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Chinese but not Chinese? A case study of identity in post-colonial Hong Kong*

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Abstract

The study of language and identity attracts attention from numerous inter-related disciplines such as social psychology and sociolinguistics. Recent research has seen a move beyond the structuralist's idea of identity as static categories (e.g. male/ female; Asian/ non-Asian) to a post-structuralist's interpretation of identity as a site of conflict or struggle, and as a dynamic and ever-emergent construct (e.g. Block 2007; Duff & Talmy 2011; Norton 2013). Migration and globalisation provide fruit-bearing contexts for identity research. Similarly, colonialisation is another site where interesting research on identity has been produced (e.g. Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985). The present study focuses on the identity struggle experienced by participants in post-colonial Hong Kong (HK). Data obtained from 65 HK participants born in the 70s, 80s, and 90s through quantitative (an ethnic group affiliation questionnaire) and qualitative measures (field notes, informal interviews and conversations) reveal their ambivalence about their own identity. Participants acknowledge an ethnic affiliation with Chinese, but the majority concurrently resists being aligned completely with Chinese mainlanders.

Through using HK as a case study, we hope to illustrate the complexity involved in quantifying and qualifying identity, echoing the move towards the study of identity as a multifaceted, multidimensional construct.

Keywords: Identity, Hong Kong, Post-colonialism, Post-structuralism

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Introduction

Identity has been an important topic that continues to capture researchers' attention across numerous fields of studies including anthropology, applied linguistics and social psychology. The countless monographs and edited volumes on related topics (e.g. Abrams & Hogg 1990; Block 2007; Coupland 2007; Edwards 2007; Joseph 2004; Norton 2013; Regan & Ní Chasaide 2010; Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004; Stryker et al. 2000; Tajfel 1982, and of course the present volume), state-of-the-art articles (e.g. Brown 2000; Norton and Tooney 2011), dedicated journals, e.g. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, as well as the numerous special issues that appeared in outlets such as *TESOL Quarterly* (1997, vol 31 (3)), *Applied Linguistics* (2013, vol 34 (5)), *Language and Communication* (2014, vol 35), and *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (2015, vol 35) are testimony to the vibrancy and vitality of this line of research.

The cross disciplinary nature of identity means, perhaps unsurprisingly, that as a construct it has been studied and analysed with multiple paradigms from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. For instance, the social psychological tradition often employs instruments based on self-reporting as an effort to quantify participants' personal and social identification with different ethnic groupings (see Noels 2014; also Brown 2000 for a related discussion on social identity theory). These measures often tap into elements such as *self-categorisation, public and private evaluation, importance of membership, attachment and sense of interdependence, social embeddedness, behavioural involvement, and content and meaning* pertaining to the group and identity (Ashmore et al. 2004). While on the other hand, researchers from the sociolinguistic tradition tend to focus on the qualitative aspect and the emergent nature of identity. For example, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) proposed a social-cultural framework for understanding and analysing identity as produced in linguistic interaction. Their model is based on five tightly related principles which emphasise the *emergent, positional, indexical, relational*, and essentially *partial* nature of identity which they see as engendered within linguistic interactions.

Yet, it will be a gross over-simplification to assume that scholars within a broadly similar theoretical/ or methodological tradition share exactly the same set of assumptions or follow an identical approach to the studying of identity. Far from it: they often differ with regard to how they interpret the agency and volition of participants as well as how they treat the interplay between the macro, micro and beyond (cf. Wortham 2012), the ascribed and assumed (cf. Blommaert 2006; Otsuji & Pennycook 2010). In a sense, all these subtle differences in underlying assumptions are implied in and reflected through their choice of

terminologies, for instance, *investment* (Darvin and Norton 2015), *performance* (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985), *positioning* (Bucholtz & Hall 2004), *socialisation* (Ochs 1993), *styling* (Coupland 2007), *translanguaging* (Lewis et al. 2012) all suggest very different degrees of agencies (vs passivity) (cf. Canagarajah 2013), volition, and interactions between participants whose identity is under construction or negotiation and their environment, as well as other stake holders present in the immediate or wider context.

In spite of all these potential discrepancies, researchers from different paradigms do share the general belief that there is a need to move away from the static, essentialised, structuralist's account of identity where people's identity are benchmarked against 'check-list' categories of a binary nature or similar (e.g. female/ male; Caucasian/ non-Caucasian). It is safe to say, at the time of writing, that there is a general consensus that this view of identity is too restrictive and limiting as a tool to capture the dynamic and increasingly complex nature of identity (or rather identities) (see Block 2006; 2007; Coupland 2007; De Fina & Perrino 2013; Duff 2015; McEntee-Atalianis & Zappettini 2014; also Blommaert 2013). Though it should also be noted that Block (2006) cautions against the non-critical reception of this post-structuralist view of identity, which he fears can descend into a 'free-for-all', 'everything goes' chaos. In fact, as shall be seen in this paper, the wholesale rejection of nominal categories is unhelpful if not impossible, since humans do not exist in a social vacuum free from ready-made, sometimes, entrenched categories. Indeed, we have also had to grapple with how participants can be (roughly) categorised according to some externally defined criteria such as age and gender (see *study design* section below).

It is impossible to do justice to the divergent identity frameworks that have been presented in the literature in an article of this length, however, what we do intend to do in the present article is to use Hong Kong as a case study to highlight this notion of complexity and explore the multifaceted and potentially conflicting nature of identity in the HK context, through employing a research instrument that includes measures affiliated with both the quantitative and qualitative paradigm. In what follows, we will provide contextual information to help readers better understand the situation of HK. We will then proceed to discuss the study design. Subsequent to that, we will offer our interpretations of the data and discuss our findings in depth. Finally, we conclude the article by relating our findings back to the literature covered above in this brief introduction.

Background

Shaped by its past as a British colony, HK people claim a dual/ mixed identity, seeing themselves as both ‘Hongkongers’ and ‘Chinese’ (Brewer 1999; Ma & Fung 2007). This allows them to claim their ethnic heritage with the wider Chinese population, but also to differentiate themselves from Chinese outside HK, prizing their cosmopolitanism and command of the English language (Chan 2002; Joseph 2004).¹ With tourism liberalism measures easing travel restrictions between mainland China and HK and the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), there has been an increase in contact between residents of the two places.² These have significant ongoing effects and repercussions on political, cultural, and socio-economical dimensions of people’s life in HK, putting the notion of identity to the fore. Below, we briefly outline the political reality of HK, followed by a discussion of cultural and linguistic issues, as well as the socio-economic situation.

One country two systems: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region’s polity

Hong Kong, a land of 1,104 km² with a population of around 7 million, was a former British colony (1841 - 1997), excluding the 4-year Japanese occupation between 1941 and 1945. It became a special administrative region (SAR) of China when the sovereignty was returned in 1997. Under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, Hong Kong is administrated under the ‘one country, two systems’ policy, where it is said to have a high degree of autonomy and will enjoy minimal interference/ change for 50 years. Perhaps one of the most markedly different aspects of life in HKSAR from mainland China is the entitlement of freedom of speech. At the same time, being part of China also entails that the Chinese Central Government has a complete oversight (i.e. the final say) over issues that involve for instance national security. Before the handover in 1997, scholars focused on the concept of Chinese identity vis-à-vis the coloniser, Britain. For example, Bolton & Luke’s (1999) *The social survey of languages in the 1980s*, investigated the complexity of constructs such as ‘British Hong Kong’ and ‘Chinese’. They point out that a large population of the HK people are

‘[p]laying the dual role of being, by birth and “in truth”, a Chinese person, and by law and “in name” a British colonial subject, living in a place owned and governed by Britain, and yet keeping close contacts with China, being faced always with the problem of dealing with the uncomfortable role of being “a special species”’ (ibid.:158).

¹ However, this pluralistic/ multi-listic view as shall be argued still falls short in accounting for the complexity of identity as a construct (cf. Blommaert 2013).

² <https://www.tid.gov.hk/english/cepa/> [25 July 2014]

Since the handover, identity remains a complicated matter in HK, with multiple discourses at play, for instance, *Hong Kong citizens*, *Motherland China*, and even the *remnant shadow of the British Empire*.

The complexity in identity and identification has been once again put under the spotlight by the recent massive protests of an unprecedented scale which spanned from September to December 2014. During that period, tens of thousands of citizens took to the streets and occupied central business districts and areas outside the Hong Kong government headquarters. These protests, termed the ‘Occupy Central protests’ or the ‘Umbrella Movement’ broke out in response to the decision made on the 31st of August 2014 by the National People’s Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) on electoral reform regarding future Hong Kong Chief Executives.³ That decision was seen to be highly restrictive as regards which candidates would be allowed to stand for election. It was proposed that candidate(s) be pre-screened by a selection committee prior to the general electorate casting their vote. This effectively amounts to the Chinese government going back on its promise of full democracy with genuine universal suffrage. Notably, students born in the 90s led a demonstration against the NPCSC’s decision. The Hong Kong Federation of Students and other parties joined forces to protest, sparking the ‘Umbrella Movement’ alongside various acts of civil disobedience. The Chinese government, as well as a number of government officials in HK, denounced the occupation as ‘illegal’ and a ‘violation of the rule of law’ (Luo 2014). The Hong Kong police force finally cleared the occupation sites on the 11th of December 2014. The protests ended without any political concession from either the Chinese or the HKSAR government. The Umbrella Movement, in conjunction with previous protests regarding the National Security (Legislative Provisions) Bill (Hualing et al. 2005) and marches against the ‘national citizen education’, triggered propaganda by the government and China officials about the rule of law and patriotism.⁴ In particular, the urge to cultivate a national identity for HK youths was reinvigorated. This incident reveals the ambivalence of certain HK people towards China’s hard-handed approach. Concurrently, it also unveils the appetite for full democracy under the *one country two systems* policy.

Cultural dimension: language use and surrounding debates

³ For more details, please see: <http://www.scmp.com/topics/occupy-central> [17 April 2015]

⁴ <http://world.time.com/2012/07/30/hong-kong-divided-over-plans-for-patriotic-lessons-in-schools/> [17 April 2015]

According to the 2011 population census, 94% of the HK population is ethnically Chinese, with the remaining 6% of the population self-identifying as Whites, Indonesians, Filipinos, and others.⁵ The community language is Cantonese, which is one of the official languages alongside English and Mandarin. Traditional Chinese characters are used in writing as opposed to the simplified ones used elsewhere in China.^{6,7} The issue of language use has fuelled ongoing debates, as will be discussed below.

Owing to the relatively homogeneous composition of the population, it is easy to assume that policies regarding the medium of instruction in schools are a straightforward matter. Yet, they are anything but. The HKSAR government's implementation of a mother-tongue (Cantonese) education policy shortly after sovereignty was returned to China, which converted the original medium of education of many secondary schools, English, to Cantonese (Bolton 2011; Evans 2013), created a huge public outcry. The government has now reverted to the so called 'fine-tuning' policy which in effect allows schools to make their own choice on the medium of instruction.⁸

Other debates around language use are also commonplace. The use of Cantonese, Mandarin, or English during inter-group encounters generates constant topics for discussions, some of which can become quite heated and emotive. For example, in 2012, in response to an argument between a HK person and a Mandarin-speaking person (presumably from mainland China) in the HK underground system (MTR) over the 'no eating and drinking' rule, a professor of Chinese in Peking University criticised the HK person furiously for not using the 'lingua franca' of Mandarin in the exchange. In what can only be described as a 'rant', he went on to describe HK people as 'dogs' and 'British pets'.⁹ These fiery and derogatory comments by 'prominent figures' can at times exacerbate the conflicts and hostility.¹⁰

As HK and China have a closer tie in terms of economic and political development, Mandarin, the national language of China, has become increasingly important in HK, e.g. in business communications with Mandarin-speaking customers, in speeches delivered at national official gatherings and for meetings which are broadcast in the media. The use of

⁵ http://www.had.gov.hk/rru/english/info/info_dem.html [19 Sept 2014]

⁶ Community language is broadly defined here as the default language used among HK citizens in day-to-day communications and functions.

⁷ Cantonese and Mandarin share the core formal syntax to an extent; the written system is what can be called, 'formal Chinese'. The difference between simplified and traditional characters can be understood as a difference in script.

⁸ This also means that the exact number of schools which adopt EMI and CMI is difficult to come by, since the actual medium of instructions can potentially differ from the reported or advertised medium.

⁹ Clip available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko5MSXZjmBE> [29 August 2014]

¹⁰ See the section entitled *Socio-economic dimension: Economic boost and social tension* immediately below.

Mandarin to teach the Chinese language in school is another contentious area with dividing opinions. Some schools in HK, from primary to university level, are using Mandarin to teach Chinese and Chinese culture lessons. There is a debate on what spoken language, Cantonese or Mandarin, appears to be the most ‘appropriate’ language for teaching Chinese-related subjects. Moreover, it is argued that Cantonese is at threat from the current policies and trends, a view shared by Stephen Matthews, an associate professor in linguistics at the University of Hong Kong (Parry 2012); in this context, the use of Cantonese to teach Chinese is argued to help preserve the language. In addition, controversies pivot around the use of two different Chinese writing systems – the traditional Chinese characters in HK that have been taught in schools and the simplified Chinese characters used in China that were not officially introduced until recently. This is a sensitive and emotive issue evidenced through ‘angry’ protests by some locals who lament the exclusive use of simplified Chinese characters in restaurant menus and public signage (Lo and Chong 2012). These protestors claim to want to preserve the continued use of traditional Chinese characters in HK, which they feel would in turn help protect a HK identity.

Socio-economic dimension: Economic boost and social tension

The Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) between HK and mainland China has been effective since July 2003. This is an economic and trade agreement between both places, aiming to strengthen trade and investment cooperation between the two sides. In addition, tourism liberalism measures including the ‘Individual Visit Scheme: multiple-entry permit scheme’ allow easier travel between mainland China and HK. These policies are said to have boosted the HK economy. However, these arrangements have led to some undesirable and perhaps unexpected societal repercussions in HK.

In particular, despite the financial benefits to the local economy brought about by the millions of mainland Chinese visitors through the multiple-entry permit scheme, some HK people see the scheme as a catalyst for unwelcomed, rampant parallel-goods trading activities, whereby mainlanders smuggle goods from HK to China to evade tax duties. The burgeoning numbers of chain shops, which primarily target tourists from mainland China, in the already very crowded city of HK has led to a dramatic rise in rental prices and a marginalisation of local businesses, affecting the livelihood of local HK people. As a result,

some demand a halt to the issuing of multi-entry visas.¹¹ The influx of Mainland Chinese visitors, a ten-fold rise from 4.4 million in 2001 to 40.7 million in 2013, seems to be unmanageable and has created quite a bit of social discontent (Chugani 2015). Some anti-parallel trading activists even took a series of aggressive acts by rallying against mainland Chinese passersby in March 2015 (Lai 2015). This episode reveals the conflicts between local and mainland Chinese visitors, with the result of unwelcome behaviour towards mainland Chinese from local HK Chinese.

The State of play: Hong Kong identity

The brief discussion above illustrates the complexity involved in the notion of Hong Kong identity. Attempting to adopt the broad-brush monolithic term ‘Chinese’ to capture the identity of Hong Kong people is rather limiting, if not futile, since it is clear that on every level we are dealing with multiple ideologies: some compatible, some incommensurate or some even conflicting. For instance, matters around language use in public domains, educational contexts, as well as inter-group exchanges are clearly unresolved. Likewise, the discussion within the socio-economic domain also reveals mutual animosity or even hostility on some occasions between local HK people and Chinese from the mainland. These in turn unveil the socio-psychological loading of notions such as ‘Hongkongers’ and ‘Chinese’.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on the identity struggle experienced by participants in post-colonial Hong Kong. The purpose of our study is manifold, by involving participants who were born in the 70s, 80s and those who were born after the 90s (closely before the return of sovereignty). This study aims to explore HK people’s sense of identity as well as potential differences in identity across generations. It also aims to tap into people’s understanding of what it means to be a Hong Kong person. Extending beyond the current context, we also endeavour to relate to the wider literature on the study of identity by problematising the hard-and-fast ‘cataloguing’ of people into existing, ready-made categories.

Study design: Ethnographic approach

We have taken a broadly ethnographic approach in this study. Initially, we planned to adopt a research instrument that relied on interviews and focus groups. However, adding to the usual limitations of strategic responding or social desirability bias, whereby participants answer in a way that creates a positive impression instead of revealing their true beliefs (Fisher 1993;

¹¹ Subsequent to the writing of this article, the multiple entry visa was scrapped by China in April 2015, see: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-32282029> [17 April 2015]

Grimm 2010), it soon became apparent after the first pilot interview that these direct methods alone are inadequate in eliciting data pertaining to identity, which is by nature multi-faceted, dynamic, and complex, as established above. Therefore, we opted for an open ended, quasi-ethnographic approach where we collected data from multiple sources, including both quantitative and qualitative data (an ethnic affiliation questionnaire, informal interviews, unsolicited participant accounts, and field notes). Ethnographies involve collecting data from a range of sources in everyday contexts instead of putting participants in artificial situations (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007; Nunan 1992). Ethnographers usually spend a prolonged period of time being as unobtrusive as possible, collecting data from the field in the hope of generating concepts and ideas that can be interpreted and written up in a way that makes sense to outsiders/ readers who have not spent time in the research context. The iterative and organic characteristic of this research tool, we feel, is best suited for investigating identity, a construct characterised by its ongoing evolution and complex nature.

The effort to utilise research instruments associated with both the quantitative and qualitative paradigm is partly to address the call by Noels (2014) to bring various disciplines that are interested in the study of identity closer together (e.g. social psychology and sociolinguistics). At the same time, this cross-disciplinary approach is also necessary if one is to try and capture the complexity of identity. Inevitably, this paper can only cover part of the larger notion of Hong Kong identity; however, we feel that insights generated through a combination of quantitative and qualitative traditions will take us a step closer to a comprehensive account of the phenomenon at hand.

Between the period of May 2014 and January 2015, we spent time immersing ourselves in the present research context and gathering data. The quantitative data mainly come from the paper-based ethnic affiliation questionnaire that we issued our participants (see below). The qualitative data come from field notes taken while the researchers were in the field, informal interviews with some of the participants, and from a number of unsolicited accounts offered by informants during interactions with the researchers. It is clear that the two strands of data collection methods have a set of very different underlying assumptions; one leaning towards positivism, the latter perhaps inclining more towards naturalism. Yet, we believe that they complement each other in providing data that reveals different facets of identity, i.e. the quantified self-identification, and the discursive narrative of identity. Below, we explicate the research instrument in more detail.

Quantitative measure: Ethnic group affiliation questionnaire

To tap into the participants' sense of identification quantitatively, we adopted the ethnic group affiliation (EGA) questionnaire developed by Gatbonton and colleagues (e.g. Gatbonton et al. 2005; Gatbonton & Trofimovich 2008; Trofimovich & Turuševa 2015).¹² Originally, the EGA questionnaire was developed to examine how a varying degree of ethnic affiliation and identification in the Quebec context would affect a second language (L2) learner's level of attainment in an L2 (French/ English). Gatbonton and colleagues were able to establish that EGA scores or a general sense of belonging to/ affiliation with the target language and its community positively correlate, to an extent, with how proficient a person is in the L2, as well as how accented they are deemed to be (e.g. Gatbonton et al., 2005; Gatbonton & Trofimovich 2008). Here, we have taken the EGA questionnaire as a proxy of the quantitative self-report measures that are normally employed in social psychology studies of identity (cf. Cameron 2004). We should also point out that even though the potential link between EGA scores and participants' degree of proficiencies in the various languages in Hong Kong (e.g. Cantonese, English, and Mandarin) is an interesting avenue of research, this will not be pursued further.

The EGA questionnaire contains 93 9-point Likert scale self-rating ethnic group affiliation statements which pertain to five main themes alongside some sub-themes. The five main themes are:

- (1) depth of involvement in the (my) ethnic group;
- (2) pride in, familiarity with, and feelings of comfort with the (my) group;
- (3) perception of the place of the (my) ethnic group in relation to other groups;
- (4) perceptions of the (my) group's vitality; and
- (5) views towards the socio-political concerns of the (my) group.

The higher the rating a participant assigns, the stronger s/he identifies with the theme in question. The 9-point self-rating scale is shown below:

Do not agree at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 *Strongly agree*

The statements from theme (1) are provided as an example below. This set of statements investigates the degree to which participants are involved in their respective ethnic group. Sub set A contains the following statements:

- A. Appreciating/ consuming group's cultural output (movies, films, books, music produced by group).

¹² We would like to express our gratitude towards Elizabeth Gatbonton for sharing the latest version of the EGA questionnaire.

1. If there are movies and films *made by* filmmakers and actors who are members of my ethnic group I make it a point to go and watch them.
2. If there are movies and films *made about* my ethnic group, I make it a point to go watch them.
3. If songs played on the radio are *composed by members* of my ethnic group I make it a point listen to them.
4. If there are stories and novels *written by members* of my ethnic group I make it a point to buy and read them.
5. If there are stories and news reports *written about members* of my own ethnic group I make it a point to read them.

In this case, the higher the scores participants provide, the more involved they are in their respective ethnic group.

In addition to the above core EGA section, biographical information is also collected. The biographical information section includes questions related to gender, participants' age group, birth place, self-categorisation of their ethnic identity, educational levels, language(s) spoken, etc.

Procedures

72 potential participants in Hong Kong were identified through convenient sampling, seven of whom were subsequently excluded from the study, either because they were not born in HK or because they did not speak Cantonese as a first language.¹³ The rationale behind this was to obtain as homogeneous a group as possible, focusing on Hong Kong people's ethnic group affiliation. The remaining 65 informants were then categorised according to three age groups, ranging from the birth years of 1970-1979, 1980-1989, and 1990-1999. This grouping was designed with the aim to investigate potential generational differences among the population who have experienced British colonialism and post-colonialism in HK. The number of participants in each group was roughly the same (see table 1). It is worth pointing out that though we believe identity is a complex and multidimensional construct, we have alluded to the difficulty of rejecting hard-and-fast categories. We appreciate how categorising participants according to these age groups can be problematic, but we feel that this grouping,

¹³ Convenient sampling is a method that draws data from participants who the researchers have access to; this contrasts with random sampling where participants are recruited on a completely random basis.

which incidentally corresponds roughly to how some local scholars classify the population of HK (Lui 2007 in Cheung 2014), has a certain degree of ecological validity, as they fall within the repertoire of the general public commonly circulated and utilised in popular discourse in the current research context.

All participants completed the biographical information section and then the Chinese-translated version of the EGA questionnaire on paper where items of different themes were randomised to avoid systematic answering or strategic responding. In total, it took participants approximately 30 minutes to fill out the whole questionnaire.

Table 1: Number of participants who completed the EGA questionnaire

Year of birth	Number of participants
1970 - 1979	22
1980 - 1989	21
1990 - 1999	22
Total	65

Data obtained from the questionnaire was grouped and tallied according to the five themes noted above. Basic inferential statistics (Kruskal-Wallis test) were conducted via SPSS to identify potential differences among participants in the three age groups.

Qualitative measures: Field notes, informal interviews, unsolicited accounts

In order to understand the notion of Hong Kong identity in more depth, we included qualitative measures that allowed us to further explore participants' identification and their understanding of what it means to be a HK person. In addition, informal interviews and conversations with some of the participants as well as unsolicited accounts communicated to the first author while he was at some of the protest sites of the 'Umbrella Movement' provided data for unpicking HK identity. Some of the main themes/ prompts we used revolved around questions such as, 'what does being a Hong Konger mean?', 'how would participants define Hong Kong identity?', 'what are the characteristics of Hong Kong people?'.

It should be pointed out that due to the transient and potentially sensitive nature of these exchanges and the degree of intrusiveness involved, audio recordings are not available. The exclusion/ inclusion of recordings was a difficult balancing act for us; on the one hand, verbatim materials enable the conducting of in-depth analyses such as the moment by moment analysis advocated by Li (2011; also Li and Zhu 2013) and conversation analysis,

which is common in the field of Sociolinguistics (e.g. Auer 2013; Block 2007; Kramsch 2003; Wang 2013). On the other hand, having word-by-word quotes increases the (unlikely) likelihood of participants being identifiable retrospectively. Due to the fact that this study could potentially be interpreted as politically loaded, it was decided that audio recordings are not deemed appropriate because of the possible unforeseeable repercussions they might have on participants. We should also stress, however, that ethical procedures were adhered to with rigor, by means of seeking consent post-hoc as well as the anonymisation of all participants involved. We believe that the field notes and reconstructions organised and written up soon after the events are still valuable data to utilise as an alternative to word-by-word quotes (see various studies reported in Atkinson and Hammersley 2007).

Apart from these, we also gathered data from the mass media and social media. Some of the relevant episodes/ excerpts will be referenced to in the discussions.

Procedures of data coding and analysis

We followed a bottom up, grounded theorising approach (Glaser and Straus 1967), often adopted to handle qualitative data. In addition to the main themes identified above, we included themes that emerged through iterative data coding and processing. These procedures allowed us to relate our data with our initial research questions and at the same time enabled the expansion of our scope by including evolving and emergent themes that could also shed light on our investigation of identity in the current research context. In other words, we followed the guidance of Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) in not simply thinking about the data, but thinking through and with our data. The insights and interpretations were then systematically organised to be presented in the discussion section to follow.

At this point, we should also acknowledge that though we have been adopting a more or less principled theoretical eclecticism, the interpretation of our data, at least with regard to the qualitative aspect, is shaped by our reading of works by various applied linguists and sociolinguists on the topic including Block (2006; 2007), Duff (2015), Duff and Talmy (2011), Norton (2013), Norton and McKinney (2011), *inter alia*. Moreover, it should also be borne in mind that both of us were originally from Hong Kong and have friends who feel strongly about recent events unfolding in HK including the ‘Umbrella Movement’. This inevitably adds a hint of subjectivity and reflexivity into the account we portray, however vigilant and cautious we are. Nonetheless, it is also worth pointing out that the notion of so-called ‘objective truth’ is often criticised and challenged in any social research. Any qualitative accounts are bound to be an artefact of the researcher’s/ author’s interpretation;

our account is no exception. By making our theoretical traditions and personal background explicit, it is hoped that readers can evaluate for themselves the merits and shortcoming of our account. This caveat essentially also means that we believe the data we bring into our discussion can potentially be interpreted via other (competing) perspectives, including one of *superdiversity* (e.g. Creese and Blackledge 2010; Vertovec 2007).

Findings: EGA questionnaire

Participant background information

The background information collected reveals the 65 participants (see table 1 above) to be fairly homogenous in that they all speak Cantonese as their first language, were all born in Hong Kong, and have received an education of post-secondary or above.

Participants' self-categorisation of their ethnic group

In order to obtain data for self-identification, we asked participants the following question:

Q1. How would you describe your ethnic group? An ethnic group refers to the group one was born into or the group that one has chosen to be a member of.¹⁴

(Select ONLY ONE categorisation)

1. Chinese
2. Hong Konger
3. Chinese Hong Konger
4. Hong Kong Chinese
5. Other: _____

Table 2 outlines the findings generated from this question. There are a few trends that can be observed from this data. First, participants identified with the category 'Hong Konger' the most, with 43.1% of them (i.e. 28 out of 65) choosing this classification overall. Second, 77.0% of the informants (i.e. 50 out of 65) chose a category that contains 'Hong Kong' as an element, i.e. 'Hong Konger', 'Chinese Hong Konger', and 'Hong Kong Chinese'. This observation applies to all the three age groups. Together, these suggest that 'Hong Kong' is a salient element/ feature for participants in identifying themselves. In contrast, only 20.0% of the participants (i.e. 13 out of 65) identified themselves using the label 'Chinese' exclusively. In general, these agree with the recent survey on Hong Kong people's ethnic identity

¹⁴ This ethnic group definition was developed by Gatbonton et al. (2005)

conducted by the University of Hong Kong's Public Opinion Programme in June 2014.¹⁵ Their survey found that only approximately 20.0% of the 1,026 informants identified themselves as Chinese. Although this figure and our own figure reported here are not as low as the one provided by another similar survey conducted by the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in November 2014 where only 8.8% of the 280 sampled participants classified themselves as Chinese, they do reflect how participants view 'Chinese' as an identification category.¹⁶

Table 2: Participants' self-categorisation of their ethnic group

	Entire group		Sub-group 1		Sub-group 2		Sub-group 3	
Year of birth:	1970 - 1999		1970 - 1979		1980 - 1989		1990 -1999	
Selected ethnic group:	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Chinese	13	20.0	4	18.2	5	23.8	4	18.2
Hong Konger	28	43.1	5	22.7	11	52.4	12	54.5
Chinese Hong Konger	18	27.7	9	40.9	3	14.3	6	27.3
Hong Kong Chinese	4	6.2	2	9.1	2	9.5	0	0.0
Others**	2	3.0	2	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
	65	100	22	100	21	100	22	100

**'Han dynasty person' (漢人) & 'Asian' respectively

EGA questionnaire: Findings for the five themes

Table 3 shows the overall descriptive statistics for the EGA questionnaire with respect to the three sub-groups (70s, 80s and 90s) and the entire group. As can be seen, the ratings assigned fall around the region of 5, which is the mid-point average in the 9-point Likert scale. This seems to suggest that participants have neither a strong nor weak affiliation with the Hong Kong identity.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for EGA questionnaires

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Min.	Max.
Sub-group:						
70s	22	4.818	.7557	.1611	3.5	7.0
80s	21	4.986	1.0565	.2306	2.6	7.2
90s	22	5.177	.8292	.1768	3.1	6.4
Entire group (Total)	65	4.994	.8855	.1098	2.6	7.2

¹⁵ See: <http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/release/release1150.html> [28 November 2014]

¹⁶ See: http://www.com.cuhk.edu.hk/ccpos/en/research/Identity_Survey%20Results_2014_ENG.pdf [16 January 2015]

We then broke down the scores according to the five themes noted above. The mean scores by the three groups are listed in table 4.

Table 4: Mean scores obtained for the five main themes of the EGA questionnaire

Scale used in the EGA questionnaire										1970-79	1980-89	1990-99
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Strong	Mean	Mean	Mean
Theme 1: Depth of involvement in the (my) ethnic group (Q. 1-18)										4.7	5.0	5.2
Theme 2: Pride in, familiarity with, and feelings of comfort with the (my) group (Q. 19-38)										5.4	5.7	5.7
Theme 3: Perception of the place of the (my) ethnic group in relation to other groups (Q. 39-53)										4.9	4.6	5.0
Theme 4: Perceptions of group's vitality (Q. 54-66)										3.4	4.0	3.7
Theme 5: Views towards the socio-political concerns of the (my) group (Q.67-93)										5.1	5.2	5.5
Ranges of mean scores										3.4-5.4	4.0-5.7	3.7-5.7

In line with the overall scores reported in table 3, the averages listed in table 4 indicate that participants are rather undecided, assigning ratings that are close to the mid-point region. However, one point that is noteworthy is the scores assigned to questions in theme 4, which are below the mid-point score 5. This hints at the pessimism participants have towards the group's vitality. This incidentally agrees with one of the key themes identified in the qualitative data which will be elaborated below.

In order to investigate whether there is any statistical significance among the differences observed in the data reported in tables (3) & (4), we ran a series of non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests.¹⁷ The tests reveal that the overall average assigned by each group was not significantly different from each other, as indicated by the p -value 0.128 (i.e. $p > 0.05$). Subsequent Kruskal-Wallis tests performed on the scores by the groups for each of the five themes also signal an absence of statistical difference among the ratings assigned by the various groups. The p -values obtained are 0.310 for Theme 1, 0.498 for Theme 2, 0.567 for Theme 3, 0.155 for Theme 4, and 0.264 for Theme 5 respectively.

¹⁷ With a sample that contains only a small number in each group, it is virtually impossible to tell whether the population distribution is normal or not (Larson-Hall 2012: 463). Therefore, we have chosen the non-parametric alternative of ANOVA, Kruskal-Wallis test, which does not assume the data to be normally distributed.

As a result, we aggregated the three groups into one for further data analysis. Table 5 details the average yielded for the entire sampled population.

Table 5: Mean scores obtained in five main themes for the entire group of 70s-90s

Scale used in the EGA questionnaire 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 → Strong	Entire group 1970-1999 Mean
Mean score of the entire group (N = 65)	5.0
Theme 1: Depth of involvement in the ethnic Group (Q.1-18) <i>A. Appreciating/consuming group's cultural output (movies, films, books, music produced by group.)</i> <i>B. Maintaining contact with ethnic group (Social contacts)</i> <i>C. Participating in Ethnic groups events and affairs</i> <i>D. Defending/ promoting the Ethnic Group</i>	5.0
Theme 2: Pride in, familiarity with, and feelings of comfort with group (Q. 19-38) <i>A. Feeling of comfort in group</i> <i>B. Familiarity with my ethnic group</i> <i>C. Familiarity with the cultural leaders of my ethnic group</i> <i>D. Pride in my group</i>	5.6
Theme 3: Perception of the place of my ethnic group in relation to other groups (Q. 39-53) <i>A. Superiority of my group to other groups</i> <i>B. Preferential view for my group</i> <i>C. Preferential view for my ethnic leaders, community, etc.</i>	4.8
Theme 4: Perceptions of group's vitality (Q. 54-66) <i>A. Perception of my group's power</i> <i>B. Perception of group's future</i> <i>C. Perception of group's acceptance by other groups</i>	3.7
Theme 5: Views towards the socio-political concerns of my group (Q. 67-93) <i>A. Views about role of language and identity</i> <i>B. Attitudes towards immigration</i> <i>C. Attitudes towards reasonable accommodation to immigrants</i> <i>D. Political concerns</i> <i>E. Freedom of choice</i>	5.3

As seen in table 5, the overall mean score for the entire group is 5: right in the middle of the 9-point Likert scale. The highest mean score obtained is 5.6 for theme 2. This score is significantly different from the mid-value 5 in the Likert scale as revealed by the one-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test ($p < 0.000$). This indicates that participants positively identify

with questions in this theme in that they take pride in being a Hong Konger, and that they are familiar with the culture and figures that are associated with Hong Kong. Moreover, they feel comfortable being around members who belong to the same group. The second highest mean score, 5.3, is assigned to theme 5. Although the same statistical procedure did not yield a significant result for this score compared to mid-value 5 ($p = 0.075$), the positive ratings can be interpreted to suggest that informants identify with the concerns of the Hong Kong ethnic group to an extent. Notably, the lowest mean score, 3.7, is yielded for theme 4. This rating, which was significantly different from the mid-point 5 ($p < 0.000$), reflects the pessimism and insecurity over the vitality of Hong Kong as a group in terms of the perception of its power and future, which as mentioned is also an important theme emerged in the qualitatively data.

Interim summary

Contrary to our expectation, the classification of participants according to their age group did not turn out to be useful. The EGA ratings they assigned are not statistically significantly different from each other. This reminds us of how at times readily available categories, in this case, age group, might not necessarily be as important as one initially thought. In view of that, the groups were aggregated into one for further analysis. In spite of the fact that the majority of participants (77%) identified 'Hong Kong' as a key element for self-categorisation, the inferential statistics ran on this larger group show that they did not have a clear affiliation nor disaffiliation with the Hong Kong group. Although it should also be pointed out that the average scores for questions in theme 2 as well as those for questions in theme 5 appear to be slightly above average. The overall general picture possibly suggests that informants are rather ambivalent towards their ethnic identity and affiliation. The score yielded for theme 4, which is below average, is also worth highlighting. This is indicative of the insecurity participants have towards their vitality and future existence. Importantly, these concur with some of the findings obtained through the analysis of the qualitative data. Studying the qualitative accounts potentially enables us to better understand the reasoning behind these quantitative scores. It is to these we shall now turn.

Findings: Qualitative data

Hong Kong identity: a site for negotiation or a site of struggle?

As noted above, the notion of identity in Hong Kong came under scrutiny in light of the recent socio-geo-political build-ups. On a par with Duff's description of how 'people who

have not moved physically may ... find themselves in a new country with a different identity' (2015: 58) concerning not just survival but also belonging, Hong Kong people find themselves grappling with the impact of political transitions and an ever-changing socio-economic landscape. The following section discusses some of the noticeable themes in our data. We will offer our interpretations along the way.

Identity ambivalence

One of the main themes that emerge from the qualitative data is participants' ambivalence of their own identity. Identity or a sense of 'who they are' did not seem to figure prominently until recently. Informants conceded that they had never been too concerned with what it means to be a HK person. However, the ongoing events briefly described above seem to have led to an active search of self and identity as well as an exploration of what is unique to HK. This is illustrated by the brief account (6) by a 80s-born male informant:

(6) 'It's true that Hong Kong's positioning is a bit vague, it's not clear who we are and how we characterise ourselves, perhaps we have always been pragmatic [minding our own business, focused on working hard and earning a living]; but you can tell that people are actively searching for their unique qualities, they are looking.'¹⁸

Some informants adopted an approach of negation, similar to the negative identity practices discussed by Bucholtz (1999), defining themselves in terms of what they feel they are not. This includes an effort to actively disaffiliate themselves from Chinese mainlanders on cultural and value grounds. For instance, referring to recent negative publicities, informants expressed strong disapprovals towards episodes where some Chinese mainlanders were reported to have defecated in public, saying that (7) 'there's a cultural difference, like we do not defecate in public'. Although, media reports are likely to be sensationalised and overblown, exaggerating how common and representative these incidents are, this kind of identity work and positioning serves to highlight the distinctions between the two groups of 'Chinese' and alienate the mannerisms and behaviours that are deemed uncivilised and embarrassing. Similarly, remarks such as (8) and (9) in relation to the disruptions some Chinese passengers caused in airports and on flights; some footage of aggressive behaviour

¹⁸ As discussed in the *study design* section, these are not direct quotes but reconstructions of participants' accounts based on the field notes taken. Materials were all uttered in Cantonese unless otherwise stated; they are broadly translated into English for reporting purposes.

towards flight attendants and fellow passengers even made it to UK-based broadcasting houses such as Channel 4.¹⁹

- (8) ‘Like they are rich and all, but I do not feel that people respect them because of the chaos they create when travelling abroad’ (90s-born male)
- (9) ‘It’s annoying when people ask whether I am Chinese [when outside of HK]; it is true that I’m ethnically Chinese [by blood] but I always qualify it for them, not everyone knows much about Hong Kong, but Hong Kong people do not necessarily behave in ways similar to how the media portrays mainland Chinese to be.’ (90s-born male)

In addition to dis-alignment based on concrete actions and behaviours, this disaffiliation act can also be related to more abstract constructs such as human values and freedom of speech, or to be more precise, the purported lack of it in parts of China (see below).

Importantly, despite comments found in the media such as ‘[w]hen it comes down to it, it's simple: Many Hong Kongers just don't feel very Chinese’ (Ng & Chan 2015), it is misguided to think that informants in the study simply do not identify with ‘Chinese’ at all. Participants recognise the growing importance of China in the international arena and that it is now one of the biggest economies in the world. Relatedly, readers would have noticed from (9) that even though it was framed rather negatively, there is a sense of affiliation to the ‘Chinese’ category at least on an ethnic ground. This again highlights the complexity of identity and identification, in that within a short episode there can be a constant to-and-fro of identity alignment at work; in this case, the claim of ethnical heritage with ‘Chinese’ and the concomitant disaffiliation with other behavioural aspects of ‘non-HK Chinese’. This, in our view, reinforces the idea that identity is multidimensional and how ready-made categories can obscure the subtle details and distinctions in personal and social identity construction.

Apart from the perhaps antagonistic definitions, participants also identified some positive definitions relevant to the Hong Kong identity which can be seen from (10).

- (10) ‘Hong Kong is a bit of everything, a mix of East and West, a sense of pragmatism, adaptability, multiculturalism, and diversity.’ (80s-born female)

¹⁹ See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2fbj3hepoE> [27 February 2015]

This understanding of Hong Kong identity is one of the possible sources of the apparent conflicts between how some HK people perceive themselves and how they are perceived to be by some Chinese compatriots. The ideology behind (10) is clearly one of multi-locality (Vertovec 2009), internationality, and cosmopolitanism common to transnational contexts (e.g. De Fina & Perrino 2013; Duff 2015) and international financial hubs such as London and New York City. This outward looking, ‘liberal-minded’ and diverse conception is arguably at odds with the rhetoric and policy of the Chinese Central government, which emphasises homogeneity and unification, as opposed to heterogeneity and diversification. Looking at the official language policy of China as a quick example: despite the fact that there are 55 officially recognised ethnic groups in China, Mandarin (Putonghua) is the only official language in the country.²⁰ This can be seen as an effort to unify and perhaps homogenise citizens who may not share an identical ethnic and cultural background. A further case in point is the recent prohibition of the use of Cantonese in public domains in Foshan, a part of Guangzhou where the community language has been Cantonese.²¹ This point of departure in ideologies is also one of the causes of concern vis-à-vis participants’ perception of HK group vitality as will be elaborated below.

Sense of threat and pessimism

Another salient aspect of the data is the sense of threat and pessimism about the vitality of Hong Kong and Hong Kong identity. Participants feel that they have come under a lot of pressure on all fronts. These threats include a threat to the rights that they have taken for granted. Some informants described how people are now living in a kind of ‘white terror’, afraid of speaking out or expressing dissident views. In fact, unprompted, two participants explicitly commented on the ‘sensitive’ nature of the present study. Informants feel that Hong Kong as a city which prides itself on its freedom of speech and rule of law should not be turned into a place where there is a high degree of censorship and self-censorship. Sentiments such as (11) ‘we don’t want [HK] to become just another part of China’, are shared by all informants. Many of the participants see ways of life in mainland China as radically incompatible with the one in HK. For them, HK is a land of freedom where people have the right to disagree and not be prosecuted simply by expressing dissident views; while China on the other hand is a land where even social media such as Facebook and YouTube are banned. Yet, the increasing influence of China over local HK polity has led citizens to cast a great

²⁰ <http://www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/> [13 April 2015]

²¹ <http://localpresshk.com/2014/07/canton-banning-cantonese-hong-kong-endangered/> [27 August 2014]

doubt over the way of life they are used to. All of sudden, expressing opinions do not seem to be safe anymore; worried about potential repercussions, the general public becomes much more self-conscious in deciding circumspectly whether to articulate one's opinions or not. In fact, as recent as 19th April 2015, a local band, *My Little Airport*'s performance of a rendition of the UK's national anthem at the Hong Kong Film Awards Presentation Ceremony attracted instant online trolling and condemnations from pro-China writers and bloggers, some of whom recycled the derogatory terms such as 'British dogs' and 'sell-outs' mentioned above. One of them is even reported as having blatantly said that the band members should be sentenced to an immediate death penalty, which ironically is a remark that is perhaps only permissible in a place where freedom of speech is practised.²² This episode uncovers the intolerance of some mainlanders toward the freedom of expression, a supposedly universal human right. It also justifies the concern and sense of threat experienced by many HK informants who identify with cosmopolitan values, treasure internationality and cultural diversity.

Some participants also feel that they are gradually being marginalised, even in HK, a locale which they consider home. There is a sense that local government policies favour 'outsiders' over local Hong Kongers; for instance, they see the government as turning a blind eye to the parallel goods trading mentioned above. The Shanghai-Hong Kong Stock Connect cross-boundary investment channel launched in November 2014 is cited as another example which debatably considerably benefits China, but not the local HK economy, due to the relative immaturity of the Chinese stock market as opposed to HK's well-trusted fully fledged stock exchange system.

The anxiety, worries and pessimism over HK's vitality possibly originates from a sense of powerlessness and insecurity which is captured by (12), a comment made by another 80s-born, male informant.

(12) "We have no bargaining chip really, we have minimal domestic production (farming industry); we even have to count on China to sell us drinking water. Our economy relies heavily on service industry, tourism and the property market, and China has increasingly become one of the biggest consumers of these things in Hong Kong. They drive up the prices to an unaffordable level for local Hong

²² See: <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/eneews/realtime/20150422/53661891> (in Chinese) [23 April 2015]

Kong people, but some businessmen are happy because at the end of the day they are making more profit.”

It is also conceivable that the sense of threat and insecurity sources from a distrust of both the local HKSAR government and the Chinese Central government as revealed through (13) and (14).

(13) ‘The government keeps going back on its promise, we don’t see a future; we are really worried about the time when HK is returned to China for good. It’s promised in the Sino-British Joint Declaration that HK would enjoy a high degree of autonomy and freedom, and it’ll be governed by local HK people for 50 years, but look, after the sovereignty is returned for 17 years or so, there are clear signs of China trying to exert more control over HK on all aspects of life. We were promised a universal suffrage for 2017, but now the proposal they are offering, or rather shoving down our throat, involves pre-selected candidates. How can we trust either the local or the Central government?’ (80s-born male)

(14) ‘Today they say they want to implement this so-called universal suffrage, totally disregarding [Hong Kong] public opinion, tomorrow they can do whatever they want, they could say, “oh, sorry we are not exporting food to you guys anymore”, they are pretty much saying, “haha we can do whatever we want, we own you, so you better listen and do as you’re told.” *One country two systems my ass!*²³ (80s-born male)

All the above point to a perceived threat of the way of life, a life that is different from the rest of China, one that is anchored against an international outlook and universal values, some of which are questionably absent in mainland China. These help explain the low EGA scores assigned by participants with regard to the group vitality reported above.

Discontent over ‘ownership’ and active challenges over imposed identity

Some participants, both males and females, have also expressed how disgruntled they are over China’s ownership of Hong Kong which they see as belittling HK and undermining the qualities of HK people, see (14) & (15).

²³ The italicised portion of the excerpt was originally uttered in English.

(15) ‘Yea, we may be part of China geographically, but it’s revolting of them to think that they own us and we are in a subservient relationship with them in the sense that we need to simply follow what we were told. Hong Kong people know better than that, in fact, the ability of individual thinking and critical mind-set is exactly what the Chinese government is afraid of. They do not like people to be able to have the knowledge or capability that can challenge their position as the single, only ruling party.’ (80s-born female)

It is also worth noting that some participants refuse to take a back seat role. Through actively challenging and questioning the identity imposed on or ascribed to them, they are taking initiative to resist the dominance and retaking the ownership of their identity. Accounts (16) – (18) are good illustrations of that.

(16) ‘It’s true that HK is part of China historically speaking, but at the same time it’s also true that we were governed by the British which has undoubtedly shaped HK’s development, arguably it has helped HK to become one of the important players in the global [financial] arena.’ (80s-born male)

(17) ‘Yea, I mean they (China) are rich and everything, but then they still have to rely on the relatively well-trusted financial market [of Hong Kong] to attract foreign investment, HKD are properly regulated and anchored with the USD, that gives investors confidence, this is something that China doesn’t have, a trusted and well governed currency.’ (70s-born female)

(18) ‘When one comes to think about it, what is “real Chinese”? Are we talking about Han Chinese? China has after all been ruled by non-Hans for quite a few dynasties, so when one thinks about the definition of “Chinese”, it is actually highly problematic, there is no such thing as “pure Chinese”, not in Hong Kong, not in China.’ (80s-born male)

Through retracing the past, the participant was able to take pride in the present in (16). Likewise, in (17), the participant was able to look forward to the future where China is inter-dependent with Hong Kong. This contrasts starkly with the unilateral dependency of Hong Kong on China portrayed by some earlier accounts. The account in (18) went even further in challenging the legitimacy of the monolithic and perhaps hegemonic notion of ‘Chinese’,

questioning the historic origin of 'pure Chinese'. This in turn serves to problematise the rhetoric that homogenises people in HK, classifying them with the overarching category of 'Chinese'. This is tightly related to the ideologies of multiple alliance and diversity discussed above.

At this point, it is also worthwhile revisiting the notion of pragmatism which was mentioned by separate participants on various occasions, e.g. in (6) and (10). In a way, 'pragmatism' in the HK context refers to how people are satisfied or rather satisfied with 'getting on with things' and 'earning a living'. This defining characteristic would perhaps predict participants to be fairly content with the Chinese governance, especially given China's exponential growth of importance in the global economy and the presumed benefits that will be brought to HK's economy. However, as seen above, this value is reprioritised if not trumped when weighed against human values such as freedom of speech. Again, this helps to highlight the intertwined and perplexing nature of identity, reinforcing the post-structuralist's approach to studying identity.

Interim summary

Summing up the discussion in this section, it is clear that the notion of Hong Kong identity is complex and entangled. Identity in HK is a multifaceted, highly contested notion. On the one hand, informants are ambivalent about their own identity. On the other, there is also a sense of insecurity over the vitality of HK and its identity. However, the overall sentiment does not appear to be entirely negative; some participants are expressively resistant of the engulfment of a 'monolithic' construction of Chinese identity, similar to the Chinese university informants in the UK interviewed by Li and Zhu (2013). Evidently, HK people's search for their own identity is concurrently an effort to resist the imposed, monolithic 'Chinese identity', which is legitimised by the geographic, cultural, and ethnic heritage. Once again, all these underscore the complexity involved in studying identity and the impossibility to cover the notion using broad-brush and ready-made categories alone.

Conclusion

We began by wanting to explore the notion of Hong Kong identity in a postcolonial context. We also aim to understand what it means to be a Hong Kong person in light of the ever-changing geo-socio-political climate. Through employing an instrument that includes quantitative and qualitative measures, we are able to establish how our participants identify themselves with the Hong Kong ethnic group. In addition, we are able to tap into the reasons

behind informants' choices. In a sense, we are able to demonstrate how instruments associated with the two different traditions can complement each other.

The quantitative EGA scores reveal that participants in the study are to an extent ambivalent towards their identity, though there are also signs that they take certain pride in being a Hong Konger and that they share the concerns of the group as a whole. Furthermore, there is also a sense of insecurity over their group's vitality and future presence. The qualitative part of the study enables us to delve into people's rationale and reasoning and hence allows us to unpick the issue of identity further. The themes of ambivalence and pessimism over the group's vitality prevail. Participants are rather unsure about who they are, some of them adopted an antagonistic approach in defining themselves against what they think they are not. Some others provided a collection of qualities which they feel Hong Kong people value. Participants also fear that Hong Kong will be marginalised. Yet, some of them are quite verbal in fighting the rhetoric of dominance and are hopeful that Hong Kong will continue to have an important role to play in China and in the world as a financial hub.

Another goal of ours is to provide evidence for challenging and problematising the hard-and-fast 'cataloguing' of people into ready-made, essentialised categories, in line with the move to the multi-dimensional, post-structuralist's account. The Hong Kong case study above clearly shows that identity is not at all a monolithic construct. As seen through the qualitative accounts, our participants identify with facets of the category, Chinese, e.g. acknowledging the ethnic (biological) affiliation, but at the same time some of them reject being aligned completely with Chinese on cultural and behavioural grounds.²⁴ This clearly demonstrates how using broad-brush categories is inadequate in capturing the complexity of identity. A more multiplistic view still falls short in accounting for the dynamic and organic nature of identity, since identity is not simply a constellation of qualities or characteristics. Some of these features can work together at one time, and they can also be in conflict at others. Readers may have realised that we deliberately avoided nominating a definition of identity anywhere in our piece. We wanted to allow readers to 'walk through' the data and have a sense of how identity is in a constant state of flux with different facets coming to the fore depending on how the individual interacts with the socio-geo-political ambience without creating (or priming) any preconception of identity. Bucholtz and Hall's definition of identity as "the social positioning of self and other" (2005: 586) is relevant but we also have to bear in

²⁴ But see (18).

mind that these positioning are not fixed and can change on a moment-by-moment basis depending on the salient aspect in focus, for instance, in the present case, whether one is concentrating on the biological relationship of Chinese, or whether one is talking about the incongruity between the value systems and ways of life of Chinese in HK and Chinese in mainland China.

All in all, by looking into the case of post-colonial Hong Kong, we hope to have underscored the complexity involved in quantifying and qualifying identity and foregrounded the multifaceted, multidimensional nature of identity.

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