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WENDY SIUYI WONG
York University

Transmedia *Sai-lou*: The evolution of Hong Kong's core values through comics, film and street protests

ABSTRACT

In this article, I investigate the evolution of the core values of the Hong Kong people through the term Sai-lou 細路, by means of storytelling in a transmedia context and with a focus on different historical stages, from approximately the end of the Second World War to the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Using the late 1930s four-panel comic strip, Sai-lou Cheung 細路祥 (Kiddy Cheung) created by Yuan Bou-wan 袁步雲 (1922–95) as the origin work for the term, this study examines the core values reflected in the 1950s film Sai-lou Cheung 細路祥 (The Kid or My Son A-Chang) starring 9-year-old Bruce Lee, the 1999 film Sai-lou Cheung 細路祥 (Little Cheung) directed by Fruit Chan as well as news reports of the 2014 sit-in street protests whose student leaders the public regarded as Sai-lou 細路 ('kids').

KEYWORDS

Hong Kong
transmedia
Kiddy Cheung
Little Cheung
civil movement
Hong Kong identity

INTRODUCTION

The term *Sai-lou* 細路 in Hong Kong's principal language of Cantonese means child or children. In the history of mass media in Hong Kong, locally born artist Yuan Bou-wan 袁步雲 (1922–95, also written as Yuen Po-wan) was the

first to adopt the term in the late 1930s when it appeared in the title of his *manhua* 漫畫 ('comics'). *Sai-lou Cheung* 細路祥, Yuan's four-panel comic strip, was first printed in local newspapers during this period and was among the most popular *manhua* titles in post-Second World War Hong Kong and neighbouring Chinese city, Guangzhou.

The *manhua* was adapted into a film in 1950 under the same Chinese title (*The Kid* or *My Son A-Chang*, in English), and starring 9-year-old Bruce Lee (1940–73) as the lead character, Sai-lou Cheung 細路祥. Almost half a century later in 1999, Fruit Chan (b. 1959) directed a new film with the same title, *Sai-lou Cheung* 細路祥 (*Little Cheung*, in English). This colloquial term, *Sai-lou*, moved into the streets in the new era of sit-in street protests that marked the 2014 Umbrella Movement (UM). Lester Shum 岑敖暉, a university student and movement leader at the time, was quoted in news reports as saying: '[w]e are the kids chosen by the times' 我地係被時代選中嘅細路, which is a line from *Digimon: Digital Monsters* 數碼暴龍, a Japanese anime TV series that aired in Hong Kong in the 2000s, the decade in which this young generation came of age. The use of the term *Sai-lou* in the news media during the UM was not solely a reference to the student protesters as a group of children, but its use was also an elucidation of this young generation's core ideology, thereby revealing their motivations for dissent.

In this article, I argue that the core ideology of Hongkongers and its transmission by storytelling has evolved alongside the adaption of the term *Sai-lou* within the transmedia context in Hong Kong. Through a textual analysis of the three examples mentioned above, I will examine how the Hong Kong people's core values have been reflected in transmedia at different historical stages. I will expound on how the term *Sai-lou* evolved from the notion of children socialized into the values of honest living to that of children's own views on core societal values, and finally that of the younger generation's self-perception in our contemporary world. This inquiry will contribute to the ongoing debate on Hongkongers' core values and the region's democratic future under the tightening grip of Chinese authoritarianism.

To distinguish the romanization of Cantonese, the spoken language in Hong Kong, *jyutping* or the established Hong Kong romanization styles are used interchangeably in the Chinese titles for *manhua*, film titles and in names. The English title will be used after the first mention of the Chinese title, *Sai-lou Cheung* 細路祥, to distinguish which media is being referenced. The English titles used in this article are the author's own translation if the official title is not available or established elsewhere. The English terms, kid(s) or child(ren), will be used throughout the article as the translations of the colloquial term *Sai-lou* 細路.

BACKGROUND: LOCAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTITY

Tracing back through its British colonial history from 1841 to 1997, Hong Kong started as an entrepôt of East meets West based on British imperial narrative. Newcomers, largely from Mainland China, migrated to the colony for employment opportunities and a new life, but they rarely saw Hong Kong as their permanent home until early 1970s (Tong 2016). Cultural studies professor Wing-sang Law (2018) points out that colonial Hong Kong was indeed a highly mobile and very adaptable migrant society whose culture and identity evolved to meet the practical needs of its social environment. In his consideration of local consciousness and ethnicity as a product of Hong Kong's history, Law (2018) traces three waves of post-war local identity consciousness: the

baby-boom generation; Hong Kong as the world prior to 1997; and the cultural uprising of the post-1980s generation.

In his article, 'Decolonisation deferred: Hong Kong identity in historical perspective', Law (2018) provides us with an insightful cultural anthropological analysis that supports this article's investigation of characteristics that have defined Hong Kong identity in order to determine how Hongkongers viewed themselves through the term of *Sai-lou* and its use in various media during different stages of local consciousness. He reminds us that in the post-Second World War period, Hong Kong was considered as a 'refugees society' where the colonial government applied a registration system of identity cards for the first time to document its residents and new arrivals. Hong Kong's population in 1945 was around 500,000; this increased more than threefold, to 2.36 million, by 1950. The majority of newcomers were Mainlanders, some who remained permanently as well as locally born individuals returning to Hong Kong to work in the creative sector, including the film industry and in comics arts. In tracing the evolution of local consciousness and ethnicity, it is unavoidable to acknowledge the strong connections to Chinese cultures that these newcomers brought to Hong Kong.

Law (2018) describes the attributes of the Hong Kong native gentlemen's identity from the early colonial time. They were members of the local Chinese elite or 'superior Chinese' who did not give up his Chinese identity and defended Chinese social customs in their role as a bridge between the British and Chinese communities. Law argues that this position contributed to the formation of the imperishable 'collaborative colonial system' between the ruler and its people. Here I assert Law's perspective that post-1945 arrivals from Mainland China helped to further construct, reinforce and expand the 'system' by advancing the Chinese values that were favourable to the colonial rulers into the mass media arena in Hong Kong.

The history of Hong Kong mass media is rooted in Chinese cultures, specifically the early-modern Chinese popular cultures inherited from the Mainland via migrant arrivals in the early twentieth century and after the Second World War. After the Chinese Communist Party's victory in the Second Kuomintang-Communist Civil War (1945–50) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Mainland suppliers of capitalist popular reading materials and other popular culture products eventually ceased their production. Hong Kong was poised to take advantage of this gap in the market as well as the arrival of talented creative migrants; both opportunities nurtured the colony's development into a Chinese cultural production centre that supplied the local market as well as Chinese diaspora communities. Although Hong Kong benefited from new capital and creative talent from across China's different regions, Cantonese as the colony's principal language and southern Chinese cultures eventually took the leading role in shaping the popular media and storytelling of modern Hong Kong after 1945.

Among Hong Kong mass media in the post-war era, *manhua* was one of the most popular pastimes reading materials, especially those published in newspapers. The media quickly grew in this period with the resumption and then growth of newspaper publishing – one of the signs of recovery after the wars. Chinese *manhua* was a modern product of 1920s Shanghai. *Manhua* columns first appeared in daily newspapers or periodical magazines in Shanghai and later in other major cities, and it became common practice to reprint these creations as single or serial publications. Guangzhou-based artists such as Yip Yan-chun 葉因泉 (1903–69) and Lee Fanfu 李凡夫 (1906–67)

were pioneers in the field, and both men had a significant influence on the establishment of the so-called southern-style Chinese *manhua*. Yip's title, *Aa Lou-daa* 阿老大 (*Brother Aa*), which debuted in 1929, broke new ground by introducing the first *manhua* character and comic strip syndicate created in Guangzhou. His comics magazine, *Bungok Manhua* 半角漫畫 (*The Sketch*) (1929–35), also played an important role in Chinese *manhua* history. Modelled after *Aa Lou-daa*, Lee Fanfu's 1934 creation, *Ho Lou-daa* 何老大 (*Brother Ho*), was another very popular title that circulated widely in southern China, in Hong Kong and in Chinese diaspora communities (Hong Kong Arts Centre 1996).

Lee and Yip's works, written in colloquial Cantonese and depicting the vernacular cultures and quotidian life of average people in southern China (mainly referring to Guangdong province), made it very easy for Cantonese-speaking readers to engage in the artists' humour and stories. Lee's works and both artists' vernacular creative approach heavily influenced Hong Kong-born Yuan Bou-wan 袁步雲 (1922–95), who later applied what he had read in their *manhua* into his own titles. He was a 15-year-old living in Hong Kong when his first comic work was submitted to and published in a Guangzhou-based newspaper in 1937. His following work, *Yi baa-fu Yu Ho Lou-daa* 二伯父與何老大 (*Second Uncle and Brother Ho*), was published a year later. Lee later sued Yuan for mimicking his drawing style in his *Ho Lou-daa manhua*, and the resulting publicity made Yuan an instant celebrity. He was very productive during this period; his works were first published in newspapers and later republished together as collections in *manhua* booklets. His portfolio expanded and Yuan became a well-known *manhua* artist. His *manhua* titles created between 1938 and 1941 were unfortunately short-lived due to the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong (1941–45).

Yuan resided in Guangzhou during the Japanese occupation period, but returned to Hong Kong at the end of the War. The reputation that he had established before the war endured, and some of his Guangzhou-published titles before the war, including *Lau Je* 柳姐 (*Miss Lau*), *Saa-chan Chiu* 沙塵起 (*Arrogant Chiu*) and *Sai-lou Cheung* 細路祥 (*Kiddy Cheung*), were reprinted in syndicate in Hong Kong on his return. He resumed submitting comic strips to newspapers in Hong Kong for publication in 1946. Yuan created a legend for himself at a young age; he had created numerous *manhua* characters through his comic strips by the age of 23 in 1945. In his memoir, he recalls his friends at work giving him the nickname Sai-lou 細路, which means kid or child in Cantonese, because of his age (Hong Kong Arts Centre 1996).

With this background, I have illustrated the relationship that existed between Mainland China and Hong Kong in the first half of twentieth century in terms of southern-style Chinese *manhua*. By borrowing the term *Sai-lou*, as Yuan did for his *manhua* title, I will argue in this article that this Cantonese term reflects the core values of Hongkongers throughout the interpretations of different stages of history in the transmedia context. The term *Sai-lou* represents a key sector of Hong Kong's demographic in the 1961 census and the maturation of a group of children under age 14 that would shape Hong Kong's future. In the next section, I review how Yuan's *manhua* title, *Sai-lou Cheung*, and the 1950 film based on the comic constructed the ideological values of Hongkongers through depictions of its child character, Sai-lou Cheung.

FROM PAPER TO SILVER SCREEN: SOCIALIZING THE FIRST GENERATION OF SAI-LOU

In Yuan's memoir, the *manhua* artist who was born in 1922 in Hong Kong does not explain whether he modelled his famous character, Sai-lou Cheung, on himself, but he does confirm that his friends nicknamed him Sai-lou during the 1930s when he was active in the *manhua* creation scene. The title first appeared in various Guangzhou-based daily newspapers around 1939, was later reprinted in various collections, and Yuan resumed his work with new creations in post-war Hong Kong. Inspired by southern-style Chinese *manhua*, Yuan was dedicated in his work to realistically reflecting the social milieu in Guangzhou at the time, and he used colloquial Cantonese Chinese to tell stories (Hong Kong Arts Centre 1996).

His four-panel comic strip in vertical format, approximately 5cm wide by 20cm high, was published as a serial with its main character, Sai-lou Cheung, a 9- or 10-year-old boy, and So-mui 蘇妹, a supporting character and Cheung's young female friend of a similar age. Cheung's parents do not appear in the *manhua*, and depictions of adults are often the little boy's competitors or enemies. Although the two main characters are children, both are portrayed as joining the workforce rather than schooling, which was common in post-war Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Sai-lou Cheung had a short haircut, dressed in Chinese costume, and his readers considered him as a 'young adult' who was trying to imitate grown-ups given that he needed to support himself financially. However, due to his immaturity, the stories that unfolded through his interactions with his friend So-mui focused on their attempts to understand the practices and logics of the real world while also portraying Sai-lou's imaginary world.

Yuan used sarcasm to plot the life of his down-to-earth young character who he endowed with values of honest living and inventiveness that helped Sai-lou to tackle everyday difficulties. For example, in the reprinted volume of this 1947 *manhua* title, four-panel strips – numbers 41–43 – reveal another slice of Sai-lou Cheung's life. The plot revolves around Sai-lou Cheung's search for employment. After failing as a shoeshine boy due to the harsh competition in the street from adults, Cheung visits So-mui to seek her advice on making a living. As Cheung is a smart survivor, at the end of the conversation, he figured out that he could develop a career in the newspaper publishing industry. Making his vision a reality, the drawings show him entering a newspaper publisher and exiting with a stack of newspaper to sell in the street. With this new work opportunity, he reports back to So-mui, happy even if he is just a newspaper boy. This section of the story showcases Sai-lou Cheung's positive attitude – he does not see himself as a kid and fully understands his financial needs. The post-war era of the 1950s was not an easy time for underage children in Hong Kong. Many of them, like Cheung, had to work for their own survival or for their family's survival. Yuan's *Sai-lou Cheung* can be construed as a record of quotidian life of the average Hongkongers during this period (Figure 1).

Studies on Yuan's comics works are rare, and the Hong Kong Arts Centre held the sole retrospective exhibition, *Farewell 'Kiddy Cheung': A Tribute to the Hong Kong Cartoonist Yuan Po Wan (1922–1995)*, in 1996, about a year after his death. A short essay written by a reader and published in the exhibition's catalogue recalls how the comic strip quips government corruption in the 1930s and in the 1940s in a humorous and light-hearted way. This reader testifies that the *manhua* was very popular among both children and adults in southern China and Hong Kong during this period (Hong Kong Arts Centre 1996).



Figure 1: Sai-lou Cheung 細路祥 (Kiddy Cheung), four-panel comic strip in vertical format, approximately 5 cm wide by 20 cm high. Art/story: Yuan Bouwan. Date: late 1930s.

Sai-lou Cheung was one of the popular *manhua* characters in Hong Kong during the late 1930s, and the titles that Yuan created at the peak of his career (and his fame) continued in the post-war period. The *manhua* was adapted into a film with the same title, *Sai-lou Cheung 細路祥* (*The Kid or My Son A-Chang*, in English). Director Feng Feng's 馮峰 film was released in late May 1950 and starring 9-year-old Bruce Lee in the lead role (Figure 2). Drawn from the original *manhua*'s storyline, this film adaptation expanded on the portrayal of Sai-lou Cheung's life, and the plot includes his living with a parental adult, Uncle Ho, who was played by Yee Chau-sui 依秋水. Together with his uncle and three younger cousins, the family of five struggles to make ends meet in the city in the post-war period. Uncle Ho tries hard to keep all four children in school, but as the eldest child in household, Cheung feels obligated to contribute financially to the family. On the brink of quitting school, Cheung is tempted by easy-money opportunities offered by gangsters



Figure 2: Feng Feng 馮峰 (dir.), Sai-lou Cheung 細路祥 (The Kid or My Son A-Chang, in English), starring 9-year-old Bruce Lee in the lead role, 1950.

and their seemingly superior bullying lifestyle. Cheung runs away from home and returns with cash for his morally upright uncle who refuses to accept the money, disapproves of the young man's criminal activities and preaches the values of honest living.

There was a consensus among filmmakers and others in the industry during this period that popular movies should not just amuse and distract but also strike a balance between entertainment and social critique (Fu 2008). Film scholar Paul Willemen (1986) states that the 1950s Hong Kong Cantonese melodrama presented 'both perspicacity and critical courage in the sense that they try to develop ways of understanding how cultural practices and products actually function within social formations' (1986: 196). This is reflected in this film with Uncle Ho's lecturing of Cheung on the core moral values of honest living, which also promulgates the strong societal criticism of gangster's behaviour during the 1950s. Cheung was touched by his uncle's speech and decided to follow him home to the *hoenghaa* 鄉下 (could be translated as 'hometown') in the film's happy ending. The final scene shows Uncle Ho and Cheung walking along a railway track in the countryside, but the location of the *hoenghaa* is unclear. It could refer to a rural area of Hong Kong from which many urban dwellers emigrated. For newcomers to Hong Kong, *hoenghaa* could signify their hometowns in Mainland China, leading one to assume that these migrants did not consider the colony as their permanent home (Law 2018).

I would like to argue that both the transmission of traditional Chinese values and the concept of *hoenghaa* are key in the formation of the ideological values of the Hong Kong people during this period. As Law (2018) points out, the first wave of post-war local consciousness and local identity hardly existed because Chinese people living in the colony were considered Chinese nationals. Their traditional Chinese values shaped Hong Kong society at the time, with older generations eager to pass on their knowledge and traditions to the young generation. The colonial government was not suppressing early Hong Kong-born community leaders' maintenance of their Chinese identity and cultural values in quotidian life while incorporating British-style indirect rule in daily life. Yuan's post-war *manhua*, through its print and film versions, acted as a socialization tool for transmitting and upholding traditional Chinese values between generations (Wong 2017). I assert that the film is about *Dai-yann* 大人 (adults) coaching Sai-lou in general about the value of honest work and hardship in post-war Hong Kong where opportunities were available for locals and new arrivals who were willing to work hard for their future. In the takeoff stage of the colony's economic growth that followed from 1953 to 1971 (Nyaw 1997), the values of instrumentalism helped Hong Kong to progress from being absolutely poor in terms of material life to a relatively adequate economy within a 20-year period (Lui 1992).

FROM HONG KONG TO CHINA: CONFUSING THE NEW SAI-LOU GENERATION

After Yuan's *manhua* was adapted into a film in the 1950s, this talented artist turned to other creative endeavours, including acting and writing. His interest in *manhua* faded, along with the fame that he had received for his pre-war work. Although he resumed creating *manhua* between 1957 and 1963 (Hong Kong Arts Centre 1996), Yuan was never able to regain the popularity that he had earned in the late 1930s and 1940s. Audiences forgot about Sai-lou Cheung, and the iconic character from *manhua* and film was unknown to later generations. The exception was the role of Bruce Lee in the film version; Lee later became a famous actor who initiated the global fad of the Kung Fu fighting film genre in the 1970s. Lee's fame, though, was short-lived as the legendary star died in 1973 at the age of 32. Yuan worked in the broadcasting industry and at various publication venues from the mid-1970s until he retired in the early 1990s. He died in 1995, having never regained his pre-war glory.

The Hong Kong of the 1970s was entering full industrialization – the colony was modernizing and the economy was developing rapidly. The crude birth rate steadily declined during the 1960s as a result of these processes, similar to the circumstances in the West (Chan 1976). Hong Kong quickly became a metropolitan city, known for its high-rises, consumerism and materialism that developed at a full speed throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Economist Mee-kau Nyaw (1997) views the 1980s as Hong Kong's industrial transformation stage with the expansion of the service industry, especially financial and business fields, and the decline of the manufacturing sector with jobs shifting to Mainland China. For example, the advertising industry grew to world-class status, and the film industry prospered in the 1980s, a zenith that lasted until 1997. Hong Kong continued to upgrade its public infrastructure as it increased its economic and trade ties with China.

As the 1997 handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty from Britain to China approached, there was increasing interest from Hong Kong residents in their



Figure 3: Fruit Chan (dir.), Sai-lou Cheung 細路祥 (Little Cheung), 1999.

local culture and vernacular history, observed cultural studies scholar Ackbar Abbas (1997). Unlike their parents' generation, the baby-boomers who were born or resided in Hong Kong from an early age in the 1950s and 1960s had little knowledge of Mainland China. Although many of them did not identify with China, especially given its stereotypic image as backwards and crude, they also did not see themselves as British. Eight years before the 1997 handover, there was an eruption of resistance expressed in the rethinking of Hong Kong's identity after the Tiananmen Square Massacre on 4 June 1989, and the rise of the second and third waves of local consciousness in the colony. Law (2018) describes these waves as 'proudly affirming the hybrid nature of Hong Kong culture, to self-affirming the urban characteristics of Hong Kong culture and the lens of "marginal", and to applauding the resistance and subversive potential' (2018: 26). Within the British government narrative, Hong Kong people believed that the colony's economic success was a miracle, ushered in by the British who brought the rule of law, urban infrastructure and democratic systems that also allowed for individual freedom in Hong Kong.

A post-1997 quest for Hong Kong's identity was the inspiration for the film director Fruit Chan's 1999 new *Sai-lou Cheung* 細路祥 (*Little Cheung*), which carried the same title of the 1950 film *Sai-lou Cheung* 細路祥 (*The Kid or My Son A-Chang*, in English). This film is the final instalment in Chan's *The 1997 Trilogy* film series, which includes *香港製造* (*Made in Hong Kong*) (1997) and

去年煙花特別多 (*The Longest Summer*) (1998). Based on the everyday life of a working-class Hong Kong family, Chan's *Little Cheung* captured the attitudes of the local population shortly before and after the 1997 handover, which was consistent with his two other films in the trilogy (Figure 3). Based on media interviews with the director, he has never explained why he titled the film *Sai-lou Cheung* in Chinese, or why he never acknowledged either Yuan's late 1930s *manhua* or Feng's 1950 film. It seems that Chan's new *Little Cheung* film in 1999 only drew from the same title, and the key link is the 9-year-old lead character nicknamed Sai-lou Cheung.

However, the director's background may provide clues to the feeble connection between the 1950 *The Kid* film and Chan's 1999 version. Born in Mainland China in 1959, Chan moved to Hong Kong with his parents at age 10. Yuan's *manhua* was no longer popular or well circulated in the 1970s during the director's adolescence. He was too young to view Feng's 1950 version in the theatre himself. Esther Cheung (2009) in her book, *Fruit Chan's Made in Hong Kong*, states that *Little Cheung* was drawn from Chan's personal experience and is an autobiographical reference to his adolescence living in government public housing. Like the other two films in his 1997 Handover Trilogy series, Cheung sees the 1999 film as Chan's attempt 'to participate in defining the meaning of Hong Kong's identity and cultural space at a changing moment' (2009: 7), and we can find evidence of this intention in the film.

In the movie's opening scene, the lead character, Sai-lou Cheung, explains that his grandmother nicknamed him in honour of her recently departed former lover, Cheung-gor 祥哥 or Brother Cheung, who was a legendary Cantonese opera singer called Sun-ma Sze-tsang 新馬師曾 (real name Tang Wing-cheung). To record the changing moment of the historic 1997 handover, as a part of the film, Chan embedded news clips on Brother Cheung's passing as a reference to the infighting between his widow and children over his inheritance – a news story that earned major media coverage during the same period as the colony's handover to China. When compared to people who resided in Hong Kong in the 1950s, cultural studies critic Wing-sang Law (2018) comments that Hongkongers became 'economic animals' (2018: 14) and 'urban economic animals' (2018: 24) in 1997, a situation that echoes the Brother Cheung family's inheritance dispute case. As the story unfolds through the eyes of Little Cheung, monetary and economic values remain of utmost concern to this young kid living on Temple Street, a district known as for its grassroots community. This is hardly a surprise since almost every adult character in the film, from Cheung's parents to their Filipina maid, is constantly seeking better opportunities to make money and expressing through these actions the societal desire for financial wealth. Film scholar Woei Lien Chong (2001) comments that the movie's plot is emblematic of the rotting of Hong Kong society's Confucian value system. Here, I argue that the director is not only trying to interpret the various meanings of Hong Kong's identity and in doing so project the changing cultural space, but also highlighting a clear core value that the adult's world is showing to the young generation, the foremost of which is that money is the most important thing in life.

What I attempted to articulate here is the change in Hongkongers' moral values during the post-war period when Yuan's *manhua* was popular to the post-handover era when Chan directed *Little Cheung*. Assertions of values of honest living that resonated through the *manhua* and the earlier film disappeared from the mass media as the 1970s approached, to be replaced by reassurances of smartness and pride in being urban, economically savvy people.

Such changes are expected as Law (2018) commented that ‘the native culture of Hong Kong was nothing more than the habits and customs of the ordinary men; such folk customs would inevitably be wiped out in the process of modernization’ (2018: 15). Chan’s movie testified to the changes, but it was not intended to critique on such values. Cheung (2009) views that the issues of social and cultural marginality of Chan’s film, such as in *Little Cheung*, offer the audience ‘alternative perspective of understanding Hong Kong’s forgotten history through images of otherness’ (2009: 7).

Throughout the film, the director brilliantly references the historical moment of Hong Kong’s return to Mainland China, a period when Hong Kong people were uncertain about how to deal with China in the future when they could no longer recognize their parents’ *heonghaa* and *jo-guo* 祖國 (hometown and motherland). In her critique of the film, Wendy Gan (2010) comments that *Little Cheung* is the film that prompts viewers to start to envisage Hong Kong and China as alike but dissimilar, connected but unconnected as well as presenting a new self-awareness of Hong Kong identity. Chan’s insertion of news footage of the handover makes his trilogy films worth studying from the viewpoints of all of the Sai-lous in Hong Kong, who are its future. At the end of *Little Cheung*, the mood changes with several sad events – the death of Sai-lou Cheung’s grandmother and the departures of his little friend Fan, the daughter of illegal Chinese immigrants, and the family’s Filipina maid, all which Chong (2001) views as symbolizing the end of his carefree adolescent days in easy-going British colonial Hong Kong. In the next section, I will inquire on the reappearance of the term *Sai-lou* in the public realm in China’s Hong Kong and how it reflects the new values of the generation that was born in the 1990s and onwards.

BEING CHINA’S HONG KONG: THE DISSENTING GENERATION’S SAI-LOU

Easygoing British colonial Hong Kong slowly began to wither after 1 July 1997, transforming into the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under the rule of the PRC. China–Hong Kong incidents increased in the post-handover years, testifying to the alike but dissimilar analogy used in the previous section. A major event of social dissent was inevitable given that Hong Kong already had a reputation as a ‘City of Protests’ in the postcolonial era (Clarke 2017). Wing-sang Law (2018) remarks that China’s resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong was a political, but not cultural or ideological, success. One of the key reasons for this failure was the Hong Kong people’s strong feeling of helplessness when the British and China negotiated Hong Kong’s future in the 1980s without acknowledging the rights of the Hong Kong people. It is also because of the marginalization of the role and the significance of Hong Kong within the broader PRC since 1997. When the massive student-led civil sit-in street protest launched, various social, cultural and political agitations finally broke out; the 79-day UM lasted from 28 September to 15 December 2014. In this section, I will use protest art artefacts and the UM’s development to delve into the reasons why the term *Sai-lou* reappeared in the public realm almost twenty years after the release of Chan’s 1999 movie, *Little Cheung*.

The UM failed to elicit a promise from the government and ended in social justice deadlocks and worsening direct and indirect authoritarian rule through the puppet HKSAR government. Nevertheless, the UM became one of the legacies of the global mass civil dissent movement of the 2010s; art and

https://hk.news.appledaily.com/local/realtime/article/20141024/53056100

即時新聞 焦點 北美 要聞 突發 娛樂 兩岸 國際 財經 果籽 體育
賽馬 影片推介 壹週刊 飲食男女 Ketchuper

即時新聞 2014年10月24 請選擇

【短片】【和平佔中】岑敖暉KO政府全靠數碼暴龍

讚 0 分享



鍾耀華：每一輯《數碼暴龍》都有被選中嘅細路同啲數碼暴龍去打大佬。(互聯網)

建立時間 (HKT): 1024 06:00

AA

Figure 4: 'Lester Shum "KO" government, thanks to Digimon' (Apple Daily 2014).

installation works once fixed to the site have generated significant worldwide media attention (i.e. BBC News 2014a; BBC News 2014b; Kaiman 2014; Lau 2014; CNN World 2014). It has also seduced academics from various disciplines who have been publishing articles in scholarly journals since November 2014.

Patsiaouras et al. (2018) offer a systematic examination of the empirical materials used in the UM's creative dissent objects and protest activities. The authors utilized the arts marketing theory, which provides us with insights from a cross-disciplinary perspective on viewing the interrelationship between ephemeral protest and social, historical and cultural forces. They pointed out that 'Hong Kong protesters created protest art which distinguished their values and political beliefs' (2018: 84), where they find artwork depicted at



Figure 5: Book cover, *I Am Not a Kid*, written by Joshua Wong. Publisher: White Paper Publishing. Date: September 2015. (Author's own photograph.)

the sites referencing various inspirations including both local and non-local, Asian and non-Asian comics characters and celebrities. Offering an analysis of the uses of American and Japanese superhero figures in the 2013's Defend Snowden rally, Dan Garrett (2014), who teaches in Hong Kong, commented that such an adaptation is demonstrating 'Hong Kong's struggle for democracy, human rights, social justice, and in the rejection of mainland communist values and identity' (2014: 112).

Similarly, in the UM, images of American superheroes and Japanese anime characters, such as Spiderman, Batman and Captain American, or from Japanese anime, like *Pokémon*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Doraemon* and *Digimon*, could be spotted at the protest sites, which is a reflection of the political values and ideological influences that the dissenting generation responded to and adopted. To the new generation of Sai-lous behind this social movement,

數碼暴龍 (*Digimon: Digital Monsters*), a Japanese anime TV series that was dubbed in Cantonese and aired in Hong Kong during their early school years in the 2000s, is one of their shared memories and experiences. One of the UM leaders at the time, Lester Shum, borrowed a line from the aforementioned Japanese anime in a public talk with senior government officials on 21 October 2014. The media quoted Shum, a university student, as saying: ‘我哋係被時代選中嘅細路’ (‘We are the kids chosen by the times’), which is from *Digimon: Digital Monsters* (Apple Daily 2014; Figure 4). The term *Sai-lou* and *Digimon* evoked immediate identification of the UM peers.

I assert that in his use of the term, Shum is not just referring to his contemporaries as a group of children, but rather subconsciously distinguishing their core values and political beliefs from the adults. They are being chosen to defend the world and uphold the righteousness of the universe. In each episode, they encounter different missions that require them to save the world and fight together with the Digimon against evil. Like any communication media, Japanese anime also embeds ideological functions. In this case, this anime is setting the agenda for its young audience, suggesting the core values to defend the world from evil and encouraging its viewers to believe that they are the chosen ones.

As many scholars observed and acknowledged, the UM is the rethinking of Hong Kong’s cultural identity, political position, as well as its relationship with China, especially among millennials – the dissenting generation. It is a shift among the younger generation from a ‘powerless and passive reminiscent mood to the determination to safeguard the city’s cultural and historical memories’ (Law 2018: 29). Some regard themselves as radical localist champions who use the cultural differences between Hong Kong and Mainland China as a tactic to defend the local cultural identity as well as political autonomy and democracy promised under the principle of ‘one country, two systems’. I argue that those positions formed the new core values of the dissenting generation, or what I refer to as a new generation of *Sai-lou*, even though they are practically grown-ups of 18 years or older. The term became their label, later in early 2015, a book in Chinese of UM participants’ published interviews, *被時代選中的我們 (We Were Chosen by the Times)*, written by People under the Umbrella, and in mid-2015 book, *我不是細路 (I Am Not a Kid)* by Joshua Wong, the most prominent UM student leader, further registered the label of *Sai-lou* for this new generation of Hongkongers (Figure 5).

Viewing Japanese anime, such as *Digimon: Digital Monsters*, is a collective memory for this young generation who grew up in Hong Kong in the 2000s. When compared to the generation that grew up in the 1950s reading Yuan’s *Sai-lou Cheung manhua* and watching the earlier film, the UM generation is being educated and socialized in a very different way. Many watched Japanese anime, which was their main companion after school as well as a popular pastime activity. The post-war generation honoured an honest living for building a lawful society. It is the universal values of democracy, social justice and human rights that inspire the post-1997 generation. The in-between generations of the 1970s and 1980s grew up in a social environment when the Confucian value system was deteriorating, but they enjoyed individual freedoms and experienced democracy along with the economic success. As many scholars have asserted, Hong Kong is a very adaptable migrant society and its culture and identity are constantly evolving to meet the practical needs of its social environment (Law 2018). However, this adaptive characteristic faced change when it was passed onto the UM generation in the 2010s.

Ackbar Abbas (1997) commented that the 1989 pro-China democracy movement 'was a rare moment when economic self-interest could so easily misrecognize itself as political idealism' (1997: 5). The 2014 UM was a genuine cry of political idealism by a new generation of Hongkongers, especially the young generation born during the 1990s and later who have little or no experience living under British rule with economic self-interest. They are not, though, like their parents' generation who grew up during the colonial period when Hong Kong was a 'collaborative colonial' – the general public was allowed to exercise their cultural customs, nurture the local identity and even participate in patriotic pro-Chinese national political activities as long as those activities did not threaten British rule (Law 2017). After 1997, Hongkongers are experiencing the disappearance of cultural identity and individual freedom in China's ongoing efforts to assert political control, especially as the HKSAR enters its second decade under communist China. The collaborative colonial city of the past needs to redefine itself to reflect its new circumstance, and this is being done from the perspective of the young generation who are transforming it with expressions of resistance in both political and cultural terms as Law (2017) commented.

Law (2017) observes that young Hongkongers are increasingly interested in halting the demolition of old neighbourhoods, the disappearance of local communities, and the decreasing choices available in everyday life. With the influx of Mainlanders competing for resources with locals of all social classes and the poor administration of the pro-Beijing government, it is expected that Hongkongers feel frustrated and have doubts about whether they can still call Hong Kong their home. This UM generation does not share the older generation's positive views of Hong Kong as a city of opportunities. The former does not identify with the old 獅子山精神 ('Lion Rock Spirit'), a term originating from the theme song of a 1970s TV programme produced by Radio Television of Hong Kong, a government-owned broadcast station, symbolizing Hongkongers' shared values of solidarity and perseverance. Instead, they created the new Lion Rock Spirit from the 2014 UM period, embodied by a gigantic yellow banner with its message painted in black – 我要真普選 ('I want genuine universal suffrage') – that once hung on Lion Rock Hill, a mountain with a lion's head-shaped rock that can be viewed from the west side of the city. This is their new political ideological value of democracy.

Law (2018) explains that the UM generation, who are experiencing a lack of social mobility and limited career opportunities, are showing their pride by turning their attention to saving localness – finding ways to resist the new political and economic order in their own terms. Law is optimistic about the future of Hong Kong and trusts that the city is 'now in the process of developing a stronger sense of a united civic/political community to safeguard itself from being recolonized again' (2018: 32). However, I argue, this is yet to be determined, and will hinge on the evolution of political developments in China and its actions in Hong Kong through the puppet HKSAR government.

CLOSING REMARKS

Across the world, children are often regarded as the future of a society. In this article, I investigate the ideological values of Sai-lou as reflected through the generations in the transmedia context at different historical stages of Hong Kong. For the baby-boomer generation, their parents passed on the value of an honest living, which the late 1930s *manhua* and the 1950 *manhua*-adapted film both portrayed. Along with the modernization progress and based on

their paternalistic reference, the next generation of Sai-lou were being trained as economic animals, as characterized in the 1999 film. As the society continued to flourish, the millennial UM generation – who grew up in the 2000s watching Japanese anime television with plotlines of saving-the-world-from-evil – were indirectly influenced, drawing them towards the value of righteousness and the political ideal of democracy for their birthplace, Hong Kong. If its future is dependent on the UM generation, it is difficult for all Hongkongers to stay optimistic as they witness daily social injustices and increasing government deterioration. Future projections are hard to make given the evolving political and social developments, but with increasing political censorship and the tightening of the so-called ‘red line’ from Beijing, it is becoming more challenging for voices of dissent to be heard.

This reality is evident in the denial of the candidacy of Agnes Chow for the 2018 Legislative Council byelection. A member of Demosistō, a small pro-democracy political party that was formed in the wake of the UM and mainly by the UM generation, the election office accused Chow of non-compliance with the relevant electoral laws upholding the Basic Law because of her political position of advocating ‘self-determination’. Her disqualification is also the disqualification of her party from elections. In response, the party has had to change tactics to focus their efforts on international lobbying and strengthening civil society in Hong Kong. Such recent developments are resulting in an unfavourable environment for the next Sai-lou generation, which is also threatened by the Hong Kong government’s cultural thinning strategy that affects language, education and immigration, the latter permitting more Mainlanders to reside in Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s core values will continue to evolve as the next Sai-lou generation matures, and only time will reveal the full extent of Mainland China’s influence in Hong Kong in the next wave of local identity consciousness.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Wendy S. Wong is a full professor in the Department of Design at York University, Toronto, Canada. She has established an international reputation as an expert in Chinese graphic design history and Chinese comic art history. She is the author of *Hong Kong Comics: A History of Manhua*, published by Princeton Architectural Press (2002). In 2009 and 2010, she was a visiting research fellow at the Department of Design History, Royal College of Art, and she served as a scholar-in-residence at the Kyoto International Manga Museum. She is a contributor to the *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Design* (2015), and acts as a regional editor of the Greater China region for Bloomsbury Publishing's *Encyclopedia of East Asian Design* (2020). Her latest book, *The Disappearance of Hong Kong in Comics, Advertising and Graphic Design*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan (2018).

Contact: Department of Design, Rm 4008 Victor Phillip Dahdaleh Bldg, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON, M3J 1P3, Canada.

E-mail: wsywong@yorku.ca

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8420-5008>

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