditioned by the changing sociocultural situation; it also challenges models of active audience research which examines audience practice in separated process of reception and usage. Hence, levels of engagement, ranging from "selectivity, involvement, personal and social use and interpretation" (Takahashi, 2002:18) as well as other media engagement should not be analyzed in isolation. Rather than a fixed audience model, the convergence of effects research, uses and gratification tradition, and reception studies was useful to understand the complex interaction involve in meaning production.

This study is nonetheless delimited to examine the cultural significance of a particular text; the interactive aspects of multiple text and media remain unexplored. It is apparent that, alongside with the array of contextual circumstances, everyday engagement with partisan news and social network also played an influential role in the meaning production of *Ten Years*. The mediatized society (Hepp, 2013) has complicated notions of participation where viewer is not simply watching the text but is also engaging with interactional and participatory opportunities (Dahlgren, 2012; Carpentier, 2012). Based on the limitations in the study, I suggest that future studies of similar interest could complement qualitative interviewing research with data analysis to unveil a network of multimedia interactions. For example, behavioral patterns of audience digital interaction; when and how the text is referenced on what kind of digital platform. Data analytics have been used by the film industry to

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inform business strategies (Kohlert and Konig, 2015; Canepa, 2013); I believe the integrative method could complement the understanding of the type of audience and the meanings of their engagement with the corresponding text.

To extend the work from the audience perspective, it would be interesting to conduct comparison studies of diasporic and domestic Hong Kong audience to understand the extent of media's role in constructing imagined communities. It would also be beneficial to address the oppositional views of self-identified Hong Kong people who deliberately refuse to engage with the film.

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## 7 CONCLUSION

This discussion sets out to explore the cultural significance of *Ten Years* through two sub-questions of how the audience responded to the text and the significance attached to their engagement. Revealed from the thematic analysis of 14 semi-structured interviews with Hong Kong domestic audience, *Ten Years* signifies meanings of shared perception of threat, collective resistance, and community formation.

Addressing to the theoretical aim of the research, this dissertation attends the particularities of the sociocultural and political conditions involve in meaning-production under the convergence model of audience engagement (Takahashi, 2010). The result indicates that all dimension of engagement with *Ten Years*—the representative narratives, the resonations and interpretations, the social participation—was culturally meaningful to the audience in this study. The findings build on the argument that meanings emerge from the contextual interaction of text and audience (Livingstone and Das, 2013; Lee-Brown, 2002), where cultural meanings encounter the text, and are then re-contextualized into an unending spiral of the changing contexts.

In asking questions around the cultural significance of *Ten Years*, the dissertation links audience studies with identity formation. The concept of imagined community (Anderson, 1983) complements theories of audience studies by contextualizing meaning production within Hong Kong's sociocultural and political landscape. Audience in this study drew from their own personal experience and ideological allegiances as they engaged with *Ten Years*. Identifications and resonations with the textual narratives of *Ten Years*, although varied in accordance to individual's background, forged a robust sense of an existing imaginable collective of Hong Kong people. The backdrops against which this community was situated became apparent among others: the threatening vision of cultural assimilation and disappearance of distinctive identity. What mattered was not only that the

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community engaged with the same film, but also how it was forged by the shared empowerment, fear, and uncertainty.

In conclusion, I want to return to the interviewees and their views on the past, present, and their imagined future. Throughout the interview process, I was captivated both by their enthusiasm and their devastating candor. Feelings of total helplessness were discussed by every single interviewee—across generations and across background. I sensed that understanding *Ten Years* through their eyes was not a mere intellectual discussion of academic matters. The interviewees I spoke with genuinely seek to protect Hong Kong of which they called home, but found themselves powerless to do so.

As of this writing marks the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of handover to China. It remains to be seen Hong Kong's future ahead as none of us know for sure what the future is like. And yet, while it is difficult to imagine an alternative future other than what has already been determined 21 years ago, perhaps it is time to move on and move beyond the negative aspects of Hong Kong life. Returning to interviewee Shun's words, "The government is a high wall and we are eggs [pause] But I don't think the effort was useless and we must never give up." *Ten Years* is an imagination of a future. It has aggregated a community of those who resonated with the imagined fears, which in turn inspired new collective actions. For this community, the struggle over Hong Kong's future will no doubt continue. Perhaps a structural reform hardly seems likely, but "giving up doesn't lead us anywhere." (Ho, 43) *Ten Years* is a starting point for discussion and it is as the director of "Local Eggs", Ng Ka-Leung, writes in the prologue of *Ten Years: Record, Interview, Re-imagination*, "Let us put *Ten Years* in the past and begin to think about the present and the future. This is how I remind myself, never just stop at *Ten Years*." (Yao, 2016:7) Ultimately, hope still remains and as I, too, hope to remind myself of the many inspirations I have gained from my interviewees; Particularly, as interviewee Jane said, "Regardless of the ultimate course, there is always something you could do."

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX A - HONG KONG HISTORY AND POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURES**

Hong Kong history has always been a politicized past. Under British rule, Hong Kong was administered as one region but three separate territories. These territories were separated from China



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through three stages in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the first stage, Hong Kong island was ceded to Britain after the first Opium war (1839-1842); Kowloon Peninsula was then included to the colony after the conclusion of second Opium War (1860); and in 1898, the New Territories, which makes of 90% of Hong Kong's region, was added to the 99-year lease.

After Hong Kong became a British colony, it was first used as an entrepot to promote trade in China and to build a shipbuilding industry (So, 2011:101). During the early colonial history, Hong Kong was still closely affiliated with China socially and economically. There was no official border between Hong Kong and the Mainland; Mainland Chinese could freely cross the border for trade and employment or to flee from political instability in the Mainland. In the 1940s, Hong Kong population grew from 5000 to around 1.6 million before Japanese invaded Hong Kong in 1941 (Siu, 1996).

Being a city of transient, a space of transit, Hong Kong has been a port and in the most literal sense, a middle point in between different spaces (Abbas, 1997:4). For the port mentality, Hong Kong was a fluid space and everything floats—identity, population, human relations, currencies. As such, there was no “Hong Kong people”—only Chinese and Westerners (Lee, 2009:24). The early immigrants of Hong Kong had neither feel Hong Kong as their home nor imagined themselves as a unified community. Westerners, mostly British, came to Hong Kong to govern, to trade, and to preach Christianity (Turner and Ngan, 1995). There was a strong sense of Hong Kong being a temporary place of living, a fast-growing capitalist place where people from various background stop-by to earn a living until they eventually return to a hometown elsewhere.

However, after the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1949, the early Chinese migrants could no longer return to China (Hambro, 1955). Additionally, to prevent the coming of refugees, the British colonial government erected fences in the border. Such is the context when Hong Kong Chinese identity was first forged and imposed by the colonial government in the 1960s (Turner and Ngan,

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1995). The government implemented a series of “de-nationalization” policies and measures to consolidate its control. It first disconnected Hong Kong’s economy from the Mainland economy. Hong Kong was changed from entrepot trade centering in China to export-led centering in global markets (So, 2011:101). Second, to discourage hostility towards the colonial government and the locals from identifying with the Chinese Communist Party, the colonial government actively pursue measures to construct Hong Kong as a permanent home. It carried out various social welfare policies, political reforms by setting Chinese language as one of the official languages, and cultural campaigns such as Hong Kong Festival (Turner, 1995:32). These initiatives were meant to distance the Hong Kong Chinese from Chinese in Mainland and to foster a quasi-sense of nation-building (Tang and Yuen, 2016:472) only without actual political rights and institutional sovereignty of an independent nationhood (Chu, 2009:94). The colonial efforts were clearly successful where by the 1980, Hong Kong identity was portrayed as westernized and sophisticated English-Cantonese bilingual living in the fast-paced competitive modernized skyscraper city (Tsang, 1997). Hong Kong was politically, economic, socially and cultural separated from China. The identity of Hong Kong Chinese is rid of abstract notion of Chinese nationalism, culturally patriotic but is likely to be indifferent to British culture and politics (Yew and Kwong, 2014:1090; Lee, 2009:25).

In retrospection, two significant events have come as a political awakening for the public: the signing of the Sino-British joint Declaration of 1984 followed by the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989. Both events have created the context of Hong Kong people to question the security of their way of life and the tangible place that had been “home”.

Hong Kong island was initially permanently ceded to Britain while only the New Territories were leased for a limited time of 99 years until 1997. However, when the UK government enter

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negotiations with China in the early 1980s to renew the lease in New Territories, the British government was not only rejected of the renewal but was also pressured by Beijing to return the entirety of Hong Kong territory. (Scott, 1989). Hence, Hong Kong was scheduled to return to China in 1997 despite multiple negotiation attempts. Between 1986 and 1989, an estimated of 100,000 Hong Kong people emigrated oversea to Canada, United States, Australia and the United Kingdom for a more certain future (Ren, 2010:37).

In the wake of the Tiananmen Square, many have feared the way of Beijing governance and distrusted its promises made to Hong Kong in the Joint Declaration. Tiananmen Incident triggered another tidal wave of emigration with an average of 50,000 people migrating out of Hong Kong during the early 1990s before the 1997 handover. Hong Kong people's response to the military action in Tiananmen Square expressed a collective anxiety over what life would be like in the post-1997 future under Beijing governance. On May 20, 1989, an estimated of 1.5 million people demonstrated in support of the students in Tiananmen Square despite the typhoon weather (Cheung, 2014:100). Many of the activists were the middle class who had never participated in social movement before (Abbas, 1997:5). Whereas democracy movement before 1989 could draw only a few thousand activists (So, 1999), the post-Tiananmen era marks the beginning of pro-democracy activities and democratic events in Hong Kong (So, 2011:107).

### **“One Country, Two Systems”**

The “One Country, Two Systems” model was designed by the Chinese government in 1980s to achieve reunification with Taiwan but was then used to apply to Hong Kong and Macau. The policy

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has the following key features to grant Hong Kong its independent executive, legislative, and judicial authority (Wong, 2004):

- 1) Under the model, Hong Kong would be governed as a Special Administrative Region (SAR), separated from Mainland central government.
- 2) Hong Kong would keep its capitalist economic system and currency, separated from Mainland's socialist system.
- 3) Hong Kong would run its political and cultural affairs. This includes having its own police service and jurisdiction, separated from Mainland laws and regulations.
- 4) Central and provincial government in Mainland could and would not interfere in Hong Kong domestic affairs. Hong Kong governors would be elected by Hong Kong people to rule Hong Kong and that central government would not appoint any official from the Mainland to rule Hong Kong.
- 5) Under the principle of "One Country, Two Systems", Hong Kong is guaranteed high degree of autonomy in accordance with the Basic Law with no change for a period of 50 years from 1997 to 2047.

To actualize the principle of "One country, Two Systems", Basic Law was drafted in accordance with the National People's Congress in the PRC. The "Two Systems" implies the co-existence of capitalism and socialism as well as the distribution of separated power between Hong Kong and Mainland (Li, 2011:15).

### **Legislative Council of Hong Kong**

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The voting system of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong (LegCo) are determined using a mixed system: the traditional functional constituencies (comprised of 30 selected members), regional-level new functional constituencies (comprised of five selected members), and the local-level geographical constituencies (comprised of 35 elected members by universal suffrage in district councils). Of the 30 functional constituencies, half of the seats accounts for members in business sectors, one-third belongs to professional sectors, and the remaining are for representatives of special interest or social organizations (Cheung and Ng, 2014:292). The traditional functional constituency aims to guarantee representation to businesses and social interests (Ma, 2007). Qualifications for electorship in traditional functional constituencies require individual electors that have officially recognized professional qualifications, such as lawyers and doctors, and are approved and endorsed by a member of an official legal entity, such as the Hong Kong General Chamber of commerce (Yip and Yeung, 2014:367).

Despite having legislators from eight parties (as of the 2012 election campaign) and those who run as independents, they are split between two major political camps divided in accordance to the attitudes towards democratic and political reforms: the pan-democracy camp (seeking for radical reform, typically critical of Beijing government) and the pro-establishment camp (seeking for steady reform, typically pro-Beijing government) (Oksanen, 2011). Although Hong Kong does not rule by a formal party and the Chief Executive is required by the Basic law to be non-partisan, the government along with the majority votes of the pro-establishment camp is seen as supportive of the Beijing decisions (Yip and Yeung, 2014:368). Hence, the distribution of power between both camps within the Legislative Council is intrinsically linked to the process of democratization in Hong Kong, if only by the passage, amendment, or blockage of government bills (Kaeding, 2017:159).

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## APPENDIX B – HONG KONG CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The lack of official agency from the government fostered a discursive synergy amongst the public to produce a credible self-image of their “collective past” for the present (Yang, 2009:10); that is, a crafting of history to solidify the cultural dichotomy between Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong identities. The rise of Hong Kong localism indicates an explicit rejection of the idea that the Chinese nationalism imposed by Beijing is part of Hong Kong’s ethnic and cultural identity (Kwan, 2016:941; Chan, 2017:430).

Leung and Cheng (1988) propose four understandings of nationalism to examine the complexity of Hong Kong identity, albeit nationalism, ethnicity, or culture: 1) biological ethnic nationalism defined by blood ties; 2) cosmopolitan nationalism, which focuses on the unity of all mankind; 3) totalitarian nationalism, which emphasizes attachment to one’s nation is equivalent to attachment to the ruling government and its ideology; and 4) anti-colonial nationalism, which promotes political and economic independence from foreign rules. Leung (2003) suggests that Hong Kong version of nationalism is shaped by cultural patriotism and affective construction of a unified community independent from the Chinese nation in historical and cultural terms.

Fixated in the metaphor of time, Hong Kong’s history and cultural identity is inseparable from the “time is running out” mentality. Written under the pen name of H.K. Lamb, a group of local Hong Kong middle class businessmen and professionals published *A Date with Fate: Hong Kong 1997* in 1984 to express their views and concerns over the handover in 1997. 1997, in their terms, is a “date destined by history” (1984:1) where Hong Kong is imagined to be traveling on the fast lane, approaching the dark unknown tunnel of 1997. Vividly, they illustrated a bleak imagined future as described below:

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For fast-living Hong Kongers, life at 'bust' times can also be very exciting and challenging...The situation changes as the vehicle approaches 1997, a dark unknown tunnel for all in Hong Kong. Those who can afford to jump off, stay as the vehicle gets nearer and nearer, will do so. They, in turn, are increasingly replaced by more and more reckless drivers, racing against time with complete disregard for lane discipline. Will the Hong Kong vehicle be wrecked before 1997 because of such reckless driving? The nearer the vehicle approaches 1997, the greater the chance, as drivers increasingly quarrel among themselves about whether to drive on towards the tunnel or whether to switch to another direction" They are also coming to realize more and more that the routing of their vehicle is, to a large degree, not under their control...As an alternative, anyone who wants to is still able to jump off, at his own risk. (Lamb, 1984:3)

This nervousness about Hong Kong's future has not ended in 1997. Hong Kong studies scholars have suggested that the crisis point of the China-Hong Kong relationship began in 2003 when there was an unprecedented and self-mobilized demonstration of 500,000 people against the government's insistence to enact legislation of Article 23 of the Basic Law which exercises legislation for national security in Hong Kong (Lee and Chan, 2011). Article 23 requires grants the power to pass laws to prohibit treason and subversion against Mainland government including the prevention of foreign political bodies to conduct political activities in Hong Kong (Loh, 2006:296). To the public, Article 23 entails compromises to civil rights like freedom of assembly and freedom of speech (Tang and Yuen, 2016:474). The protest against Article 23 marked another critical phase of the post-handover Hong Kong governance. Since then, China has altered its non-interventionist approach to Hong Kong governance to proactive and direct manipulation in the framework of One Country, Two Systems (Cheng, 2009:3). For instance, Chinese government has revised its national policy on Hong

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Kong by integrating its economic development, resulting an increased affiliation and indirect interference (Fung and Chan, 2017:396). In 2004, China has claimed the power to determine changings to the nominating committee selection; Universal suffrage and elections for Chief Executive was originally promised for 2007 election but has since been repeatedly postponed first to 2012, then to 2017 (Cheung, 2014:100).

Having endured 21 years of increasingly ineffective and distrusted government since 1997, the public find little patience and anticipation to the actual implementation of democratic politic system. Significantly, cultural actions through local struggles and activism manifested the public's frustration over the threatened social rights of Hong Kong citizens (Tang and Yuen, 2016:469; Chan, 2015:329) and the delayed promises of democratization. Hong Kong was named as the "city of protest" (Chandler, 2000). Simultaneously, the practice of social movement and collective contentious actions have penetrated in the conception of Hong Kong citizenship. In particular, the impression of "saying no" to the government have been a common sense of Hong Kong politics (Chan and Lee, 2009:43) as an essential part of bottom-up grassroots participation of civil society in Hong Kong.

## **Mainlandization**

The term "Mainlandization" has been frequently deployed to describe the influences of Chinese government in Hong Kong. Lo defines the process of mainlandization as "making Hong Kong politically more dependent on Beijing, economically more reliant on the Mainland's support, socially more patriotic toward the motherland, and legally more reliant on the interpretation of the Basic Law by the PRC National People's Congress" (2007:186). As Beijing is seen backtracking the promise of high degree of autonomy and rule of law has increasingly intensified the sense of



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ephemeral and the fear of losing Hong Kong's distinctiveness. Many incidents have exemplified the declining of civil rights. Whether extending the National Anthem law to Hong Kong, the attempt to impose a co-location arrangement that grants Mainland immigration officers the authority to exercise jurisdiction within Hong Kong's land, or the political pressure given to put pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong in jail, all these happenings alarmingly pull the imagination of imminent danger of Hong Kong's autonomy, democracy, and rule of law (Hui, 2018). "Mainlandization" is also used to describe the covert insertion of "national identity" through educational reform and enforcement of national education in the compulsory curriculum.

In the economic sphere, Hong Kong and Mainland China has signed the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) to foster trade and economic collaboration. Some scholars note that since the signing of CEPA, an increase of corrupt practices in economic and financial sectors in Hong Kong has resulted (Chan, 2001; Hui and Lo, 2015). Furthermore, the SAR government also introduced Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) to grant multiple entry visas to number of residents in designated Mainland cities to visit Hong Kong. The influx of mainland consumers resulted serious community gentrification, displacing local businesses with commercial chains to accommodate the mainland consumer's demand for milk powder and luxury (Hui and Lo, 2015:1106). Other conflicts emerged as an outcome of increased mobility of Chinese population relate to the impact of everyday lives in Hong Kong and the impact to citizen's social rights. For instance, a major issue relates to children who are born in Hong Kong (the "Double-not children") while neither of the parents is Hong Kong. Serious social issue has resulted including shortage of school places, housing and healthcare resources, and education and welfare provision. These economic integrations resulted impact of changings on the ground of community and the experience of livelihood. All in all, there is a heightened impression that "China now looms large in Hong Kong culture" (Szeto and Chen, 2012:116).

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## Occupy Central and the Umbrella Revolution

The Basic Law promised “a high degree of autonomy” including universal suffrage in voting for the Chief Executive. The actual implantation has been repeatedly delayed since the handover. On 31 August 2014, the National People’s Congress (NPC) of China, enforced a new election procedure of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. It stipulated that Chief Executive candidates must secure more than half of the 1,200 members in the Election Committee to qualify. This implies that candidates for Chief Executive would be selected by electoral committee dominated by pro-Beijing supporters (Kaeding, 2017:157).

At the critical political juncture of Hong Kong came the 79-day occupy action of the 2014 Umbrella Revolution, also known as the Occupy Central movement – with “Central” being the heart of Hong Kong’s financial district. The movement was proposed in 2012 by the Hong Kong University law professor Benny Tai in his publication, “The Most Lethal Weapon of Civil Disobedience” (2013), where Tai criticized the SAR government’s commitment in advancing democratic reform. Tai aimed to pressure the Beijing government to reform the Legislative Council and Chief Executive system through a seven-step progression. “Occupy” was proposed as the last step should all efforts to reforms failed. However, the proposal did not receive public attention until June 2014, when the Central government publicly demanded that Hong Kong judges have to be loyal to Beijing (Chan, 2014:575).

Clearly, the Occupy movement did not go as the original proposal intended. To Tai’s surprise, on 22 September 2014, a group of university students led a strike under the title of “Class Boycott and Occupy the Civic Square” campaign on Facebook and successfully mobilized a large demonstration

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outside the Central government headquarter on 26 September 2014. Under pressure, on 28 September 2014, Tai announced the official beginning of the Occupy Central movement. An estimated of 100,000 protesters have participated the movement (Chan, 2014:576).

### *Effect on Hong Kong Society*

Umbrella Revolution has problematized various cultural divergences in the postcolonial and national spaces of Hong Kong. Discursively, the movement reflected a set of “core values”, ranging from liberty, democracy, rule of law, autonomy, human rights that embellished the cultural imagination of what Hong Kong is (Chan, 2015:328). These core values, largely classical liberal values, are of contrast to what Mainland China is not and hence, the desperation to maintain the “status quo of what we can now” (Lui, 2015). As Margaret Ng, a well-respected Hong Kong barrister, states, “We are Chinese without being only Chinese. We can accept western civilisation without identifying with the west. We observe universal values without losing our own cultural identity” (cited in Yu and Kwan, 2017:678).

The experience of Umbrella Revolution, as Lee (2015) observes, has helped the participants to find a “sense of belonging in the city”. As Lee discusses with participants, participation and meaning is created in the sense that they are involved “in the making of a new landscape, and collectively our act made a profoundly different way of experiencing Hong Kong” (Lee, 2015). This subjectivity is associated with a strong affective drive to protect Hong Kong from a certain outsider (Ip, 2015). Hence, this imagination of Hong Kong as the land of the “native indigenous of Hong Kong people” is also reflected in the campaign to “Restore Hong Kong” from the Mainland “locust” (Chan, 2015:334).

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By the end of the Umbrella Movement, activists were unable to achieve the initial goal for universal suffrage, but most significantly, the movement has fundamentally changed Hong Kong's political atmosphere. In addition to the increased political and social antagonism between Beijing and Hong Kong, various political factions and disunity have also resulted in Hong Kong community; Notably, the "yellow ribbon camp" (supporters of the Umbrella Movement, who are critical of both Beijing and Hong Kong government), the "blue ribbon camp" (opposers of the Umbrella movement, who are supportive of both Beijing and Hong Kong government), and the "localist" (supporters of the Umbrella movement and Hong Kong independence) (Fung and Chan, 2017:410). The unresolved clashes point to the fragility of status quo. On 17 August 2014, the pro-Beijing camp organized an "anti-Occupy" demonstration against "Occupy Central". Pro-democracy activists criticize that many of the pro-Beijing activists were bused in and paid to "visit Hong Kong" from other parts of China (The Economist, 2014). It was, as a local reporter writes, "less a spontaneous protest than a sponsored walk" (The Economist, 2014). However, public polls on the public attitudes on China's control over direct election of chief executive shows an even split between those who strongly disagree and those who agree to accept (The Economist, 2015). As Hui and Lau (2015) observe, the fundamental difference between political group is not between leftist and rights, rather the split between those wishing to maintain the utopian hope of "status quo" and those who stand firm to fight against the "truth". Verging on the tipping point, the community is posited at a crossroad of deciding between acceptance and rejection of the Beijing authority (Chan, 2015:327). In other words, underlying the public debates is whether there is a room for disobedience or, more importantly, can such room be created when there is none on the ground.

*Rise of Localism*

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Some Hong Kong studies scholars have observed structural changes in the conception of Hong Kong identity in the past 20 years and particularly, in the events leading to the Umbrella Movement (Fung and Chan, 2017; Ma, 2007; Cheng, 2009). From 2002 to 2010, surveys on Chinese and Hong Kong identities have shown that the single identity of choosing either Chinese or Hong Kong people decreased; where a mixed identity of identifying as both Chinese and Hong Kong people increased in the same period (Fung and Chan, 2017:399). However, the percentage of identifying with “Chinese people” has drastically decreased since 2013 which an increasing percentage of respondents chooses “loving Hong Kong” as opposed to “loving China” (Fung and Chan, 2017:399). Fung and Chan explain that the result is correlated to a rising number of conflicting interest in recent years—including the delayed progress on universal suffrage and the strong attitude of Chinese government emphasizing “one country” instead of “two systems” (2017:400).

A significant legacy of the Umbrella Movement is the emergence of localist discourse and the increase support amongst the younger generation (Yew and Kwong, 2014; Yip, 2015). For decades, the pro-establishment camp has dominated the seats in the functional constituencies while the pan-democrats have continuously failed to secure universal suffrage. The localist position has not only attacked the pro-establishments for their partisanship to Beijing government but also the pan-democrats for their ineffective initiatives and their commitment to “one country”. Such was the context that fostered the support for localist groups to call for new and radical strategies, arguing that the only way for democratization in Hong Kong was to actualize some form of self-determination and independence (Kaeding, 2017:158). The dissipated Umbrella Movement demonstrated that even having such largescale occupy movement could not bring forth political reform and universal suffrage. Underlying its discourse signifies an affective commitment to protest the interest and identity of “local” Hong Kong, which is characterized by essentialist features of Hong Kong’s identity such as Cantonese language and a glamorized version of Hong Kong’s history. Unlike the formation

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of Hong Kong identity prior to the handover, the emergence of localism and Umbrella Movement in 2014 implies social imaginary beyond regional identity into Hong Kong independence as a nation-state. Going beyond cultural heritage, localism emphasizes core civic values and demand for nation-building and self-determination (Kaeding, 2017:158). As Fung observes, local is important in the context of Hong Kong's political transition to Beijing governance (2001:591). The label "local" in particular embodies internalized values in the resistance to the imposed label of "the national". Particularly, the localist leaders aim to institutionalize the discourse on Hong Kong self-determination (Kaeding, 2017:158). The localist discourse is marked by controversy; pro-establishment camp (pro-Beijing government) has reactively fought to remove key localist leaders from the Legislative Council (Cheng, 2017).

### **APPENDIX C – HONG KONG FILM INDUSTRY**

Hong Kong cultural sphere and cinema has become inseparable from the domain of politics, economic, and culture (Abbas, 2001:622). As Erni argues, Hong Kong cinema provides a strategy to manage the social imagination of Hong Kong people's past, present, and future (2001:405). It has provided "records" of the changes in Hong Kong society, its history, politics, and attitudes. Interestingly, Hong Kong cinema does not fit comfortably into the genre of national cinema but it has played a pivotal role in constructing community of a Hong Kong cultural identity and has successfully earned international recognition, both in political and cinematic terms.

Widely recognized the as the dream factory of East Asia, Hong Kong cinema has witnessed a drastic shrinkage in the past decades. The domestic box office of Hong Kong cinema has reached USD 158m in 1992 but by 2008, the local market share had dropped to 25% (Szeto and Chen, 2012:118). Its overseas revenue plummeted from HKD 1.86 billion in 1992 to HKD 252 million in 1998, indicating an 85% decrease (Pang, 2007:414). In 2007, only 50 Hong Kong films were released and as a local

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producer noted, “third of our labor were cut off, a third of our product is gone” (Szeto and Chen, 2012:118). Hong Kong cinema, as Rehling calls it, has turned into “a cinema in crisis” (2015:533). The struggling industry alongside the deaths of cultural legendary icons Anita Mui and Leslie Cheung further feed into the postcolonial depression and political unrest. Discursively, with the deterioration of its domestic film markets, the cultural identity of Hong Kong film industry is at stake. In the moment of financial crisis, commercial industry attempts to revive its market by breaking into new markets but efforts are increasing focusing on the Mainland Chinese market.

Under the agreement of the 2003 CEPA (Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement), Hong Kong-Mainland co-production films have since become the dominant mode of production in the domestic film industry. The arrangement was initially designed to open up Chinese and Hong Kong market to financial co-dependence. As a result, many experienced local filmmakers have relocated their productions to accommodate the Chinese market and Mainland audience. Co-production operates under a strict requirement of having at least one-third of the actors from Mainland Chinese, without limitations on the diversity of production crew members (Pang, 2007:416). Reliance on the Chinese market forces co-production content to comply to regulation of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). SARFT must approach all scripts of co-production work before producing and all final edits must pass censorship again before releasing to the public. A golden rule to get approved is to avoid banalizing the modern image of China and any negative portrayal of the Communist party (Szeto and Chen, 2012:120). This self-censorship and awareness to cater to the new market has resulted considerable changes in the plots and style of Hong Kong filmmaking (Rehling, 2015:543).

In addition, distributors such as China Film Group Corporation and Huayi have become the major investors of the co-productions while traditional Hong Kong film companies such as Shaw and

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Golden harvests have gradually withdrawn from the industry. Alongside the direct investment of Chinese distributors, Hong Kong key distributors such as Media Asia and EDKO rely heavily on partnered studios with Mainland production crews. Traditional cinemas are also replaced by transnational multiplexes like UA and AMC. In short, the entirety of the film chain system, from production, distribution, and exhibition has disintegrated (Pang, 2007:418). Hence, screen time for local independent productions that have no affiliated with Chinese distributors struggle to negotiate screen times in major theaters. Hong Kong films targeting niche local audience becomes increasingly precarious as art house market has also collapsed (Szeto and Chen, 2012:117).

### **7.1**



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## APPENDIX D - TEN YEARS PLOT SUMMARY

*Ten Years* is a series of five short vignettes, each produced by a different director, which depicts a bleak imagination of Hong Kong's social and political landscape in ten years ahead. *Ten Years* ends with an epilogue scene, showing a quote from the Book of Amos in the bible, "It is an evil time. Seek good and not evil, that you may live" and the phrase "Already too late" replaced by "Not too late". A summary of each five section is provided below:

*Extras* (Kwok Zune, dir.)

The government officials hired an Indian immigrant (Peter) and a middle-aged triad member (Hairy) to stage a public attack in providing the pretext for the passage of the National Security Law in Hong Kong. The pair is assigned to shoot two popular Legislative Council representatives at a Labor Day event, misbelieving that they will be protected and get generously compensated afterwards. Both Hairy and Peter are immediately shot dead on scene by the police. The section ends with the background of a news audio announcing the passage of a National Security Law.

*Season of the End* (Wong Fei-pang, dir.)

The section chronicles two archaeologists, Wong Ching and Lau Ho-chi, who attempt to preserve what remains of Hong Kong city destroyed by bulldozers. Having endlessly collecting and attending to these specimens, Lau ultimately asks Wong to create a specimen of his own body. In response to Wong's protest that taxidermy is intended for the dead, Lau asks, "What about me? Am I living or

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dead?”. The section ends with Wong collecting hair and nail clippings as she prepares the catalogue entry for the sample of Lau’s corpse.

### *Dialect* (Jevons Au, dir)

After Mandarin displaces Cantonese as Hong Kong’s official language, the Hong Kong government enacted laws to limit non-Mandarin speaking taxi drivers from operating in central areas and the border crossing district. Leung Kin-ping, a Cantonese-speaking driver, is mocked by a customer for his broken Mandarin and his inability to understand Mandarin. He also struggles to communicate with his son, for whom Mandarin is his first language. To avoid negative influences upon their son’s future, Leung’s wife urges him to stop speaking Cantonese with their son.

### *Self-immolator* (Chow Kwun-wai, dir.)

Au-yeung Kin-fung is a young activist for Hong Kong independence and becomes the first to be convicted under the National Security law. He dies during a hunger strike during his sentence. Simultaneously, an unknown person commits self-immolation in front of the British Embassy in protest against UK’s indifference in protecting Hong Kong’s autonomy. The story revolves around the press and the police attempting to determine the identity of the self-immolator. Au-yeung’s friend, Karen, an ethnic minority in Hong Kong, has gone missing since the beginning of the protest. She is suspected to be the self-immolator but is later revealed to have been kidnapped by the secret police. To support Karen and Au-yeung, a group of university students breaks into the Central government Liaison Office and sets the building on fire. The government labels the activists as rioters

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and justifies the deployment of China's People's Liberation Army to stop the protest in the city. The section ends with a flashback in a prolonged still shot, revealing the unknown self-immolator to be an old woman and her yellow umbrella burning outside of the British Embassy. The story plot is intertwined with documentary-style interviews with current affair commentators critiquing the ongoing conflicts and incidents.

### *Local Egg* (Ng, dir.)

Sam, a local grocer, is forced to contend with school children dressed in Maoist uniforms who are assigned to police the local community for censored words. Sam insists to keep the use of "local" eggs instead of "Hong Kong" eggs. Sam soon learns that his son Ming is a member of the youth guards squad as a compulsory part of local education. But Ming assures his father that he has not participated in the vandalism. The section ends with revealing a secretive underground organization associated to the bookstore in which Ming has helped by leaking the censor list and youth guard activities to the organizer.

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## APPENDIX E - INTERVIEWEES INFORMATION (PSEUDONYMS)

Name	Age	Gender	Profession and Education	Venue of Consumption	Remarks on Participation	Most Resonated Scene
Jacky	19	M	Student, Business Management	Home via Google play	Watched <i>Ten Years</i> with friends	"local" (Local Eggs)
Wilson	22	M	Paralegal Clerk, Law	Online and church	Discussion with friends	Mandarin and taxi driver (Dialect)
Tiffany	24	F	Officer, Public Policy	Cinema	Invited friends to screening, discussion	Self-immolator
Shun	46	M	Director, High School Diploma	Church	Facebook sharing	Self-immolator
Melody	23	F	Student, Media and Cultural Studies	University	Discussion with friends	Self-immolator
Akane	24	F	Merchandiser, Fashion Design	Cinema	Discussion with family	Taxi driver and Mandarin (Dialect)
Tsang	37	M	IT Officer, High School Diploma	Cinema	Facebook sharing, invited friends to screening, discussion with friends	Local Eggs

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Wing	54	M	Church Youth Worker, High School Diploma	Cinema and church	Facebook sharing, lent out equipment for public screening, invited friends to screening	Youth guards and children (Local Eggs)
Pakho	37	M	Photographer, Fine Art	Cinema	Organized public screening	Self-immolator
Chelsea	24	F	Student, Journalism and Communications	Cinema	Invited friends to screening	Self-immolator
Ho	43	M	Photographer, Industrial Design	Cinema	Invited friends to screening, Facebook sharing	Cantonese and Mandarin (Dialect)
Jane	25	F	New Media Producer, Sociology and Social Policy	Church	Facebook sharing, invited friends to screening	Overall
Patti	22	F	Student, Fashion Buying	Church	Facebook sharing	Self-immolator
Wan	30	M	Self-employed, High School Diploma	Office via YouTube	Facebook sharing, discussion with friends	Numbness in Season of the End

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## APPENDIX F - INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

### Interview Consent Form

This study is conducted for my MSc degree in Global Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science. I aim to examine the cultural significance of *Ten Years* and how the film is understood and perceived by the Hong Kong audience member. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked about your interpretation of the film content and your perception of the significance of the film.

The interview will take around 45 minutes to an hour. During the interview, I will take notes and voice record your responses. However, any writing I produce including the transcript of the interview will not identify you personally. Your real name will be altered and will not be identified. I will not pass any personal information onto any third party. I will provide you with a transcript of the recorded interview and I am willing to remove any comment that you may wish to withdraw. You are also welcome to review the finished research.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any question and may withdraw from the study at any point.

If you agree to participate in this interview, please sign on the line below.

*By signing this form, I declare that I understand what this research is about. I am aware that my views will be recorded and transcribed. I consent to the use of voice recording.*

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## APPENDIX G - SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE (ORIGINAL AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

### ORIGINAL VERSION

Introduction to Research, aims and nature of study: no right or wrong answer

Consent

Questions before we begin?

#### **Introduction**

簡單的介紹下你的年齡同專業背景

你一直有關心香港時事嗎？哪有方面？主要透過什麼渠道？

會怎樣評論香港現況？

#### **Motivation**

你是怎麼得知這部電影？

回想當初你是什麼時候看的？和誰一起？

是什麼令你決定去看？

#### **Viewing Experience**

知道電影放映的事後 你有和誰分享過嗎？

回想起放映日 有什麼印象嗎？大部分其他的觀眾是什麼背景的人？



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## Film Interpretation

你會如何總結十年電影內容？

關於電影內容印象最深刻是哪一幕？

- 為什麼
- 這一幕是你最有共鳴的嗎？
- 如果不是，最有共鳴的一幕/角色是？為什麼？

你覺得電影中誰是受害者 誰是敵人？

記得“自焚者”這一幕嗎？有什麼想法嗎？

## Perception of “Future” in the Film

你認為十年是有關香港的“未來”嗎？

- 對於片中“未來”的陳述有什麼想法？

## Meaning and Significance

你覺得十年的target觀眾是？

有和誰討論過電影的內容嗎 有不認同你的觀點嗎？怎樣回應？

製片人不認為十年是政治片 你會怎樣歸納這部電影？

製片人覺得“十年”是一種爭取，怎樣看？

電影成功嗎？成功在哪裡？

## Perception of Hong Kong

香港對你來說什麼？

誰是香港人？

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有沒有什麼沒討論過的 或者你想補充的？

## ENGLISH VERSION

Introduction to Research, aims and nature of study: no right or wrong answer

Consent

Questions before we begin?

### **Introduction**

Can you briefly introduce your age and professional background

How often do you pay attention to Hong Kong current affairs? Mainly through what channel?

How would you comment on the current situation in Hong Kong?

### **Motivation**

How did you know about *Ten Years*?

When did you watch *Ten Years*? With whom?

What makes you want to watch the film?

### **Viewing Experience**

Did you tell anyone else about the screening?

Any particular impression from the screening? Other audience member / atmosphere?

### **Film Interpretation**

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How would you summarize *Ten Years*? What is it about?

Tell me about the most memorable scene?

- What makes it memorable to you?
- Is this also the most resonating scene?
- If not, which scene/character is most resonating?

How would you distinguish the victim/enemy role?

Do you remember “Self-immolation”? Any thoughts?

## **Perception of “Future” in the Film**

Do you think *Ten Years* is about Hong Kong’s future?

- If so, about such “future” do you have any thoughts?

## **Meaning and Significance**

Whom do you think *Ten Years* was made for?

Have you discussed *Ten Years* with anyone else? Or with those who disagrees with you?

Producers disagree that *Ten Years* is political, how would you categorize this film?

Producers think *Ten Years* is a way of resistance, what do you think?

Is this film successful?

## **Perception of Hong Kong**

What is Hong Kong to you?

Who are “Hong Kong people”?

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Anything you would like to add to the discussion?