

# Introduction

## *Are We Dead Yet? . . .*

When the prequel of this book—*Lost in Transition*—was published in 2013, I did not expect that it would rightly predict the changes that took place in Hong Kong in the following year: I would rather have been wrong. “Hong Kong was lost overnight” was the tagline on the poster for the movie *The Midnight After* directed by Fruit Chan, whose Hong Kong trilogy—*Made in Hong Kong* (1997), *The Longest Summer* (1998), and *Little Cheung* (1999)—was widely acclaimed for presenting remarkable postcolonial Hong Kong imaginaries, and the end of the official trailer offered the following cryptic one-liner: “On April 10, give me back my Hong Kong.” The allegorical horror movie premiered on April 10, 2014, about one year after Benny Tai, Kin-Man Chan, and Rev. Yiu-Ming Chu released the Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) “manifesto” on March 27, 2013. Benny Tai, an Associate Professor of Law at the University of Hong Kong, formally promoted the Occupy Central campaign in January 2013 as a means to strive for “genuine” universal suffrage, which led to heated controversies in Hong Kong about whether to support it or not. At that point, genuine universal suffrage was seen as the key to taking Hong Kong back. Echoing the theme of the Occupy Wall Street Movement and its offshoots across the globe, the Hong Kong version called on protesters to block roads and paralyze Hong Kong’s central business district in response to the chief executive election in 2017, which did not meet international standards in terms of universal suffrage. OCLP was subsequently initiated in March 2013 to ensure that the election of the Chief Executive of Hong Kong in 2017 would take place with “genuine” universal suffrage. Despite this effort, the decision of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) on Issues Relating to the Selection of the Chief Executive

of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region by Universal Suffrage on August 31, 2014, mandated that, among others,

[a] broadly representative nominating committee shall be formed. The provisions for the number of members, composition and formation method of the nominating committee shall be made in accordance with the number of members, composition and formation method of the Election Committee for the Fourth Chief Executive.<sup>1</sup>

In the eyes of many Hong Kong people, this “8.31 resolution” ruled out genuine universal suffrage based on the “screening” process of the chief executive candidates.

In response to the 8.31 resolution, students led a strike against the decision on September 22, 2014, which later triggered the OCLP Movement. Student protestors were arrested for “unlawfully” entering a fenced-off area during their attempt to reclaim Civic Square outside Hong Kong’s Government Headquarters in Admiralty on September 26, 2014. Two days later, OCLP formally announced the official start of its civil disobedience campaign against the NPC Standing Committee’s decision on the 2017 Hong Kong election framework, which in the end took place not in Central but in Admiralty. Less than two hours after the peaceful crowds flooded a major road into Admiralty, police fired eighty-seven rounds of tear gas to disperse the crowd, which provoked more angry citizens to swarm to Admiralty to occupy the site. The OCLP Movement later spread to Mong Kok and Causeway Bay, turning the protest into the pro-democracy “Umbrella Movement,” as umbrellas became the symbol of protestors’ resistance against the Hong Kong Police—and the rest is history. The 8.31 resolution was arguably the straw that broke the camel’s back. As noted by OCLP co-organizer Benny Tai, “[i]t wasn’t until the NPC declared the ‘8.31 resolution’ that many people in Hong Kong finally began to realize that Beijing had no intention of allowing us universal suffrage whatsoever,” and, after the government’s election proposal was defeated by the Legislative Council in June 2015, “many [Hong Kong] people . . . started to feel disillusioned with ‘one country, two systems’ and stopped believing that the Basic Law would guarantee us real democracy.”<sup>2</sup> While I do agree that OCLP was a watershed in the history of pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong, I would like to focus more on the transformation of the cultural and social landscape in this book.

In *Lost in Transition*, I argued that the “Donaldization” of Hong Kong society—the prioritization of neoliberal logic heavily slanted toward

the privileged when Donald Tsang was the chief executive—thwarted the development of Hong Kong society as well as its culture.<sup>3</sup> I did not anticipate that the Chief Executive election in 2012 would result in any unexpected changes, especially those for the worse. Henry Tang, the then-Chief Secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, was expected to succeed Donald Tsang to be the third chief executive before the leakage of a series of scandals (such as the illegal construction of his luxurious house) derailed his election campaign. Chun-Ying Leung, who pledged to tackle real estate hegemony and improve the living conditions of the underprivileged, turned the tables by winning Beijing's support shortly before the election in March 2012. After he took office on July 1, 2012, his honeymoon phase was so short that his popularity rating, according to the HKU Pop Site, fell below 50 during his third month of service. Although his ratings occasionally rose to slightly above 50, they were consistently low and hit record lows again and again.<sup>4</sup> Not only did Leung fail to keep his promise to alleviate the problem of the uneven distribution of resources, he was widely believed to have produced divisiveness in the community. When he announced that he would not be seeking reelection on December 9, 2016, which was totally unpredicted as most Hong Kong people expected him to be reelected in spite of public discontent, it was “a happy day” for many Hong Kong people, to borrow the words of one chief executive contender in the 2017 election, retired judge Kwok-Hing Woo.<sup>5</sup> But happiness did not last long for most Hong Kong people.

On March 26, 2017, former Chief Secretary Carrie Lam, nicknamed “CY 2.0” (Chun-Ying 2.0) and who reportedly received Beijing's blessing, won the election with 777 votes (out of 1,194 eligible votes) from a 1,200-member election committee. According to the 2017 CE Election Rolling Survey conducted by the University of Hong Kong, however, former Financial Secretary John Tsang's support rate was over 50 percent, which was 20 percentage points ahead of Lam.<sup>6</sup> Apparently, the 777 votes came from the alliance between the pro-establishment camp and the Hong Kong economic elites who were believed to be supporters of Henry Tang, not Chun-Ying Leung, in the previous election. (This was why Chun-Ying Leung won the 2012 election by 689 votes, which was definitely on the low side per the standards of “election” with Chinese characteristics.) The 2017 election proved that Lam was acceptable to the so-called “Tang Camp,” and the reunited Leung and Tang camps won the Chief Executive office for her despite miserably low public support, which did not matter in a small-circle election. Just one day after Carrie Lam was (s)elected to be the next Hong Kong chief executive, nine OCLP leaders and key

participants were charged for their roles in the pro-democracy movement in 2014. Ironically, the problem that was tackled was the divisiveness of the pro-establishment camps, but not that of Hong Kong society per se. The (s)election of Carrie Lam to be Leung's successor arguably proved that the change of chief executive was not meant to be a change of the system and course for administration.

### “One Country, Two Systems” Reconfigured

Carrie Lam was sworn in by Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, on the final day of his three-day visit to Hong Kong to mark the 20th anniversary of the resumption of Chinese sovereignty. During his first visit as China's President, Xi tried soothing Hong Kong people's resentment swollen over perceived growing interference by Beijing in the affairs of the Special Administrative Region immediately after landing at Hong Kong International Airport, saying that it was a trip to show Beijing's support: “The Central People's Government has always given Hong Kong Special Administrative Region its strong backing . . . We will support development and livelihood improvement in Hong Kong, as always.”<sup>77</sup> In his speech delivered after he inaugurated the new Hong Kong administration, President Xi added that “making everything political or deliberately creating differences” will “severely hinder Hong Kong's economic and social development.” Facing a divided city after the OCLP movement, Xi said that the “One Country, Two Systems” model, under which the city maintains autonomy in its legal, economic and financial systems, has been confronting “new problems.” While his speech addressed Hong Kong as a “plural society” with “different views and even major differences on some issues,” Xi also warned that “any attempt to endanger China's sovereignty and security, challenge the power of the central government” or to “use Hong Kong to carry out infiltration and sabotage against the mainland is an act that crosses the red line and is absolutely impermissible.”<sup>78</sup> By “red line” he was making it clear that the Central People's Government has zero tolerance toward potential challenges of its authority. This was well-echoed by Carrie Lam in her acceptance speech: her administration would take all necessary action “against any acts that will undermine the country's sovereignty, security and development interests.”<sup>79</sup> Although the OCLP movement was striving for genuine universal suffrage, it was often defined as pro-independence as it was indiscriminately seen as challenging the authority of the Central Government. The jailing of three prominent

Hong Kong pro-democracy student leaders—Joshua Wong, Alex Chow, and Nathan Law—in August 2017 for storming the Government Headquarter shortly before the OCLP Movement in September 2014 was a marked marginalization of human rights discourse in the so-called “One Country, Two Systems” framework. Hong Kong’s increasingly marginal, minor position, especially after the OCLP movement and the subsequent (s)election of the new chief executive, has become a predicament as well as condition for the Special Administrative Region.

Before he stepped down, Chun-Ying Leung, (in)famously repeated the “One Belt, One Road” initiative more than forty times in his penultimate Policy Address in January 2016. “As a centre for international asset management, risk management and multinational corporate treasury services, Hong Kong is well-positioned to capture the wealth of the Belt and Road,” according to Leung.<sup>10</sup> The “One Belt, One Road” initiative was first proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013 as a strategy to create an economic land belt across Central and West Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, as well as a maritime road that would link coastal cities in China to Africa and the Mediterranean. Almost immediately after President Xi rolled out the initiative, Leung claimed that Hong Kong could be positioned as a “super-connector” linking the Mainland to more than sixty countries on the new trade map of China. This sounded familiar to many ears in Hong Kong, a city that has long been considered a “middleman” between China and the world. As noted above, the change of chief executive was not meant to be a change of the system. Not surprisingly, Hong Kong’s super-connector role remained unchanged even though Leung was stepping down. Top business leaders of the HKSAR joined the leaders of twenty-nine countries at a major summit in Beijing in May 2017 to discuss the future development of the initiative. Conversely, *South China Morning Post* columnist Jake Van der Kamp argued the opposite, that the “Belt and Road middleman role is a dead end for Hong Kong.”<sup>11</sup> As rightly underscored by Van der Kamp, the notion of “middleman” has become outdated in the age of globalization. Moreover, the once singular, prolific in-between position of the former British colony was lost after its reversion to China, which has witnessed an unexpectedly swift rise of its economy and soft power. The “in-betweenness” of Hong Kong has therefore to be understood differently. With the increasing dependence of Hong Kong on Mainland China in terms of not only politics but also economic and cultural markets, it will be more and more difficult for Hong Kong to inscribe pluralities from its in-between position. For example, the once world-famous Hong Kong cinema has in recent years been dominated by Mainland-Hong Kong co-productions. As most of these

co-productions have the Mainland as the targeted market, Hong Kong's in-betweenness has been lost, to such an extent that "Hong Kong cinema has become an oxymoron": "the beautiful irony that the highest-grossing Hong Kong titles at the domestic box office in recent times have all been Hong Kong-China co-productions, which mostly rely on their box-office revenues in China."<sup>12</sup> Worse yet, the super-connector role envisaged within the "One Country, Two Systems" framework, not unlike the co-productions, has been heavily slanted toward "One Country." Hong Kong's development as a Special Administrative Region in the two decades since its reversion to China is succinctly summed up by Joseph Cheng: "The Chinese leadership probably had intended to maintain the 'One Country, Two Systems' model in Hong Kong. Its desire to secure a high level of control to avoid risks, however, proved to be a stronger motivation."<sup>13</sup>

While the distinctiveness of Hong Kong is fading away, rule of law and freedom of expression are widely believed to remain the cornerstones of the city's success. Van der Kamp did hit the nail on the head by arguing that,

[g]iven present trends of tightened control by Beijing in the mainland . . . the future probably now beckons us to rule of law areas such as commercial dispute settlement as well as to money laundering (always a big business for us) and perhaps to freedom of expression fields such as the arts.<sup>14</sup>

But the legal system of Hong Kong, not unlike its culture, did not remain unfazed by the rise of China. Wai-Man Sin and Yiu-Wai Chu have argued, shortly after the handover, that in spite of this, the rule of law was hailed as "the secret of the present success of the economy and the key to Hong Kong's future prosperity."<sup>15</sup> It was because the rule of law was seen as a grand narrative that it ensured Hong Kong's autonomy and hence prosperity, conjuring up a "myth of status quo" that Hong Kong would continue to succeed if the legal system, *inter alia*, remained unchanged.<sup>16</sup> In her *Lost in China? Law, Culture & Identity in Post-1997*, Carol Jones supplemented this argument by noting that this had become the grand narrative around the world by the 1990s, and even "China officially subscribed" to it.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Beijing does not mind letting Hong Kong retain its grand narrative—but just as a grand narrative—to secure its role of middleman in the global economy. Political and social controversies since the handover have exerted significant impacts on the rule of law in Hong Kong, and Sin was indeed (and arguably still is) right in arguing that

[t]he weakening of the ideological role of the law in relation to political autonomy is however somewhat compensated by a more subtle role played by the (common) law in cultural identity construction that is more immune to political influence. . . . On a more general level, (common) law's more subtle role as a cultural identity marker for Hong Kong and its people has survived all the political turmoil before and after the handover.<sup>18</sup>

The rule of law in Hong Kong is often seen as an unshakable core value that defends a “unified sense of Hong Kong identity,” but, as rightly cautioned by Jones, “neither the border nor the law prevented the ‘two system’ [sic] from becoming ‘one country.’”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, as argued by Yves Dezalay and Bryant Garth in their *Asian Legal Revivals: Lawyers in the Shadow of Empire*, “[t]he general pattern is that even well-functioning and well-established legal institutions, including law firms, bar associations, courts, and legal education, cannot by themselves hold back authoritarianism.”<sup>20</sup> Hong Kong was considered a “special type of liberal authoritarian regime featuring some electoral authoritarian elements,”<sup>21</sup> and after the jailing of student leaders, authoritarianism became a tangible threat to the city. As cautioned by Brian Fong, Associate Director of the Academy of Hong Kong Studies at the Education University of Hong Kong, authoritarian rule of law has begun to take shape in Hong Kong.<sup>22</sup> When the two systems are converging under one country and the chief executive “does not seem the kind of person to argue doggedly in defense of Hong Kong’s rule of law, its way of life or its right to have free elections,”<sup>23</sup> tens of thousands of Hongkongers took to the street again to join a National Day march on October 1 to reject “authoritarian rule.” Some may think that Hong Kong is still not Singapore and “authoritarian” is just a hyperbole,<sup>24</sup> but the emerging anxiety about authoritarian rule did suggest something urgent and critical. The changes at both macro and micro levels in Hong Kong over the past decade have somehow shown that although law and culture are important sites of resistance to Mainlandization, whether Hong Kong’s attempts to maintain its identity will be successful or not cannot but be problematic. In a sense, Jones was not utterly pessimistic as she used a question mark in the book’s title, and by way of conclusion she also made a very important remark:

The problem for Hong Kong is that, because rule of law is so widely valorized and so deeply entrenched in local culture,

Hongkongers themselves may be pacified by measures from Beijing that offer them legal instead of political answers to their demands, lawyers and civil society must therefore remain aware of the implications of this possibility . . . Hong Kong is “a fragile vulnerable space . . . easily appropriated by other forces, political or economical, this space that is open to us could easily be lost to us.”<sup>25</sup>

The question mark will possibly disappear before long, should Hong Kong be complacent with its so-called “super-connector” role in the new go-global plan of China. Jones also argued in the book that “as the walls of law have been breached, culture in its many forms has become a locus of resistance to domination.”<sup>26</sup> While culture may have become a locus of resistance to domination, the disappearance of Hong Kong’s distinctive culture and identity has recently become a cliché, which is perfectly summed up by the dystopian take on Hong Kong’s future in the award-winning independent film *Ten Years* (2015), which includes five stories on the prediction of Hong Kong’s abysmal future under tight Chinese Communist Party control. The film touched a raw nerve among Hong Kong people, who had begun to worry that Hong Kong would completely disappear in ten years, if not sooner. In other words, the creative in-betweenness that enabled Hong Kong to write itself might turn into a mere role of connector that functions most effectively by erasing its own self.

### “This City Is Dying, You Know?”

Social discontent in Hong Kong has been brewing for some time, as the territory has been widely criticized for its general decline over the past decade or so. “This city is dying, you know?” was the question raised in the Television Broadcasting Company (TVB, the leading broadcaster in the territory) drama *When Heaven Burns*, which premiered in November 2011 in Hong Kong, and it rocked the city. The drama was filmed in late 2009 but did not air until two years later. Soon after its release, the drama triggered a heated debate due to its unconventional subject matter. TVB dramas have long been infamous for being standardized, sentimental soap operas, but the drama *When Heaven Burns* changed that depiction. The show offered a dreary portrayal of humanity through a highly controversial and tragic incident, in which three young men killed and ate their friend when they became hopelessly trapped in a snowstorm during



a mountaineering trip. The four young men were band mates, and the drama's rock music theme set the backdrop against which its acute social critique was highlighted.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the haunting memories of the three survivors, the drama stressed the importance of rock band music as a source of staying true to oneself in an antagonistic society. Joe Junior, a local 1960s music band star, played veteran disc jockey Dr. Dylan, who lamented in the drama,

Let's take a look at our world and our city. Having an eye on nothing but money, we can no longer differentiate between right and wrong. We have been shaped by the environment to become standardized products: to like eating the same kind of food, to enjoy watching the same kind of TV programs, to uphold the same political view, to subscribe to the same way of living. This city is dying, you know?<sup>28</sup>

The lack of originality in Hong Kong culture is one of the symptoms of a soulless, indifferent city dominated by rampant capitalism, which was in the past masked by the economic achievements of the city once famous for its economic success. However, Hong Kong has witnessed a decline in its economic and cultural superiority over the Mainland over the past decade or so, which has caused a swell of public discontent on the one hand, and incited worries about the future of the city on the other. Toward the end of *When Heaven Burns*, the female lead, Hazel Yip (Charmaine Sheh), puts it very clearly: "Harmony is not a hundred people saying the same thing, but rather a hundred people voicing a hundred different opinions with mutual respect for other's views." In the midst of social controversies, however, the government has been sacrificing different opinions for the sake of harmony, which can only make things worse.

Not just the city of Hong Kong but also its popular culture has been seen as declining, if not dying. That Hong Kong cinema, television, and Cantonese popular songs (Cantopop), among other Cantonese popular culture genres, have died, has become almost a cliché in the new millennium. "Either go north or wait for death," the subtitle of a round table panel on Hong Kong cinema organized by the Shanghai magazine *Xinmin Weekly* in 2009, says it all. The swiftly growing importance of the Mainland market dealt a hefty blow to the distinctiveness of Hong Kong culture, which led to the waning of its unique identity. The notion of the "New Hong Konger" put forward by former Chief Executive Donald Tsang in *The 2007–08 Policy Address: A New Direction for Hong Kong* failed to offer a new direction

for Hong Kong people.<sup>29</sup> The formation of a Hong Kong identity in the 1970s was a process of accumulation from below, in which popular culture genres were important sources.<sup>30</sup> The Lion Rock Spirit, for example, began as a theme song of a popular television program, which later became so widespread that it inspired generations of Hong Kong people. According to Donald Tsang, however, the New Hong Konger must be defined top-down from the perspective of the country:

Hong Kong will certainly continue to serve the country in our unique way. We will also lay an even more solid foundation to maintain our own long term prosperity, stability and development. . . . Working hard for bread and butter, Hong Kong people have created an economic miracle without realizing it. Right now we are creating a new miracle.<sup>31</sup>

The heated controversies in subsequent years proved that the former chief executive had taken the wrong direction, and the empty slogan “New Hong Konger” could not muddle through Hong Kong’s identity crisis. The (forced) integration with the Mainland has stirred up Hong Kong people’s anxiety. To a certain extent, the Umbrella Movement was inspired by the March 2014 Sunflower Movement in Taiwan, in which Taiwan’s parliament was occupied by hundreds of protesters in an audacious rally against trade links with China. The resistance against the overwhelming China factor—“under constant threat of disappearance into the economic, cultural and, possibly, political folds of its powerful Mainland counterpart”<sup>32</sup>—was also apparent in the Umbrella Movement that happened in Hong Kong later that same year. To make matters worse for Hong Kong people, the recent decline of Hong Kong culture has exerted a profound impact on their sense of belonging and their local lifestyle.

Local culture has been considered an important asset in resisting the Mainlandization of Hong Kong society,<sup>33</sup> but given its diminishing influence it can no longer function as a substantial source of identity. The 2012 Ultimate Song Chart Awards hosted by Commercial Radio of Hong Kong, the most listened-to radio channel in Hong Kong, may be regarded as a pointed irony. The main theme of the popular song awards presentation in 2012 was “Stand Up! Locals,” which paid tribute to popular songs that reflected local Hong Kong cultural and social issues. The New Female Singer Gold Award paradoxically went to Kimberley Chen, an Australian-born singer, actress, and model based in Taiwan. In this special context, “the last generation” has unsurprisingly become one of the most widely

debated issues in Hong Kong, from “The Last Generation of Hong Kong Cultural Critics” to “The Last Generation of Hong Kongers.”<sup>34</sup>

As recent developments have reshaped our understanding of the future of Hong Kong culture and society, it is necessary to review how Hong Kong Studies as an academic field should face this problem. Toward this end, I would like to shift the emphasis to the study of local cultures beyond my take on how Hong Kong culture was lost. Not unlike the subjects of their researches, local Hong Kong Studies have faced a similar, if different, impasse in recent years, reminding me of the famous lines in Tang poet Meng Haoran’s “Seeing off Mr. Du Shisi South of the River”: “A sail is underway at sunset, where will it moor? Looking to the end of the sky can break a man’s heart.”<sup>35</sup> After the Fifth Annual Strategic Leaders Global Summit, “Career Outcomes for Graduate Students: Tracking and Building Pathways,” held at the University of Hong Kong in 2011, Paul Tam, the then Pro Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Research) and Dean of the Graduate School at the host institution, made a remark about one of the major problems in graduate education in Hong Kong: “For a research university, the undergraduate-graduate ratio should be 1:1, or the number of graduates a bit more than undergraduates. The number of undergraduates in Hong Kong, however, is way above that of graduates.”<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong, established in 1965 to play the role of independent professional advisor to the government on the funding and development of the higher education sector, “firmly believes that internationalization should be one of the central themes of all UGC-funded institutions.”<sup>37</sup> This central theme has had an enormous impact on local undergraduates planning to pursue graduate studies. The 7:3 local/non-local graduate student ratio in 2000–2001 fell sharply in a decade to 3:7 in 2011–2012.<sup>38</sup> The small number of graduate institutions and the prioritization of non-local students have shut the door on many potential local students who had hoped to pursue graduate studies.

The theme of “internationalization” may sound sweet to many ears, and according to statistical figures, it seems to be successful. Moreover, the number of non-local students is often hailed as an important benchmark against which the degree of internationalization is measured; as stated by the Education Bureau, “[a]dmission of qualified non-local students to research graduate programs not only diversifies the student mix, but also helps boost the level of local research programs and enhance the effectiveness of public spending.”<sup>39</sup> However, it is an open secret that “non-local” means nationalization much more than internationalization in this context. According to the figures from the UGC, in 2015–2016, 11,894 of the 15,730

non-local students were from the Mainland, 3,130 came from other places in Asia, and only 706 were from the rest of the world.<sup>40</sup> In other words, more than three-quarters of the “non-local” students came from the Mainland. The UGC knows very well that “[i]nternationalization is not the same thing as encouraging mainland students to study in Hong Kong” (as noted in a 2010 higher education review).<sup>41</sup> Despite the concerns raised by the Audit Commission of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, which functions independently and is accountable to the chief executive for providing independent, professional, and quality audit services to help the government and public sector organizations enhance public sector performance and accountability, its 2016 report about the problem of (inter)nationalization stated that “[the UGC should] further encourage the universities to continue their efforts to attract more non-local students, in particular those other than Mainland students, and promote more diversity at the universities.”<sup>42</sup>

### (Inter)Nationalization’s New Clothes

A further examination of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme proved that the public spending watchdog did hit the nail on the head. The Research Grants Council (RGC), which operates under the aegis of the UGC and functions as an advisory body on research matters, rolled out the scheme in 2009 with an eye to “attracting the best and brightest students in the world to pursue their PhD studies in Hong Kong’s universities.”<sup>43</sup> In 2010–2011, among the 115 awardees, 62 percent of the candidates were from the Mainland, 9 percent were from Hong Kong, and the remaining 29 percent were from other parts of the world (11% from Europe, 10% from other Asian countries, 5% from America, 2% from Africa, and 1% from Australia). These figures have remained basically the same, with a majority of awardees coming from the Mainland: 65.6 percent in 2011–12, 55.8 percent in 2012–13, and 55.7 percent in 2013–14.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, there has been a stellar rise in the number of self-financed taught graduate programs in Hong Kong, and most of the students are also from the Mainland.<sup>45</sup> The overwhelming increase in the proportion of Mainland students in these graduate programs has undoubtedly exerted adverse effects on internationalization and, worse yet, the diversity of academic approaches to teaching as well as learning quality. In its audit report of the University of Hong Kong in 2016, the Quality Assurance Council, established under the aegis of the UGC to assure the quality of all programs offered by UGC-funded institutions, underlined the adverse impact of the uneven

distribution of student origins: “The Audit Panel heard that in some TPG [taught graduate] courses there is a majority of Mainland students, which in some cases inhibits class discussion and the teaching methods used.”<sup>46</sup> In short, although under the new clothes of internationalization there may not be the naked body of Hong Kong’s education system, it does not need the innocent child in Hans Christian Andersen’s story to explain that internationalization is another kind of emperor’s new clothes. Let me borrow Rey Chow’s insightful interpretation of a derivative of the new clothes: “[I]n spite of the fact that the Emperor has no clothes on, people see him as the opposite: precisely because he has no clothes on, people themselves provide the vision that makes up for this lack.”<sup>47</sup>

This problem has been aggravated by the lack of farsighted policy to nurture local graduate students. The internationalization of higher education in Hong Kong has had an impact on not just the proportion of local versus non-local students but also the percentage of local professoriate staff in tertiary institutions. It has become more and more difficult for local PhDs to secure a tenure-track professorial appointment, and senior management in tertiary institutions in Hong Kong are aware of this problem. Alexander Wai, Vice President (Research Development) of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), made it clear in an interview in 2011 that there was no government policy to support graduate students, and most of the homegrown graduates ended up as lecturers, instructors, or research assistants because there were no professorial-track job opportunities for them.<sup>48</sup> Yuk-Shan Wong, the President of the Open University of Hong Kong, pointed out when he was Vice President for Administration of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology that although internationalization was important for the future development of higher education in Hong Kong, it was essential to have a group of scholars who were conversant with the local secondary school system and social reality. Therefore, he believed that there should be a certain proportion of local graduate students.<sup>49</sup>

Internationalization is an inevitable trend, but what it is and/or what it is not are important questions that Hong Kong has to ask. Shu-mei Shih’s collaborative effort with Ping-hui Liao to “comparatize” Taiwan shed more light on Hong Kong’s imaginaries in regard to internationalization. Shih brought forth the notion of “relational comparison” in “Comparison as Relation” and highlighted the importance of “comparison as relation,” as indicated in the title of the essay:

Comparison as relation means setting into motion historical relationalities between entities brought together for comparison,

and bringing into relation terms that have traditionally been pushed apart from each other due to certain interests, such as the European exceptionalism that undergirds Eurocentrism.<sup>50</sup>

In line with this innovative critical endeavor, *Comparatizing Taiwan* considers “Taiwan not as a discreet or separate object or area of study, but as a site and a product of relations with other entities and areas in terms of culture, geography, history, politics, and economy.”<sup>51</sup> As convincingly argued by the editors, “[c]omparatizing’ here is a transitive verb that acts directly upon the word ‘Taiwan,’ so that ‘Taiwan’ itself becomes an open term that acquires specific meanings in relation to that which it is compared to.”<sup>52</sup> In her essay assessing the possible impacts of the Sinophone on Taiwan, Shih further explicated her view on the importance of comparatizing: the major aim of *Comparatizing Taiwan* is to situate Taiwan in a context of possible comparisons (with America, the Caribbean, Southeast Asian, or Ireland), projecting multi-object and multilinear dialogues.<sup>53</sup> Shih’s interest in world history and world literature in “Comparison as Relation” has spoken volumes for her emphasis on the literariness and the worldliness of literary works. The turn to “comparison as relation” can be seen as paving the way to move beyond area studies toward world studies, so to speak.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, while the internationalization of a city often means urban renewal projects that uproot local communities to make way for new luxurious commercial complexes, the internationalization of academia in Hong Kong is grossly simplified to mean the language of research outputs and the nationalities of teaching faculties, but not their academic training and vision.

Internationalization is, of course, not a problem for just Hong Kong; in non-Western countries and regions, it has become a common problem. The Taiwanese scholar Chang-yung Liu made the following remark, which is applicable to almost all of these cases:

Chinese journals are certainly not acceptable to SSCI [Social Sciences Citation Index], and it is simply impossible for Chinese articles to be published in SSCI journals. [Even those written in English] will often find themselves not being able to fit the interest of western society, and thus much more difficult to pass the reviews. Therefore, the use of the amount of essays published in SSCI journals as a benchmark of the value of local studies is neither objective nor reasonable.<sup>55</sup>

From a similar perspective, Hong Kong scholar Ming-Yan Ngan put his finger on the problem by asking this question:

The best outputs would be exported, and the inferior ones stay home. In order not to perish, Hong Kong scholars have to meet international standards and export their outputs, forfeiting the possibilities of local publications. . . . Why do Hong Kong scholars have to sacrifice their own local culture for the sake of survival?<sup>56</sup>

In recent years, the slogan “Internationalization” has been chanted in Mainland universities again and again, and thus Mainland scholar Chen Pingyuan has also lamented in a similar vein,

[o]ne of the major characteristics of universities is that they have to ‘keep themselves grounded.’ Unlike factories, they cannot simply import a set of facilities, assemble them; or else problems will surface time and again. Therefore, I am disturbed by the overwhelming, indisputable discourse of ‘internationalization.’<sup>57</sup>

Needless to say, the resources for academic research in Humanities-related areas in a commercial city like Hong Kong are far from abundant, and the emphasis on internationalization only further directs attention away from local topics. As noted by the Taiwanese scholar Liu, it is ridiculous “to do research according to the mainstream agenda of the West and publish the research output in English in Western journals which only a few would read in Taiwan.”<sup>58</sup> To write about local issues in English is already a burden, and the rise of China has made things even worse for regions like Hong Kong and Taiwan. As international journals have shifted their foci to the Mainland, it is easier to publish essays on Mainland China rather than on Hong Kong or Taiwan. It is thus not surprising that more and more Hong Kong scholars are directing their efforts toward Mainland topics, which is ironically similar to the situation of cultural industries such as Hong Kong cinema. The lack of succession of young scholars in academia, together with the change in research direction, has driven local studies into a deadlock.

That the government has been turning a blind eye to the importance of local scholars can arguably be attributed to the fact that higher education is now seen as a business investment. Contrary to the common fallacy that local Hong Kong students are less interested in pursuing further studies,

the survey conducted by the Hong Kong Professionals and Senior Executives Association in 2010 spoke loudly about the desire to pursue further studies among the generation of Hong Kongers who were born between 1976 and 1990. It was stated clearly toward the conclusion of the report that education is believed to be the most important factor in the upward mobility of this generation.<sup>59</sup> The sad but true fact is that, in a society with diminishing upward mobility, the government has not paid enough attention to the lack of educational opportunities in graduate schools and, more importantly, the lack of career prospects for graduate students. As shrewdly argued by Arif Dirlik in his critical account of universities in the age of global modernity, “transnationalization challenges the local responsibilities of universities as institutions of learning intimately connected with practices of citizenship” as financial gains from the “education industry” have become more and more attractive.<sup>60</sup> One research assistant working in a local tertiary institution rightly criticized the funding model of graduate education in Hong Kong, which is heavily slanted toward non-local students in the name of internationalization. It is the social responsibility of the government to nurture local scholars, as argued by the author, and those countries where creative industries are not just valued but also practiced would not refuse to shoulder this responsibility.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, Hong Kong is not an isolated case regarding the local responsibilities of universities. Singapore, often seen as Hong Kong’s major competitor, has been facing a similar issue, in which Singaporean faculty members are a minority in Singapore’s local universities. Two Cornell PhD candidates who were born and raised in Singapore, Jack Chia and Carissa Kang, answered the question “Why hire locals?” by way of the conclusion of their study on the low proportion of Singaporean faculty in Singaporean universities:

After all, with the current global obsession with world university rankings, promoting academic diversity and hiring renowned foreign scholars rather than recruiting young local talent is a more attractive and viable option to further advance the global image and international standing of Singapore’s universities. However, as Southeast Asianists born and raised in Singapore, we hope to end on a more romantic note. The late eminent Southeast Asian historian, Harry J. Benda, once observed that Southeast Asian intelligentsias [are] actively engaged in promoting political development and social justice in their home country and in the region. Singaporeans simply cannot expect



foreign intellectuals to engage politicians, lobby for social reforms, and advocate for the preservation of cultural heritage on their behalf. Rather, Singapore needs to nurture its own Singaporean intelligentsia and play a more proactive role in attracting talent back home.<sup>62</sup>

### Local Studies @ End Times

While I cannot agree more with this “romantic note,” I find it difficult to interpret the indifference toward nurturing Hong Kong’s own intelligentsia as a way to demote political and social awareness at home, which is not unreasonable though. As the upward mobility of local graduate students has diminished, those who have entered academia have often found themselves in teaching-track posts. These young scholars have to spend most of their time teaching—these posts do not require research—which is frequently three to four times that of professorial-track faculty, thus leaving them with no time to focus on their research projects. These graduate students are trapped in a vicious circle: without research output, it is increasingly difficult for them to shift to the professorial track. For the luckier ones who are able to secure a professorial-track job in academia, the publish-or-perish pressure often forces them to move away from local researches, which are relatively harder to publish in international journals because, in recent years, international academia has been much more interested in the Mainland and the world than in Hong Kong. As rightly lamented by Ngok Ma, a local political scientist, “[i]t is not impossible to publish Hong Kong studies in top-tier international academic journals, but if the research abilities are similar, publications of China studies, regional studies or international studies researches would be much easier.”<sup>63</sup>

As per the “Guidance Notes” of the Research Assessment Exercise conducted by the University Grants Council, more and more emphasis has been placed on internationalization, from “possibly showing some evidence of international excellence” in 1996 to “showing some evidence of international excellence” in 1999, “showing evidence of international excellence” in 2006, and adding “world leading” to “internationally excellent” in 2014. This is why local scholars resent the fact that “the University system in Hong Kong requires scholars to be ‘off the ground.’”<sup>64</sup> It is thus not surprising that shortly before the renowned Hong Kong critic-cum-poet Ping-Kwan Leung (also known by his pen name Yesi) passed away in 2013, he “was wishing in his death bed that Hong Kong literature

can receive serious and fair attention domestically and globally and that local quality writers can be read and known to do justice to Hong Kong literature, which has long been marginalized.”<sup>65</sup> Local Hong Kong literature and culture has long been marginalized in academia, and, to borrow Ackbar Abbas’s notion of “reverse hallucination,”<sup>66</sup> Hong Kong people have been trained to turn a blind eye to what they actually see—Hong Kong literature and culture. Thanks to the untiring efforts of scholars such as Ping-Kwan Leung and Stephen Ching-Kiu Chan to promote Hong Kong literature and culture in the 1990s, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Unfortunately, soon after local scholars saw the light it went dimmer and dimmer because of the rising trend of internationalization, China, and its soft power. Studies on local Hong Kong culture, which gathered momentum in the 1990s, suddenly found themselves being trapped in an impasse. If Ping-Kwan Leung’s often-asked question “Why is it so difficult to tell the Hong Kong story?”<sup>67</sup> is put in this context, the answer would be the double marginalization of local studies—through internationalization and the rising interest in China.

Without a new generation of local scholars committed to local culture, the problems faced by local studies will echo Slavoj Žižek’s *Living in the End Times*. Trapped in global capitalism, one of Žižek’s “four riders of the apocalypse,” and the inherent rise of China, local studies in Hong Kong are experiencing an “apocalyptic zero-point.”<sup>68</sup> “Living in the end times,” to borrow Žižek’s words, the acceptance of a terminal illness might help discern “the signs of an emerging emancipatory subjectivity.”<sup>69</sup> Žižek borrowed Swiss-born psychologist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s theory to describe “the five stages of grief which follow . . . upon learning one has a terminal illness”: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.<sup>70</sup> In the context of “end times,” Hong Kong could generate possible imaginaries after the last generation. Žižek also quoted what G. K. Chesterton called “thinking backwards”:

[W]e have to leap back in time, before the fateful decisions were made or before the accidents occurred that generated the state which now seems normal to us, and the way to do so, to render palpable this moment of decision, is to imagine how, at that point, history might have taken a different turn.<sup>71</sup>

Living in the end times, Hong Kong, Hong Kong culture, and its studies have to move on and accept its fate before imagining radical alternatives.

Local discourse can easily be considered parochial, as academic

studies are intoxicated by the monolithic narrative of (inter)nationalization. Essays like “What Happened to Hong Kong? On the Local-centrism of Hong Kong” is a prime example of interpreting local studies as a kind of parochial centrism:

The real challenge Hong Kong people are facing—their last chance—is not to highlight their own position as the center, but to take advantage of the rise of China and enhance the integration into and interaction with the Mainland . . . how to occupy a position when China becomes the center of the world by standing on the shoulders of the giant.<sup>72</sup>

This should not be interpreted as the different perspectives of Hong Kong and the Mainland, however. The argument cited above strongly echoes the notion of the “New Hong Konger” proposed by Donald Tsang, the former Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Conversely, *Southern Metropolis Daily*, a Mainland newspaper distributed largely in the Pearl River Delta area, voiced an opinion utterly different from other official media. In the essay “Seeing Hong Kong as Method,” for example, *Southern Metropolis Daily* urged Hong Kong to focus on its own characteristics. Moreover, Hong Kong should not be framed by the myth of “Hong Kong = shopping paradise,” as suggested by the newspaper, which is generally regarded as one of China’s most liberal official media: “In recent years, Hong Kong has lost its unique humanistic qualities. It is in desperate need of a spiritual awakening, a kind of self-salvation originated from the younger generation.”<sup>73</sup> Hong Kong’s humanistic qualities are fading because it is trapped between nationalization and internationalization, and any “self-salvation” is thus vulnerable to parochial centrism attacks. Stuck in dire straits, Hong Kong has to understand parochialism differently. As argued by Meaghan Morris in her “On the Future of Parochialism,” parochialism can be seen as “a complex disposition of variable significance which provides an angle from which to consider issues of cultural impact and change under globalization in a concrete way.”<sup>74</sup> In her inspiring account of the *Young and Dangerous* movies and Tuen Mun, a remote district in the northwestern part of Hong Kong, Morris argues that it is not necessary for teachers and students “to renounce parochialism in order to acquire an ‘international’ outlook.”<sup>75</sup> Being “cosmo-political,” in other words, can lead to having both an international vision and a local sense of belonging.

This reminds me of a story retold by Žižek during the Occupy Wall Street Movement in 2011:

In an old joke from the defunct German Democratic Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia; aware of how all mail will be read by censors, he tells his friends: 'Let's establish a code: if a letter you will get from me is written in ordinary blue ink, it is true; if it is written in red ink, it is false.' After a month, his friends get the first letter written in blue ink: 'Everything is wonderful here: stores are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, movie theatres show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair—the only thing unavailable is red ink.'<sup>76</sup>

Žižek retold this story to underscore our unfreedom: "And is this not our situation till now? We have all the freedoms one wants—the only thing missing is the red ink: we feel free because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom." This story of red ink is perfectly applicable to Hong Kong academia: we thought we had the academic freedom to choose, according to our own will, the topics to study and how to publish the output, but, all of a sudden, we noticed that we did not have red ink to articulate our unfreedom. Speaking at the Occupy Wall Street Movement, Žižek stressed the importance of red ink once again: "The way we are taught to speak about freedom—war on terror and so on—falsifies freedom. And this is what you are doing here. You are giving all of us red ink."<sup>77</sup> As warned by Arif Dirlik and Roxann Prazniak, "[i]n Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region (SAR) ruled by and for business interests entangled in the PRC economy, the Beijing government's silent invasion is most evident in the increasing self-censorship of the press."<sup>78</sup> Given that the red ink in Hong Kong academia depends even more on the persistence of local studies in academia, as noted in Masao Miyoshi's precursory critique of universities in the mid-1990s, due to the rampant influence of global capitalism, universities were turned into transitional corporations and were no longer able to function as sites of resistance.<sup>79</sup> As sites of resistance, universities could produce red ink, but when higher education across the world became corporatized, the red ink would turn blue. In such case it is strategically significant to bear in mind Gayatri Spivak's suggestion that "the notion of what the work cannot say becomes important."<sup>80</sup> But in order not to forget the function of red ink and to understand what the work cannot say, it is necessary to underline the importance of inheritance and the transmission of oppositional discourse, which is particularly important in a society—ruled by and for business interests entangled