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From Flexible Citizenship to “I am Hongkonger”:  
Hongkonger diasporas and long-distance nationalism

From the start of the unprecedented city-wide anti-extradition protests to Beijing’s imposition of the draconian National Security Law, the years 2019 and 2020 saw a series of events that would profoundly impact the future for the people of Hong Kong. Fear over China’s eradication of Hong Kong’s rule of law, democracy, and human rights protections prompted many Hongkongers to consider emigration, catalyzing the formation of a global Hong Kong diaspora. This paper evaluates the applicability of different theories of diaspora on the situation of Hong Kong and explores the implications of the 2019-20 democratic protests on the identity of overseas Hongkongers. Existing theories of diaspora focus on 1) the diasporas’ connection to the homeland and 2) the potential of diasporic communities to evade the nationalist agenda of nation-states. I argue that the two models fail to describe the emerging Hongkonger diasporas that have mutated in form and substance due to the “stateless nationalism” at home (Fong, 2019). I propose a slight modification to the Safranian formulation of diaspora, placing an emphasis on the imagined community rather than the homeland. The nation, made *imaginable* by specific narratives of mythico-history, create collective memories that facilitate a cohesive national and diasporic consciousness. The 2019 protests have provided fertile grounds for the invention and reinvention of myths that place Hongkongers at the center of their moral world, casting them as valiant rebels against China’s authoritarian oppression. I conclude by discussing the limitations of my theoretical approach and suggest directions for further ethnographic investigation.

## **The complex identities of Hongkonger diasporas**

Do Hongkongers constitute a distinct diasporic community? Anthias (1998) describes two ways scholars have used and advanced the concept of diaspora. The first is treating diaspora as a descriptive typological tool. Safran (1991) centers the concept of diaspora around the myth of homeland and return. He suggests six criteria for determining whether members of a transnational community qualifies as diasporic: 1) they have been dispersed from a specific original “center” to “peripheral” regions, 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland, 3) they are, to varying degrees, alienated and insulated from their host society, 4) they desire an eventual return to their original homeland, 5) they provide ongoing support for the homeland, and 6) their collective identities are based on some association to the Homeland. Cohen (1993) concurs with Safran’s approach but makes slight modifications to the list of criteria, highlighting the metaphoric, rather than territorial, quality of the homeland. He categorizes diasporas into five major forms - victim, labor, trade, imperial, cultural -, each entailing a different reason for departing the original homeland. In sum, diasporas can be defined and described by delineating the communities’ relationship with an origin homeland on various dimensions.

The theoretical emphasis on the homeland has some utility for examining and describing the overseas Hongkonger community. Ethnographic evidence shows that overseas Hongkongers do identify Hong Kong as the original homeland, both in a physical and metaphoric sense. For instance, Tang (2014) finds that first-generation and second-generation Hong Kong Americans consider Hong Kong as their point of origin. This is evident in the deictic expressions of her interviewees, who consistently describe traveling to Hong Kong as “going back to Hong Kong” (返香港 faan1 heong1 gong2) (97). The use of *back* conveys that their travel is relative to a spatio-temporal reference point. Their going to Hong Kong implies returning to the point of origin.

Interestingly, this word choice was also employed by second-generation Hong Kong Americans who were born and/or raised in the U.S.. It shows that individuals do not need to have lived in or experienced the original homeland to develop an association with it. The homeland, conceived not as a literal place but as an imagined and constructed entity, supplies a sense of positioning in the world.

However, the homeland does not dominate Hongkongers' self-conceptualization of their identities. Tang's ethnography reveals a more complex understanding of identity characterized by multiplicity, fluidity, and contingency that could not be adequately captured by the binary construction of homeland and dispersal. As one informant describes: "I am Chinese American in the U.S. because I already have a U.S. passport...When I go back to Hong Kong, I am a Hong Kong person. I hold a permanent HKID (Hong Kong Permanent [resident] Identity Card)" (Tang, 2014: 99). Although this informant continued to identify himself as a "Hong Kong boy," his identity is not inexorably bound within the spatial boundaries of Hong Kong, such that he identifies himself as Chinese American in a way that Tambiah (2000) calls "dual territoriality" or "dual location" (170). Other informants highlight their identity's hybridity, conceiving themselves not as distinctly American, Chinese, or Hongkonger, but as "Hong Kong Chinese American." Overseas Hongkongers perceive the need to use the hyphenated nationality instead of identifying solely with their place of origin. One informant confides that

I am culturally Hong Kong American. I mean, I think the culture that drives me most is my parents' who grew up in Hong Kong. I don't ever feel American. Just cause I don't fit the American picture, you know what I mean? I feel like the identity of an American is very black and white cause instantly because of the way that I look I don't fit into American culture; people don't instinctively categorize me as American basically. (Tang, 2014: 101)

Instead of deepening their diasporic consciousness as different from host society as predicted by Safran, the perception of alienation and isolation encourages overseas Hongkongers to carve out

an alternate, non-mainstream space for their ‘American’ side of social being. Another informant highlights how social context influences her sense of self. As she explains,

On a day-to-day basis it's very much Chinese-American there's no doubt in that, especially in my area of work [accountancy]...But you know on a more, when I am dealing with my family it is very Hongkonger and that is to be expected to say that least... With friends it really depends on social setting you know? With Chinese friends it tends to be more Chinese, whereas with co-workers, other friends it tends to be more American. (Tang, 2014: 100)

Her identity is socially situated and constructed through interactions with perceptively different groups of people. The above narratives documented by Tang undermine the centrality of the bounded territoriality inherent in the nation-state paradigm in defining individuals’ sense of identity and selfhood. Reference to the homeland, territorial or symbolic, does not encapsulate the complexity and richness of the ways overseas Hongkongers’ self-concepts.

Tang’s findings were echoed by Lan (2012), who argues that class positioning and racialization experience in the larger U.S. society mediate how Hongkongers express their association with their homeland and differentiate themselves with mainland Chinese. The instrumental reference to the homeland demonstrates that overseas Hongkongers’ identities are embedded within particular social contexts. Their imagined relationship with their homeland is not a totalizing influence in the way they conceptualize their identities. In Clifford’s (1990) words, “transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland -- at least not to the degree that Safran implies” (306).

This directs us to the second approach, which views the concept of diaspora as a social condition and societal process rather than a denotation of group and intergroup relationships. Instead of identifying essential features of diasporas, Clifford (1990) suggests that we should focus on the concept’s borders by juxtaposing diasporas with other analytic concepts. Specifically, he identifies diasporas as challenging the norms of nation-states and indigenous/autochthonous claims of people’s relationship to land (307). Since diasporas maintain loyalty and connections to

a homeland or a dispersed community located outside of a state's borders, they defy the national assimilationist and subject-making agendas to varying degrees. While Clifford acknowledges that diasporas could and do maintain important associations with the homeland, he argues that they also value cultivating and maintaining "homes away from home" (308). Being diasporic does not mean being fixated to their homelands located temporally in the past and spatially at a distance. Rather, it means living in the present and maintaining their communities in the host society's local environment through selective accommodation.

The subversive and transgressive potential of diasporas has been applied by many scholars to analyzing the Hongkonger diaspora. In the existing literature, Hongkongers' migration is primarily seen and narrated as defying the nation-state paradigm of citizenship. Ong's (1993) concept of flexible citizenship has been foundational to the understanding of contemporary transnational mobilities among ethnic Chinese. Having experienced modernity under British colonial rule, wealthy Hongkongers epitomized the notion of flexible citizenship. Their experience of modernity, conditioned by the British philosophies of the non-intervening state and maximum freedom in the marketplace, led to the belief that citizenship is not associated with a sense of obligation to society at large, but as an instrument to promote familial interests and economic gains (754). The logic of flexible accumulation further manifests in family biopolitics, in which the roles of husband, wife, son, and daughter are defined in relation to the promotion of the transnational family business. This neoliberal fashioning of the self thus eschews any ideological links to particular nation-states. In Ong's words, "diasporic Chinese family must be seen as discontinuous with the biopolitical agenda of the nation-state...Family biopolitics and the elasticity in pursuing wealth-making opportunities in diverse places continue, where possible, to escape state control" (756). The wealthy Hongkonger diaspora is thus a deterritorialized people who refuse to be rooted

in particular homelands, owing allegiance not to any political, cultural communities but to the transnational flow of capital.

Subsequent scholars have supplemented or resonated Ong's argument one way or another by viewing Hong Kong as an exemplar of postmodernity - flow, fluidity, fragmentation. For instance, Siu (1999) argues that Hongkongers have always avoided rigidly defined identities in order to navigate through the ambiguities of sovereignty in their city and in the world. [Overlapping identities of Hongkonger, Cantonese, Chinese, and global citizens] "The Hong Kong identity is attached to a territory without clear boundaries. It constitutes fluid layers of social meaning, economic interests, and political preferences and has grown global without losing its Chinese bearing" (100). Hongkongers retain their Chineseness not in the form of national allegiance but "highly localized in relation to the family" (Ong, 1993). Moreover, the refugee mentality in Hong Kong leads to an instrumental attitude towards the issue of nationality: "Passports are regarded mainly as travel and insurance documents; they are not endowed with much emotional significance such as national commitment and loyalty" (Wong, 1992: 930). Other scholars attempt to attribute Hong Kong's success as a global city to the people's flexibility and opportunistic disposition.

### **Are Hongkongers beyond nationalism?**

By these scholars' work, it is easy to conclude that Hongkongers have moved beyond the issue of ethnicity and nationalism and have fully embraced the so-called post-ethnic global landscape. This perspective, however, fails to take into account some Hongkongers' continual "'ethnic' solidarities and attachments to the symbols of national belonging and continuing investment, emotionally, economically, and culturally in the 'homeland'" (Anthias, 1998: 567). The 'ethnic' characteristics

of diasporic communities and their identity and cultural narratives, which I observe to be increasingly prominent following the 2019 protests, have not been given enough attention. This line of inquiry is particularly relevant in light of the recent global resurgence of ethnic revitalization and an emerging Hong Kong nationalism in recent years. There is clear evidence that Hong Kong's 'national' democratic struggle has garnered significant support from Hongkonger diasporic communities worldwide. Since the outbreak of the anti-extradition protests in June 2019, overseas Hongkongers have contributed to the protests through various political acts, such as raising funds, remitting money to support frontline protestors, organizing rallies in different countries, lobbying their national governments, and so on.

These overseas Hongkongers are heavily invested in the democratization and liberalization of their homeland, Hong Kong. Hong Kong students abroad in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, and other countries have created organizations specially dedicated to spreading awareness of Hong Kong's political situation (*How the Hong Kong Protests Affected Overseas Chinese and More*, 2019). Students and other temporary immigrants are not the only participants; some permanent migrants have also invested heavily in Hong Kong's democratic movement. The founder and director of the Hong Kong Democratic Council, a Washington-based nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to countering Hong Kong's erosion of freedom and democracy, is a naturalized U.S. citizen and has lived in the U.S. for more than thirty years (*US activist accused of breaching HK's security law says he will not back down*, 2020). Another organization of interest here is Stand with Hong Kong, an independent, grassroots, crowdfunded group of individuals "united in our love for our home" (*About Us*, n.d.). Since its formation, the group coordinated diasporic Hongkongers' transnational efforts in promoting global awareness of their democratic struggle, having sponsored and/or organized more than 50 rallies

across 12 countries. The emergence of such diasporic organizations that are dedicated to the homeland's political betterment calls for a re-examination of the Ongian and postmodern notion that overseas Hongkongers are isolated from the nation-state paradigm of politics.

Another noteworthy development is that the Hongkonger diaspora will include more members from the middle to lower economic class. Flexible citizenship's narrow focus on upper-class capitalists will become less applicable to people who emigrate out of fear of political persecution that is indiscriminate across all classes. This shifts the nature of the Hong Kong diaspora from what Cohen would characterize as a 'trade' diaspora toward a 'victim' diaspora. Western countries are proceeding to ease restrictions regarding Hongkongers' immigration. For instance, Canada has recently allowed work permits to be granted to Hong Kong residents who have graduated in a Canadian university within the last five years. The UK has also initiated a program that would allow holders of the British Nationals Overseas (BNO) passport, granted to Hong Kong residents born before the year of 1997, to apply for a visa allowing them to work and live in the UK and they will be eligible for citizenship after five years. This program is estimated to attract more than 300,000 people from Hong Kong to move to the UK (*Will UK Hong Kong Immigration Program Trigger an Exodus?*, 2021).

While class will continue to determine people's willingness and ability to leave Hong Kong, the emigre population will consist of a wider spectrum of economic class than under the old immigration regime, as prospective immigrants are not required to invest significant sums of money in exchange for residence. The lowered restrictions make the UK an attractive destination for Hongkongers who are not necessarily elites but who fear the erosion of freedoms back home. Instead of motivated by the need for capital accumulation, the emerging diasporas will be primarily motivated by ideological concerns.



In light of the waning relevance of flexible citizenship, the way forward to the inquiry of Hong Kong diasporas should not be solely a re-emphasis on the myth of homeland and return. In the above section, I have critiqued the deficiencies of using the concept of homeland to understand Hong Kong diasporic identities. Although the nationalist movement in Hong Kong could potentially reconfigure Hong Kong diasporas' relationship to the homeland, there are still theoretical problems about focusing on the homeland in defining and describing diasporas. The diaspora notion grounded on connection to the homeland often assumes primordiality, asserting the dominance of the fatherland in structuring and conditioning the diasporic experience and identity. The fixity of the linkage is insufficient for explaining the discontinuities in the expression and lived experiences of overseas Hongkongers before and after the 2019 protests. If the Hong Kong diasporas are about connections to a stably construed homeland, what explains the periods of high and low in their identifications with Hong Kong over time? What explains the sudden and sharp increase in the number and scale of overseas Hongkonger organizations in the second half of 2019? The disjunction points to a set of unexplored mediating factors between diasporic identity and connection to the homeland.

One important mediating factor is the construction of myths in the nationalist projects and its consequent manifestation in long-distance nationalism. I engage with Anthias (1998) call to formulate a theoretical conception of ethnicity that avoids primordiality in the notion of diaspora (570). Instead of taking the concept of homeland at face value, I propose a reinterpretation of the homeland as an extension of the imagined community. Doing so would help us better understand the uneasy relationship between a Chinese identity and a Hongkonger identity. In the past year, Chinese students studying abroad have clashed with Hong Kong students over the latter's support for Hong Kong's democratic movement (*How the Hong Kong protests affected overseas Chinese*

*and more*, December 2019). These conflictual encounters reveal a deep fission within the umbrella term, “Overseas Chinese.” The concept of homeland could not adequately resolve this contradiction, as it is more useful in describing diasporas who correspond to distinctive homelands rather than ones with contested boundaries. The concept of homeland assumes a natural, primordial tie with the people, which prevents us from seeing how it could be highly contested and negotiable. If overseas Hongkongers consider Hong Kong as their only homeland, what prevents overseas Chinese from saying that Hong Kong is merely a part of China? What substantiates overseas Hongkongers’ claim as different from Chinese diasporas?

Benedict Anderson’s conception of nations as imagined communities is useful for disambiguating the homeland and highlighting the boundaries of identities. By conceptualizing homelands as extensions of imagined communities, we can examine the process through which diasporic communities attain their distinct collective consciousness. This conceptualization is theoretically grounded on the premise that people and environment are but two sides of the same coin - the imagination of one entails the imagination of the other. Hence when Anderson (1983) describes printed materials make it possible “for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (52), he is describing imagined communities that are grounded and situated in concrete environmental and architectural settings. As he argues, “the nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson, 1983: 50; emphasis original). This formulation demarcates the imagined community in both human-centered and territorial ways, alluding to the importance of the homeland in how we visualize and mentally project the nation in our minds. The concept of imagined communities could also account for the territorial mobility that is characteristic of an

Ongian approach and leave room for possible shifts in homeland<sup>1</sup>, as the imagined community is grounded not on fixed territoriality per se but on a community of people. In sum, the homeland in the Safranian notion of diaspora could be refashioned as an aspect of the imagined community of diasporic peoples. The study of the Hongkonger diaspora should take seriously how the imagined community of Hongkongers is conceived and articulated.

This leads us to a promising line of research focusing on how Hongkongers' imagined communities are constructed. In his study of Zionism and other diasporas, Smith (1995) highlights how collective memories exert a stabilizing, cohesive influence on diasporic identities. Building upon his previous work of ethno-symbolism, Smith illustrates the importance of myth-creation in facilitating collective historical memories among diasporic communities. A relevant concept is Malkki's (1990) idea of mythico-history, which she uses to explain the historicized national consciousness of Hutu refugees from Burundi living in Tanzania. Placing the Hutus as the principal actors, the construction of a collective narrative of the refugees' past is also "essentially a construction of a 'national past,' of the past of the Hutu as a 'People,' and as a *'moral community'*" (Malkki, 1990: 34. Emphasis original). Historical narratives are thus crucial in the construction of a national subjectivity that binds the globally dispersed members of the same imagined community together.

In the following section, I shall outline some themes of Hong Kong's mythico-historical narrative by combining an autoethnographic approach with textual analysis. Having participated in Hong Kong's political activism, I have witnessed a growing national consciousness and have experienced nationalism in a personal, visceral way. My positionality as a participant in the formation of Hong Kong's nationalism endows me with an insider perspective for interpreting the

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<sup>1</sup> Some have proposed that to lobby other countries to lend Hongkongers land for replicating a overseas "new Hong Kong." See Gu (2020).

symbolisms involved. “All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others” (Rosaldo, 2009: 170). Being a participant myself allows me to evaluate and, in turn, mitigate the gap between *expression* (the ‘textual’ form of national myths) and *experience* (the emotional, moral contents embodied by the myths) of nationalism (Bruner, 1986). I do not purport that my interpretation and understanding of these myths be universal among all Hongkongers, and I hope to balance the potential deficiencies of my positioned interpretation by considering secondary sources and commentaries pertaining to the construction of Hong Kong’s national myths. It is also important to note that it remains an empirical question as to whether the themes described below represent a “standardized mythico-history” (Malkki, 1990). This matter is beyond the scope of this paper but should be investigated by further ethnographic studies.

### **Hong Kong’s mythico-historical narratives: resistance against authoritarianism**

Smith (1995) discusses several types of myths that have facilitated the maintenance of collective memories and cohesion of diasporas. Reflecting on the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian experience, Smith suggests that a myth of divine ‘chosenness’ has been central to their desire to return to their sacred homeland. Although he contends that “only within the monotheistic traditions can we find that exclusive and strong conception of chosenness,” I believe some secular traditions could also take on certain religious characteristics, possessing a degree of religiosity in the nature of the national myths’ construction and performance. Indeed, a central function of collective myths is to supply a sense of ‘chosenness’ by reconstituting the moral order of the world around a ‘chosen’ people (Malkki, 1990: 53). In mythico-historical narratives, the ‘chosen’ nation is construed as the main character navigating through a world structured in moral terms.

In Hong Kong's case, the sense of sacred 'chosenness' is primarily conjured up through the myth of valiant resistance. Writing about the use of symbolisms during the 2014 Umbrella Movement, Bosco (2016) notes how secular symbols can acquire a sacred quality:

Though the act of hanging a giant banner that says "I want universal suffrage" is a completely secular act, hanging it on the Lion Rock attempts to link the question of universal suffrage to the special and sacred quality of Hong Kong. Juxtaposing the banner (especially its enormous size) with the iconic mountain seeks to link the pro-democracy movement with Hong Kong history, with the struggle for a better life, and with the fondness for SAR and nostalgia for what made it special. Neither the banner nor the Lion Rock mountain are religious but the act of hanging the banner on the mountain sacralized the cause and the territory of Hong Kong. (as quoted in Lowe and Tsang (2018))

Initially conceived as a symbol of Hongkongers' tenacity in achieving Hong Kong's economic miracle (Mak, 2013), the 'Lion Rock Spirit' has been refashioned to symbolize the persistence of Hongkongers in their democratic struggle against an immensely powerful totalitarian regime, China. It appeals to a sense of nostalgia toward the economic hardships and successes under British colonial rule, exhibiting a genealogy of evolving collective memories about Hong Kong's colonial past.

As a result of the democratic movement, the original 'Lion Rock myth' has been imbued with ideological and moral significance, heroizing Hongkongers as the main protagonists in the fight between democracy and authoritarianism, between good and evil. On the night of 13 September 2019, some Hongkongers hiked up the iconic mountain and displayed an enormous banner demanding universal suffrage for elections. This display demonstrates Hongkongers' conviction in the ideological ideal of democracy. The return of the banner onto the Lion Rock in 2019 is an analogue to the myth of Sisyphus, an ancient Greek mythological figure punished by the gods to repeat the action of rolling a boulder uphill and letting it roll down. Despite the Umbrella Movement's failure in effecting genuine political reforms, Hongkongers rose to the occasion in 2019 again, ascending to the familiar peak of the Lion Rock again to showcase their

unrelenting faith.<sup>2</sup> The apparent ‘futility’ of Hongkongers’ democratic struggle against Beijing could be, in an existentialist reading, celebrated and recast as exemplifying their perseverance.

This mythical narrative is anchored on several historical reference points that relate to the juxtaposition between Hong Kong’s ‘good’ and China’s ‘bad.’ The year 1841 marked the start of British colonization and has been invoked by some as the start of Hong Kong’s contemporary history (Watershed Hong Kong, 2021). In this view, Hong Kong’s colonial status had shielded the island from much of the political turmoil happening from the Qing dynasty’s fall through the establishment of communist China. Colonial Hong Kong provided a safe haven for political and economic refugees who escaped from Chinese communism and brought with them their anti-communist sentiments. These contributed to an affective aversion toward Communist China in Hongkongers’ collective psyche (Mathews et al., 2007). In 1984, the British and Chinese governments issued the Sino-British Joint Declaration that paved the way to Hong Kong’s handover to China. Some interpret this as Britain’s betrayal of Hongkongers for handing the city over to an authoritarian regime. This was further validated in the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, in which Chinese leaders cracked down on students peacefully demonstrating for liberal and democratic reforms in China. The Tiananmen incident is believed to have revealed the barbaric, brutal nature of the Chinese Communist Party regime and should not be trusted to keep its promises. Therefore, although the Declaration promised the ways of life in Hong Kong - including the freedom of expression, human rights, and the rule of law - will remain unchanged for 50 years under the principle of One Country Two Systems, China has not honored this Declaration and eroded Hong Kong’s freedoms and the rule of law.

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the metaphor of ‘climbing the mountain’ is also featured in a popular protest slogan, “brothers climbing mountain: each in their own way” (兄弟爬山 各自努力), evoked to encourage people to use the methods they deem most suitable to attain the same goal.

This mythico-historical narrative is based on the view that Hong Kong has benefited from the British colonial legacies of freedom and the rule of law, which are currently being destroyed by Beijing's interference. Lowe and Tsang (2018) call this a "strategic essentialism" of Hong Kong's colonial past, as it entails a rediscovery of essential characteristics of the past to inform Hong Kong's present predicament and roadmap for the future. While I partly agree with the authors that this narrative exhibits "a collective memory and shared consciousness marred by a sense of loss and yearning for the glories of the past" (Lowe & Tsang, 2018: 558), I disagree with their conclusion that a sense of nostalgia toward British colonialism is "a vector of racism and intolerance toward Mainlanders in Hong Kong" (ibid. 568). While Lowe and Tsang's accusation presupposes a Han Chinese ethnic identity onto Hongkongers (568), I believe groups that possess a distinct collective memory of the past could be duly categorized as a different *ethnie*. For the most part, nostalgia does not necessarily represent a "selective amnesia" that entails a perverse affinity to Hongkongers' colonial master. Rather, an inquiry into and an appropriation of Hong Kong's colonial history in creating a mythico-historical narrative arch is an attempt to forge a sense of continuity, shared memory, and collective destiny of Hong Kong's imagined community (Smith, 1992: 25). And such an attempt inherently objectifies and essentializes history at least to some extent in order to organize chaotic historical events into a narratable sequence. It is a way to assert Hongkongers' subjectivity. That said, I believe the Hong Kong nationalist project would greatly benefit from a more open, balanced investigation into colonial history.

The song, *Glory to Hong Kong*, is the culmination and embodiment of Hong Kong's mythico-history. Created in September 2019 democratic protests, the composer wanted the song to boost morale and unite people when hopes were low and Hongkongers were exhausted. The song soon became popular among Hongkongers and was turned into a de facto protest anthem,

frequently sung in peaceful protests and gatherings. As the protests waged on in Hong Kong, it was not uncommon to see thousands of Hongkongers assembling in shopping malls or other public places to sing the song together. Not only was the singing of this song a display of solidarity among supporters of the protests, I would argue this act was also a secular analogue of religious gatherings that allowed people to make public their own faith and belief in one another and their common, despite it generally being more improvisational and less structured than strictly religious occasions. A closer look at the lyrics reveals the underlying mythical narrative structure. The anthem crystallizes the mythico-history of Hongkongers democratic struggle, from their suffering (“tears on our land”), to their determination to fight (“Now, to arms! For Freedom we fight with all might we strike with valor, wisdom both, we stride”), to Hong Kong’s eventual liberation (“liberate our Hong Kong”; “Revolution of our times”). Like the ‘Lion Rock myth’, in the lyrics, as much as they are victimized, Hongkongers are constructed as deviant freedom fighters who “would not be slaves again.” Despite the deep uncertainties and “dread that lies ahead,” Hongkongers will persevere in the face of “darkness” and the “mist.”

<p><i>We pledge: No more tears on our land In wrath, doubts dispell'd we make our stand Arise! Ye who would not be slaves again For Hong Kong, may Freedom reign</i></p> <p><i>Though deep is the dread that lies ahead Yet still with our faith on we tread Let blood rage afield! Our voice grows evermore For Hong Kong, may Glory reign</i></p>	<p><i>Stars may fade as darkness fills the air Through the mist a solitary trumpet flares Now, to arms! For Freedom we fight with all might we strike With valour, wisdom both, we stride</i></p> <p><i>Break now the dawn, liberate our Hong Kong In common breath: Revolution of our times May people reign, proud and free, now and evermore Glory be to thee Hong Kong</i></p>
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**Glory to Hong Kong, English version.** The English version roughly corresponds to the original Cantonese version sung by protestors in Hong Kong. Source: Google.

More significantly, the lyrics make explicit reference to “the people,” making members of the moral community ‘imaginable,’ using Anderson’s term. One of the most powerful lines I find



in the original Cantonese version is, “同行兒女 為正義 時代革命”, which directly translates as “we who march together, for justice, wage the Revolution of our times” (the corresponding line in the English version is, “In common breath: Revolution of our times”). This line conjures up the image of our fellow Hongkongers fighting alongside one another, sacrificing for the common cause of justice. As one participant in a mass sing-along put it, “I hope Glory to Hong Kong will become our national anthem instead (of the Chinese anthem) because it represents the voices of all Hongkongers. I finally understand why people from other countries cry, when singing their national anthem. I now understand how a place can belong to me. I feel love and honour for Hong Kong.” Another participant told the BBC after a rally, “To me, this is not just a way to express our identity, but a sort of resistance, People can feel the same sort of *pain* that connects them as Hong Kong people” (BBC News, 2019). The pain refers to not only the physical injuries suffered by the protestors due to police brutality, but also the collective trauma of *witnessing* our comrades’ suffering without being able to impact the status quo of systemic and bodily violence. The song reminds individual Hongkongers that they belong to a greater collectivity, empowering and supporting them through feelings of powerlessness and despair.

This protest anthem reaches far beyond Hong Kong’s borders and into the consciousness of Hong Kong diasporic communities. It serves as an emotional ‘glue’ for Hongkonger communities and a medium for enacting the mythico-historical script of resistance. Since its creation, the song has been posted and reposted on multiple social media platforms, accessible to anyone anywhere connected to the Internet. Video clips of Hong Kong Denise Ho, a renowned Hong Kong singer-activist, travelled to the United Kingdom for a concert in October 2019, where

she performed *Glory to Hong Kong* (Goomusic, 2019).<sup>3</sup> Before Ho started her vocal performance, however, she invited a pre-teen young boy to perform the violin instrumental version of the song. He introduced himself in fluent British English, which I infer as evidence of his being born and raised in Britain. He said, “I’m going to be playing the Hong Kong anthem, Glory to Hong Kong.” What surprised me was that after his performance, he led the crowd of Hongkong audience to chant the Cantonese protest slogan, “Free Hong Kong, Revolution Now” (光復香港 時代革命 gwong1 fuk3 heong1 gong2, si4 doi3 gaak3 ming6) a total of three times! The fact that a child of that young age already learned to voice support for the protests reveals the potential for Hong Kong’s national ethos to transmit intergenerationally in diasporic communities. The Hong Kong anthem, as well as political slogans, continue to act as common reference points for overseas Hongkongers to connect and feel connected as a community.

## **Conclusion**

In the previous section, I have summarized the mythico-historical narrative that emerged out of Hong Kong political struggle against China’s tightening grip. In this narrative construction, Hongkongers are construed as valiant, deviant rebels who resist the encroachment of China’s authoritarianism against the odds. More importantly, they are imagined as a collectivity, bound by their shared historical memories and thus a common destiny in the future. This sense of temporal, generational continuity provides the emotional and cognitive bases for a distinct Hongkonger identity. Using *Glory to Hong Kong* as a case study, I have also shown that this mythico-historical narrative can be contained, transmitted, and performed through different mediums of expression.

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<sup>3</sup> Ho’s arrival was met with a small group of pro-Beijing demonstrators, who shouted anti-Hong Kong protest slogans and threw eggs. This is yet another piece of evidence marking the increasing rift between overseas Chinese and overseas Hongkongers.

What does this mythico-history have to do with Hong Kong diasporas? I have argued above that the new developments in Hong Kong warrant a revision in how we approach the study of Hong Kong diasporas. With its emphasis on the individual and the family, the longstanding notion of flexible citizenship no longer captures Hongkongers' emerging sense of national collective selfhood. The concept of the homeland also has its limitations in charting the boundaries between the Chinese and Hongkonger diasporas, which has become increasingly evident in clashes between the two groups in overseas protests. This paper proposes a third way to account for both the fluidity of identities and their 'primordial' appearance: to examine the role of mythico-historical narratives in generating collective memories and how that constitutes Hongkongers' unique imagined community. The Hong Kong nation is imagined as *limited*, but not in terms of a circumscribed geographical boundary, as the concept of homeland would imply. Instead, the imagined community is limited in terms of the people made *imaginable* as fellow compatriots by a given mythico-historical narrative. Geographical dispersal is a necessary condition for being diasporic, but the possession and embodiment of a collective historical consciousness is the sufficient condition for seeing Hongkongers' as *a* diasporic people.

There are several points raised in this paper that await further empirical investigation. First, I have implied that mythico-historical narratives are able to transmit through time and space relatively easily. For example, I have not examined in detail the process through which *Glory to Hong Kong* reaches the consciousness of diasporic Hongkongers. The role of communications and transportation technologies in promoting long-distance nationalism and maintaining diasporic consciousness (Anderson, 1992) have yet to be discussed.

Second, how inclusive/exclusive is a Hong Kong nation defined by collective memories? How permeable is the imagined community's boundaries? The use of collective memories to

define communities seems to circumvent the binary construction of civic versus ethnic nationalism. Still, upon deeper inquiry, there exists a potential paradox: at what point does a collective historical consciousness arising from ideological, civic struggles transform the group into an ethnic group? Hong Kong's nationalism appears to be more ideological, civic in nature, which suggests that Hong Kong's identity could include different ethnicities and races. However, is it possible for a mythico-history to essentialize the civicness of a nation that it becomes 'ethnicized' in a sense? Could overseas Chinese supportive of Hong Kong's democratic struggle become Hongkonger without embodying the affects of suffering and victimhood embedded in Hong Kong's mythico-history? Both normative and descriptive answers to these questions would prove important to the theorization of ethnicity and nationalism.

Third, this paper has not addressed the intersectionality of the Hong Kong nation and diasporas. I have focused on how collective memories exert a centripetal influence on the imagined community, conveying a sense of homogeneity within Hongkonger communities. However, issues of class, gender, and race also exert a considerable influence on individuals' sense and conception of their identities. They also contribute to the differing power relations within and between defined communities. Further research should inquire about these topics to enrich our understanding of diasporic and national identities.

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