Discourse and identity in the Hong Kong comic magazine *Teddy Boy*

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Abstract  
The discourse and cultural identity of Hong Kong media have long been of academic concern. Hong Kong media and the consumption of cultural products often reveal the process of local cultural identification formation and discourse practices. Based on the textual analysis of a local comic, *Teddy Boy*, this article attempts to explore and examine the discursive culture and nature of Hong Kong identity. Based on du Gay et al.'s concept of the circuit of culture, this article explores how the local discourse is formed and legitimized in the process of textual production and consumption by the representation of an idealized cultural hero. In the conclusion, we argue for a connection between local and global identity formations.

Keywords  
Comics, cultural identity, global identity, Hong Kong, local discourse

Introduction  
China has become the second largest global economy. In response to global politics, China claims its “own path of peaceful development” and attempts to alleviate its perceived threat by different means, such as cultivating its soft power (Lee, 2016; Wallis & Balsamo, 2016), mutual agreement with the West about global issues (Riley, Wang, Wang, & Feng, 2016), and cooperating with global media as a sign of its modernization (Liao, 2016). On one hand, political and economic agreements between China and other nations indicate the aspiration to form an economic and political
Sino-global connection. On the other hand, it demonstrates the economic and political position of China in the global context.

In the wake of a globally rising role of China, how do people in the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, which is a part of China, conceive their own identity? The identity of Hong Kong to a certain extent has a strong global connection (Fung, 2008), but as China becomes increasingly global, how does Hong Kong rationalize its own identity and global position? Admittedly, it is difficult to locate an exact answer for this question. Neither is there any consensus in Hong Kong society about the position of Hong Kong vis-à-vis China, nor is there a commonly acknowledged identity—which is conceivably split between the local identity and the national identity—across different classes and sectors in Hong Kong society at large. Thus, instead of persistently searching for the answer, this article depicts one facet of Hong Kong identity and discourse formation among a particular group of Hong Kong community.

Hong Kong identity has been a common subject of inquiry in pre- and post-colonial cultural studies. At the time of the handover of sovereignty in 1997, studies of Hong Kong cultural identity suggested that Hong Kong identity was a result of hybridization of Western and Chinese values (for a review, see Fung, 2001, 2004; E. Ma & Fung, 1999, 2007; Ma, Fung, & Lam, 2010). Many concluded that the formation was highly associated with the consumption of local media texts such as TV dramas (E. Ma, 1999; Fung, 2012), films (Curtin, 1998), lyrics (Chu, 1998), cartoons (Ng, 2006), and pop songs (Fung, 2009). The formation of local identity in Hong Kong has always taken China as a reference point. At times, the integration of Hong Kong identity and Chinese identity has been strong (E. Ma & Fung, 2007). Recent studies have tended to focus on the formation of local identity in relation to China (e.g. Chan, 2015; Chen & Szeto, 2015; T. Cheung, 2015). With regard to the identity issue, some research institutions (e.g. Irons, 2015) and governmental research centers (e.g. Wang, 2014) strived to investigate the reasons for local identity formation in Hong Kong. Some studies explained it in terms of the resistance to nationalization (Wang, 2014) while other studies suggested that local identity formation in Hong Kong is affected by fundamental cultural differences between China and Hong Kong (Chan, 2015; Chen & Szeto, 2015; T. Cheung, 2015). There are underlying beliefs, which arose after the handover of sovereignty in 1997, that Hong Kong localism is driven by anti-China discourses and the fear that China will “erode” Hong Kong local culture, identity, history, and social stability (Chan, 2015; Chen & Szeto, 2015; T. Cheung, 2015).

However, this study is based on a different argument; it goes back to the fundamental connections between Hong Kong identity and global values, such as freedom, equity, and righteousness, to name a few, which are empirically demonstrated as constituent core values of Hong Kong identity (Fung, 2008). Along the line of such argument, by studying a particular mediated discourse of Hong Kong—comics—this study takes a more textual approach to chart the elements and values that are specific to Hong Kong identity.

In retrospect, with a history of 40 years, popular comics in Hong Kong used to be a major entertainment mainly for children. Early comics that were locally available in the 1960s were dubbed Japanese comics with few of them acknowledging the original sources and creators (Wong, 2006). It was not until the 1970s that local artists, such as Yuk-long Wong, Wing-shing Ma, and the brothers Tung-yuen Kwong and Nam-lun Kwong, produced a unique style of wuxia comics—or ancient kung fu fighting—that targeted adolescents (Lent, 1995). At that time, in connection to the global fad of martial arts brought by Bruce Lee from Hong Kong, local martial arts or kung fu comics featuring this “hero” was also successful (Lent, 1995). The production scale of the kung fu genre was so big that some comics industries were incorporated and it was also circulated to southeast
Asia, including Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan, and China. Socially, these comics became reminiscence of the local context under which the lower classes survive in a decadency of corruption, scarcity, and injustice, and thus, the heroes serve as a fantasy of hope in that they defend for justice in the constructed worldview in the comics. The most popular comics of this kind, Chung Wah Ying Hung or The Chinese Heroes, created by Wing-shing Ma reached a record sale of 200,000 for one single volume (Shi & Ng, 1995). Despite the fact that this genre of comics is no longer a popular entertainment now, the legacy of these comics as representations of the lower class or grassroots of the society is still seen.

**Objective: Study of comics and identity**

The objective of our study is to, through the study of comics texts, examine the Hong Kong local identity and discourse. The focus is on the consumption and representation of the Hong Kong comics, which is unique in style and content compared to the comics produced in Japan, China, and the West. The case we selected is Teddy Boy, which is one of several commercially surviving comics based on the triad theme. Since its inception in 1992, the comic has been produced by artist Cowman and his team of 20 colleagues and distributed locally. This title Teddy Boy was so popular in the 1990s that Hong Kong movies of the same titles were produced in the 1990s. Anchored on the theme and phenomenon of the triad society in Hong Kong, comics artists began narrating the story of Ho-nam Chan and his four good friends, who grew up together in the Nam Tin public housing estate (one of the government-built low-rental housing for the grassroots), following their rise and fall in the triads underworld. Triads, which are always featured in Hong Kong cinema, refer to outlawed Chinese gangs and societies that organized crimes, including prostitution, extortion, drug trafficking, and protection of racketeered business. Despite the law and order, it is a public secret that triads in Hong Kong still exist in a controlled manner. The history of Hong Kong triad societies and its relation with British colonial era could be traced back to the 19th century (Morgan, 1960). At that time, influx of deprived Chinese immigrants in exile became new bloods for the over 300 triad societies established in the period between 1914 and 1939 (Hong Kong Government, 1974). They are grassroots who were primarily males working as hawkers, carpenters, or coolies, striving for life and seeking for protection in this new milieu. High vulnerability of these immigrants became readily members to join the blooming triad societies in such era (Morgan, 1960).

With such colonial history, apart from the iniquity of the crimes associated with triads, it was admitted that Teddy Boy was a mediated imagination of the bright side of the wicked societies. During its heyday, Teddy Boy was believed to have had record sales of over 10,000 copies per week. After 1997, circulation of the comic declined. According to Cowman, the comic maintains estimated weekly sales of 5000 to 6000 on average, and its circulation depends on whether the content mirrors current issues in Hong Kong (personal interview with Cowman on 9 September 2016).

The rationale for selecting this local comic was that the very characteristics of this publication addressed the untold side of the Hong Kong story. Given that mass media operated under various politico-economic constraints—and thus might either refrain from depicting sensitive issue or underscoring the agendas of the vested class in Hong Kong—this comic always addresses the concerns of lower class or grassroots which are the majority of the local populace. If local Hong Kong identity formation is the common public perception of their own, then comics usually echo the identity with the lower class of the society. Besides, based on what we learned in interviews with the production team, the artists themselves are reflexive to the common culture of Hong Kong in the course of creating the hero in Teddy Boy. Thus, in the study, we could also make more valid
claims that texts in the comics are not merely trifling entertainment, but true intended manifestation of Hong Kong identity, although there must be discrepancy between readers’ interpretation and the intended meaning of the texts.

In short, the methodology is a textual analysis of this local comic book, *Teddy Boy*. We also interviewed the artists in 2016 to gather supplementary information. Based on the content of *Teddy Boy*, we aim to explore and clarify the nature of Hong Kong identity and its formation through mediated production, consumption, and identification. The contribution of this article is that it provides an up-to-date study of media and culture by describing the formation of Hong Kong identity since 1997 in the eyes of a particular community of people in Hong Kong. In the end of the article, we also attempt to offer the alternative interpretation that Hong Kong identity might align with global values in the contemporary world.

First, we establish a connection between cultural production, readers, and cultural identity by reviewing the active audience paradigm and social imaginary theory (Castoriadis, 1975). Second, based on du Gay et al.’s (1997) theory, the circuit of culture, the textual analysis of local identity and discourse focuses on the nature of Hong Kong local identity as cultural formation and identification through the consumption, reproduction, regulation, and representation of cultural products.

**Imagination, identification, and consumption**

Several previous studies articulated the association between media texts and cultural identity. Media texts carry rich cultural resources that enable audience to interpret their culture (Corner, 1983; Eco, 1979). Many studies (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1981) observed that audiences are active and capable of such interpretations. Different mediums textualize different stories, scenes, images, and social events and consider cultural issues such as identity formation and the preservation of local culture. These cultural texts have been distributed to the public with the aim of raising public concern or drawing attention to cultural and identity issues (Fiske, 1992). In Hong Kong, studies of cultural identity have been conducted to examine the texts of different mediums, such as TV dramas (E. Ma, 1999), films (Chan et al., 2009; Curtin, 1998), lyrics (Chu, 1998), cartoons (Ng, 2006), and popular songs (Fung, 2009). Quite coherently with research of other studies, Chan et al. (2009) found that the ideology of Hong Kong identity could be determined by media analysis and examining the cultural resources that were articulated in media texts. Based on these previous studies, we expect to find an association between the cultural product, *Teddy Boy*, and the formation of Hong Kong identity.

To examine the nature of the new Hong Kong local identity and its reproduction in *Teddy Boy*, we presume the existence of a social imaginary and a reading audience that actively consumes the text. The concept of a social imaginary was originated by Castoriadis (1975). In his theory of the social imaginary, the image of a specific identity and cultural group defines the social world through the creation and representation of human beings in their collective lifestyles (Thompson, 1984). Taylor (2003) extended this theory, arguing that society is largely tied and elaborated by the public in defining social norms and values. In other words, to understand local identity formation, which is both existing and emerging in Hong Kong’s contemporary society, it is necessary to show how the audience, the cultural product, and the public discourse define the social imaginary of Hong Kong. We therefore conduct a textual analysis of a cultural product, the local comic, *Teddy Boy*, which may allow us to understand Hong Kong identity. Unlike previous studies that viewed Hong Kong localism as a mutually exclusive category or as different from “Hong Kong identity”
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(T. Cheung, 2015), this study neither aims to establish the link between localism and Hong Kong identity nor attempts to define the new formation of localism. In this article, we return to the fundamental concept of Hong Kong identity. We aim to determine the core contents and values of Hong Kong identity in this contemporary historical context in relation to mediated portrayal and consumption.

**Teddy Boy and the local discourse of righteousness**

A core concept in *Teddy Boy* is righteousness, the value embraced by the hero who is the head of one of the branches of the triads. In our interview with the artist of *Teddy Boy*, Kai-Ming Man, he plainly espoused in publishing *Teddy Boy*, he intended to address the questions of unfairness and injustice in the contemporary society of Hong Kong. Whether righteousness is one of the core values in triads in reality is beyond the scope of our enquiry. Rather, we are interested in how *Teddy Boy* as a cultural text conveys this concept, which is vital to the formation of local identity. Righteousness, in Chinese context, literally meaning the willingness of sacrifice for the perceived justices, is a positive Chinese virtuous standard upheld in triads (ter Haar, 1998). This concept in triad society purposively instructs that “… members [should] share the idea of neutralizing the powerful and helping the poor. They also offered help, support and protected their brothers in time of peace and crisis” (C. J. Cheung, 1995, pp. 51-52). Righteousness is particularly needed in the times of chaos. In the wake of political transition in Hong Kong, in parallel with those grassroots who joined triads for self-protection, the locals also long for core values such as righteousness to be re-discovered in cultural texts and local discourses. The latter performs a special role in reinforcing the need of safeguarding the law and order of Hong Kong.

**Hybridized culture in Hong Kong identity**

Previous studies on Hong Kong identity (Fung, 2001, 2004; E. Ma & Fung, 1999, 2007; Ma et al., 2010) found that a hybridized colonial and Chinese culture, including virtues (e.g. righteousness) and living habits, is embedded in Hong Kong’s local culture. An example is the plot in *Teddy Boy*, which concerns the lifestyle of triad members. The superficial reflection in the text is the collection of Hong Kong’s cultural icons such as its tenement buildings (*Tong Lau*), Chinese restaurants, food stores (*yum cha, cha chan tang*), and public transportation (e.g. the Kowloon Motor Bus (KMB)). In addition to portraying a general picture of the reality in Hong Kong, these icons reveal the downtown lifestyles of the triad members, living in old buildings, enjoying Chinese food or fast food, and traveling by public transport in the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong. If we have to really tell what sector of life of people these icons are reflecting, admittedly, these images more or less provide a clear picture of the livelihood of the grassroots in Hong Kong. The grassroots of Hong Kong mentioned herewith primarily refers to the lower working class with low income and education level. Ostensibly, residing in poor living conditions, they are expected to be more skeptical to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government and have a strong frustration toward the status quo. In practice, they tend to live in the old, tumbledown urban districts such as Kwun Tong, Tai Kok Tsui, Kowloon City, and other areas that were long developed in the early stages of Hong Kong development, and these gloomy conditions are represented in the comic *Teddy Boy*. Theoretically, these residents are concerned with their local affairs, community and vested values, but if their living conditions are being eroded and threatened, would they appeal to higher principles from without?
In terms of lifestyles, contrasting the texts of public media, such as TV dramas, with themes of professional and modern regimes (E. Ma, 1999) (which perhaps reflects the phenomenon and values of another class, perhaps a lifestyle that is more superior to the grassroots as described in the comics) in _Teddy Boy_, the absence of images, such as modern shopping malls, international-brand chain stores, and fashionable clothing, emphasizes a lifestyle that differs from social pseudo-reality depicted in major media. Disliking the feeling of being ignored and marginalized by the public media text (mass media), the lifestyle in _Teddy Boy_ could achieve better coherence with the grassroots and articulate a much different discourse for certain class sectors of the population.

Furthermore, the in-depth semiotic meaning in these indexical images is that they embed the pre-1997 colonial culture of Hong Kong, in which Western and Chinese cultures were mixed. The term _Tong Lau_ refers to buildings that were built from the 19th century to the 1960s. In this period, Chinese architecture was often combined with elements of Western architecture, such as the use of arcs and columns. These buildings are reminders of Hong Kong’s colonial past. The setting of _Tong Lau_, which is of residential use on the upper floor and of commercial use on the ground floor, represents the pragmatic function of _Tong Lau_, especially during the development era of Hong Kong. Similar depictions of colonial and Chinese culture can be found in food. The traditional Chinese restaurant, which has socializing and entertaining functions, is _yum cha_. In contrast, _cha chan tang_ restaurants provide busy workers with combinations of Chinese and Western cuisines, such as barbecued pork chops and tomato soup. The high degree of hybridization in the food culture is the legacy of Western and Chinese culture in the colonial period. The hybridized colonial culture can be perceived as a strong core value of the local identity, the preservation of which comics such as _Teddy Boy_ promote in the context of post-1997 Hong Kong. To a certain extent, the preservation of such non-Chinese values and cultural artifacts in comics is a call for the continued existence of the Hong Kong identity.

**Radical approach of comics**

_Teddy Boy_ depicts a radical political stance. Its resistance to strong control and moderate democratic parties is observed in its content. According to DiPaolo (2011), comics can be politicized, and their superheroes, such as Spiderman and Marvel, could be political tools for conveying a political stance. _Teddy Boy_ reflects the opposition against the authorities and the dominant culture. For example, volume 1573 of _Teddy Boy_ involves a real character, Yeung-tat Wong, who was the founder of the local interest group called Civic Passion. In this plot, Wong asks the main character, the triad hero, Ho-nam Chan, for help in circulating his newspaper, the _Passion Times_. After his investigation, he was told by his fellow triad members that the alternative or oppositional political stance of the newspaper was the major obstacle to its publication. As a fictional character who upholds noble values, Chan helps Wong by circulating the newspaper by and through his triad network. The representation here is an indirect and subtle call for the protection of Hong Kong’s free speech and freedom of the press.

While this article is not intent on revealing that some media (e.g. comics) are offering resistance to the authorities, we do show that comics, for example, outside the realm of mass media or of public concern, offers very different viewpoints about Hong Kong. The latter might actually reflect the view of a certain class of people in Hong Kong. Our previous example about Chan’s support of the _Passion Times_ does signify a kind of cultural resistance against the establishment. To put in another way, _Teddy Boy_ has a central theme that always draws the public attention about a
dominant view does in Hong Kong society, and how that “mainstream view” eliminates diversity. To relate this episode to the formation of a local identity, the very radical view represented by Chan is to show that Hong Kong is more afraid of a contracting Hong Kong identity that is to be “nationalized” after handover (L. Ma, 2015). Yet, what is also worth mentioning is that such a radical view is equally critical of democratic leaders in Hong Kong, apart from the authorities. *Teddy Boy* includes a hilarious parody to satirize the famous Chairperson of the Hong Kong Democratic Party, Albert Ho, with regard to the scandal caused when he was seen examining images of scantily dressed women on his tablet during a formal meeting. The distrust of democratic icons and parties shown in illustrations of *Teddy Boy* represents the anger and disappointment in the Hong Kong Democratic Party. To locate the fundamentals of these critiques, although the comic does not “say” in words, quite clearly, we can argue that the criticism is based on ideals of righteousness, democracy, openness, and morality, which are believed as values strongly held by the Hong Kong populace (but they are not practiced by mainstream politicians as well as democrats). Needless to say, these values as such are seen as fundamental elements of Hong Kong identity. Moreover, they are strongly redolent of Chinese Confucian values and modern Western values, which we have termed global values in this article.

**Righteousness and the willingness to sacrifice for perceived justice**

The hybridity of global and Chinese values in *Teddy Boy* can be further illustrated by the adherence to righteousness (*yiqi*) in the local Hong Kong culture. In *Teddy Boy* and other Hong Kong wuxia cinemas, *yiqi* are positive Chinese or Confucian virtues, and they play a prominent role in the illegal triad society’s membership and structure (ter Haar, 1998). This Chinese righteousness is the core value of brotherhood and justice. In every triad society, this value is expressed in cultural and moral standards. The sacrifice of self to achieve the universal goal of the community is highly praised in the triad society.

Logically, as the triad leader, Ho-nam Chan would go for interest; his self-interest or the interest of the triad. However, what *Teddy Boy* celebrates is his notion of public interest. It is ironic. A triad leader—not an official though—would be willing to risk his own business threatened by another triad rival. Even he faces threats from the establishment, he still defends some of the tasks which might not be directly linked to his triad business. At this point, we would argue that he simply sees himself as a Hong Kong person. The underlying meaning is that Chan, as a hero but also as a Hong Kong citizen, is willing to sacrifice his livelihood and his life in order to pursue the value of righteousness, which literally means doing the right things at any cost.

In *Teddy Boy*, the pursuit of freedom was recognized as the major reason for the sacrifice of this heroic triad member. Of course, there are many fighting scenes that illustrate Chan’s heroic act, but there is no real need to discuss in this article. What we emphasize is that, unlike other practices of righteousness in the Chinese context, in which people love and “die” for only friends, family, and relatives, or triad members in this case, Chan’s sacrifice is for the public good of Hong Kong. The local cultural value that Chan preserves is freedom of speech. In this context, the pursuit of freedom could be conceived as the representation of universal culture as having an important role in the hybridized culture of Hong Kong. For loyal readers of *Teddy Boy*, Chan’s action is as idealized as those of other democratic figures, such as Martin Luther King or Gandhi, both of whom suffered political threats but sacrificed their lives for the freedom of their communities. In addition to promoting resistance and rebellion to achieve a better
and brighter future, these heroes also exemplify the idealized moral heroic figure portrayed in *Teddy Boy*.

**Subcultural conflicts in the comic**

Nevertheless, we have to admit that localized ideal, slightly radical heroes can represent the grassroots readership of *Teddy Boy*. It might be true that radicalism is the view of a specific group of subcultural readers who are willing to participate in social conflict to achieve social rights and moral righteousness, as in Sykes and Matza’s (1957) neutralization theory and Cohen’s (1955) subculture theory.

However, regardless of the values on which Hong Kong identity is based, in general, the examples described, from the fast-changing or fading Hong Kong culture to the fear of losing freedom of the press, reflect the public craving for conserving the core values of Hong Kong culture. Abbas (1997) summarized this fear in his phrase, the “disappearance of Hong Kong” after 1997. This apprehension is represented in the triad fiction of Hong Kong.

It is true that *Teddy Boy* depicts a radical approach to preserving the Hong Kong cultural identity that is highly valuable in the eyes of local people. However, we could understand that this is a subcultural representation of Hong Kong identity. Simply put, the very nature of triad society is characterized by chaos, conflict, and flights, which are similarly depicted in other genres and cultural forms (e.g. Hong Kong films). The subcultural form is by definition in opposition to the cultural mainstream authority. It, therefore, represents alternative paths in the pursuit of a solution.

Thus, while we attempt to understand the conflicts portrayed in the comics as necessary in a fictional story, we also attempt to understand the meaning of these conflicts. The storylines in *Teddy Boy* concern the conflict among triads. The main heroic character Chan and his fellow triad members are affiliated with a traditional Hong Kong triad party, and that triad is always sustained by co-opting local worker communities and by co-opted British colonial officers (C. J. Cheung, 1995). In using this story structure, the artist is able to reflect the intention of conserving Hong Kong’s hybridized local values, as in the interview, he said, “of course, I believe in what I draw.” On the contrary, because the dominant rivals of Chan’s triad have lost their belief in righteous behavior, they commit various crimes and misdemeanors. In *Teddy Boy*, this binary represents the abstract opposition between the protection of Hong Kong’s identity and those who have forgotten it. To a certain extent, based on Miller’s (1958) cultural conflict theory, the storylines in *Teddy Boy* are subtle reminders of the disappearance of Hong Kong’s hybrid identity, which serve to elicit public concern about the latter.

**Formation of an idealized moral figure as a cultural hero**

The subcultural value of righteousness in Hong Kong’s local identity is further magnified by the in-group role model, Ho-nam Chan. This approach characterizes subcultures in which the members share similar values and meanings and even moral prestige in order to restrict the encroachment of outsiders. In the subculture depicted in *Teddy Boy*, the ideal triad hero, Ho-nam Chan, “does the right things and fulfills his belief in righteousness.”

The idealized hero figure, Ho-nam Chan, is a typical local person in typical Hong Kong dress, who speaks local Cantonese and shares local Hong Kong cultural habits (e.g. hobbies, lifestyle, etc.). He is a triad mobster with a lifestyle similar to the people living in the downtown core of Hong Kong. However, this seemingly low character transforms into a hero who combats against
rivals to uphold the values of Hong Kong sometimes by radical means. As described previously, Chan risks losing his business and his life to ensure freedom of speech in Hong Kong. Two more examples of Chan’s moral behavior are found in *Teddy Boy*. In the first example, the triad hero Ho-nam Chan and his fellow members violently punish a villain. The exercise of an alternative power to punish the perceived “evil official” indeed poses a challenge to the authorities. Similar plots that involve punishing a malevolent official are common in Chinese *wuxia* novels, such as *Tale of the Marshes*, in which the hero kills the villainous official who destroys a village for his own benefit (Jenner, 1996). In the second example, peaceful protestors are hurt by the triad villain and then prosecuted by the corrupted local police force. It shows that it is not Chan (or Cowman) alone who is not satisfied with the status quo; some general public, represented by the peaceful protestors, also share with such values of righteousness. Looking at the macro picture, we can see that there is a narration that it is a particular group of people, perhaps the grassroots, plus a hero in the society who are upholding the Hong Kong values, and inevitably, they engage in radical action.

In a nutshell, in *Teddy Boy*, Ho-nam Chan presents a cultural hero who appeals to a higher moral principle by which he is able to resist any dominant public discourse that tries to potentially undermine the core Hong Kong values. Thus, the act of martial arts of this fictional character is suddenly transformed from triad mob fighting to *wuxia*. Like what Hong Kong people read in *wuxia* novels, to certain extent, triads are no longer “the outlaws or bandits mercilessly hunting for fame and gain by any means” and these triads’ deeds are sublimed into “underworld heroic stalwart fighting for justice and righteousness.” This sublimed image of Chan is similar to the *wuxia* image described in Jenner’s (1996) study, in which a moral figure performs heroic actions to save people’s lives and punishes evil officials who cannot be penalized by the existing rules or judiciary system. Both *wuxia* and the triad hero Chan represent subcultural resistance against the authorities. Basically, he carries the silhouette of Robin Hood in the Western context.

**Formation of Hong Kong local discourse and culture**

Based on the above discussion, we argue that the heroic character of Ho-nam Chan functions as an idealized signifier of Hong Kong’s culture. In the theory of the “circuit of culture,” the identification of oneself is closely related to the patterns of cultural production and consumption. Within a society such as Hong Kong, meaning is produced and exchanged through the practice of social interactions by different means such as images, language, and combination of both. When individuals socially produce, consume, and interact, the meaning of culture, representation, and the cultural consumption and production involve in the symbolic meaning for identity formation.

With regard to representation, Chan’s subcultural heroic action against his rivals and the evil authority echo Western comic heroes, such as “Batman” and “Kick-ass,” who promote the disobedience of law dominated by the authority and the idea of grassroots heroism. Unlike Batman who has no superpowers but possesses other resources, such as wealth, genius, and so forth, the grassroots hero in “Kick-ass” represents helping people in need at the individual level, where normal citizens become heroes and secure the peace and harmony of their community. These idealized concepts are represented in these two Western comic heroes. Similarly in *Teddy Boy*, Ho-nam Chan is a moral icon of Hong Kong cultural identity. The believers in this identity seek justice through their vigilance and resistance to the dominant authorities.

In the eyes of the producers, local comics or *Teddy Boy* are not profit machine now. As a declining medium, in our interview the creator of *Teddy Boy* stressed that the value of the publication simply based on his personal ideal and “mission.” The latter is a project conjecturing an alternative
culture or his perception of what Hong Kong identity, as opposed to the dominant ruling principle of Hong Kong Government. Because of the general freedom of the press, free market policy, and the absence of political censorship in Hong Kong, this unique publication serves to eulogize and perpetuate the heroic culture, one that is sided with virtue, righteousness, and public good, in the constructing world depicted in this Hong Kong comic.

The consumption of a cultural product such as *Teddy Boy* suggests the further identification of local subcultures in Hong Kong. In the digital era, consumption includes the purchase of cultural products, the sharing of images on the Internet or social networking media such as Facebook and Twitter, and the affirmation of such image sharing. The images of the triad hero Ho-nam Chan fighting against injustice are also circulated and consumed online. In different social network platforms, such as Facebook, these images are “liked” and “shared” thousands of times, and supporters comment that they would buy the *Teddy Boy* comic because it affirms the importance of local identity.

On the surface level, the cultural hero Chan can be perceived by the audience as a sign of cultural resistance and a defense of Hong Kong cultural identity. But at a deeper level, having a perceived hero in a triad is by itself contradictory. Perhaps, Hong Kong society is itself full of such contradiction. As seen in *Teddy Boy*, triad members are seen as triads because they have tattoos on their body. But in the comic, a group of policemen patrolling in a protest site are also shown with the tattoos of a tiger and a dragon on their body. While this illustration parodies police, we can argue that the cultural boundary between the establishment and the grassroots blurs. At a deeper meaning, the implicit question is, who represents Hong Kong and which party is the true manifestation of Hong Kong identity?

**Is the notion of “global identity of Hong Kong” still valid?**

In response to the fact that Hong Kong identity is always used as an ambiguous term, our earlier studies (e.g. Fung, 2008) searched for actual and concrete content that is unique in Hong Kong’s cultural identity. In Fung’s study, most of the values articulated by the Hong Kong population were in fact a combination of values that are shared by many civic populations across the globe. While the values of social harmony, tolerance, and self-discipline were inherited from the Chinese tradition, an entire set of values, such as freedom, human rights, and equity, was assimilated from the West and across the globe. The question then is whether the Hong Kong identity celebrated by Hong Kong people is a hybridized identity.

This article, which examines the mediated content of Hong Kong, seems to add qualifications to this argument. At the very least, the argument shows that the local identity that Cowman and the comic magazine want to defend is a mix of traditional local culture combining with a variety of global values which we roughly can identify Hong Kong’s local cultural identity. It is also that identity formation as represented in Hong Kong comic *Teddy Boy*. In the comics, the discourse of treasuring the grassroots’ local cultural life indicates the importance of conserving the pre-existing Hong Kong local cultural habitat. In other words, the preservation of Hong Kong’s local culture depends on upholding the local conservative belief that is against any erosion of local values. Moreover, this “threat” is seen not only locally—it now appears to be a global issue. In the United Kingdom, for example, the majority of the population, as demonstrated in the Brexit referendum, supported Britain’s separation from the European Union, and this is equivalent to a blow to ideal values such as equity, freedom, and so forth. Developed nations like the United Kingdom faced
threat from losing its core, more or less universal values of freedom, equity, and righteousness, which the British used to take pride in. The similarity of the Brexit issue with the current theme lies in preserving these cosmopolitan values such as righteousness, fairness, and so forth, which we see are not too different across major global cities in the world. Clearly, the formation of local Hong Kong identity is not simple. It is not a populist movement, and there is no referendum in Hong Kong whatsoever. What is documented here is just an ideal version of a community of people who read *Teddy Boy*. However, this does not mean that “minority voice” is not important to Hong Kong people and Hong Kong identity.

**The continual search for core Hong Kong values**

In conclusion, by reviewing and examining the cultural representations and reflections in *Teddy Boy*, we attempted to chart the local Hong Kong identity formation. First, the Hong Kong culture described in this article focuses on the preservation of the original, pre-existing hybridized colonial culture, including geographic locales to local food and artifacts. Second, *Teddy Boy* uniquely uses the triad society to highlight core values of the local identity and local culture. Among these values are fairness, equity, freedom, morality, and righteousness. As a strategy used in the comic, the main character of *Teddy Boy*, Ho-nam Chan, prioritizes righteousness or *yiqi* over other values. On different occasions, the character uses radical means (perhaps reflecting the radical means used in society) to show that he is willing to sacrifice himself to defend core Hong Kong values such as diversity and freedom of the press. As a fictional subcultural character, Ho-nam Chan has the sublime status of a cultural hero in the social imaginary. The formation of cultural identity in Hong Kong reflects two strong roots. While values such as morality and righteousness are traditional core Confucian Chinese values, values such as freedom and fairness are shared by Western democratic settings. *Teddy Boy* demonstrates that the local Hong Kong identity formation is not only the hybridity of Chinese values long held in Hong Kong society but also the preservation and perpetuation of values that are held by other societies across the globe. To return to the fundamental question of Hong Kong’s cultural identity or core Hong Kong values, although we are aware of the danger of essentializing culture, this article focuses on the fundamental search for Hong Kong identity. However, as discussed in the introduction, Hong Kong’s identity is developing in tandem with China’s increasing global influence. A local argument is that the seamlessness of the global identity preserved in Hong Kong depends on how much China affects, changes, and opposes the global context. If China becomes integrated into the global community, logically, the preservation of Hong Kong identity will be less problematic and vice versa.

As a self-reflexive note to this article, we also admit that we choose to answer the question of identity by scrutinizing *Teddy Boy*, a comic magazine that has long been recognized by the grassroots culture of Hong Kong. In future research, global elements in the local identity could be finely revealed by studying their representation in other media, such as Hong Kong movies in which the culture of the triad in Hong Kong is momentously featured and accentuated. We also recommend that other social imaginaries be explored in other local mediated content and sites in Hong Kong.

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