Guarding the Space In-between: The Quandary of Being a Liberal Mainland Student Migrant in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Based on eight in-depth interviews, this article analyses the quandary faced by liberal mainland Chinese student migrants in Hong Kong. On the one hand, the liberal pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong are deeply intertwined with the rise of localism, which is based on a dichotomy between Hong Kong and mainland China. On the other hand, a rising, development-centric nationalism in mainland China reduces Hong Kong protesters to unemancipated British colonial subjects. However, in the context of this "double marginalisation," liberal Mainland students guard a form of liberalism that transcends both Hong Kong localism and Chinese nationalism. They debunk the stereotype of mainland Chinese students being apolitical and therefore provide an alternative definition of being Chinese. They challenge the view that mainland Chinese can only be emancipated outside mainland China to destabilise a Fukuyamian linear interpretation of history. They use four tactics to cope with double marginalisation: understanding localists, befriending expatriates, assuming professionalism, and becoming apolitical.

Keywords: Hong Kong, China, liberalism, student migration, Hong Kong–Mainland conflict, gangpiao

> Who am I? Do you mean where I'm from? What I one day might become? What I do? What I've done? What I dream? Do you mean . . . what you see or what I've seen? What I fear or what I dream? Do you mean who I love? Do you mean who I've lost? Who am I? I guess who I am is exactly the same as who you are. Not better than, not less than. Because there is no one who has been or will ever be exactly the same as either you or me.
> – *from the television series Sense8*

Introduction

By the time I had finished writing this article, it had been almost two years since the June 2019 commencement of the anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong. The extradition bill was withdrawn in October 2019, but the protests and arrests continued until the COVID-19 pandemic prohibited, or rather legitimised the prohibition, of mass gatherings. On June 30, 2020, the National Security Law (NSL) was passed. As protestors, including those who were born in mainland China, face imprisonment for sabotaging national security, discussing certain topics risks breaking the newly promogulated law. For this reason, no discussion of the NSL and the anti-extradition bill protests is included in this article.

What I do discuss has now become history: the pre-NSL era. Even though very little time has passed since I conducted my research, my respondents may now have different attitudes, feelings, and strategies as liberal Mainlanders in Hong Kong who participated in pro-democracy

protests. They would have, very likely, rejected my interview requests if the new law had been passed before I conducted my research. However, this has not invalidated my research: the more reticent, silent, and invisible they become, the more meaningful it is to record their voices.

This article discusses the quandaries of liberal mainland Chinese student migrants living in Hong Kong at a time of demonstrations and politically charged everyday interactions. My aim is to provide a more nuanced representation of this social group and challenge both the stereotype of the apolitical mainland Chinese student and the notion that mainland Chinese cannot nurture liberal values, except through the liberalism of a liberal society outside mainland China. Liberalism in this article refers to the belief in diversity, plurality, and heterogeneity without hierarchy.

Arguably the best-known representative of a liberal Mainlander in Hong Kong is Li Ming, [1] a lecturer at the Education University of Hong Kong and a key opinion leader. Li Ming is best known for her siding with the "yellow" (or "pro-democracy") protesters in Hong Kong, [2] and for her outspokenness about being sexually harassed in a church as part of the global #MeToo movement. She is commonly portrayed as having been "enlightened" by Hong Kong's liberal education, after which she decided to join the Hong Kong protests in pursuit of democracy and equality (Apple Daily, 2017; Leung, 2019; Steel and Li, 2019). For instance, the New York Times described her as "a Shanghai native, [who] moved to Hong Kong in 2008 to study sociology and then stayed, she said, because she enjoyed its freedom of speech and other civil liberties that are absent in her increasingly authoritarian homeland" (Steel and Li, 2019). In this type of media coverage, Li Ming is portrayed as understanding Hong Kongers' discrimination, if not racism, against mainland Chinese, due to her Shanghainese origin.

Such media representation reinforces the assumed dichotomy between authoritarian, illiberal China and the democratic liberal West. It implies that colonisation brought modernisation to former colonies like Hong Kong and Shanghai, that risk justifying domination, exploitation, and violence in the name of modernisation. In this narrative, those places left behind, like the rest of China, must catch up with Hong Kong and Shanghai, which were first liberated by the West. However, Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong (2015) point out that the hatred against mainland Chinese is different from intra-China discrimination, exemplified by discrimination on the part of Shanghainese towards people from other, "less developed," areas:

> Hong Kong racism is extraordinary in surpassing the conventional form of racism and going beyond the racism of the Shanghai colonial modernity, because a discourse of vermin is being used against a well-intermixed and culturally proximate people. These otherized people are regarded by localists as more than just innately inferior, underdeveloped humans; they are scarcely seen as human at all. (Sautman and Yan, 2015: 24)

The authors poignantly summarise racism against mainland Chinese in Hong Kong as "yellow-red peril," a combination of yellow peril inherited from the imperial West and the red peril represented by illiberal socialist China. In other words, such racism is justified by a Fukuyamian linear view of history in the context of a lingering Cold War.

I do not intend to engage more with media representations of liberal Mainland student migrants. Instead, I will use the multi-faceted lived experiences of my interviewees to argue

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[1] East Asian names in this article follow the convention of family name followed by given name.
[2] The coloured symbol originates from the 2014 Umbrella Movement where yellow umbrella and yellow ribbon became the symbols of the protest.

against any narratives that reinforce the dichotomy between localist Hong Konger versus nationalist Mainlander, or a liberal Hong Kong/West versus an illiberal China. I intend to show that these liberal Mainlanders were not "liberated" in Hong Kong, as portrayed by some neo-Orientalist media and scholars (Vukovich, 2012, 2019), because they experienced liberalism as they grew up in mainland China. These students are also not opportunistic "flexible citizens" (Ong, 1999) who benefit from civil society in metropolises. Rather, I argue that they actively engage with the local community to preserve and guard the social values that they had already come to uphold before migrating to Hong Kong.

Chinese Student Migrants and Political Participation

Most existing research on discrimination against and exclusion of Mainland immigrants, as well as their resistance and resilience, focuses on lower-middle-class women, often with limited education, who are married to lower-class Hong Kong men and reside in Hong Kong on the basis of the one-way permit scheme (Law and Lee, 2006; Ng et al., 2015; Wong, 1998; Yu et al., 2014). Student migrants from mainland China, even though they share the same place of birth as well as some cultural characteristics like not speaking Cantonese, belong to a different category for immigration purposes. Different from the one-way permit scheme, which is designed for family reunion, Mainland student migrants are recruited to Hong Kong universities as potential professional labour. Mainland Chinese were first admitted to Hong Kong universities in 1998 and three years later the government permitted them to stay and work upon securing a job, subject to a set of rigid conditions (Gov.hk, 2001; UGC, n.d.). [3] Since early 2000, internationalisation and the integration with the Pearl River Delta have become the primary objectives of Hong Kong tertiary education (UGC, 2010). The government eased quota limitations for self-funded programmes, mainly consisting of associate degrees and taught master's degrees, targeting non-local students, of which more than 70 percent came from the mainland (Gov.hk, 2012; UGC, 2010). In 2008, the government further launched the Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates (IANG) to grant these students an unconditional one-year stay in the city, and if they managed to find a job, the visa would be extended until they accumulated seven years of the legitimate right of abode time to apply for permanent Hong Kong citizenship. It is said that from 2003 to 2015, 159,000 Mainland immigrants came to Hong Kong and around 80,000 ended up settling in the city (Wong, 2018).

Other than the student visa, in chronological order, the Hong Kong government put forth the Admission of Talents Scheme after the handover in 1997, the Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme in 2001, the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talent and Professionals in 2003, and the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme in 2006. The government launched these schemes and expanded the recruitment of Mainland students to attract and cultivate professional and high-end labour who were familiar with China to better serve Hong Kong as the economic hub to link China with the world. [4] Vivian Chan et al. (2013) have written about the aspirations and struggles Mainland workers have faced. They concluded that being mainland Chinese was both a stepping stone and a stumbling block, as familiarity with mainland China provided individuals with advantages in the workplace but Mainland identity also incurred social exclusion and discrimination (Chan, Chan, and Chong, 2013: 39). To distinguish from the Mainland immigrants on one-way permits, students and professional immigrants call themselves gangpiao 港漂 (Hong Kong drifters) (Ip, 2020). This article focuses on gangpiao who settled down in the city during and after their bachelor's and master's degrees.

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[3] The conditions include possessing expertise that local candidates do not have and a job contract of more than a year.

[4] In comparison to the IANG scheme, conditions are much stricter for overseas Chinese students to stay in other developed countries and areas.

For Mainland Chinese student migrants, studying in Hong Kong represents a liminal choice between domestic and international study. Students are attracted to Hong Kong for its cosmopolitan and modern lifestyle, but mostly refrain from deep engagement with politics, or rather dissident politics, due to a perception that it will endanger their safety (Ip, 2020; Peng, 2016; Xu, 2015). Fong (2011) observes that overseas Chinese students in other liberal-democratic developed countries often defend China, especially on sensitive and controversial political topics abroad, but boast about their overseas cosmopolitan lifestyle when back in China. In other words, they desire a cosmopolitan economic lifestyle and wish to become flexible citizens (Ong, 1999) but distance themselves from political civil society activities against the Chinese state. Facilitated by the development of information and communications technology (ICT) and especially social media (Martin, 2014; Peng, 2016), the dichotomy between economic engagement and political disengagement might lead to a superficial integration into the host society where strong emotional bonds and political views are still tied to and shaped by mainland China. In short, the cosmopolitanism that these Chinese migrant students acquire is perceived to be compromised, that is, an enjoying of superficial materialistic and cultural benefits that is deprived of political engagement in guarding shared universal values.

In the context of Hong Kong, Ip (2020) found that a very small number of gangpiao have participated in pro-democracy civic gatherings. They, however, still refrain from identifying with Hong Kong and instead refer to themselves through the framework of "local internationalism," which refers to "caring about one's living environment and community without allegiance to any rigid local or national identity" (Ip, 2020: 270). While Vivian Chan et al. (2013) discuss the marginalised conditions Mainland professionals face without focusing on political dimensions, Ip (2020) touches on political tensions without engaging deeply with the conflict of identity between Hong Kong and the Mainland. My article fills this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the identity conflicts faced by mainland Chinese who have participated in pro-democracy demonstrations.

My Research Respondents: Liberalism beyond the Cold War Dichotomy

Liberalism is an ideology that contains seven political concepts that interact at its core: liberty, rationality, individuality, progress, sociability, general interest, and limited and accountable power (Freeden, 2015). "The Liberal does not meet opinions which he conceives to be false with toleration, as though they did not matter. He meets them with justice, and exacts for them a fair hearing as though they mattered just as much as his own" (Hobhouse, 1964: 63). Hobhouse enthusiastically argued that at "the heart of Liberalism is the understanding that progress is not a matter of mechanical contrivance, but of the liberation of living spiritual energy" (73). Although liberalism as guiding ethics has metamorphosed into different political forms across the globe (Freeden, 2015), its core is the pursuit of liberty and respect for divergent opinions. Arguably, Fukuyama's "end of history" discourse (Fukuyama, 1992) has tightly linked liberalism with the expansion of the liberal-democratic capitalist system. However, democracy in liberalism should be understood rather as an ontological calibration based on communicative action (Habermas, 1984), which no existing representative democratic system has yet achieved (Freeden, 2015). In other words, the universalism that underpins liberalism ought not to be constrained by a certain political model, as Fukuyama (1992) advocates. If liberalism celebrates diversity without hierarchy, it would be false to consider actions in pursuit of liberalism as defending one political model over others. Instead, liberals defend liberalism's core values in any political system. Although mainland China is known for its authoritarian governance, this does not mean it does not comprise elements of liberalism or public calls for liberalism, manifested, for example, by the "new left" and the public intelligentsia after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident (Vukovich, 2019).

Some scholars argue that the tension between Hong Kong and China is a remnant of the Cold War and representative of the ways in which the socialism–capitalism divide that defined the Cold War has morphed into a different dichotomy that juxtaposes authoritarianism and liberalism (Dai, 2018; Li, 2008, 2015; Sun, 2009, 2011). Hong Kong-based scholar Vukovich (2012, 2019) argues that knowledge produced in and by the liberal West is inevitably neo-Orientalist, assuming that mainland Chinese are blinded and brainwashed by the repressive illiberal state, waiting for civilisational enlightenment through the "free" flow of information from liberal-democratic areas. In other words, for Vukovich, neo-Orientalist knowledge about China fundamentally serves to help the capitalist West win the Cold War. Here the West refers not only to the developed states of Europe and the US, but also Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other nations considered to be part of the capitalist side in the Cold War in Asia. Xu's (2015) findings confirm such assumptions, since her research respondents only gained access to Mainland-prohibited information in Hong Kong. This research, in contrast, aims to break such a neo-Orientalist knowledge paradigm.

This article focuses on liberal mainland Chinese student migrants who came to Hong Kong for university education between 2011 to 2018. I focus on students who came for tertiary education with Mainland passports. I chose this period because it was after 2011 that the conflict between the Mainland and Hong Kong intensified. For the purposes of this research, I identified students' liberalism based on their actions. I approached individuals who had participated in demonstrations that appealed for democracy, liberty, and diversity. These activities included the June 4 Tiananmen Anniversary Vigil, the Umbrella Movement, and the annual Pride parade.

I adopted the qualitative research method of semi-structured in-depth interviews, conducting eight interviews based on snowball sampling in December 2018. Six of the interviewees were recent graduates staying in Hong Kong at the time of the interview and two were in their final year of undergraduate study. Six had come to Hong Kong for a bachelors' degree and two had come for a master's degree. The interviews lasted from one to two hours and were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, then verbatim transcribed and coded (that is, thematically sorted and grouped). All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Through these interviews I aimed to answer the following questions. How did these students participate in Hong Kong demonstrations and what were the consequences for them, if any? How did they navigate the rising tension between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and what were their experiences and tactics in the process? How did they define and guard their liberal values when caught between the two sides?

The interviews were broadly structured around the process of their migration to Hong Kong, their experiences of being a Mainland student in Hong Kong, their experience when taking part in political demonstrations, and their reactions toward anti-Mainland sentiments in Hong Kong. This approach was informed by Babbie (2012), allowing my research respondents to narrate their life trajectories, motivations, and reasonings, and provided space for them to focus on life events that they found particularly important or transformative. Demographic information on my informants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Information of Interviewees

Name	Age	Year of Arrival in Hong Kong	Hometown
Sophie	27	2016	Kunming
Lily	25	2015	Guangzhou
Lucy	22	2014	Fuzhou
Jodie	25	2014	Guilin
Tom	24	2012	Guiyang
Jerry	25	2013	Fuzhou
Betty	23	2017	Fuzhou
Mary	24	2012	Wenzhou

In the following sections, I show how my research respondents debunk the dichotomy constructed by localist Hong Kongers and nationalist Mainlanders, who are both influenced by the aforementioned Cold War mentality.

"I Was Who I Am"

Most of my interviewees believed that they had been critical of the Chinese government and that they had access to information banned in China before arriving in Hong Kong. Some of them developed liberal attitudes through their family education. Sophie came to Hong Kong for a master's in business administration. She inherited her critical distance to the Chinese government from her parents, who owned a family business in Wuhan:

> Since I was young, all I was hearing from them were complaints about the government. For every little profit that we made, we had to share some with the local government. If we did not give them bribes, they would come to us and warn us that we broke some rules. . . . My parents hated them and told me stories about the Tiananmen incident since I was a kid. . . . They also told me that they wanted me to go abroad so that I can escape such a system. (Sophie, aged 27)

Lily, who came to Hong Kong for a master's degree in management, echoed Sophie's view:

> My father is a cadre in Guangzhou. I think he is just an honest man. I grew up witnessing how much he struggled in the guanxi network in China. Once he even received a death threat from his competitor. He told my mother and me that he would not be home for dinner that day. We were really scared. We could not sleep until he came back early morning the following day. All he told us was, "There was no way to solve it" and "China is what it is." (Lily, aged 25)

Both families seem to be negatively affected by the guanxi system (enduring interpersonal relationships for instrumental purposes), understood as the norm for conducting business in China (Gold, Guthrie, and Wank, 2002; Wank, 1996, 2000). Seen by some as a product of lack of legal institutions for business (Guthrie, 1998), guanxi involves practices such as the intensive exchange of gifts and favours that can turn into bribery and corruption (Wank, 1996, 2000). Many overseas Chinese students loathed guanxi practices in China and considered their host societies to be free

from such practices (Fong, 2011: 176-179). Underneath their aversion to guanxi is the longing for a mature legal system that regulates power and makes it limited and accountable, a core value of liberalism (Freeden, 2015). In other words, liberalism was part of Sophie and Lily's value system before they came to Hong Kong.

Similar but more articulate, Lucy, a 22-year-old final year bachelor's student in politics, whose words are quoted in the title of this section, said, "I despise it when people tell me that Hong Kong has transformed me. I was who I am before I came to Hong Kong." Lucy did not come to Hong Kong to be "liberated." It was because of her belief in liberalism that she chose Hong Kong for her studies.

> My high school in Fujian province is famous for being liberal. Our history teacher taught us about Tiananmen. Every year, we commemorated June 4. . . . The school kept an eye open and an eye closed . . . I was very into the Model United Nations (MUN) [5] back then. And we MUNers always had heated discussions about politics in our spare time. . . . During my last year in high school, I came to Hong Kong to visit a [fellow] MUNer. He studied politics in a university. I was satisfied with the lectures that I sat in on. The lecturers all seemed rather open-minded. I was aware that I would not have such a liberal atmosphere in mainland China. (Lucy, aged 22)

In a different vein, Jodie and Tom became liberal because of their gender awareness and queerness. Jodie came to Hong Kong for a joint bachelor's degree in engineering, [6] and Tom came to study literature. Tom called himself a "sinful son," referring to Pai Hsien-yung's novel Crystal Boys, where the male protagonist is expelled from school and shunned by his family for his same-sex relationship. Tom used the novel as a metaphor for his choice to leave mainland China. Kam (2020) has linked coming out with going abroad and argues that queer Chinese students can justify their sexuality as a form of becoming cosmopolitan. For Tom, this cosmopolitanism goes beyond social distinction and cultural capital (Igarashi, 2014) as is the case of most gangpiao (Ip, 2020; Xu, 2015), as he also participated in the Umbrella Movement "to guard the values that have attracted me to the city."

Jodie, a self-identified lesbian, was an activist before coming to Hong Kong. Between 2012 to 2014, she participated in the Vagina Monologues in Guangzhou and travelled around Guangdong province for participatory theatre. The crew she was a part of collected stories from rural women and turned these into material for local theatre performances. Starting from gender issues, she also participated in human rights camps and volunteered in animal rescue centres. In other words, she had been a veteran activist before coming to Hong Kong.

Lucy took to the streets as soon as she arrived in Hong Kong in 2014. "There wasn't a better time for a liberal like me than that time, right? After commemorating June 4 for so long, now I could finally experience something real." Three other interviewees decided to join the Umbrella Movement after the police used tear gas for the first time on September 28, 2014. Some may not have had a clear political identity at this point, yet they were mobilised to take to the streets because of the injustice they saw in police brutality and the election system. Two interviewees came to Hong Kong for Pride parades before they commenced their studies there.

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[5] The MUN is an educational simulation of the United Nations, in which students represent different countries in activities.

[6] She spent two years in a university in mainland China and two years in Hong Kong.

Growing Anti-Mainlandisation

Liberalism cultivated during their life in mainland China brought these students to the streets of Hong Kong, only to encounter illiberal anti-Mainlander exclusion and discrimination as a result of a policy of Mainlandisation which had emerged, and was increasingly perceived as threat, after the handover in 1997. [7]

> Mainlandisation refers to the HKSAR government's policy of making Hong Kong politically more dependent on and similar to Beijing, economically more reliant on the Mainland's support, socially more patriotic toward the motherland, and legally more reliant on the interpretation of the Basic Law by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. It is the dependency psyche of the HKSAR administration that has triggered Hong Kong's swift convergence with the motherland in multi-faceted aspects. (Lo, 2008: 42–43)

The handover took place on July 1 and the annual pro-democracy Hong Kong marches symbolically claim this date for their demonstrations. In 2003, the July 1 march brought half a million people to the streets to protest the implementation of the proposed anti-subversion Article 23 of the Hong Kong Basic Law, which was seen as an attack on freedom of speech along with other rights in Hong Kong. The bill to enact Article 23 was withdrawn after the mass demonstration.

Meanwhile, it is widely acknowledged that the basis of Hong Kong identity has shifted from socioeconomic superiority over mainland China (1960s–2000s) to an intra-ethnic racialising strategy of othering Mainlanders (2000s–present) (Fong, 2017; Ma and Tsang, 2010; Yew and Kwong, 2014). The perceived incompatibility of Hong Kong and Mainland identities intensified in 2011 and 2012, after the emergence of localist political parties in Hong Kong (Kwong, 2016). During these two years, Hong Kong cultural studies scholar Chan Wan-kan (2011) published The Hong Kong City-State Theory, which paved the theoretical foundation for localism. Chan promotes the incompatibility of Hong Kong and Mainland identities and confines Hong Kong identity to one's birthplace and a political anti-Mainland agenda. Inspired and justified by this narrowly defined localism, a series of anti-Mainlandisation campaigns unfolded.

In early 2012, users of the Hong Kong online group Golden Forum raised HK$100,000 to run an image on the front page of the tabloid newspaper Apple Daily: a locust looking over the Hong Kong skyline from Lion Rock Mountain, a metaphor for mainland Chinese taking over Hong Kong. The event officially marked mainland Chinese as locusts, and paved the way for waves of racism against mainland Chinese (Sautman and Yan, 2015). The fear of Mainlandisation at the heart of localist identity poses a serious challenge to claims of a liberal and inclusive agenda on the part of localism. Mainland Chinese student migrants are seen as the embodiment of Mainlandisation, and Hong Kong universities are fertile ground for localism. In a survey of 331 students from seven universities in Hong Kong in 2016, 36 percent of respondents supported the localist camp, ranking it first among all available political options (Zeng and Pang, 2016). Liberal demonstrations were fuelled by illiberal discrimination in which gangpiao were identified with mainland China in the perceptions of localists.

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[7] Colloquially in Cantonese, Mainlandisation is commonly referred to as *chek fa* 赤化, which means the process of "becoming redder," as the colour red is commonly used in communist regimes. This, once again, perpetuates the Cold War mentality.

Double Marginalisation

The quandary of being doubly marginalised is shared by all diasporas to some extent, that is, a sense of being an outlier in both the host and the home society. The predicament particular to the liberal Mainland students is that the two identities are being torn apart. It is exactly because of the commonalities that Hong Kong and mainland China share that the boundaries between them need to be drawn so brutally, in the effort to make a distinction.

Both Lucy and Jodie came to Hong Kong for their studies in 2014, right at the beginning of the Umbrella Movement. First-year bachelor's students usually attend two large scale orientation events, known as o-camps (orientation camps), organised by their dormitory halls and departments for integration. Each o-camp lasts from three days to a week. Other than these two o-camps, Mainland students participate in another o-camp, organised by the association for Mainland students. Each university in Hong Kong has an association for Mainland students, supported by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government (LOCPG). Some gangpiao believe that their political activities are put under surveillance by LOCPG through these student associations (Ip, 2020: 263-264).

Lucy skipped some days of the o-camp for Mainland students to join the Umbrella Movement. She actively posted on her WeChat and Weibo accounts, both popular social media in mainland China, to report about the Umbrella Movement. She received many negative and aggressive comments from the Mainland students she had just met in Hong Kong. "They posted, 'are your parents aware that you are an idiot?'" Her fellow Mainland peers did not want to communicate or listen. They only wished to unleash their anger and demonstrate their power against Lucy, backed by nationalism against Hong Kong.

However, Lucy wrote a page-long message to engage in a discussion with these Mainland students, whom she had just met at the beginning of her university life. "I was trying to tell them that I participate in the Umbrella Movement for the values I believe in. I agree with universal values like liberty and freedom. And I support democracy. It might be confusing because the event is portrayed as supporting the independence of Hong Kong in the Mainland media. By posting photos from the front line, I wanted to show them the information that they cannot get by just watching the news." However, this only led to social exclusion from the group of people that she was supposed to identify with. "At the time, I had no friends at all. When I walked in corridors at the university, I didn't dare to raise my eyes from my [mobile phone] screen because I didn't want to have eye contact with anyone."

When I asked if she made any Hong Kong friends, she sneered "not a friend but Facebook friends." Sadly, the social exclusion of Mainland migrants by Hong Kongers is felt by almost all student migrants, no matter what political stance a Mainland student takes (Ip, 2020; Xu, 2015). Lucy went to the Umbrella Movement with a few liberal high school friends from Fujian. However, as they were scattered across different universities in Hong Kong, she ended up being all alone in her university.

During the Umbrella Movement, a video of a Mandarin-speaking woman being harassed by protesters went viral. The woman tried to support the protesters only to end up having her words interrupted before she could finish. Instead of listening to her, the protesters around her sang birthday songs, perceived to be a peaceful way to interrupt any unwelcome speech (dhkchannel, 2015).

"I posted the video on my Facebook page," Lucy said, "but it was as if nobody noticed. I have a couple of local friends on Facebook. I know that they are protesters too. But they just treated me like [I didn't exist] . . . I also commented on their posts when they mocked Mandarin

or mainland Chinese . . . but again they just replied with an emoji or simply ignored me." Were it not for this type of social exclusion, Mainland student migrants in Hong Kong might not need to depend so much on ICT to maintain connections back in mainland China to alleviate their loneliness, as Peng (2016) has observed.

All the interviewees shared the same observation, neatly captured by Lucy, "Mainland students ended up just hanging out with each other, just like the locals. No one needs to communicate with others who are different or have different ideas." The people trapped in between find nowhere to belong and hence experience double marginalisation.

Jodie shared similar experiences but was even more pessimistic. She said in the interview that the Hong Kong experience had made her realise that "being mainland Chinese is an unbearable sin." As soon as Jodie came to Hong Kong, she enrolled in an o-camp that advocated LGBT rights. The o-camp was organised by an inter-university LGBT student association. Even though Jodie shared the same political agenda and sexuality with her Hong Kong peers in the association, their similarities did not seem to overcome their differences:

> In the camp, all Mainland students were put in one dorm while I was assigned with some local students in another. You know, I couldn't understand Cantonese back then. I felt rather embarrassed just for being there. When the "928 incident" [during the Umbrella Movement] [8] broke out, some of the local students got so emotional that they even burst into tears. The local students in the camp rushed to Central. [9] I understood and decided to go with them! However, as soon as we got there, my dorm-mates abandoned me. I couldn't find anyone I knew and ended up being there just by myself. (Jodie, aged 25)

"Locusts" and "Dogs"

Jodie's Hong Konger peers would include her in activism activities such as asking people to sign petitions in support of LGBT rights, but would leave her out in casual social gatherings. Jodie could not recall all names of her Hong Konger peers and believed that they could not remember hers. She could be considered a comrade, but not a friend with whom these peers shared daily life. Relations with students from the Mainland were also difficult.

> To be honest, I was a bit afraid of the Mainland students in my university. Many would really call local students "dogs" on WeChat. They posted about how backward Hong Kong is . . . for not having mobile payment . . . I knew we would not have much to discuss, so I just intentionally distance myself from them. (Jodie, aged 25)

In 2012, Peking University professor Kong Qingdong provocatively expressed that "many Hong Kong people are like dogs," responding to an online video of a Mainland child being scolded by Hong Kongers for eating on a subway train (Sina.com, 2012). Kong asserted that "Hong Kong people worship the West like dogs worship their owners" and concluded that Hong Kong people were still imprisoned by colonialism. It is beyond the scope of this article to dissect the colonial history of Hong Kong (Carroll, 2007) and its contemporary dilemma of being trapped in both colonialism and post-colonialism (Chu, 2016, 2019). Scholars have shown very well how

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[8] Referring to the aforementioned date of September 28, 2014, when the Hong Kong police used tear gas for the first time against protesters.

[9] Central is the business and administrative centre of Hong Kong. The Umbrella Movement protests started in Central and the neighbouring Admiralty district.

the discrimination against mainland Chinese is linked with colonialism and Cold War legacies (Sautman and Yan, 2015; Vukovich, 2012, 2019). In diversified pro-democratic demonstrations, some protesters have indeed used the flag of British Hong Kong, a symbol of Hong Kong's colonial legacy, to provoke the government (Lin, 2019). This symbolic act is often perceived by the Mainland state and media as evidence of uncritical colonial nostalgia and the influence of "foreign evil forces." Certainly, these actions are not free from ideological tensions. However, to reduce the heterogeneity of political thought on display in pro-democratic demonstrations to a single position – Hong Kong independence – as narrated by major Mainland media platforms (He, 2014; Ling et al., 2016) is just a way to further provoke nationalism against all Hong Kong protesters.

In fact, many interviewees rejected Hong Kong independence. As Sophie articulated: "I am not pro-Hong Kong independence. I think it is stupid. I just wished that a part of China could maintain its difference. But there seems to be no space for communication. Whatever I say to my fellow Mainland friends would be considered a betrayal to my home country."

At the same time, scholars in China have been promoting the Mainland political-economic model as a superior post-colonial alternative to the Western liberal-democratic model, justified by its track record of economic development (Zhang, 2012). Scholar Zhang Weiwei (2012) claims that China is developing a civilisational state model which redefines human rights, governance, and democracy. In short, he advocates for a civilisation dependent on visible material development – individuals enjoying better material living standards and attributing material abundance to the state. Under such logic, effective mobile payment infrastructure, as mentioned by Jodie, is taken as the embodiment of the success of China. Any place without access to such technologies is considered inferior and backwards. In his books and public talks, Zhang included many anecdotes of western Europeans being shocked and fascinated by the living standards in Chinese metropolises. In his mind, the West, as well as Hong Kong, is simply unaware of China's development. In this development-centrism, once China's economy surpasses the West, the tables are turned, and Hong Kong and the West must learn from China.

In these discourses, mainland Chinese are deemed "locusts" by localists backed up by their illiberal, "pro-democracy" claims, while Hong Kongers are deemed "dogs" by Chinese nationalists backed up by their development-centric ideology. Both locusts and dogs are used to dehumanise the Other as uncivilised or not civilised enough to think freely. My interviewees are trapped in this position of double marginalisation exactly because they are guarding the space between two increasingly rigid and antagonistic political stances that share something fundamental in common: both nationalism and localism are based on distinction and hierarchy and a linear perception of history that justifies subversion and domination.

Coping with Double Marginalisation

My interviewees revealed four strategies or coping mechanisms to deal with double marginalisation. The first strategy was to align entirely with the localists and to show understanding or even support for discrimination against mainland Chinese.

> Populism was just a bad strategy to fight for democracy but after all, it had a
> positive effect in anti-authoritarianism . . . I agree with the localists. . . . If
> [discrimination] is an efficient strategy against mainland China, I think it is
> okay. (Jerry, aged 25)

Jerry studied politics in his bachelor's and seemed very firm in his political stance. I asked Jerry whether he would identify himself as Chinese. He replied, "Why would I? Isn't it troublesome?" Perhaps to Jerry, an individual's national identity is unrelated to their birthplace.

However, as localism assigns birthplace as a critical and rigid component of the Hong Konger identity, a total denial of mainland Chineseness would entail a highly tactical presentation of self to cover the stigma of one's Mainland background (Goffman, 1990).

> I am sorry to be Chinese . . . I felt ashamed when I went abroad with my Chinese passport. I cover my mainland Chinese passport with a passport case so that travellers around me would not notice that I am from mainland China. . . . Sometimes when I use WeChat in Hong Kong, I will hide my screen from people surrounding me because I don't want them to know that I am using a Mainland app. (Jodie, aged 25)

Jodie was not a native Cantonese speaker, so I asked how she dealt with the language and accent issue. "Yes, my Cantonese is flawed," she replied. She tried to speak as little as possible in movements and only used short sentences in everyday conversation to pass as a local.

The second discernible strategy was to escape the Mainland–Hong Kong conflict by joining the community of international students, who are usually exchange students from other countries. Majoring in English literature, Mary participated in the Umbrella Movement and Pride parade with international students and considered herself an expatriate in Hong Kong. Expatriate usually refers to middle- or upper-middle-class white international migrants from developed countries who come to Hong Kong for high-end jobs. Mary spoke proficient American English, had a German boyfriend, and only socialised with predominantly white friends. Mary found her comfort zone with international students to distance herself from the Hong Kong–Mainland conflict.

The third approach was to claim a professional distance toward the Mainland–Hong Kong conflict. Two interviewees said in retrospect that joining demonstrations did not amount to participation but was simply academic observation. As one of them put it, "There is a time during lunch when my local classmates started to address Mainlanders as locusts. I was angry at the beginning, but then I calmed myself down. I am trained as a sociologist. My task was to understand how these local people came to this stage." However, adopting such professional distance may result in further suspicion. One interviewee expressed her frustration that after three months of working voluntarily for an NGO in Hong Kong, she overheard local staff commenting that she only joined to write an academic article.

The last tactic is to break away from engaging in politics altogether, which echoes Xu's (2015) findings. "I felt bored seeking the meaning of life by participating in politics. I want to focus on life itself," Lucy said. She claimed that she got emotionally exhausted by politics after staying in Hong Kong for two years. Her exchange year in France in 2016 transformed her. "Perhaps you won't believe it," Lucy said, "but people [in France] could spend their entire afternoon lying under the sun in a park or just having coffee… I felt that this is the meaning of life." Another two interviewees turned to economic pragmatism. As one of them put it, "After all this [for her it was not only the demonstrations but also political arguments with people around her], I felt really tired. Now I think politics is useless. I just want to earn money now... I don't discuss politics with anyone now, really, [but] just a few people who I knew would understand me."

Conclusion

This article has examined the double marginalisation which traps Mainland student migrants in Hong Kong between two social identities and two places of belonging. While the pro-democracy liberal movements in Hong Kong are deeply intertwined with the rise of localism, based on the Hong Kong–Mainland dichotomy, the anti-Mainland sentiment of the demonstrations means that my interviewees participate in demonstrations alone and without solidarity. The rising patriotic

and nationalistic sentiment in mainland China reduces Hong Kong protesters to unemancipated British colonial subjects, while a discourse of the mainland Chinese model as a better alternative to the liberal Western model is also growing (Zhang, 2012). This has pushed my liberal interviewees to further distance themselves from other Mainland students, as development-centric nationalism increasingly defines the meaning of being Chinese. In the last section of the article, I listed four tactics that my interviewees individually adopted to deal with their double marginalisation: understanding localists, befriending expatriates, assuming professionalism, and becoming apolitical.

In this article, I tell stories of a few liberal Mainland students, but the quandary involves many more people and larger groups, not confined to Hong Kong and China. What they are guarding is a grey area that makes invisible the universality of liberalism that goes beyond the Cold War arena, and which includes the freedom of expression, the freedom to be queer, etc. Liberalism in this article refers to the belief in diversity, plurality, and heterogeneity without hierarchy. There is not a single idea, identity, or ideology that is superior to the other, and therefore must dominate and subsume the other. The elevated tension following the anti-extradition bill protests and the NSL would only have further marginalised anyone who wishes to stay in-between, not to mention risking daunting political consequences and ruthless cyberbullying. What I related above have become stories of the past in Hong Kong. However, as such voices are rendered more silent, there exists even more need to cast light on those who persist to guard transregional liberalism and who contest both localism and nationalism. It is in such in-between zones that we see possibilities of co-existence that go beyond domination, power, and conversion. Regardless of how faint their power is and how limited in number they are, these Mainland liberal migrants, too, define what is Hong Kong and what is China.

Acknowledgments

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