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A Study of Visuals and its Significance in Group Formations and Communications During the 2019 Hong Kong Anti-ELAB Movement

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Abstract

Beginning from June 2019, the streets of Hong Kong have been turned into a theatre of protests. Together with their banners and umbrellas, protesters took to the street to protest against the proposed extradition bill that allows the government to send suspected criminals to mainland China. This ongoing movement is the largest anti-government movement in the city's history, and it is also the first movement that employs a voluntary mass production of protest arts. These posters are seen across the city and countless 'protest poster groups' are established to dedicate themselves in the creation and distribution of the posters.

This thesis aims to analyse the roles of visuals in group formations and communications during the Anti-ELAB movement, through establishing a theoretical engagement with protest images, in the forms of posters. 9 in-depth interviews with creators and distributors, and a critical visual analysis of 10 posters were conducted, while theories from visual culture, network society and social movement studies were applied to the analysis. The findings indicates that protest posters highlight different important cultural perspectives and play significant roles in bridging communicational, information and geographical gaps between participants.

Keywords: *Visual culture, Social Movements, Group Formations, Hong Kong, Anti-Extradition Bill movement*

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TABLE OF CONTENT

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>page</i>	2
<i>Acknowledgements</i>		3
1 Theatre of Protests		5
About the Anti-ELAB Movement		5
Aim and Objective		6
Research Questions and Dissemination		7
2 Literature Review		8
Group Formations in a Social Movement		8
The Network Society: Digital Networking and Connective Actions		13
Visuals in Social Movements		17
3 Methodology and Research Design		25
Methodological Approach		25
Location of Research		26
Design and Sampling		27
Analysing the Data		29
Reflection on Methods		31
4 Analysis		32
From a Small Initial Group to a Group of Millions		32
The Formations of Groups and Anti-groups		37
Sustaining the Group: “We are ‘hands and feet’ of each other”		44
Protest Images as a Recruitment Tool		46
The Power of Visuals		51
5 Conclusions		59
<i>References</i>		65
<i>Appendices</i>		71
Consent Form		71
Interview Guide		72
Sample Transcript		74
Excerpt of Coding for Qualitative Textual Analysis		80
Spider Diagrams for Pre-category		81
Overview of Themes, Categories, Subcategories and Quotes		82
Original Samples of Visual Analysis		84
Excerpt of Coding for Critical Visual Analysis		86
Overview of Visual Analysis with Panofsky’s Three Levels of Meanings		87

1 THEATRE OF PROTESTS

Protests in contemporary society are not static, but dynamic. Networks, digital media and communications are crucial for organising movements and engaging individuals. Esherick and Wasserstrom (1990) claim that the public nature of social movements is that they take place at a ‘street theatre’, where citizens are invited to join (Veg 2016:683). This street theatre involves performances of different culture practices carried out by participants. Textual materials like slogans can be seen as expressions of claims and a part of the performance of the democratic nature of the movement (ibid.:682), and so can visual materials. In summer 2019, protesters in Hong Kong who are against a proposed extradition bill have turned the city into an enormous street theatre. Protest arts including posters, graffitis, and statues were seen everywhere in the city: walls in pedestrian tunnels, fences and grounds on footbridges, bus stops, entrances of metro stations... are all covered with paintings and posters created by protesters. Protest posters have integrated into the citizens’ everyday life, regardless of whether they are protesters. Although these artworks convey messages that impose heavy meanings contributing to the future and democracy of Hong Kong, the creativity and colourful designs have brought liveliness to the city that was once being called the ‘cultural desert’. This thesis presents key findings that emphasise on the significant roles of protest posters in communicating messages, creating connectivity between protesters, and ultimately, in group formations during the movement.

About the Anti-ELAB Movement

The Anti-Extradition Bill (Anti-ELAB) movement has been taking place in Hong Kong since June 2019. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government announced the amendment of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance on February 12, 2019 (Lee et al. 2019:1). Small-scale protests were organized since then, however, the government has made no plan on withdrawing the proposed extradition bill that allows Hong Kong citizens to be extradited to mainland China. Few months later, 2 millions people took to the streets to protest against it. Since early June, massive protests were organised to urge for the withdrawal of the bill. After several strikes and violent clashes between protesters and police, the government finally announced the bill has been withdrawn in September. Despite the bill itself is no longer an immediate threat to

the public, the protests have developed into a city-wide movement that seeks for an independent inquiry that investigates police's abuse of power and political reforms (ibid.).

Big and small group formations were observed during the movement. In the eyes of the general public, people who participate in demonstrations and protests all belong to the group of 'protesters'. However, the formation of smaller groups actually allow more effective discussions and executions of plans, as each of them tend to focus on a particular tactic or tend to have a particular channel of distribution. There are groups of 'frontline fighters', who are actively interacting with and fighting against the police directly during violent clashes between the two. There are also groups of 'protest poster fighters', who are actively creating and distributing posters that combines information and protest values with visual elements.

In this largest movement of Hong Kong's history, protesters engage in a variety of activities in addition to mass marching and protesting, in order to make an alliance with more groups and individuals. In particular, they realise it is important to ensure effective communication of information, which is very beneficial for expanding the protester population and sustaining the group. This has given rise to a wave of poster production, in which local professional and amateur artists created thousands of protest posters that serve different kinds of purposes. While some posters include practical information such as protest calendars and event timelines, some other posters tend to tell stories of different participants and promote values of the movement. Numerous 'protest poster groups' on social media platforms and popular forums were established in June, which are dedicated to the distribution of the protest images in the forms of posters and digital images to the mass audience online and offline. This thesis focuses on the importance of the posters in group formations and communications, specifically in how they facilitate effective spread of messages and affective bond between protesters.

Aim and Objective

The aim of this research is to analyse the roles of visuals in social movements through establishing a theoretical engagement with protest images. Studies have been conducted to understand the impact of photographs on social movements in terms of how they mobilise individuals, with emphases on different concepts such as collective identity. Approaching

social movements as visual phenomena have not been the study focus for most researchers, but there has been discussions on how visual texts are crucial for diffusing ideas in a social movement (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:11). Researchers also argue that there is a call for further research that has a focus on cultural diversity (ibid.). Given that the majority of the chosen case studies for this kind of research are focusing on western societies, studying a case from an Asian culture will allow this research to contribute to this area of study from a different cultural perspective. Hence the objective of this research is to take a different cultural approach to investigate the roles of visuals in group formations and communications.

Research Questions and Dissemination

The main research question this thesis answers is: ***What roles do protest posters play in group formations and communications in the Anti-ELAB movement.*** This will be analysed by answering the following sub-questions:

- *What do protesters communicate through the posters?*
- *How does the way of distribution facilitate effective spread of information?*
- *How do visuals create connectivity between individuals?*

The thesis is structured as follow. Chapter 2 presents the *Literature Review*, which is constructed by three main themes. The first theme discusses about the group formations in a social movement and the conflicts that occur during the process, with a review on academic works on leaderless social movements. The second theme introduces network society studies with a focus on digital networking, connective actions, and affective publics. The third theme discusses about visuals in social movements. I will look into the functions of symbols and colours, the circulation of protest images, images and traumatic memory, and archiving of the protest images. Chapter 3 talks about the *Methodology and Research Design*. It begins with the introduction of the chosen method, a mixed qualitative method with in-depth interviews and critical visual analysis. The processes of sampling and research will also be discussed, with a reflection on the methods and their limitations. Chapter 4 presents the *Analysis* of this research. In Chapter 5, I will summarise the findings and present the key results. This chapter also includes my reflections on the study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to identify the key theories, concepts, and ideas of this research. And through reviewing problems that have been addressed by previous research, the literature review serves to justify the approaches that have been use to understand the topic and to demonstrate how this research can contribute to this topic of study (Hart 2018:1-2).

GROUP FORMATIONS IN A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

To study social movements, it is helpful to begin with understanding their formations. Castells (2007:238) argues if a majority of people disagree with the values and norms that have been part of the state and perserved in the law and regulations, the system will change eventually. In other words, social movements often aim at changing values and interests institutionalized in the society (ibid.:249). Gamson (1992) states the perception of injustice is an important element in the formation of movements, for instance, the misrepresentations of minority or dissenting voices in mainstream media is an example of content-related injustice (Milan 2013:50-51).

The formation of the Anti-ELAB movement is an example to illustrate the notions of Castells (2007) and Gamson (1992). Hong Kongers who oppose the increasing intrusion of Hong Kong affairs by China were aware that the amended extradition bill could be a potential threat to their basic rights and freedom of speech. They are worried that their interests will not be valued if the Hong Kong government allows extradition to China, which might possibly lead to suppression of criticisms on the Chinese Communist Party and the central government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Prior to this movement, activists have begun to promote a form of localism that emphasizes on the priority of Hong Kongers' interest in the mid-2000s (Lee 2019:3). Some new political parties formed by younger politicians have started to shift their focus on work from democratization to the protection of Hong Kong citizens (ibid.).

As Dahlgren (2009:121) notes, it is difficult to feel empowerment if one is alone. In order to enhance the sense of empowerment, one has to belong to a group, or as Dahlgren suggests, a political community. Political communities are never static, they evolve with changing circumstances with new members joining and old members leaving from time to time (ibid.: 121). As members build their commitment to the community, they also become loyal to the values and procedures of democracy. Developing a high degree of solidarity within the community means that a sense of “we” against “they” will also be developed, according to Dahlgren (2009:122). And in response to an external threat, self-defensive networks emerge out of necessity (Milan 2013:153).

In his book *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, Bruno Latour (2005:25) argues that there are five sources of uncertainty that interrupt and interfere with movements. The first source of uncertainty is that there is no group but only group formation in society (ibid.:27). However, group formations are difficult to see as they are only visible when there is a crisis. In Latour’s (ibid.:31) words, when there is a sign of crisis, there will be an outrage of millions of contradictory voices about what a group is. He points out that ‘for every group to be defined, a list of anti-groups is set up as well’, people that belong to the same group will act against their anti-groups, in order to protect the group from crises (ibid.: 32). Yardi & Boyd (2010) also note that like-minded people are likely to strengthen group identity through replying to each other while building conversations around controversial topics. However, when they reply to different-minded people, the in-group and out-group affiliation will be reinforced. This supports Milan’s notion of the self-defense networks and Dahlgren’s of “we” against “they”. Latour (2005:34) also emphasizes that groupings have to be constantly made, or remade, and during this creation or recreation the group-makers leave many traces that can be used as data by the informer. There is never a grouping that can sustain its existence without some keeping up (ibid.:37).

As the formation of groups is invisible unless there is a crisis, it becomes particularly noticeable when a group of activists get together to recruit others during a movement. Jasper (2014:92) mentions these previously engaged activists usually convince others to join by packaging their ideas, images and morals in striking shocks, or to take advantage of shocks

created by others. He further elaborates the idea by mentioning that individuals have moral intuitions about right or wrong, and therefore when a person experiences something that is very upsetting, what he calls a 'moral shock', they will be motivated to get involved (ibid.: 96-97). These individuals may seek for help online, reach out to organisations, or even establish their own group in some cases. Demonstrating moral shock allows an image to get a lot of attention within a short period of time. As an emotional state of shock can paralyse individuals, it can also develop into anger and drive people to action (ibid.:98), including those who are not from existing networks or previously inactive in political events. Latour (2005:32) stresses that there is no group without some kind of recruiting officers. This notion is in parallel with Jasper's (2014:96-98) argument that, in a social movement, recruiters often tell stories about cruelty and oppression to engage new members, and these stories are often shown in images. It is important to note that moral shocks can damage one's sense of reality and normality, which might result in a thorough evaluation of one's life and values (Jasper 2014:99). They are specifically effective when they happen as a surprise and offer us a "sympathetic connection to other humans", which enables us to understand our feelings and express an emotion that we have been not aware of (ibid.). 'Moral batteries', is what open people to their initial recruitment into a social movement, as people are fearful and angry about the negative situations that threaten them, but are hopeful for positive solutions that save them from the threats (ibid.:106). Jasper (2014:100) suggests that one of the most effective moral shocks in social movements is - when the police arrest, beat, and kill peaceful protesters. After all, moral shock is effectively used for recruitment in movements because it gives people a sense of urgency (Warren 2010).

Latour's (2005) emphasis on how threats enable group formations can be perfectly illustrated within the context of social movement group formations. As Jasper (2014:105) argues, although a sense of threat might paralyse us, more often only vigorous actions can relieve the tension created when we are threatened. There is no restrictions in the form of threats, it can be physical or psychological, and they are both capable of inspiring protest. People tend to have a better feeling when they act against a threat, which basically means doing anything to the best of their abilities, even if the action is dangerous. In other words, being active makes

people feel good about themselves. Specifically, carrying out political actions is the ‘most healing response’ to the mood of desperation for most people (Jasper 2014:98).

Conflicts Occurring During Group Formations

An interesting note on Latour’s approach on studying group formations is that, the actor-network theory (ANT) is designed to underline the conflicts instead of focusing on the positive aspects only. The significant impact of conflicts in group formations has also been shown in the case of the Anti-ELAB movement, as in-group conflicts occur from time to time and the formation of anti-groups also takes place very often due to huge conflicts of interest.

Anti-groups are however considered as the biggest source of information from the perspectives of scholars. The distinction of the anti-groups from the dominant group can be shown through their actions and expressions, as groups are not silent things (Latour 2005:31). In terms of in-group conflicts, although a large scale movement might impress stakeholders and bystanders, as it is easier to get the public’s attention and to compile resources, there is also a high possibility for disagreements over goals and tactics between participants to occur (Jasper 2014:99). In fact, scholars suggest that “the larger the movement, the harder it is to coordinate its actions and statements” (ibid.). If we take a look at the Anti-ELAB movement, we can see that the relationship between radical and moderate protesters is conflictual by nature, although their existence in a social movement are not mutually exclusive (Lee 2019:1). When radicals try to achieve their goals by more disruptive and violent tactics, moderates who prefer non-violent tactics might not agree with their doings. However, Lee (2009) highlights the sense of solidarity has played a crucial role in sustaining the movement and allowing it to have a dynamic development. This can be explained by Latour’s (2005:33) concept that, various features of group formations will support the group boundary to ‘hold against the contradictory pressures of all the competing and anti-groups that threaten to dissolve it’.

Keeping in mind that disagreements and conflicts are extremely common in all kinds of groups, we should also be able to realise that the outcomes of the conflicts vary between

different groups. Taking this idea to an extreme, Jasper (2014:135) suggests that disagreements sometimes even provide a way for the group to explore alternatives, which encourage it to make careful decisions, to articulate its goals, and to defend its positions. Nevertheless, it is arguable that disagreements can also result in the destruction of a group.

Although conflicts are difficult to avoid, we should be aware that group formation is also about group maintenance. It is not uncommon for groups to remain together while disagreements take place again and again. Mistrust, dislike, and even hatred for each other might exist within a group (Jasper 2014:136). Given that people seem to like those who agree with them and feel more comfortable with those who like them back, clusters of like-minded people emerge eventually (ibid.), which might result in separations and reformations of groups. But for those that remain as a group, *trust* is probably a key element to achieve maintenance. Dahlgren (2009:121) notes that the dimension of trust is immensely important to construct a community-based identity. It plays an important role in achieving democracy, in terms of creating bonds and networks (ibid.:112-113). Conflicts of interests can be a result of mistrust in the social relationships. To establish a strong bond within the group, trust between groups members has to be enhanced. Dahlgren (2009:114) suggests an effective way is through a growth in positive civil society experiences among citizens, which expands the cultural disposition to expect positive performance.

A Leaderless Social Movement

It is also interesting to study how groups are being maintained especially when there is no leaders in the group. Milan (2013:92) explains that a system of diffused leadership provides an opportunity for everyone to have an equal status and to make decisions together. One distinctive feature of the Anti-ELAB movement from the previous protests in Hong Kong is that it is leaderless and decentralized (Lee et al. 2019:14). Events and protests were mainly organized by protesters on messaging apps and online forums, which require self-mobilization and high reliance on social media (ibid.:14-15). The absence of a leader does not prevent protesters from effective communication and discussion of tactics, instead, Lee et al. (2019:15) suggest a leaderless social movement can allow different groups to advocate their

own ideologies and tactics. Bennett and Segerberg (2012:740) also mention “leaderless” as one of the most remarkable aspects of previous protests. They argue that one way to effectively sustain protest organization is to avoid interventions from political parties, unions and other powerful political organizations. However, it remains questionable whether a loose organizational structure that relies on frequent group reformations could be a problem, as the groups being formed and reformed over again are likely to be more fragile.

THE NETWORK SOCIETY: DIGITAL NETWORKING AND CONNECTIVE ACTIONS

Networks are important for groups to communicate effectively without the presence of a leader. Van Dijck (2013:11) suggests that social media are online facilitators and enhancers of human networks. Concerning the connectivity that social media brings to humans, she argues that the term ‘social media’ should be replaced by ‘connective media’ (ibid.:13). In order to understand the role of the media platforms in social movements, we will be examining the concepts of the network society, digital networking, and connective actions in the following.

The importance of technology in social movements has been recognised by scholars in many aspects. Bennett and Segerberg (2012:753) acknowledge the significance of applying ANT on studies about organizational structures of people and its relation to connective actions. From the perspective of ANT, digital networking mechanisms such as social media, can be regarded as potential network agents that support human actors. Social media also facilitate connective actions by allowing information sharing and making online event coordinations possible as multifunction networking platforms (ibid.). The large capacity of technologies develops a strong digital networking mechanism that enables online and offline plannings, which enhances the levels of transparency and trust between individuals during the groupings.

Technology platforms and applications are replacing traditional political organizations to some extent (Bennett & Segerberg 2012:742). Protests and organizational work are no longer occurring offline only, as advances in technology create opportunities for the events to

happen online (Bennett & Segerberg 2012:749; Earl & Kimport 2011; Bimber et al. 2012). Interestingly, online communication has been regarded by some scholars as “the liberation from the body and the unlimited freedom to join and leave virtual groups” (Bakardjieva & Feenberg 2002:184; Turkle 1995; Stone 1996). Among different technologies, communication technologies play a significant role in the expansion and stabilization of structures across the networks (Bennett & Segerberg 2012:760). Castells (2000, 2007) believes information and communication technologies have become the foundation of political developments. Although social movements are not completely derived from technology, technology has been widely used for the facilitation and mobilization of social movements as an important medium (Castells 2007:249).

Mainstream mass media has long been used as the main channel of communication between the political system and citizens, it is also a channel for politicians to exercise some degree of influence. However, Castells (ibid.:240-241) argues that the means of mass self-communication are getting more heavily used by individuals to influence public opinion and intervene in the mainstream media. He brings up the discussion about how shaping people’s minds through mass media creates problems in the society, especially when the media are trying to avoid some particular content in order to protect the interest of some entities. As a result, internet-based mass self-communication has been growing as individuals and different parties are trying to avoid the domination of mainstream media in the shaping of public’s minds. Mass self-communication is all about self-generated content and self-selection of the individuals (ibid.:248), which allows them to have a greater control of the kind of information that they are receiving on certain platforms. The trend of mass self-communication shows a change in the existing media system and power relations as these sources are becoming more reliable and innovative than the traditional media (ibid.:247). It is important to acknowledge that ‘without the means of mass self-communication, the new movements and new forms of insurgent politics could not be conceived’ (ibid.).

Aligning with previous discussions, Milan (2013:40) also describes some communication technologies as ‘liberation technology’. By this term, she refers to those technologies that enable citizens to ‘report news, expose wrongdoings, express opinions, mobilize protests,

monitor elections and scrutinize governments'. Although she emphasizes that social media's ability to promote democracy is yet to be consented, the Internet is definitely the main platform for action, recruitment and identification for activist networking (ibid.:41). This leads to a point of discussion, in which Papacharissi (2015:31) argues that the recent wave of political unrest and demonstrations has illustrated how social media can lead to significant outcomes, including democratic reforms or even further suppression of political freedoms.

Regarding the roles of social media in political movements, Highfield (2016:3) acknowledges that social media supports a broad range of political actions and functions in different contexts in his book *Social media and Everyday Politics*. Specifically, he argues that 'the personal and the political are not mutually exclusive, and separating the two is both impossible and impractical' (ibid.:15). Suggesting the notion of that the personal and the political are closely interlinked, Highfield believes that social media bring about the further personalisation of politics. The discussion of politics on social media is dynamic, it can be 'explicit and implicit, affective and personal, and reflect many practices, communities and issues' (ibid.:30), even though some platforms were not designed for this kind of discussion. He further illustrates this notion with the example of Twitter and Facebook: '[Twitter and Facebook] are not political social media, but are relatively generic channels enabling a wide range of topical coverage, of which politics is just one example' (ibid.). This indicates that basically every platform can be used by activists to support political actions, as long as the users make use of the conventions and affordances of the platforms to create content, share media and connect with others (ibid.:60).

It should be emphasised that the engagement with politics can be taking place on multiple platforms at the same time, and different social media users will have different roles and practices. Together they establish 'curated and cultivated information networks, through their friendship and professional connections and their personal interests' (Highfield 2016:78). Highfield (ibid.:79) notes that although the accuracy of social media coverage of news and politics is still debatable, social media is impactful in establishing narratives and counter-narratives in the coverage of political topics (ibid.:80). It is also important to mention that since social media allows immediate publication and dissemination of information, it fosters

the coverage of breaking news as social media has the ubiquity within everyday communications (ibid.:85).

As the discussions of politics are getting more personalised and individualised in the information age, the importance of ‘large and fluid social networks’ (Castells 2000) has been enhanced. Bennett and Segerberg (2012.:748) write, “these networks can operate importantly through the organisational processes of social media, and their logic does not require strong organisational control or the symbolic construction of a united ‘we’”. The connective action networks are supposed to be far more individualised as they do not require the framing of collective identity (ibid.:750). The authors then refer to Benkler (2006), who proposes that ‘participation becomes self-motivating as personally expressive content is shared with, and recognised by, others who, in turn, repeat these networked sharing activities’ (Bennett & Segerberg 2012:752). In other words, when there is no formal organisations or the transformation of social identifications, collective action occurs with the support of digital media as organising agents (ibid.). Central or lead organizational actors are unnecessary for establishing connective action networks, instead, larger organisations are likely to remain at the periphery (ibid.:755).

Highfield (2016:103) also makes notes on the concept of connective action when discussing about the interlinkage between social media and everyday politics. He refers to Bennett and Segerberg (2003) that connective action ‘extends notions of collective action within protests and activism, as individuals form groups to campaign for change’. Highfield (2016:103) adds, “within connective actions, such political engagement is also personalised and digitally mediated, as social media and other digital technologies offer additional means for organization, information and mobilization”. As organising agents, social media has been used to demonstrate against governments or regimes, in terms of providing information and bringing visibility to participants (ibid.:104). In some cases, governments will impose Internet control and increase their intervention in this domain to suppress the movements (Milan 2013:41). In particular, the PRC government maintains a high level of control over the Internet by increasing the level of sophistication in its internal filtering practices (Woolley &

Howard 2018:31; Dahlgren 2009:162; Lagerkvist 2006). This also explains how social media is being used by observers, supporters and even opponents during a movement.

Affective Publics

Affect, unlike emotion, emphasises on both emotion and logic (Papacharissi 2015:134). In her book *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*, Papacharissi (2015:133) writes that affective publics materialize and disband around connective conduits of sentiment every day and find their voice through the soft structures of feeling sustained by societies. Political interests of social media users are very likely to be activated through information that is related to culture, as ‘spaces that stimulate political interest, expression, and engagement work best when they invite impromptu, casual, and unforced forays into the political’ (ibid.: 120-121). When defining the tendencies of affective public, Papacharissi (2015:127) summarises that affective publics ‘materialise uniquely and leave distinct digital footprints’ and ‘support connective action yet not necessarily collective action’. To illustrate this idea, she points out that awareness of a political event can be amplified if the platform has a high affective intensity, which allows mobilized support, release of tension, and general opinion expression. Collective action is also democratic by nature, as it pluralises interactions and ‘facilitates thin or monitorial varieties of engagement that may - but do not necessarily - morph into deeper forms of civic involvement’ (ibid.129). While networked framing and gatekeeping enables interconnected people to curate and co-create narratives collaboratively, affect plays an important role in supporting ‘thin, moderate, or thick forms of engagement or deep understanding of issues’ (ibid.:135)

VISUALS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Doerr, Mattoni and Teune (2015:1) discuss about visuals in social movement in an article and they criticise that visual elements have never been at the core of scholarly interest when it comes to social movement studies. While previous studies always keep their focus on textual sources, one should not ignore that visual elements including ‘clothing and bodily gestures,

images and symbols, posters and videos' as they are considered as important forms of representations of a movement (ibid.). Visual texts serve as 'rich materials to answer central research questions in social movement studies' and visuals is a crucial medium for protesters to communicate and represent complex messages (ibid.:7-8). In the field of media studies, images have been proven effective in attracting media attention and mainstreaming social movement claims (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:9; Delicath & DeLuca 2003). Rovisco (2017:351) argues that this kind of new social movement tactic, which shifted the focus of the civil rights agenda to a much more publicly visible struggle attracts wide public attention. This explains how non-violent mass participatory direct-action protest has become the leading edge of the movement's demand for social and political change (ibid.). To conclude the above discussions, it is undeniable that visual representations of protest constitute a key concern of social movements (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:9; Ryan 1991).

To explain how visual representations actually influence social movements, we can take a look at one example from the study of the Shahbag movement in Bangladesh. De (2015:364) argues that a wide number of people were motivated to participate in the movement after seeing a picture of an accused war criminal flashing a V sign. The particular image has such a huge significance that it has become an invoker of memories and moral shock in the absence of formal leadership (ibid.:368). In that connection, Rovisco (2017:343) suggests that protest images, including memes, photographs, posters and videos, can potentially 'generate creative public debate and send messages that cannot be covered by words', which eventually bring the discussion to a more vibrant public sphere (Milner 2013; Olesen 2013). De's (2015) research on the iconic image of the occupied square of the Indignados social movement shows that images are capable of constructing a shared visual language, which are likely to be picked up and reproduced immediately (Rovisco 2017:353).

In the context of the Anti-ELAB movement, it is impossible to identify the most iconic protest image, as there are over 30,000 images being produced and circulated since the movement has begun (Collaction 2020). However, a few of the images have been rapidly reproduced and remixed by the protesters, and are often seen on different platforms and protest merchandises. As defined by Hariman and Lucaites (2007:5), iconic images 'provide an accessible and centrally positioned set of images for exploring how political action can be constituted and controlled through visual media. They are the images that one sees again and again in the

historical tableaux of the visual media' (Rovisco 2017:353-354). These iconic images are therefore more worthy of interpretations and analysis among the others, as they have a stronger presence and are more likely to be representing the core values of the political actions and the movement as a whole.

Visuals is also a key element in the concept of performance in social movements. Goffman (1959:26) defines a performance as 'all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants'. Applying the notion of performance on social movement studies, it is noticeable that there are different practices and visual codes employed by protesters. For instance, some wear badges at marches to demonstrate dissent (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:3; Alexander 2011; Tilly 2008). This kind of performance shows the solidarity between participants and represents the movements as well (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:5; Linke 1988; Lahusen 1996; Goodnow 2006). Moreover, images are often used in social movements to shape emotions, from shame and anger to irony and pride, they can also be used to ridicule opponents and to picture them as cruel and violent (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:5; Halfmann & Young 2010; Mattoni 2008; Mattoni & Doerr 2007; Howell 2012; Streetby 2013). As Jasper (2014:104) claims, villains always grab our attention because negative emotions catch our attention more immediately and urgently than positive emotions do. In light of this idea, it can be assumed that images does not only allow activists to arouse emotions that draw attention and mobilise individuals into action eventually, but they also enable researchers to understand emotions (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:11).

The Functions of Symbols and Colours in Social Movements

Symbols. According to Doerr, Mattoni & Teune (2015:5), colours and symbols that 'emerge as signifiers of political struggles lead to a more general perspective on visual aspects of social movements'. Applying knowledge from visual culture studies helps to build narrative through symbols and images. Iconology studies defines that attributes are the props or objects that help us identify the characters and the stories, especially for old religious paintings (Howells & Negreiros 2019:18). However, attributes, codes or symbols are not only used in religious or mythological art, they are present every day in everywhere (ibid.:19). Ordinary objects can also be significant symbols in a certain context. For instance, umbrellas has

become a symbol in the 2014 Hong Kong democracy protests after protesters used them to protect themselves from pepper spray and tear gas (Leung 2014:132). It was such an iconic and impactful symbol that the movement is thus known as the 'Umbrella Movement'. Goodnow (2009:170) argues that a nonverbal symbol in a social campaign 'often acts as a logo for the movement itself [...] designed to promote the movement'. However, the artistic element of a symbol is also crucial as the designer has to ensure that it is simple enough to be easily replicated. Simplicity allows the symbols to be altered and replicated, which foster engagements while maintaining the association with the original symbol (ibid.).

Symbols are created to condense and to act as representations in social movements, as they are effective at performing four rhetoric functions, according to Goodnow (2009:171). *Explanation*, a movement symbol projects the goals and hopes of the participant, functions as a nonverbal argument in support of its cause, and conceptualises complicated verbal arguments by visual means. *Awareness*, a movement symbols create awareness, which may increase the number of participants (Stewart et al. 1994). *Identification*, a movement symbol allows participants to form bonds among themselves. *Sanction*, a movement symbol allows participants to show their association and stance.

Symbols of the Anti-ELAB movement have been showcased on posters, stickers, clothings, accessories, and even as tattoos. Goodnow (2009:172) emphasises that not all symbols in a movement will fulfil all functions, but a symbol will always carry some meaning for the group. In their book *Representation*, Hall, Evans and Nixon (2013:4) discuss that visual images, including those which are produced by hand or digitally are used to express meanings and communicate thoughts to other people. And meanings are 'produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes or practices' (ibid.:xix). Therefore, whether it is the original poster that introduces a movement symbol or a self made keychain that replicates the symbol, they will all be interpreted in the same way.

Colours. Messages of a symbol can also be conveyed through the use of colour, Goodnow (2009:172-173) explains this with an example of the symbol of The Congress of Racial Equality. The symbol uses black and white to illustrate different races, which illustrates a goal of the organization: to strive for integration and cooperation among different races. Rose (2016:136) suggests that different colours associate different symbolic meanings to an object,

in one instance, the light grey used by the Apple can be associated with cool and elegant designs. However, Stuart, Evans and Nixon (2013:11) argue that colours and objects have no meanings in themselves until we fix the meaning so firmly that they become natural and inevitable after a while. Following the Umbrella Movement in 2014, yellow has become a symbolic colour for pro-democracy protesters due to the influence of the yellow umbrellas. During the Anti-ELAB movement, protesters also call themselves 'yellow-ribbons' and identify opponents as 'blue-ribbons'.

Colours of the movement can also be displayed in dress codes (Goodnow 2009:174) and protest images. Constructionists consider clothes as signifiers, which 'correlates particular kinds or combinations of clothing with certain concepts' (Stuart, Evans & Nixon 2013:22). In specific, the colour of one's clothing can be used to convey certain symbolic meanings (Rose 2016:199). Erwin Panofsky (1953:201-3) demonstrates how the colour of clothings convey different meanings with the example of *The Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan van Eyck (Rose 2016:199). In the portrait, the deep purple and green clothes, which are being worn by a newly wedded couple, symbolise fire and water respectively. This suggests that colours of the clothings carry more meanings than only the 'coupling of two people', but also the 'complementary union of two elemental properties which will be harmonious and fertile' (Rose 2016:199; Panofsky 1953:201-3). Given that different colours correlate with different concepts, or 'say' different things, it is therefore important for researchers to actively read and interpret the meaning of the colour that people wear.

Circulation of Protest Images

Technological developments have foster the process to produce and distribute images in efficient ways with lower costs, which give more attention to visual aspects of political processes (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:2). In fact, the circulation of the image plays a key role in raising public attention and to garner support for the movement (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:8; Oldfield 1995). In the digitalised and globalised world, images travel across different places and undergo various processes of meaning adaption (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:10). Global images, are diffused via digital media platforms (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:10; Halfmann & Young 2010) and therefore visual elements becomes especially salient for younger generations, as they are living, thinking, learning, and expressing themselves in

multimedia ways (Dahlgren 2009:110). When a simple message is attached to an image, it becomes the most powerful message (Castells 2007:242). Social media platforms like Facebook, are designed to promote specific forms of sharing behaviour online, specifically among young people (Wahl-Jorgensen 2018:79). The action of sharing allows the marking of existence as well. Cumiskey and Hjorth (2017) argue that by sharing images, one broadcasts his social identity to others. Also, different forms of individual and public participation are intertwined with each other through personalized communication on social media platforms, which generates a sense of intimacy and closeness (Hjorth & Cumiskey 2018:114-116; Cumiskey & Hjorth 2017:15).

Images and Traumatic Memory

As photographs ‘concretize memory in an accessible way and become aides in facilitating the recall of events’, they are the ‘primary markers’ of memory (Ibrahim 2009:108). This explains why visual media is fundamental for the recreation of memory (Ibrahim 2009:95; Lennon & Foley 1999:47). Joffe (2008:85-89) also argues that ‘visual material appears to be especially memorable’ and an image allows one to ‘read’ the controversies in it himself. In the digitalised world, the constant visual presence of electronic media create ‘new memory’ (Hoskins 2001), which is being circulated and renewed through the digital screen cultures (Ibrahim 2009:96). Visual culture also serves a function as a memory archive, in which electronic technologies have allowed this culture to be integrated into people’s contemporary consciousness in their everyday lives, and thrusting visual to become an arena where ‘images work through both individual imagination and collective-meaning making’ (ibid.:94).

Ibrahim (2009) suggests the visual construction and re-construction of traumatic events through images is an essential aspect of human propensity to remember and work through trauma. She argues, “if images provide a window to the past, mass viewing through the screen democratizes trauma” (ibid.:97). In other words, the occurrence of a traumatic event will often lead to public discussions especially when images illustrate the event to a large group of audience (ibid.). It is also a natural response for human to capture and preserve images of a traumatic event, as Zelizer (1990:10) explains, “the act of bearing witness as a process that enables people to take responsibility for what they see where the personal act of ‘seeing’ can

be transformed into a collective act of dealing with trauma” (ibid.:107). Therefore, setting up a stage of public discussions could be quite beneficial for recruitment in a social movement. As a witness of the event through images, individuals are more encouraged to take actions regarding the specific event, including participating in the discussions or even the movement.

Throughout the Hong Kong movement, there were many police-protester clashes in several residential districts. Many peaceful protesters and district residents were not excluded but also have experienced physical violence and verbal abuse from the police (Lee 2019:7). These events were often being broadcasted live by television stations and online media platforms, which millions of Hong Kong citizens have witnessed ‘the real-time unfolding’ of the violent events, including the most shocking incidents such as the July 21 Yuen Long attack¹ and August 31 Prince Edward station incident² (ibid.:8). These witnesses later recreated the scenes with a large number of posters that illustrate the events and the major participants. Echoing back to the notion of ‘moral shock’ suggested by Jasper (2014:100), these posters facilitate recruitment and are key mobilising tools for activists, since a large crowd were involved in a morally shocking event at the same time. These shocking images are circulated on mobile media, which creates ‘a particular relationship and mode of affect’ (Hjorth & Cumiskey 2018:112-114). With mobile devices, the affect surrounding the experience of events will be further enhanced (ibid.:116; Cumiskey & Hjorth 2017). Mobile media hence also become a tool that constructs types of memory and allows users to form emotional bonds with others. As a result, what is ultimately remembered by individuals are also likely to be influenced by mobile memories (Hjorth & Cumiskey 2018:116).

Archiving of the Protest Images

The archive of organisations and information of every movement are crucial for tracing the complex histories of any societies, however, there are often struggles in archiving participants’ activities during a movement (Ramamurthy 2006:12). Therefore, often volunteers or organizations end up being responsible for archiving, while many of them usually only have limited financial resources (ibid.). Although Ramamurthy (2006:12) stresses

¹ On 21st of July, thugs with sticks and metal bars attacked civilians, including journalists and a pro-democracy lawmaker, at a train station and on the train. However, police were filmed by photojournalists speaking to the thugs, patting one on the shoulder, while refusing to send any help to the station immediately (The New York Times 2019).

² On 31st of August, riot police stormed the Prince Edward station and indiscriminately attacked passengers with baton and pepper spray. Many passengers were left cowering and bleeding (Hong Kong Free Press 2019).

that people engaged in the heat of the moment tend to ignore the importance of movement archive, Hong Kong protesters seem to realise that archival sources are necessary for the circulation of protest images. For example, *Collaction*, an online crowdsourcing community that allows social entrepreneurs to share innovation projects has created an ‘Anti-extradition Movement Poster Gallery’. As of 5 May 2020, the total number of posters that have been uploaded to Collaction by users has exceed 34,100. Specifically, this gallery was contributed by the Collaction team together with 1,323 volunteers (as of 5 May 2020). There are also a number of Facebook pages and Instagram accounts that are dedicated to the circulation and sharing of protest posters throughout the movement.

De Kosnik (2016) draws attention to the notion of Internet as an archive. She argues that ‘techno-volunteers’ are the key players in supporting that, in which ‘self-appointed, mostly nonprofessional individuals and collectives who regard some digital cultural productions and events as worth preserving, and who choose to devote their skills, time, effort, and often their own finances to constructing and maintaining online archives’ (ibid.:41). The techno-volunteers that contributed to the recording and archiving of posters work together to preserve these electronic artworks, as the Internet itself will not be capable of doing it alone (ibid.:51). Kirschenbaum (2012) suggests that these individuals develop the new social practices of archiving, while dedicating their personal thoughts, intents and time (De Kosnik 2016:21). Archival repertoires, which transmit the specific knowledge of archiving, will also be developed and passed from person to person (ibid.:54), enabling more techno-volunteers to participate in archiving the online cultural production during the movement. According to De Kosnik (2016:54), it is the repertoires that allow the Internet to serve as an archive.

To summarise this chapter, the different approaches taken by researchers from previous studies have provided a basis for our understanding in the formation of movements in a network society. The key sources of literature, including the work by Latour, Bennett and Segerberg, Doerr, Mattoni and Tuene, have introduced the theoretical foundation of this thesis and have ensured the researchability of this specific topic. This literature review has served a function to narrow down the broad and cross-discipline topic, which enhances the practicality of this research and strengthen the idea of approaching this social phenomenon from a visual perspective, a more unusual method for social movement studies.

3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Human activity is a complex object to study, as it can have different meanings at different times (Flyvbjerg 2001:30-42; Bourdieu 1977), hence studying from different perspectives is important to understand a phenomenon. Flyvbjerg (2001:66) also put an emphasis on the power of example. He claims that ‘context-dependent knowledge and experience is at the very heart of expert activity’ and ‘such knowledge and expertise also lies at the centre of the case study as a research and teaching method’ (ibid.:71). Given that this research topic involves the study of human affairs, which only produce context-dependent knowledge (ibid.), it can be assumed that researching it with a case study will produce knowledge to understand the importance of visuals in a social movement and in group formations in this particular context.

The Anti-ELAB movement can be considered as a decent case for this study, as it is an atypical case in the Hong Kong society. Flyvbjerg (2001:78) argues that critical cases increase the generalizability of the study and they ‘often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied’. There is no certain way to determine whether a case is extreme or not (ibid.), however, it is difficult to deny that these protest images in Hong Kong are bringing enormous social impacts to the citizens in general. As Hong Kong has always been considered as a society with a conservative protest culture (Lee 2019:2), protests were basically limited to peaceful marching before the Umbrella Movement. The voluntary mass production of protest arts has remained unseen before the Anti-ELAB movement in Hong Kong, or in neighbouring cultures.

As qualitative research enables flexible theoretical concepts and analytical procedures when there are multiple empirical materials (Jensen 2013:236), a mixed qualitative method, which includes both qualitative in-depth interviews and critical visual analysis, will be used for this research. The approach of combining more than one method in a research is known as triangulation, which is commonly being used to ‘ensure that the variance reflected that of the trait and not of the method’, and to enhance the validity of the results while avoiding it to become just a methodological artifact (Jick 1979:602; Campbell & Fiske 1959; Bouchard

1976:268). Applying qualitative methods in triangulation has been widely used in social sciences studies as it has multiple strengths. Besides allowing the researchers to be more confident of their results, Jick (1979:608-609) also suggests that triangulation helps to uncover the ‘deviant or off-quadrant dimension of a phenomenon’, which enriches the explanation of the research problem. Previous studies on this topic also underline how empirical studies that combine visual and textual analysis are effective in exploring ‘the role of images and texts as a source or constraint for social movements’ organising, outreach, and fostering the diffusion of new ideas’ (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015; Doerr 2010). Therefore, participants’ experiences and interpretations should be analysed together with the critical interpretations of the researcher in this case study.

To be more specific, it becomes possible to understand the meanings of the posters and the messages that protesters are communicating through critical visual analysis. At the same time, qualitative interviews provide a means to discuss the creators and distributors’ encounters with the images in real life, through the sharing of their experiences with different ways of distribution and the connectivity between them and other individuals within the group. Seale et al. (2004:371) also mention that different materials should not be separated but studied together, in order to understand the links between them. This facilitates the presentations of a thorough and inclusive analysis based on these two sets of data, which provides a foundation for the arguments that will be made by this research. The justified, well-grounded, and consistent analysis will be able to point towards the answers of the research questions.

LOCATION OF RESEARCH

At the early stages of the design process, the empirical materials were planned to be collected in Hong Kong, as the city and the protests were the inspirations of this research. A visit to Hong Kong was conducted in December 2019, when mass protests were still taking place constantly in the city. Observations were performed at site visits to the Lennon walls of different districts, which mainly involve taking of field notes and pictures. A second visit to Hong Kong was scheduled in March 2020, in order to conduct the face-to-face interviews with the respondents. However, due to the traveling restrictions concerning the COVID-19

pandemic, the location of research hence remained in Lund, Sweden, while the empirical materials were sourced from 9 interviews over Skype with respondents located in Hong Kong.

DESIGN AND SAMPLING

To design an empirical study is ‘to identify and bracket a portion of reality for further inquiry according to a theoretically informed purpose and through a systematic procedure of data collection and analysis (Jensen 2012:267; Kvale 1987). Jensen (2012:270) suggests that in-depth interviews have been an important instrument for tapping people’s perspectives in the field of media and communication studies. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were therefore conducted to obtain in-depth responses from group members and the meanings that they are holding towards the research topic (Sturges & Hanrahan 2004:110). An interview guide³ was developed according to the interests of the study, which creates a basic structure for the interviews. The questions were constructed based on three major categories: *social movement*, *networked society* and *visuals*. All questions were followed by prompts that are aimed to avoid short answers and to deepen the understanding of the respondents’ experience or thoughts. While the interview guide has drawn the primary structure of the interviews, some degree of flexibility was remained to encourage the respondents to provide narratives that are more detailed and spontaneous (Brickmann 2014:1008). A pilot interview was conducted to assess the adequacy of the interview guide and to identify potential problems that may occur during an interview (van Teijlingen & Hundley 2010). Changes were made after the revision of the interview guide, based on the respondent’s interpretation of the questions and the flow of the interview guide. Some questions were eliminated and some were combined with others to reduce redundancy.

All respondents were recruited by using the snowball sampling method, which ensures that the participants share the characteristics related to the research interest (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981:141). Individuals from my personal network were being contacted and asked to introduce other individuals from their networks, who have participated in creating or distributing the images and are interested to be in part of this research. When the respondents’

³ See Appendix 2

contact details were given to me, I approached them online through messenger apps to explain the research in detail and to schedule the interview dates. Due to geographical dispersion, interviews were conducted online through Skype. Skype offers researchers a novel method to conduct individual synchronous online interviews that are comparable to onsite interviews, as it greatly supports interactive communication (Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour 2014:1; Deakin & Wakefield 2014). Although the interviewer and interviewee are not in the same room, the camera provides opportunities for the researcher to observe the participant's nonverbal language (Cater 2011; Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour 2014:1). Janghorban, Roudsari and Taghipour (2014:1) also suggest that Skype interviews encourage interviewees who have time and place limitations for face-to-face interviews to participate in the research.

One ambition of this research is to take the perspectives of creators and distributors into account, as people in these two roles are both highly engaged in this social practice, in two different ways. Their experiences in creating and distributing can provide relevant insights to understand the phenomenon, hence the sampling emphasises on the balance between the two and its representativeness. However, the sample size for creators ended up much smaller as the population size is also smaller and it was difficult to reach the creators due to my limited connections within my personal network. After approaching over 10 individual creators and distributors, 10 of them have agreed to participate in the research. However, only 9 interviews were yielded at the end, as one respondent did not show up for the Skype meeting at the scheduled time and have never responded again. The sample consisted of 3 male and 6 female respondents, aged from 22 to 31. Among the 9 of them, 2 have participated in creating posters and images while the other 7 mainly took part in distributing the posters online and offline. All interviews were conducted in English in order to avoid over-translation or under-translation. However, specific terms were mentioned in Cantonese as some of them were hard to translate during the interview.

For the visual analysis, it has been realised that the sample population is extremely huge and it is hard to avoid my personal bias while ensuring the quality of the sampled images. Therefore, it has been decided that the images will be sampled from the interviews. Prior to the interviews, the respondents were asked to prepare two posters that are particularly impressive and meaningful to them or to the movement as a whole. The images were being discussed during the interview and analysed by using the method of iconology at a later stage.

In this case, it becomes possible to integrate the textual analysis with the visual analysis, in which the specific interviews will be analysed along with specific images. The context of the images provided by the respondent serves as a point of departure when the visual analysis takes place, and a total number of 18 images⁴ were sampled from the interviews. A basic coding⁵ was carried out on all 18 images. This coding process serves a function to identify potential images that can provide more context for the textual analysis. No particular coding system was directly employed in this process but it was partly inspired by the basic principles of salience (Hansen & Machin 2013:188; van Leeuwen 2005), which helps to identify the subject of the images. Salient elements including potent cultural symbols and colour have guided the coding process to some extent. As sampling of qualitative studies often involve in two or more steps, and qualitative sampling should be driven by the research purpose (Jensen 2012:268), after eliminating images that are out of the scope of this study, the sample size was narrowed down to 10 images.

ANALYSING THE DATA

Media and communication studies have always put an emphasis on meanings (Jensen 2012:266). To interpret the interviews through analysis, categorising data into different themes is believed to be an effective way to make sense of the data (Seale et al. 2004:367). Although thematic coding can also be applied to videos and audio recordings, all interviews were transcribed before the coding occurs. As the core structure of the literature review has already been completed by the time, concepts derived from previous studies have guided the direction of coding to a small extent at the early stage. Seale et al. (2004:371) highlight that it is useful to begin with deductive coding for a general idea for qualitative studies, after that, inductive coding can be used to obtain further details that can be found in the data. It is worth noting that the codes are taken directly from the transcripts, in which they can capture the qualities of the person, the event they participate and the actions they take (ibid.:276). Spider diagrams⁶ have been created for each and every interviews, with all the codes and potential

⁴ See Appendix 7

⁵ See Appendix 8

⁶ See Appendix 5

categories. Five themes were established while similar categories were either combined or eliminated. The thematic structure provides a point of departure for the main analysis, which integrates the findings from the visual analysis into that from the interviews.

For the critical visual analysis, iconology was chosen as the method to interpret the sampled images. 'Iconology is both a method and an approach to studying the content and meanings of visuals', according to Müller (2011:283). Although some argue that iconology can result in over-interpretation as it has been widely and mainly used by iconologists to interpret religious arts, Howells and Negreiros (2019:29) explain that the application of iconology should not be limited to Renaissance paintings. Iconology is a three-step method of visual interpretation devised by Erwin Panofsky, in which it suggests there are three different layers of meaning.

At the primary level, one can interpret the image based on his everyday life, in which no inside knowledge is required. In other words, only the very basic subject-matter of the image can be identified, which mainly includes what is shown and what atmosphere does the image communicate. At the secondary level, one has to bring their 'existing literary, artistic and cultural knowledge' into play (ibid.:25). In contrast with the first level, the second level allows one to actually interpret the images with his knowledge of the conventions. Shin (1990:19) describes this as a process of discovering meaning that require greater participation from the self. Finally, the third level of analysis 'reveals the underlying 'basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion' (Howells & Negreiros 2019:25). To understand the highest level of meaning, one have to combine his cultural or historical knowledge to the analysis in order to identify the *disguised symbolism* in the image, which are everyday things that 'have a double life by having both a realistic and symbolic existence'. This level requires a more intensive study and interpretation of the symbolic values (Shin 1990:19). Different from semiology, in which the active self is absent, iconology indicates the participation role of the self in acquiring meaning from external phenomena and it is essential for one to keep in mind that the meanings are being understood by a self (Shin 1990:18-19).

Iconology aims at studying 'logos' and 'icons' (Müller 2011:288; Mitchell 1987:1), which appear very often in the samples of this case study. Movement icons were created and adopted by creators, indicating that Panofsky's way of interpreting images is crucial to unlock meanings in the manner of this particular kind of protest images in the form of posters.

Analysing the protest images by using iconology allow us to differentiate the interpretations of individuals from a different culture from that of a protester. This can definitely shed some light upon the revealing of the cultural attitudes and assumptions that were embedded in the images and hence the influences of protest arts.

REFLECTIONS ON METHODS

There are several notable reflections on the chosen methodological approach. Beginning with the interview method, although Skype interviews provide flexibility for both the interviewer and interviewee, some individuals are less committed to participate since it is not a physical meeting. One particular experience of a respondent cancelling the meeting right before the meeting begins and ignoring messages for the reschedule suggests that, online interviews may not be as promising as face-to-face interviews even though the technological affordances of platforms like Skype are aiming at bridging the gaps between on-site and online meetings. It is common that people are usually not completely honest with what they think, or mean what they say (Jensen 2012:270), therefore it is important for me to try to tease out the meanings and implications of the interviewees' words. Further analysis on the visual materials can serve to reconcile the opposing perspectives and to bridge the gaps between uncertainties. Moreover, triangulation has indeed allowed me to uncover unseen contextual factors while combining the two sets of data and to be more sure about the results.

Regarding ethical concerns of this research, all interviewees have signed a form⁷ that inform their consent on participating in the research before any interview takes place. In addition to the basic information of the research, the consent form ensures the anonymity of the interviewees, which hopefully removes their restrictions to express themselves more freely. The interviews were recorded on Skype and the audio tracks of the interviews were also recorded with a phone as back up. Concerning the sensitivity of this research topic, the audios and videos will be deleted upon the completion of the course. In fact, the videos on Skype have already been deleted automatically 30 days after the day of interview.

⁷ See Appendix 1

4 ANALYSIS

FROM A SMALL INITIAL GROUP TO A GROUP OF MILLIONS

The Unmasking of Threats and Moral Shock

According to Latour (2015), people are grouped together by the common threat that they are facing. The threats detected by the protesters in this movement involve concerns about Hong Kong's autonomy, which has been threatened by the introduction of the extradition bill and Beijing's increasing intervention in Hong Kong. The extradition bill is considered as a lethal threat by the protesters, which brings power to the government to send suspected criminals to the mainland:

“I believe that once the government successfully implemented this law, the supposed existence of independence of executive, legislation and judiciary in Hong Kong will be withdrawn, this would allow the minority-picked [Chief] Executive to manipulate even the fourth pillar, the media, to their favour.” (Interview 7)

Under the framework of ‘One country, two systems’, Hong Kong enjoys a high degree of autonomy, in which mainland China's criminal and civil laws are not applicable to Hong Kong (Chen 2004:631). Therefore, many are aware of the potential risk that their lawful rights and freedom will be deprived, if Beijing has the authority to extradite citizens from Hong Kong. Specifically, protesters are concerned that the PRC government may exploit this bill to send political activists to the mainland, if they protest against the Chinese Communist Party. As the movement evolves, protesters have also realised the inability of the Hong Kong government in protecting citizens' rights, many have criticised the government's role in suppressing the protests. In fact, the reaction and suppression from the government have further brought fear and anger to protesters. These emotions serve the function of the ‘moral batteries’ (Jasper 2014:106), which encourages them to act for positive outcomes while carrying negative emotions. Some respondents describe their transformation from being inactive in political activities to becoming an active protester as the ‘awakening’, particularly after witnessing the indiscriminate police violence and losing trust in the authority.

Initial groups are not always activists (Jasper 2014: 93), the interviews show that some protesters who have been actively participating in the Anti-ELAB movement were not even interested in politics at all. Very often, they are more likely to start engaging if they know someone who is already taking part of the movement (Jasper 2014:94; Snow et al. 1980). This is because when one is participating, he or she wants to communicate with someone familiar. At the same time, as new recruits, the young protesters in this movement usually have to adopt skills and tactics to protest:

“During the movement, I found a Lennon wall nearby, which is set up by an alumna from my secondary school. Every day, I spent some time on observing how they set up this wall.” (Interview 4)

This indicates that one’s interests in politics is not the main driving force for him or her to engage in a social movement. Instead, protesters participating in the Anti-ELAB movement are recruited through different reasons. And among them, ‘moral shock’ appears to be the most powerful motivation for Hong Kongers to step out from their comfort zones and participate in protests. Generally, the moral shocks include police brutality and suicide cases during the movement, and they triggered people’s negative emotions, such as anger and fear.

“The bullet doesn’t have to go through our bodies, but we can empathise with what our sisters and brothers are suffering.” (Interview 3)

As Jasper (2014:104-105) notes, potential threats are like ‘a boost of adrenaline and cortisol’, which he calls the power of negative thinking. Unpleasant experience of someone, especially of those who sacrificed themselves for their ideals, are something extraordinary that others should admire (ibid.). In mid-June 2019, there were multiple reported suicide cases involving protesters who have been expressing their political demands:

“The whole society was involved in a despair mood. It is the first case in Hong Kong that protesters would kill themselves to fight for democracy, which quite shocked me at that moment. Then I was aware of the seriousness of the impact if this bill was passed.” (Interview 4)

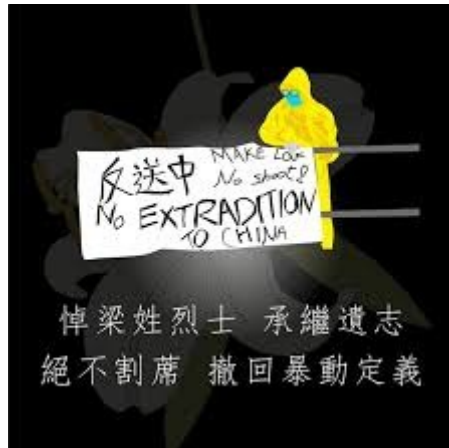


Fig. 1 Protest poster that illustrates the first protester to commit suicide in the movement. Source: Collection (2020)

“[...] posters speak of him always hit me hard, and they always remind me of the feeling I had that night when I heard the news.” (Interview 8)

To understand how posters work with moral shock, we begin from interpreting the poster at the first level of analysis, in which we will look at the fact evidence on the image. On figure 1, we see a man in a yellow raincoat standing behind a fence, with a face mask and goggles on him. On the banner he is displaying, it says ‘NO EXTRADITION TO CHINA’ and ‘MAKE LOVE No Shoot!’. The expression evidence is complicated to see here, as the man’s face is not shown. However, from the black background and the slogan on the banner, we are able to assume that the atmosphere that this poster indicates is far from colourful and fun. At the second level, the iconological investigation begins by applying knowledge about the protest history. From the banner and the outfit of the man, we can assume he is Leung, the first protester to commit suicide in the movement. This poster shows the moment before he jumps off the building in central Hong Kong. The context of this image is about a protester trying to convince the police to stop firing at protesters, however he fails to receive any meaningful response from the authority after putting himself in danger for hours. At the deepest level of analysis, this picture brings a moral shock to the audience, by showing how the government ignores her people’s demands and lives. The real-life incident has been one of the most influential events throughout the movement, as no one has ever sacrificed his life in Hong Kong protest history. Images that are related to Leung still make an impact to many protesters, by triggering their negative emotions and motivating them to protest on behalf of the dead.

Self-defencing Connective Actions on Social Media

Protesters demonstrate several self-defencing connective actions as many of them share a strong sense of protecting their lawful rights. In the connective logic (Bennett & Segerberg 2012:752), taking public actions or contributing to a common good is ‘an act of personal expression and recognition or self-validation achieved by sharing ideas and actions in trusted relationships’. Many protesters were self-motivated to share protest information on networking sites. The departure point of sharing is to inform people, whether they are based in Hong Kong, with accurate information, these sharing might also involve personalised ideas, plans and resources:

“I believe in the power of social media, I hope that by sharing some posts on Facebook and Twitter, or stories on Instagram, I can share what I find of importance to my friends or acquaintances or even strangers to let them know about the truth.” (Interview 7)

The self-defencing connective actions are not limited to demonstrations and information sharing only, but have also integrated into the protesters’ daily lives and consumptions. As Dahlgren (2009:194) mentions, political interventions into consumptions have become a common strategy in social movements. There are many discussions about ethical consumerism, in which consumer choices are related to one’s lifestyles, modes of expression, and cultural practices (Arnesson 2018:18; Harvey 2005:42). In particular, Arnesson (2018:18) argues that ‘consumer practices become important not only for how we see ourselves and others, but also for how we view society and its institutions, responsibilities, and scope’. It is worth noting that there have been examples of how some political campaigns were organised around consumption in Europe and the United States (Arnesson 2018:20; Lewis & Potter 2011). Protesters in Hong Kong have also taken a similar approach, in which they consider daily consumption as a way to demonstrate their political activism. In fact, the protesters have been trying to take this to the next level - establishing their own economic circle.

Figure 2 serves a function of encouragement for protesters to boycott the blue shops - those who oppose the movement. At the first level of analysis, we can only identify a frog closing his eyes and looking disgusted on the image. The character also looks like he is trying avoid the words and logos that are placed next to him. However, by applying knowledge from the

Internet culture, we can identify him as the popular meme icon, Pepe the Frog. The character has been widely adopted in the designs of posters in the movement, due to its highly reproducible and heterogenous features. He has been shaped by the Hong Kong protesters as an alliance, on many protest images he is often disguised as different characters, including protesters, students and journalists. It is important to clarify that, although the character has been labeled as an alt-right icon that represents White supremacy in some cultures, he has become an icon of resistance in the context of the Hong Kong movement (Victor 2019).



Fig. 2 Protest poster showing a list of blue shops and the reasons of boycotting. Source: Collection (2020)

Therefore, if we put this knowledge into play when we interpret figure 2, we can immediately realise that Pepe the Frog represents the protesters and their attitudes. Next to the character are names and logos of a list of restaurants that do not support the movement, along with the reasons for protesters to boycott. In addition to remix the character with Canadian singer Drake's Hotline Bling meme, which demonstrates how Pepe is not interested in these restaurants, the poster also explicitly expresses that these restaurants ‘suck’ and remind audience to make sure they do not support them. The disguised meaning of this image can be interpreted at the third level of analysis. Boycotting is particularly effective to protect a group from an economic perspective. The ‘yellow economic circle’ has been regarded as the economic arm by a majority of protesters. Protesters believe that it is important to sustain the group economically when they noticed this is a way to help protesters to keep participating in the movement, as many ‘yellow business’ owners tend to support protesters financially through providing free meals and gears, while Chinese-funded companies are potentially supporting the suppression of the movement through financial means:

“It becomes a lifestyle which you incorporate the movement into your life, not only fighting against something during weekends but changing your lifestyle. You will boycott blue shops when you are dining out, you will avoid buying ‘made in China’ stuff.” (Interview 9)

To spread the idea of the supporting the ‘yellow business circle’ and to help people to distinguish between blue and yellow shops, protesters create posters and stickers and distribute them online and to the yellow shops. There are dedicated Instagram accounts and mobile apps which constantly update the list of yellow and blue businesses. They have gained great popularity among protesters who are also active social media users. For instance, the Instagram account @yellow_ribbon_cattering indicates and updates restaurants protesters should support and has over 233,000 followers.

THE FORMATIONS OF GROUPS AND ANTI-GROUPS

Participants

It is fundamental to learn about the participants when we are studying a group and its formation. As mentioned, a movement might begin with a small group of activists, but it usually ends up with a larger group of members with different backgrounds and experiences. There are many pro-democracy protests around the world that involved active participation of students, including the 1989 democracy movement in Beijing, the April 1960 student revolution in South Korea (Chang 2015:4), and the massive student-led protests in Chile in 2006 and 2011 (Cummings 2015:49). Similarly, the Anti-ELAB protests also has a youthful profile (Lee et al. 2019:12). However, young university students are also accompanied with all walks of life in Hong Kong, one respondent expresses that:

“The protesters consist of people from all walks of life, I have seen many children, even toddlers, as well as elderly. Whereas for their occupation, I believe many of them are students, secondary and university [students]. In fact, I think people of all occupation participate.” (Interview 1)

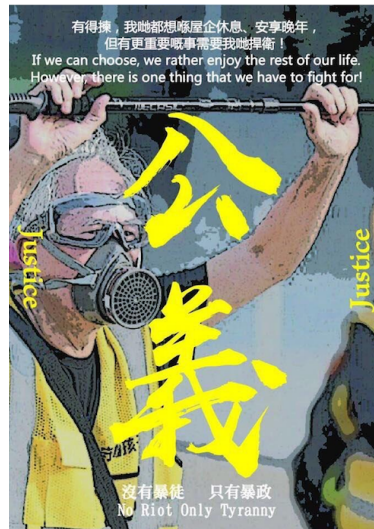


Fig. 3 Protest poster showing an elderly man holding a walking stick against the police. Source: Collection (2020)

Among the many, elderly protesters have been very much respected and praised by young protesters. On figure 3, we can see an elderly man with goggles and a gas mask is holding a walking stick high. Big yellow fonts are used for the word 'Justice' and the two Chinese characters. It is clear that there are two focuses of this image: the man and the Cantonese phrase '公義' (Justice). When we proceed to the secondary level of analysis and apply our political knowledge, we will be able to recognise this man as a member of the group 'Protect the Children' from his uniform. This group is formed by elderly people who appear at the frontline in protests and place themselves in between police and young protesters to avoid physical clashes between the two, just like what has been shown on this image.

In terms of the use of colours, we can identify yellow as the salient colour. As mentioned, yellow represents the protesters in this context, hence we can assume the author is trying to convey that justice is an important value for protesters to uphold. This leads us to the third level of analysis, which requires a deep familiarity with both visual and written texts of the culture (Rose 2016:200). The intrinsic meaning of figure 3 can be interpreted as: protesters should keep in mind that it is not effortless to uphold the rights and values and it requires the collective effort of individuals across different ages, occupations, and backgrounds. It also reminds the audience about how some elderly people, who could have lived a stable retired life, have to go on streets in order to protect the young people of Hong Kong. The vulnerability shown on the image may function as a catalyst that motivates people who have higher ability to join the protesters and fight for justice.

Groups

The analysis of the interviews reveals that we can understand different groups in the movement by capturing them in three categories: public groups, private groups, and anti-groups. Public groups refer to those that are open to everyone to join, whereas private groups refer to those that are only open to people with certain roles and connections. Those who position themselves in opposition to the groups of protesters will be identified as anti-groups. These groups have been mentioned frequently as respondents tend to have experienced contact with all of them during the movement. Public and private groups have different communication purposes, in which the former usually provide general information about the protests while the latter are usually for radical protesters to exchange private information and to discuss action plans:

“LIHKG [a local online forum] and Telegram, are more for radicals, frontline protesters and Lennon walls groups for moderates. [There are] more private groups here. Discussing what to do, what to bring, where to build a Lennon wall, something like that. Before any events, people will discuss how to gather more Hong Kongers to join.” (Interview 2)

“As I know, there are several groups in which some arts and posters are posted regularly. All of these arts are open sourced, and let everyone feel free to use them. [...] All details of each protest were posted on LIHKG or Golden Forum.” (Interview 4)

The idea of different groups can also be expressed in visual forms. Protesters create posters to illustrate their own groups as well as the anti-groups. According to the respondents, there are several groups that they refer to as anti-groups: the government, the police force, and the anti-movement protesters.

Figure 4 is an example of how posters ridicule opponents. At the primary level, we can see there are two scenes in this image. The one on top shows a woman sitting in a nice room, ignoring the clashes outside the window while men in uniform are beating some people with shields and batons. The one at the bottom shows a woman crying and spreading her hands in front of the same group of men. Applying cultural knowledge at the secondary level, we can identify the woman on top as Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, from her unique costume and facial features. While the woman at the bottom is Luk, a unarmed mother



Fig. 4 慈母與暴徒 (A loving mother and a rioter). 2019. Source: Instagram @cusonlo

who confronted the armed riot police for firing tear gas at the students during a protest and went viral online. When analysing images, it is also crucial to notice the things that are absent (Howells & Negreiros 2019:15). As the video of Luk went viral online, many people are aware that Luk got pepper-sprayed in her face moments later after she confronted the police. With this in mind, audience are likely to generate higher level of empathy as there is a strong comparison of the power between the two. Ironically, Lam and Luk are captioned as a ‘loving mother’ and a ‘rioter’ respectively on the image, as a reference to Lam’s quotes in an interview with a local television station⁸. It is apparent that the author uses some degree of sarcasm and direct comparison to illustrate the two mothers, while one being their enemy and one being their supporter. The symbolical value of this image can be interpreted as the leader and the authority defending themselves by swearing that black is white when they suggested that protesters are rioters, who vigorously harm people and destroy the city, while forcefully suppressing protesters in various ways themselves.

Interactions with Anti-groups on Social Media

As mentioned earlier, group formations become salient when the groups act to protect themselves together. Direct threats coming from anti-groups stimulate interactions between the protesters and the anti-groups, as they foster the group to react immediately and directly. Protesters have encountered with physical threats from the anti-groups as mentioned earlier. However, Jasper (2014:105) emphasises that attacks are not limited to physical harm, but also on one’s dignity. A respondent shares her interactions with mainland netizens on Weibo:

⁸ A special interview with TVB news on 12 June 2019.

“Spamming and ranting at Hong Kong people. [...] They are mostly just bad words, sometimes you can imagine, ‘Hong Kong independence dogs, a group of young people who can do nothing but just to gather together. Shoot you cockroaches, you have no money and no future. Wait for you Chinese father to punish you’”. (Interview 2)

Naturally, threats trigger people to react. To deal with the anti-groups, some try to approach and convince the anti-groups on social media platforms by explaining their doings and arguments. China’s version of Twitter, Weibo, becomes a platform for Hong Kong protesters to share posters and to broadcast their voices and values to mainland Chinese. Some have also registered social media accounts to exchange thoughts with people in the mainland. On these platforms, they are able to communicate directly with this other group of people, including those have no idea about the movement and those who oppose the movement. A common experience for protesters is to deal with hateful comments, which involves curses and verbal insults. This has discouraged many people from trying after a while, as they noticed the interactions will not bring a positive change because their values are fundamentally different:

“When I received those comments for the first time, I found that they are attempting to mislead my followers from the truth. The comments are usually biased, or even fake. I tried to explain the truths to them, but I failed as they kept spinning the topic. Then, I realised that they are here to protect the reputation of the Communist Party of China, and not here to learn the truth. So I gave up responding to them at last.” (Interview 8)

Making and Remaking of Groups

Hong Kong protesters have learned from the Umbrella Movement, that intra-movement conflicts can result in losing public support and damaging the group’s morale (Lee 2019:1-2). Nevertheless, it is impossible to avoid conflicts in such a large-scale social movement. Conflicts occur within the group frequently, so as the reformations of groups. Protester groups on digital platforms do dissolve and reform again from time to time, which usually happen under two circumstances. First, it is a temporary group that only serves a specific purpose. In one instance, a new group will emerge when there is a new event. The group will only discuss arrangements of the event, so it will be disassembled right after it. Second, disbandment will occur when the group has to protect members from potential threats:

“While on Telegram people come and go more frequently, which is usually due to safety issues. [...] If they [members of the group] got arrested and someone found out about that they [the arrested members] would be kicked out of the group to avoid the police from taking their identities or maybe to flip through history. If possible I guess they would clear all histories before going on protests which involve risks of being arrested and having their phone confiscated.” (Interview 7)

Moreover, multiple online groups were being set up to facilitate the operation of different roles. While some might criticise the effectiveness of being in more than one groups at the same time, more argue that the allocation of information in different groups is actually effective as long as one knows where to get relevant information for himself, for example joining particular protest arts groups to contribute in distributing protest posters:

“It is still easy to get information from multiple groups just depends on how you choose your way of receiving, different groups provide different information which there isn’t a definite channel that can provide absolutely all information.” (Interview 3)

“I joined protest posters groups on Facebook, so that I can download those posters and share with my friends.” (Interview 2)

Digital media is facilitating the sending and receiving of information in wide-ranging and sustained movements, while stimulating actions that contain small roles for formal brick and mortar organisations (Bennett & Segerberg 2012:739). During a lot of uprisings, social media were actively used for live-streaming, photo-sharing, collaborative mapping, and online communication (Highfield 2016:110-112; Gerbaudo 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising to notice that multiple social media platforms were employed at the same during the group formations. However, different platforms are used for different communicative purposes:

“Facebook live videos are more convenient over watching the live news on TV, yet I could witness what is actually happening from different media pages. I also read news forwarded in the feed. Instagram is the most efficient way for me to stay tuned for news updates. [...] Telegram is for getting updated to activity schedules or for more private discussions. Twitter for sharing some videos in hope of reaching to more international audiences, say foreign press and politicians by liking, leaving comments and forwarding their feeds.” (Interview 7)

Security Concerns About Communicating on Digital Platforms

Distinctive features or functions of different social media platforms attract users of different needs. Unsurprisingly, the encryption and security levels of the platform is also a big concern for protesters. Telegram, among all the social media platforms and messaging apps, have been heavily employed during the movement due to its feature that allows users to have surveillance-proof communication (Saribekyan & Margvelashvili 2017:1). It claims to have the best security and privacy guarantees among similar products (ibid.:2). It is worth mentioning that security is one of the most important aspects for protesters to consider when it comes to communications, as their activities could be tracked by the authority. A respondent mentions that he started using Telegram for personal communication as soon as the movement has begun. Users can hide their real names and numbers, which provide him a sense of security while discussing tactics and locations with his fellow protesters. However, protesters generally do not rely too much on other messaging apps such as WhatsApp, despite of their similar functions (Saribekyan & Margvelashvili 2017:1). A respondent explains:

“I was still using WhatsApp to contact some of my very close friends [in the beginning]. But we did notice that it may not be safe and we cannot include a large group of people in a WhatsApp group because it was a closed group. So at first if it is a two-person conversation, I will send the message to another person and the within an hour we will delete it. Because after an hour you cannot delete the message.” (Interview 3)

Some also express their worries about undercover cops on different online platforms. Protester have a general conception that the police are using undercover social media accounts to monitor their plans and activities, therefore some will try to avoid using certain platforms if they think they are unsafe. The presence of undercover cops have also become harmful for the thin trust between protesters, which is formed on the basis of ‘generalized honesty and expectations of reciprocity that we accord people we don’t know personally but with whom we feel we can have a satisfactory exchange’ (Dahlgren 2009:112). Destroying the thin trust will reduce the effectiveness of communications between protesters, and it may hinder exchanges among individuals and their cooperation and coordination with each other (Hagar 2013:1; Dodgson 1993; Davenport & Prusak 1998).

SUSTAINING THE GROUP: “WE ARE ‘HANDS AND FEET’ OF EACH OTHER”

“We are not only minding our own business”

The term ‘手足’ in Cantonese literally means hands and feet, which gives a metonymic meaning of ‘brotherhood, comrades and intimate friends’ (Li 2013). One of the key movement concepts that is embraced by the protesters is that they are all ‘hands and feet’ of each other. This concept is very outstanding especially when looking at the relationship between members, as it has been constantly mentioned by respondents during the interviews:

“I think the phrase ‘hands and feet’ is really a perfect description, it’s like a brotherhood between protesters. [...] I know if something happened to me, they will be a witness and try their best to help me.” (Interview 1)

Some believe that they have nothing to lose against as long as they are fighting together with their brothers and sisters for justice, and the common belief that together they can make a change to the unjust system unifies them. Despite they come from all kinds of background in society and take different roles in the movement, the one thing that many of them mention to have in common is their hope to protect and safeguard Hong Kong’s democracy. Having to share the same goal definitely strengthened the bond among members. They show their support and worries for each other explicitly through both words and actions:

“I cried so many times for this, reading the news overnight, not sleeping... so worried for people whom we saw seriously hurt on live broadcast even though I don’t know them at all. That’s the connection we have between protesters, we might not know each other, but we care and worry.” (Interview 2)

The Significance of ‘Black Bloc’

The significant degree of solidarity can also be shown in the protesters’ dress code. Black bloc has become a symbol of the protesters in Hong Kong, the basics include a black shirt, black pants, black shoes and a black backpack. Others might also put on black face masks, protection sleeves, caps and etc. As previously mentioned, clothings are one of the crucial

forms of movements' representation (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:1), the protesters have adopted this dress code to demonstrate various aspects of the solidarity in the movement:

“I feel so warm and a sense a belonging when I saw many people wearing black in the public transport, it's like we are all in this together.” (Interview 1)

Indeed, the dress code provides a physical way for members to demonstrate their identity and speak on behalf of them in a sense. Protesters can immediately identify if a person is in the group base on his or her choice of clothings, which gives them some degree of comfort, affirmation and encouragement. However, the dress code actually does more than that. For many protesters, adopting to the dress code is a way to protect themselves from potential threats, especially for radical protesters. As the movement develops, and more disruptive actions were carried out by the protesters in order to urge the government to respond to the demands, some protesters suggested that everyone should engage in the black bloc tactic. With similar clothings, it becomes harder for police to identify them and make arrests. The solidarity between the radicals and moderates provides the foundation of the actions to cover each other in dangerous situations, particularly when facing arrests. Although this kind of solidarity developed in the movement can get stronger or weaker as the protests evolve (Lee 2019:13), certainly it plays a key role in sustaining the movement and mobilising protesters.



Fig. 5 “Take a look at your back, we are all standing behind you”. Source: Collaction (2020)

The significance of black bloc and the solidarity that this dress code suggests are also often shown on protest posters. On figure 5, the image is dominated by a large group of men wearing black shirts and face masks. They are putting their hands on the shoulders of each other. There is a man in white standing in front of the crowd, a different dress code makes him stand out. We can see these people are wearing face masks and the one up front is holding an umbrella, at the first level of iconological analysis, we can only identify these as ordinary objects that are used to protect a person from virus transmission and from rain respectively. However, the symbolic meaning of these objects can be interpreted differently at the secondary level. For umbrellas, they are shields against physical attacks during clashes and they symbolise resistance against power. Disguised symbolism takes place here, where the umbrella may seem ordinary for people who are not familiar with the protest culture, but it carries a emblematic significance for those who are knowledgeable about this culture.

Black bloc and umbrella are both important attributes of this movement, which enables us to identify all of them as protesters, as they are all carrying some attributes on this image. We can assume that the reason of the particular protester is dressed differently is to bring out the loneliness he is experiencing. The intrinsic meaning of this image is relatively expressive. For protester who are feeling upset or alone, they should not forget that there is always a big group of people who are walking on the same path as them, and they will provide support from behind. As the caption says, “Take a look at your back, we are all standing behind you”. Being created soon after the first protester suicide case, this poster visualises that no one is alone in this movement and protesters are supporting each other under any circumstances.

PROTEST IMAGES AS A RECRUITMENT TOOL

A Peaceful Way to Contribute to the Movement

“My boyfriend doesn’t want me to stay in the frontline [...] but I still want to contribute.” (Interview 3)

As mentioned previously, protesters believe there are many different roles that can make important contributions to the movement. Among them, creators and distributors of protest

posters are considered as significant roles for the spread of information, ideas, and values. Due to experiences and technical restrictions, it might not be possible for everyone to become a creator, as it requires specific skills for graphic design. However, everyone can become a poster distributor within their on- and offline networks in the information age. Therefore, many protesters who want to contribute to the movement in a significant yet peaceful way, have decided to start distributing and sharing protest posters in their communities.

We can understand the distribution as either online or offline. Most of the posters are unauthored and copyright free, they were shared to protester groups on different social media platforms for free downloads and sharing. The explanation for this is that the main ambition of the creators is to spread the posters as far as possible, and as fast as possible. The easiest way to achieve this is to make them available on different popular groups and platforms, and allow protesters to simply download and repost them with their own social media accounts:

“I will post my work or the works that I got from the Telegram groups onto my Instagram stories for people to read. [...] I realised that Instagram story is very limited, it is only distributed to an echo chamber.” (Interview 3)

Here, Instagram is being referred to an echo chamber where political orientation is reinforced, as the audience of an ordinary person’s Instagram account is likely to be fixed. Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidsson (2014:319) suggests an ‘echo chamber’ effect is created when the individuals only share the information to those who share a similar political orientation, they only create a homogenous group to affiliate with each other. As a result, the information would not be effectively spread to other groups and individuals and make a significant change in influencing bystanders or those in the anti-groups. However, distributing posters on social media platforms can effectively reach people on the other side of the world:

“For my Instagram, I have friends from different countries... Vietnam, Germany and Taiwan. I can share it [the poster] and I change the language to English, so I can let them know what is happening in Hong Kong.” (Interview 5)

Bennett and Segerberg (2012:742) mention that in the network mode, ‘political demands and grievances are often shared in very personalised accounts that travel over social networking

platforms'. Protesters are able to add personalised contents that target a specific group of audience and engage them:

“I have been sharing posters from other platforms after adding translation and designing some posters by myself. [...] nearly all posters are in Chinese content, foreigners might not be able to read the details, I started creating the posters in English to allow more foreigners to understand the situation in Hong Kong.” (Interview 8)

Although foreigners are unlikely to become important players in this local movement, it is reaffirming to win them over as this reassures that the protesters are on the side of justice (Jasper 2014:156). Online distribution of posters provides a means for protesters to recruit potential members who are not in the same geographic location, as these individuals are still able to learn about the latest schedules and important events by reading information on the posters. This breaks the geographic limitation and allow more people to participate remotely with different kinds of involvements. While some protesters focus on online distribution, some believe that offline distribution is crucial to reach individuals who are not familiar with social media. Especially for those who aged 65 or older, who make up a significant percentage of the city's population:

“I don't think online [distribution] has to be done by me, there are many people doing online stuff now. [...] I think if people who are already inside the yellow [camp], they have their access to the protest arts if they want to get it.” (Interview 3)

“In my observation, some adults and elderly really stand there and look at the posters, because they don't know how to use Internet, and of course they don't know about LIHKG.” (Interview 5)

Similar to online distribution, there are also many ways to distribute protest images offline. Protesters usually download the posters from different sources and have them printed out in bulk. Handing them out on streets or at the protests are some examples of offline distribution. However, Lennon walls in different districts, bus terminals, pedestrian tunnels, footbridges, train stations, are the main distribution outlets. As there are countless number of Lennon walls all over Hong Kong and new posters are created every day, it requires a lot of effort and time for protesters to distribute these posters. Subgroups were therefore derived from bigger protester groups and dedicated to the distribution of protest posters. These groups might be

formed through the existing networks of protesters and they work closely with each other in order to reach more people who are located in different places:

“I found a Lennon wall nearby, which was set up by an alumnus from my secondary school. [...] We will print out lots of posters first, and drop them off at each wall, where protesters will help us to paste them on the wall. [...] It is much more efficient than that you going to each wall one by one, and doing it alone.” (Interview 4)

Main Roles of Posters

In general, the respondents identify three major roles of protest posters. Firstly, to provide reliable and accurate information with the support of visual elements, as protesters assume that audiences tend to believe in things that are shown through images. In that sense, the audience become witnesses of the events, which can possibly encourage them to take actions against injustice. Secondly, to effectively spread core values and slogans of the movement. Slogans have always been seen as “the expression of well-defined claims and ‘performance’ of the democratic nature” of social movements in Hong Kong since the Umbrella Movement (Veg 2016:679). In the Anti-ELAB movement, slogans have also been used to stress the importance of solidarity (Lee 2019:8). Besides chanting these slogans at protests, protesters visualised them on posters to leave a stronger impression. Thirdly, to tell the stories that cannot be covered in mass media. There were politically sensitive incidents and attacks that have not been covered on TV news, which is the major channel for elderly people to get information about the protests. It has been criticised by protesters that certain TV channels are projecting their political bias when they are reporting news related to the movement. In a specific case, there have been criticisms about how TVB news is actively trying to frame deaths and injuries of protesters in a different way. Protest posters are therefore utilised to illustrate the details of these events, in order to fill the information gap for elderly citizens, who are interested in knowing these stories from another perspective.

Target audience and contents

“I think different people are attracted to different kinds of protest arts” (Interview 3)

Creators express that besides protesters, they also want to influence people from the opposite camp or bystanders with the posters, as art is an essential tool for protesters to communicate ideas to the outside (Wong 2015; Veg 2016:691). The content of the posters have different focuses when they are targeting at different groups, some are more informative and some are more emotional. By applying knowledge about social media advertising in this poster campaign, it can be assumed that both rational and emotional appeals are positively related to the expression of empathy towards protesters (Lee & Hong 2016:364). Informativeness is crucial to ‘encompass rational appeal as it assists individuals to make an informed judgement’, whereas emotional appeal allows sender of the message to persuade individuals who have lower motivation and ability (ibid.). Moreover, to accurately deliver the specific message to specific target audiences, different design styles were adopted. For instance, remixes with popular culture and meme icons are often seen on the posters:

“One interesting icon is Pepe. We have associated Pepe as an ambassador of the movement, Pepe may look weak, yet rebellious, a relevant symbolism of us Hong Kongers who fight for our right despite the risk of being arrested and imprisoned.” (Interview 7)



Fig. 6 Hong Kong Pepe protests in Parliament, 2019, Pepelangelo.

Interpreting figure 6 at the first level of analysis, we can identify around 30 characters are being in somewhere like a conference room. We can distinguish two groups here based on their standing positions and characteristics. One is standing on stage while trying to hide their faces behind the umbrellas, while the other is capturing the moment with cameras. Moving onto the second level of analysis, we notice that three significant protest attributes are present:

yellow helmets, umbrellas and black bloc. Bringing our understandings about the protest into play, we can identify characters on the image are different individuals represented by Pepe the Frog, a significant icon of the movement. And based on the attributes wore by them, it is clear that the group on stage portrays the protesters while the other portrays the press.

Then, we will have to interpret the meaning with our protest knowledge. This allows us to recognise that this image describes an important event that took place on the establishment day of the Hong Kong SAR: the storming of the Legislative Council. This image recreates the moment when the protesters were breaking into the building and spraying words with black paint in the Chamber. The protester Pepes are covering their faces to protect their identities in front of cameras that are live broadcasting the event to the world. For the intrinsic meaning, we have to be able to recognise who is the author of this painting. An interesting fact is that this painting was created by a professional Russian artist, Pepelangelo. Therefore, this painting is not only an illustration of the historical moment of protesters storming in one of the most important government buildings in Hong Kong, but it also shows a connection between protesters and international artists through shaping Pepe as an icon in the movement.

THE POWER OF VISUALS

“Without affect, information lacks meaning” (Joffe 2008:89; Zajonc 1998). The affective nature of visual materials is the most salient distinction between visual and textual messages, in which the ‘emotive impact’ is the main drive for one to make judgements and decisions (Joffe 2008:84-89). Joffe (2008) calls this the emotive power of visual materials. Interestingly, the ‘power’ of visuals have also been mentioned many times by the respondents during the interviews. In this session, we will explore the different qualities of visuals and its ‘power’.

Allowing Different Interpretations

“A picture allows the audience to read or imagine on their own about what each part of the picture represent, so when looked at it as a whole there would be millions combos and possibilities to individuals’ imagination or social context. This is the power of art.” (Interview 7)

Unlike words, visual content creates a larger space of different interpretations. A few respondents have underlined that people might have different feelings towards the same visual information. In their perspectives, texts are more fixed, in a sense that they control to what extent the audience is interpreting something. Visual content, on the other hand, has a possibility to be expanded based on one's imagination and knowledge.

“Batman is an icon to fight against evils and crimes in the infamous Gotham city. And [on figure 7] he is throwing a petrol bomb, a commonly used tool by protestors against the brutal police, who protects only the minority few. And behind Batman's effort is to fight for a future which is young, a future that is full of hopes.” (Interview 7)



Fig. 7 *The future is young*. 2019. DC Comics

Figure 7 is a poster designed by DC Comics (2019) to promote a new Batman comic. At face value, audience may see this as a poster showing a black figure is about to throw a Molotov cocktail. The secondary meaning can be revealed when we recognise the character on the image as Batman by applying our pop culture knowledge. It can be seen as a poster that promotes the popular comic that was going to be published. However, when we move on to the third level of meaning, the image can be seen as a support to the Hong Kong protesters from the graphic novel publishing giant. As Molotov cocktails, black clothes and 'young' are regarded as attributes of the Hong Kong protests. The design of this poster has included these distinctive attributes, which to some extent, encourages young people to fight for their future.

This can be considered as a parody of the Hong Kong protests, in which Batman represents the young protesters, and try to defeat the villains in the comic. Interestingly, not only the outfit of Batman synchronises with that of the Hong Kong protesters here on the poster, but also their goals and determinations. As a matter of fact, the intrinsic meaning of this poster has offended many fans in the mainland. They have demanded the comic company to take the poster down as this reflects the company's support to the protesters and the movement.

Breaking Down Complex Messages

Written texts with detailed descriptions is definitely helpful for one to understand the complex procedures of a certain action. However, reading a lengthy text could be time consuming:

“In my experience, visual forms are very direct and irritating. Usually it does not require the audiences to go through a process of thinking. [...] Especially for cruel things, I think words cannot describe, but a picture can. [...] A photo can tell a story.” (Interview 4)

The idea that the respondent is illustrating is simple and direct: an image can tell a whole story. As protests are taking place almost every day, there are countless stories and information that the protesters would like to deliver to the public. Berger (2008) proposes that images provide us an unravelled insight into the past, which function as a ‘direct testimony’ about the world, and thus ‘images are more precise and richer than literature’ (Howells & Negreiros 2019:88). Howells and Negreiros (2019:89) state that social and political ideas and assumptions can be embedded within visual texts. Nevertheless, comparing to written texts, visual texts allow us to grasp the important points within a shorter period time:

“Sometimes people have to read too much a day, and don't really want to read more text information. Time spent on visual is less than on text. We can get the idea behind, straight and direct.” (Interview 2)

Fig. 8 is a poster that shows possible ways for individuals to maximise their contributions and votes in the 2020 Legislative election. The squares illustrate the maximum number of votes that one can have while the bubbles illustrates individuals of different occupations, including students, retirees, professionals, non-professionals and employers.

“[...] there are a lot of words, but they are distributed in different shapes, so you do not have to read a paragraph in order to know what you have to do. [...] This is very straightforward, if you are in a certain role, then do this or do that. Direct instructions, this is simple.” (Interview 3)

The respondents understand that visual texts have the affordance of summarising complicated message in a more fun and dynamic way. They claim to comprehend complicated information or ideas carried by the image without processing a lot of written words, which generally requires much more time. The respondents also emphasise that visuals are more effective in engaging individuals who are lazy to read, in a sense that they can easily catch attention.



Fig. 8 “If I am a... what can I do for the 2020 Legislative Council election?” Source: Collaction (2020)

Connecting and Reconnecting People

From the respondents’ experience, protest arts have connected them with different individuals in two different ways.

“Whenever I saw people having this artwork [fig. 9] printed on their phone cases, or a sticker of it on their backpack, I know immediately they are our ‘hands and feet’.” (Interview 1)

Figure 9 can be read vertically as Hong Kong “香港” and horizontally as “加油”, which means “keep it up” in Cantonese. This image has become the most important and popular movement symbol. It functions as an identification that allows protesters to forge bonds with each other and there are a lot of protest merchandise that integrate this symbol into the design. As Goodnow (2006:174) states, wearing or displaying movement symbols ‘fulfils a vital

function in creating identification among campaign members’, while increasing membership and creating cohesion among groups. Accordingly, the respondent expresses that she can immediately identify a passer-by as a fellow protester if the person is wearing the symbol. In other words, the symbol differentiate protesters from ordinary people, and it also shows the group has internal cohesion through shared symbolic means (Goodnow 2006:174).

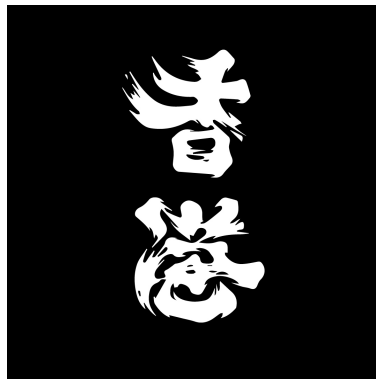


Fig. 9 “Hong Kong/ Keep it up”. Source: Collaction (2020)

In addition to connecting participants with someone they do not know before, the sharing of protest posters online can also result in reconnecting participants with someone who they have not been contacting. Several respondents have experienced reconnection with their old friends through sharing posters on their social media:

“[...] sharing posters is a kind of expression that those who share the same as you will comment on, then you may have a chance to talk and share and find someone walking together on the same path. [...] You may have a chance to talk to someone you had not been talking to for a long time.” (Interview 9)

Images are a kind of organisational resource, which helps connecting ‘formerly unlinked people’, especially in the contemporary media environment that ‘facilitates such connections through computer-mediated social networks’ (Doerr, Mattoni & Teune 2015:11; Jasper & Poulsen 1995; Bennett & Segerberg 2013). For many individuals, their online networks usually consist of people who they are either close with or no longer close with. The interactions between an individual and these two groups of people are certainly different, as one tends to interact more with someone they are closer with. It is interesting to note that, during the Anti-ELAB movement, there seem to have many reconnections between protesters and their old friends. Protest posters usually carry explicit meanings that support the movement, therefore they serve as identification of protesters and supporters of the movement

as well. Like-minded individuals who share common interests and beliefs tend to establish a connection with each other, with the affordances of social media platforms that allow materials to be shared widely (Highfield 2016). In this context, some protesters are able to reestablish a connection with a friend who they were no longer close with, by recognising each other's political stance on social media. These individuals usually get a chance to interact again, interactions might include leaving encouraging messages.

Recalling Traumatic Memories and Triggering Emotions

“Whenever I saw those kinds of poster, they caused pain, which cannot be eased even though the event has happened for a few months. Especially when the posters are mentioning the incidents which caused deaths, they will recall my sadness.” (Interview 8)

While real stories will eventually become a past, many creators commodify them through visuals (Ibrahim 2009:96). Many posters are designed to illustrate traumatic events, which usually involve injuries and deaths. To motivate audience with the affordances of image's affective nature, these posters display the cruelty explicitly. This approach has an enormous effect on recreating memory and 'spaces of commemoration', as visuals often emphasises on simulations, replications and virtual experiences (Ibrahim 2009:95; Lennon & Foley 1999:47). The audience are likely to be encouraged to take the steps to tackle problems, especially those who have witnessed the event. In addition, witnessing traumatic events again through images allows the audience to experience the event for a second time to some extent. As for those who did not experience the events themselves, they are able to get a visualised idea about the event details on the images.

“This poster [fig. 10] impressed me as it portrays the whole story on 7.21 night. It reminds everyone of the nightmare that they have had. The two policemen turned around and walked away is the highlighted part that reflects the truth and describes how hopeless and insane it is to those survivors in the MTR station at that night. The words on the posters help to report the issue precisely with description and date which enable those who don't know to know more.” (Interview 9)

The idea can be explained with the example of figure 10. As mentioned for a few times already, we can identify the factual evidences at the primary level. A lot of men in white are attacking and chasing after other people, including a woman and a man in black. Other people

are trying to escape while a man in the corner is injured. Regardless of the chaotic situation, two men in blue uniform are slowly walking away from the scene. Beside the visual text, there are also a few numbers and captions shown on the poster. At the secondary level, one can be able to identify the location as a train station in Hong Kong, basing on the exit signs and ticket gates. Taking our cultural and linguistic knowledge into account, we can recognise the men in white are the thugs who attacked civilians at Yuen Long Station on July 21. The men in blue uniforms, are the two police who walked away from the scene without providing



Fig. 10 Protest poster showing the 7.21 attack at Yuen Long Station. Source: Collection (2020)

help to victims. The numbers are statistical data such as the number of injuries, attacks, time taken for the police to arrive. The author describes the incident as a ‘humanitarian disaster’, which strongly criticises the police’s indulgence towards the attackers. The attack is detailedly recreated on the image and we can clearly identify the doings of the attackers, passengers and the police. Colours are used to highlight key figures and individuals, which points to the fact that it was a indiscriminate attack, as everyone in the station was attacked, including women.

Taking the interpretation to the third level, this image reflects the desperation of Hong Kongers when they realise that police is not dependable in such situations. The framing of the attack as a humanitarian disaster acts as a moral shock while visualising the details recalls the audience’s memories about the traumatic event. This triggers people’s emotions and motivates them to take actions by themselves, as they can no longer depend on the authority.

“People’s memory can be faded in a short time. The visuals are to refresh people’s memory and to connect people with pain, so it is quite powerful because until now people are still grieving the death of Tsz-lok⁹, so if we do not have this kind of artwork, people might not remember... that many people have died already.” (Interview 9)

Stimulating participants’ emotion through the specific affordances of these protest posters can positively affect individual participation in organised actions (Milan 2013:62). The reason for creators to remind people of the same event repeatedly can be understood as an encouragement, which supports them to keep fighting on their demands. Dahlgren (2009:83-4) points out that engagement in politics always involve some kind of passion, and motivation without affect would be hard to comprehend. Protesters who share posters on social media also expect to trigger the actions of their friends:

“Of course I have expectations from them. For example, I want them to share too. When I share with my friends, you share with your friends, and your friends share with their friends, and so on. Go to the protests if you haven’t already. If you are still supporting the blue shops, you should stop that and go to yellow shops instead. I want them to have actions, but not just knowing.” (Interview 5)

However, the distributors understand that individuals have their own limitations and participate in different roles. Therefore, they do not expect their audience to put in as much effort and time as them, but they do hope that the audience are able to recognise things they can contribute to from the posters and try to work on those things within their capabilities:

“I believe not everyone has the courage or can be a frontline fighter, not everyone can be a protest art creator or distributor as well. But I hope that after reading our posters, people will find that there are more that they can do. [...] We are human, we have limitations [...] but it is important to know what you can do to contribute.” (Interview 3)

⁹ University student Chow Tsz-lok dies after falling during a protest, as police carried out dispersion operation.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The general research focus of this thesis is to examine the roles of visuals and its significance in group formations and communications during the Anti-ELAB movement. Although combining the studies of visual and protest culture has not been a popular research interest, the Hong Kong Anti-ELAB movement provides a perfect stage for this study approach due to the strong presence of visual elements. Different from any movement in Hong Kong's history, the cultural aspects of the movement have been highly valued by participants. The several thousands of protest images created by protesters also construct a rich database for this empirical research. Based on previous studies that examined the relationship between visuals and the empowerment of movements, the aim of this research is to examine the roles of visuals through establishing a theoretical engagement with protest images, specifically with posters created by protesters. According to Burr (2015:4), culture determines the specific way that people commonly understand the world and the concepts they use. Therefore, analysing this specific case allows me to turn my cultural knowledge to good advantage. This has facilitated me to achieve the main objective of this research, which is to take a different cultural approach to investigate the roles of visuals with the support of developed concepts and theories. Considering the dynamic nature of visuals and movements, I analysed the case with mixed qualitative methods. Qualitative interviews and critical visual analysis were conducted in order to answer the research questions. In this chapter, I will summarise the results of the analysis and present how these findings can contribute to the study of group formations and communications in social movements, and their relations with visual culture. In brief, these findings illustrate the significant roles of protest posters in bridging communicational, informational, and geographical gaps between protesters and movement supporters.

My point of departure in this thesis is to examine the roles of protest posters in group formations and communications in the movement, hence it is necessary to learn the different groups that are present in it. According to the analysis of the interviews, movement groups can be categorised as public groups, private groups, and anti-groups. Public and private groups are defined based on their specific communicative purposes, the former is open to all

people while the latter is exclusive to people in certain positions or with certain ambitions. Communications in a private group usually require a higher level of security, group members are likely to employ platforms that ensure end-to-end encryption and protect the conversation from surveillance devices. For instance, the number of users on Telegram, a messenger app that claims to have surveillance-proof features, has increased by 19,000 within a month in Hong Kong during the movement (Baumgartner et al. 2020:4). For public groups, a lot of them take place at popular social media platforms, as the number of active users on these platforms are usually higher. Public groups are commonly used as channels to share digital resources, such as images and videos. Specifically, a lot of online groups on popular social media platforms are dedicated to the sharing of protest posters. Unlike the above two groups, anti-groups are formed by individuals who position themselves oppositely to the protesters. Interestingly, the analysis identified that anti-groups are often being portrayed by protesters on images and posters. This brings us to the discussion of the findings about what do protesters communicate through the posters.

In line with the argument of Doerr, Mattoni and Teune (2015:5), both interview and visual analyses show traces of protest poster being used as a tool to ridicule the anti-groups. These groups of people, usually include the police, government officials and government supporters, always appear as cruel, dangerous, and unsympathetic on the posters. And these 'features' of the anti-groups are sometimes illustrated through the recreation of real-life events that happened in the movement. By reference to the study of Ibrahim (2009), the recreation of traumatic events through images invites audiences to be the witnesses to some extent, which triggers their sorrow and anger, especially for those who have experienced the events before. The analysed data also shows that posters are actively communicating emotions to the audience, and they are often negative. However, these emotions triggered by the posters would often demonstrate what Jasper (2014:104) calls 'the power of negative thinking'. A key finding from the interviews indicate that these emotions and moral shocks obtained from the posters are very often the motivations for people to act against injustice, which often involves participations in the movement. This finding provides a strong basis for my argument, that one of the important roles of protest posters is to serve as a recruitment tool in the Anti-ELAB movement.

The ongoing movement has been taking place for almost one year as of the date of writing. From the perspectives of many protesters, the protest has not yet come to an end. Instead of taking a break from the protests, many people are integrating protests into their everyday and consumption lives. A noticeable way of doing so is to support businesses that stand with protesters, and with reference to the protest colour, this group of businesses is called the 'yellow economy circle'. The visual analysis identifies that protest posters play an active role in connecting individuals with these businesses. Explicitly, the posters serve a function of promoting yellow shops while boycotting blue shops. The analysis also shows that ethical consumerism is often being stressed in the messages conveyed by the posters, as they encourage people to make consumptions in accordance to their political ideology. However, Arnesson (2018:206) criticises that there is no guarantee that this kind of political restrictions will result in the 'win-win' ideal of ethical consumerism, which benefits both the business owners and protesters. After all, these activities are based on conflicts in society.

The posters do not make connections between protesters and the yellow economy circle only, but also between individuals. However, it is interesting to note that the connection between individuals can either be a positive or negative experience. The analysis demonstrates that both positive and negative experiences can be brought by sharing protest posters on social media platforms. An affordance of the posters is allowing people to identify each other, whether they belong to the same group. In terms of positive connections, the act of sharing protest posters on social media allows one to connect with strangers and to reconnect with old friends who share the same political ideology. In terms of negative connection, sharing posters can trigger arguments with people who disagree with the values demonstrated on the posters. A common experience of respondents is to get into a virtual fight, which often involves verbal attacks from the opposite side. In most cases, there is no solution for this kind of argument. The main reason is that the two parties uphold values that are fundamentally different and it is difficult to reach an agreement. Therefore, negative connections usually end up with one side leaving the conversation.

The discussion of connectivity created by posters has led us to another key finding of this thesis. Based on the interest in how visuals perform in enhancing the sustainability of the groups, I analysed the empirical materials with the focus of significant concepts that are illustrated by the posters and interpreted by the viewer. One concept has stood out from the rest during the process of data analysing, it is the demonstration of solidarity between all protesters. A key term that has been used repeatedly by different respondents to describe their relationship with other protesters is 'hands and feet', which indicates they see each other as brothers, comrades and intimate friends. Analysis of the interviews shows that the high degree of solidarity is built on the common experiences, goals and determinations. The visual analysis shows that this concept is taken into consideration by creators in the designing process, and an example has been illustrated in the analysis chapter. Very often, protesters are portrayed in connection with black bloc, a dress code that has been significantly adopted in the Anti-ELAB movement. Black bloc functions as a tool for identification and protection, which allows one to identify protesters and helps covering one's identity during a protest. It also carries an affective consequence for some protesters, by providing emotional support and a sense of belonging, especially in difficult times. It is worth mentioning that black bloc is an important attribute that is often shown on protest posters, along with the others such as umbrellas and face masks. Based on the findings discussed above, it is possible to draw a general conclusion that protest poster plays a significant role in creating connectivity between individuals, and between individuals and businesses within the group. However, the findings also nuance this conclusion by identifying that this kind of connectivity brings by posters can either be a positive or negative experience, depending on the political stance of the individuals.

Although the findings have illustrated the different affordances of the posters, it is important to discuss how does the way of distribution contribute to the effective spread of information and values communicated by the posters. The main sources for distributors to collect and download posters from the creators are the 'protest posters groups' on social media platforms. However, the analysis suggests that we can understand the different ways of distribution by categorising them as either online or offline distribution. Distributing the posters online has a notable effect in reaching foreign potential supporters, as it eliminates the geographical

restrictions. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Jasper (2014:156) argues that it is always beneficial to win bystanders over in a movement. Having communication and getting support from overseas audience can provide protesters with both moral and practical support. Another advantage that has been pointed out by the analysis is that, distributing online facilitates a reach to a large audience population, regarding the large number of users on different social media platforms.

The analysis also identifies a key contribution of distributing posters at offline sites, particularly at Lennon Walls. In specific, offline distribution allows young protesters to communicate to elderly people, with accurate and reliable information that might not been covered in mass media. The analysis of the interviews provides an explanation for this, in which many protesters criticise the credibility and political bias of certain newspapers and news channels. A significant thought of the respondents is that the main source of protest information for elderly people is the mass media channels, and the particular way of framing that these channels apply could possibly influence these audience's opinions towards the movement in a negative way. Given that scale of Lennon Walls in the city is massive, posters that are distributed at offline sites have a higher possibility to reach people who are not familiar with the Internet, particularly elderly people. Concluding the above findings regarding distributions of posters, it is arguably to say that the multiple channels and outlets facilitate the effective spread of the posters, as well as the delivery of important protest values and information.

The presented key findings have answered the sub-questions that this thesis has proposed, which are related to the communication of messages, the ways of distribution, and the connectivity created by protest posters. However, to claim that posters are playing active roles in group formations and communications, it is crucial to present findings in accordance with the influences of visuals, which is the main research objective of this thesis. The analysis identifies a number of affordances of visual texts, in the form of protest posters. It has been mentioned earlier in the conclusion that posters bring individuals together, and they also trigger emotions and actions. Therefore, here I will present the analysis of how visuals allow different interpretations, break down complex messages and motivate actions.

The results illustrate that visual texts create a bigger room for different interpretations. In comparison to written texts, contents that are presented in a visual form allow audience to expand the picture in reliance on one's imagination and knowledge. Another key finding about visual power is that, respondents generally do not appreciate lengthy texts, especially when it comes to directions and constructions. In the context of this movement and with these actors, posters allow complex messages, such as election procedures, to be simplified as ideas and concepts that can be better understood. The Hong Kong local elections has taken place during the movement, and voting for pro-democracy candidates has been regarded as an important action to demonstrate one's political activism. Considering the registration and voting process might seem complicated to some individuals, especially for those who were voting for the first time, creators have designed posters that heavily employ visual elements to demonstrate the processes. According to the analysis, breaking down complex ideas is believed to be an effective approach to encourage people to register and vote.

The thesis combined the findings from qualitative interviews and critical visual analysis. These findings indicate that the posters emphasise different cultural perspectives, including the culture of Hong Kong and the protest culture. One of the biggest limitations for me in carrying out the analysis is to narrow down the themes, as the data I have obtained from both interviews and visual materials is extremely rich and they all seemed to be worth discussing. My ambition to understand the influences of visuals in this particular context has guided me a clear direction throughout the research. It is fascinating to see the results indicate a general recognition of the importance of protest posters, especially in how they motivate individuals and their actions. There is a very impressive quote from one of the creators, which unfortunately I could not include in the analysis:

“People are realising how influential the protest arts is. [...] Even our Chief Executive or some government officials said that they believe we are well-trained and well-paid because of the high quality of the protest arts. [...] I would say other than the frontline fighters, protest arts fighters are as important as them. This is why the authority is targeting [at] protest arts, they are arresting us or trying to take us down.” (Interview 3)

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APPENDIX 1

Consent form



LUNDS UNIVERSITET

Department of Communication and Media

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Master Thesis Course: *Research on the visuals and its significance in group formation*

Researcher: Cheryl Fung (wi2248fu-s@student.lu.se)

This research seeks to explore the roles of visuals with a case study of the 2019 Anti-ELAB movement. I will ask questions related to your contribution to creating, circulating and sharing the protest arts produced during the movement, in relation to their significance in group formations through social media. Each interview will last around 60 minutes. The data will only be used within the confinement of my master thesis course (MKVN13).

I would like to record the interview and use the dialogue to present my findings. The audio or video will not be presented to anyone, and all data including the original transcript will be destroyed upon the completion of the master thesis course. Please feel free to say as much or as little as you want. You can decide not to answer any question, or to stop the interview any time you want. I ensure that your identity will remain anonymous.

If you agree to join this study, and be recorded please sign your name below.

Signature and information of research participant

Signature of participant Age Date

APPENDIX 2

Interview guide

Social movement

Have you been active in other political activities before?

- joined any political groups or protests?

How did you start participating in the movement?

- what motivates you to participate?
- how is it related to yourself?
- briefly about activities you have been involved in?

How would you describe the protesters in general?

- things in common? (age/ occupation/ values)

How would you describe the relationship and connection between protesters?

- in terms of solidarity and supportiveness for each other?
- what kind of common experiences or threats have created this solidarity?

Networked society

Where do you receive information about the protests?

- online/ offline?
- what app/ channels? Why?
- do you have to join particular groups?
- how often do you receive the information?
- is it difficult or easy to get information? (have there been interruptions?)

How are you familiar with this platform(s)?

- how did you learn about it? From friends....?
- how popular is it among protesters?
- how important is the platform for protesters?

How are the relationships between different members?

- how do you communicate?
- how active are the members?
- is there some sort of leaders or spokespeople?
- any conflicts within the group? What's it about? How do you resolve them?
- have you ever left any groups? And joined any new groups?
- how important is "trust" between the members?

How do you describe the interactions between you and other users on the platform?

- examples of reactions and comments?
- how often do you communicate with them?
- similarities and differences (values? viewpoints?)

Visuals

What makes you get involved in creating? Distributing? sharing?

- similar experiences? Working in the media or journalism field?
- what platforms? Advantages of the platforms? Differences between sharing online and offline?
- were you sharing a lot on your social media before?

Can you show me examples of posters that you have shared?

- what messages do you think are embedded in the poster?

(Creators) What are the messages of your artworks?

- what do you want to achieve?
- what kind of styles do you use? Why?

What are the differences in showing the content in visuals instead of texts?

- what does posters show but text doesn't? Or the other way round
- how powerful are these visuals in your opinion?
- how does it play a role in connecting people?

How important is it for you to share these posters?

- who are your audience?
- what content do you usually share? What styles?

(Creators) How supportive are your audience?

- reactions? shares?

What do you think are the symbols of the movement?

- does it appear a lot in the protest arts? Why?

There are a lot of protest arts that show past events in the protests, what are the significance of this?

- does any of the artwork remind you of particular events/ individuals/ groups?
- what kind of emotions do you have when you are being reminded by the visuals?

APPENDIX 3

Sample Transcript - Interview 3

Female, 27, Creator and distributor

Time: 1 hour 24 minutes

Let's start with the first question. Have you ever been active in any political activities?

Yes, you mean before this movement? Before this movement, I think... not really that active. Just... maybe I'll take part in distributing some news, or sometimes when there are activities maybe I'll go out, but not as active as this time. For the Umbrella movement, I have been going out to the Hong Kong island side, not to stay there for a very long time. But I'll go there after school or when there are protests I'll take part in it, but not really that active like this time.

I see. How did you start participating in this particular movement?

Actually, if we go back to last year... or in 2018, when they were discussing the act, I wasn't really noticing the whole thing. To be honest, because when the Umbrella movement... how it ended, I don't really have high hopes in Hong Kong's political environment, and in Hong Kong people, because they were not ready yet. So I was pretty hopeless with Hong Kong's situation. So when people go out and protest on the 9th of June, that was the first really huge protest, I didn't participate because I don't believe in protest anyway. And people reacted to the "Fishball Revolution" I don't believe in protests anymore and so-called peaceful protests, so I didn't go out on the 9th of June. But after that, people started saying that we have to stop it with whatever it costs, so on the 12th of June, at that time I felt like the situation this time has changed. People are not only protesting and go home and look at the news and do nothing, people are really going to stop the act. So I actually went out that day and things evolved, so that was the first time I really participated in the current movement.

How do you think the whole thing is related to yourself and people around you?

So... if we fast forward to today, people are saying that there are less large activities or gatherings, maybe it's because of the virus but I can see that people around me for both parties, the people who support the movement and people who are not supporting, things have been changed, the way of living has changed. Like now we always said, we have to support the yellow camp, for our choices in shopping, maybe the shops and restaurants... all kinds of different things, we are having the mindset of supporting... to pay those who are supporting our side or anti-China. In this way, people are changing their lifestyles. This is very different from what it used to be, because people are now using their money wisely, and when they do every minor thing in life, they think before action. They really will think like "Oh! What will the consequence be if I do blah blah blah or if I purchase blah blah blah", so this is a very awakening kind of lifestyle I believe. So this is what we haven't been seeing in the past.

Yeah, that's amazing. Can you talk about activities that you have been involved in?

Hahaha, that will be a little bit sensitive. For promotion work on its own, I have been brainstorming slogans and also to find some creators who will help us to turn those ideas and slogans into drawings... into distributing work. And also I have been trying to distribute the protest arts in different ways, like printing them out and distributing them to people that are protesting. Or we have been printing stickers, I will give it to my friends and tell them to distribute it, or I will stick them on buses so people who are taking the bus will see them. Also the Instagram story thing, I will post my work or the works that I got from the Telegram groups onto my Instagram stories for people to read. I have been forwarding news on Facebook. And for the yellow shopping thing, in the past I would not take a snapshot before dining, but now I will do it as a promotion for the shops that support our camps, and that's what I am doing now. And may be actively liking and forwarding the Instagram accounts that focus on the promotion work.

I would love to talk more about the protest arts with you later. But I also want to ask when you go to a demonstration, there are a lot of people beside you, can you find anything that you guys have in common?

A very salient thing will be the choice in clothings. People will dress in all-black and all kinds of masks... protection sleeves, and even with the same kind of backpack to try not to be identified. I think in some sense, Hong Kong people are wearing more black than they have ever did. I mean not only on protest day, I didn't really notice this in the past, but after the movement has started, the clothing choice of Hong Kong people has been very careful. On normal days, they don't wear black, they definitely do not wear white or blue. So I think in

this sense, the choice of clothings has changed. When you see a person and they are wearing black with a mask, you kind of have a hint that they are in some sense connected with us... on protest day or not. So this is amazing because Hong Kong people are always saying that we are very disconnected, very isolated. This is the sense that we have never had feelings in the past, and we have something in common that we are not only minding our own business. In the protests, people are looking around, seeing if anyone needs help, this was not found in Hong Kong in the past. For the slogans, when you are shouting the first part of a slogan, people will automatically continue with the other part, so people have that in mind already and that is what we have in common. And also people are not looking down on others who are not... I think this is a bit different now than before, but people are not comparing who is more “yellow” or when something happened and people are not aware of it, people will not laugh at others, we will just explain to them. People are not comparing who is wiser or who is better, people are aware of the different roles and in this movement, people are also always saying that every role is important, no matter you are on the frontline or you are a FA [first aider] or a student or a press. They are not comparing who is more important and we are having the same goal and doing our best to achieve the same goal. I think this is what we have in common right? The goal that is.

Yeah that is truly fascinating and I think you have answered part of the next question already. Regarding the solidarity, what kind of common experience do you have in order to achieve this?

I think the threat is a really big one. Like Brian Leung said, we are connected with pain. I think the kind of pain is like the slogan 光復香港 [liberate Hong Kong], what we mean by 光復 [liberate] is not we are asking for more, but to just get our life back to normal. The thing behind this is we can see that, many of our rights or what we have been believing, some core beliefs and core values are being taken by the Chinese government and the Hong Kong government. This kind of injustice and also pain which things progress, we can see live [broadcasts], injuries, all sorts of pain. The bullet doesn't have to go through our bodies, but we can empathize with what our camp... our sisters and brothers are suffering. That kind of pain is what brings us together. What was taken from us that is what makes us... because we grew in this place together, the teenagers, the youngsters and the young adults... I do believe it's the majority of us who will be people that are under 30 or 35? Because we really grew in the developed Hong Kong, so for people who are over 40, they grew in a developing Hong Kong. So we can see that something is declining and rotting, that was not what we grew up in, so we have a very strong sense of having to protect what we were having in the past for us and our future generations. I think that's what brings people together and also because of the future generation thing, it brings more people together, especially those in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Because they can see what threats the future generations are facing and will be facing.

Absolutely. Let's move on to the questions about the groups and platforms you are using when you are communicating with other protesters. Where do you usually received information about the protests?
Telegram.

So were you familiar with that before or you started using it after the movement has begun?

I do already have a telegram account before, it was only to communicate with my brother. I don't know why my brother likes using Telegram but it was only to communicate with my brother and we seldom used it to be honest. So when this movement begins and in the very very very beginning, I was still using Whatsapp to contact some of my very close friends. But we do notice that it may not be safe and we cannot include a large group of people in a Whatsapp group because it was a closed group on Whatsapp. So at first if it is a two-person conversation, I will send the message to another person and then within an hour we will delete it. Because after an hour you cannot delete the message, so that was what we were doing at first. And then we moved to Telegram and also may be for larger information exchange in LIHKG but I seldom participate in LIHKG. In the very beginning it was good, there were fewer undercovers. But it gets very skeptical so I don't use it now. But in the past, you can really see how people react in certain moves. In the very beginning it was all trials, what we do and how the public react to the action. And people were still having the mindset of “Don't do that, if we do this then 民意逆轉 [reverse of the public opinion]”. They always said that we will lose the support of people because Hong Kong people can't accept this kind of action and it is too violent. But at some point we found out that this is not the way people react in this movement. At the same time, undercovers are sneaking into the forums, so I personally do not use it now, so Telegram is what I use the most to communicate, to look for information because we have different groups. Because if you are participating in certain groups, there are different groups for that kind of role. And also for protest arts, we have different groups for that. So creators are putting their works on it and you download it and use it as you like. Because I play safe, so I don't really contact people in person very much. For many actions, I do it on my own, so I don't really like... some people will team up and they will do activities together, I personally don't trust people very much in this movement. So I just joined different groups and see what people are doing and make my own decisions, so Telegram groups are what I use most.

Can you tell me how often you receive information?

Well, if you say receive, it will be day and night, you just have to log in your account and information is going in every single second I would say. It is the matter of you to choose whether or not to receive information, there will be tonnes of information for you to receive. So yeah... if your question is how often do I participate in

receiving the information or to process the information then it will be... I would say I am not participating as much as I did before, I am trying to get my life back. For now, maybe every 2 or 3 hours I'll go up and see something special that I have to pay attention to or what people are discussing now. But in the past, I'd say, every 15 minutes. I don't really contribute much but I receive and process it myself.

You mentioned you are in different groups for different purposes, among these groups are there people who are more active or take the roles as leaders?

It depends on what group it is. If it is a group, it will be rather equal. But if it's a channel, it is what the administrator would like to announce, that will be a from top to bottom thing. I would not say it is a hierarchy but it is a channel right? It is like an announcement board, it is not for you to mutually communicate. So it depends on if it's a group or a channel. Also the groups that I joined are larger groups because as I mentioned, I don't really team up with people, so I don't have that kind of little groups, I think the situation will be different if it's that kind of small group. I usually join large groups, so it will be safer, my identity will not be exposed in some sense.

How would you describe the formation of the groups? Are there people going in and out constantly? Do you have had any conflicts within the group?

For conflicts, this is not my personal experience, but I know from my friend's 公會[union], it is a designers' union. They have arguments... I didn't look into what happened, but as far as I know, they eventually splitted up into two unions. People are arguing some are contributing less... so arguments do happen. Sometimes in large groups, that kind of thing will happen too. People are saying that some suggestions do not work or "from what you suggested, I believe you have not gone out and see what real life is". But at last will it heat up to a very large argument that people are kicking out people, I don't really see that kind of thing happening. In the end, you know "兄弟爬山 各自努力" [brothers climbing mountains, each offering one's efforts], if you think your method will work then you go for it. Or if you think this will have an impact on the movement, then you go for it. But if I don't agree, then I won't. Will people come and go? Yes, people come and go. Will administrator kicks people out? Yes. But in the sense that the account has been hacked, may be sending out advertisements and people will kick that account out. Or if people report the person owning the account has been arrested, the administrator will kick that account out.

Have you ever left a group and joined another group?

I personally don't have that experience. People are of course skeptical at some point, but also people are saying "不捉鬼" [no capture of undercovers], just do your thing, this is the final agreement. People will argue in a constructive way. Because if we turn agreements into personal attacks or if we go down that path, it will be destructive and 分化 [splitting] and this is what we have learned from the Umbrella movement is that we can't spare any cost to be splitted by whoever wants us to split up. For arguments, people may not find a common ground, but they are not saying that we are walking in different paths.

Have you ever been facing any situation with an anti-group?

For the battle at PolyU, I personally didn't agree with staying in the university and fighting for it, so when people are very enthusiastic and helping those inside the school or spending more labour in saving them, I don't really agree with this kind of approach. But I didn't voice out because I don't think that this will help the situation even if I express what I believe, I don't think people will stop saving them so I just kept it for myself. I also saw people taking sides, some said that those in the PolyU were too inexperienced, it doesn't worth using experienced fighters to save them. There are different opinions but for me myself, I didn't voice out. I think my opinion is different from the majority because people are saying 齊上齊落 [going up and down together], but in my mind that [going up and down together] should not be used in this way. For your question, I think the situation is a bit reversed in this case. For other situations, I don't recall any case.

So we mentioned earlier about the protest arts, what makes you got involved in creating and distributing?

It is because I didn't choose to... I kind of chose to... my boyfriend doesn't want me to stay in the frontline. So I struggled and I chose to step down a bit but I still want to contribute. I have friends that have their limitations and they can't go to the frontline [...] and when I was still at the frontline, they will ask me if I would as a frontline[r], I would like certain slogans, in their minds they will have a concept of all kinds of protest arts are supporting the people who are fighting on the frontline. So at the very beginning they asked me for opinions, how do I think of the slogans and if the [protesters] will like this kind of slogan. When I stepped down, I also helped them to think of what the frontline will need and how would the situation evolve and what kind of information we would like to bring to the public and what kind of things we would want the public to do in order to support the whole movement. I know some friends who are creators, so I started contributing in that way. When things progressed, I think I should do more because it is kind of... I have a sense of disappointment when I stepped down from the frontline because it was very different from what I did before. Being a frontline[r] really changes your lifestyle, so I feel like "what am I doing or what can I do now". I feel like only creating content

doesn't mean that much for me. For some people, they are really good at that, but for me, I am not. Because I don't draw or I don't do animations, I am not really good at writing so other than creating the content I started distributing. I started printing out the artwork and stickers and distributing them when I can. It started from there to now.

Where do you usually distribute the artworks to?

Both online and offline. In the past, it will be more like online. Instagram posts, Instagram stories... But then I realized that Instagram story is very limited, it is only distributed to an echo chamber. There are many kinds of protest arts, I will talk about that later. There are many kinds of protest arts and I believe the ones on Instagram is one kind or one channel of distributing certain kind of artwork. But for certain kind of protest arts, it has to be distributed in real life for some target audience, so I do both online and offline [distribution]. Now offline will be more because I don't think online has to be done by me, there are many people doing online stuff now, including the Instagram accounts that only focus on protest arts. I think if people who are already inside the yellow, they have their access to the protest arts if they want to get it.

Maybe we can take a look at the posters that you have prepared?

Because 2-3 is a very limited amount, I wouldn't say that these are my favourite or these messages are the most important. I would say I would like to illustrate the different kinds of protest arts. The first kind of protest arts would be something like this "what has happened on a certain day" or "what has happened today". This has been circulating throughout the movement, especially in the past when there were large protests and activities, when there were police brutality and people will calculate what kind of police brutality has happened and what has happened on that day. This kind of protest arts aims at reminding people that what have happened. As what I mentioned, people have different roles, some people don't really know what happened after they went home after the protest. People in the protest arts group don't want the hard work of the frontline[rs] blinded from the public because the mass media may not be able to cover those. And also to keep people in their anger and the pain that connect us together so this is what we can see in the very beginning. On the 12th of June, people were counting how many tear gas have been shot and how many bullets... how many injuries... how many places have been turned into battlefields. The second kind of protest arts will be this, also a reminder to people. The previous kind of protest arts targets at everyone, not only to [the people in] our camp, but also for the opposite camp and also for people who are not taking sides. It is solely to tell people what has happened. It kind of wants people to have emotions but it is rather factual. But this second kind of protest arts, it is more like to make people to empathize and also keep up the anger or the sorrow or the pain of people, so I would say this kind of protest arts targets at [people of] our camp. Because for the opposite camp, they don't really believe in the government and the police brutality, they have their stories. But this kind of protest arts focus on our stories and to target at... keeping up the heat in people's minds, this is more to connect people with their emotional sides. The third kind of protest arts... this is kind of an action post... but not really that kind of action post. Some are directly giving you the date and time and where for you to go, that is really the action post. But this kind... there is a hint of education, so if you are these kinds of people, what can you do to help the situation? It teaches people to know what to do... This one doesn't have a QR code but some include a QR code or a link for them to do the registration or sign a petition, so this is also a kind of action post. These three really target at different people, and for the last one, it targets at people who might not follow very closely with the whole movement... may be some aunties and uncles who don't know how to help but really want to contribute [...] for the people who don't really know what to do. So I would say they are for different targets and different actions.

I understand that they are very different in all kind of ways, but if you have to describe the style of most of the artworks here, what is the difference of showing these information on a poster rather than in a textual form?

For the last one, we can see that they are putting the information in different shapes and different diagrams with very vibrant colours, and also with some graphic that is widely circulated already. To grab people's attention [...] this is what protest arts do right? This kind of style, they really want people's attention. When you pass by, it can catch your eyes, you will stop and read what is written there. I would say there are lots of words, but they are distributed in different shapes, so you do not have to read a paragraph in order to know what you have to do. If you care, you can read what others can do. If you don't care, you can be "Oh I am a student" or "I am an employer" then what I can do? This is very straightforward, if you are in a certain role, then do this or do that [...] direct instructions, this is simple. For the second one, you can see the colours chosen are very greyish, very simple lines not really colourful, not really much was there. Only from the graphic, you can see it demonstrates the kind of fragileness of life. It almost immediately grabs your attention to what the salient point of this graphic is Tze Lok being pushed down from the high point to the ground. [...] For the first one, because it is very factual, it doesn't want to stir up emotion, it is just words in yellow because yellow is what the iconic colour. But to be honest, just black and white, you know this will be factual, just points points points points... what has been done that day. So these are very different examples here.

How powerful these visuals are in your opinion?

I think different people are attracted to different kinds of protest arts. I would say that people's memory can be faded in a short time. The visuals are to refresh people's memory and to connect people with pain, so it is quite powerful because until people are still grieving the death of Tze Lok, so if we do not have this kind of artwork, people might not remember... many people have died already [...] the first person who died [jumping off the] Pacific Place, it was the date of his birth and people were going to Pacific Place to send him flowers. If there is no protest arts about this, people will not remember. I can say most of the people will not remember the incident... people might remember it but it will be in the very background of their minds. The reason that it [the visuals] is powerful is that they can find that piece of memory in the very back of your mind, in that very deep cabinet, and pick it up for you. You will remember the sorrow you had in the past and continue walking the path. This is how powerful this kind of protest arts can be. And also for the third kind of protest arts, in the last year... the election... I think it was a surprise to many people that there were lots of... people were not expecting that many [democrats] to be winning the election. I would say that the third kind of protest arts really plays a role in that. Because it tells people what to do directly. There were posters like... "if you want blah blah, then go and vote for your future and for your children's future". They really tell people what to do, some people who are not really following the whole movement, they don't know what to contribute, and they know that this is the time that they can contribute. So it calls for actions. As we can see that it is what has changed the history, of course there is more to do, but it is kind of a little victory. This is how powerful a piece of protest arts can be. For the first one, just to keep up the heat, which is very important.

As a creator and distributor, how supportive are your audience?

Of course they are very supportive of what we have done. There are some works that are not from me but when I went to events they distributed to me... like this kind of large posters. When the US is passing the human rights act, we have this kind of posters that people distribute to let the reporters from all over the world to see. Me as a target audience this time, we will happily receive this and do what they aim at. People in our camp... of course they know what the creators will like us to contribute and we are very happy to contribute too. People in our camp are of course very supportive. People are appreciating [the work of] us and they will say "thank you" and they will say "thank you for your hard work" and they will hand us water or food as support. For the opposite camp, I can show you a picture... You can see here, there are some stickers being torn, which were stuck on the back of the seat on a bus. I assume it is someone from the opposite who doesn't like what we are doing, so they just tore it off and they were not even tearing all of it but just left it hanging. This is how people react sometimes. It is not like a 100% positive of course because people have different opinions. This is also what we had a slogan "撕一貼百" [If one poster is being torn, we will hang 100 more], to see which side is more firm and persistent.

I know there are attacks which targeted at people who are hanging posters, does that stop you from continuing what you have been doing?

There are attacks, verbally and physically. The latest event... I was supporting the medical staff who were having a strike to urge the government to shut down the borders, I was in front of the Hospital Authority building. I was holding my banners and people from the minibus on the opposite side of the road... passing by... some drivers were honking and that's a kind of support because they couldn't stop their cars. But some people on the minibuses, they shouted some foul language, that always happens. But that is not constructive so I really think that it is nothing. But people will have this kind of reaction. At the time we were saying that if the borders are not closed, the virus will come in and we will get sick. People spit at us, which was really awful. It is kind of like aiming at the whole event because we were saying something about public hygiene and they were using this kind of reaction to play against us. Yeah... physically attacking us. People are being beaten up of course you can see in the news, people were being chased with knives, people were injured, so there are threats and violence against us. When we are hanging posters on the wall, people come and argue with you and tear the posters down. But that doesn't really stop us because we know the risk. We really know the risk including being verbally and physically... physical and verbal violence is not a big deal. The most threatening and the largest risk is being arrested, or much worse is that being arrested and [facing] police brutality and may be death. Until now we [still] don't know how Chan Yin-lam died. People said that she was a leader in a protest arts group on Telegram... some said that... I didn't really fact check [this]. Some said that this is why she was found dead. But there are different kinds of threats and risks, but we are aware of it. I think many people were not aware of the risk in the beginning, they thought they were not on the frontline so they didn't have to protect themselves. But after the case of Chan Yin-lam, people started to protect themselves when they are putting up posters, including picking the right timing to do that or doing that in a group. So I will say now people are more aware of the risks and consequences, including the legal consequences, so it doesn't stop us from doing so.

I am really glad that you shared your insights with me and this was what I have prepared. Do you have anything to add regarding this topic?

I will say there are a lot of different protest arts. Some are really informative and it allows discussions internally. Because sometimes you won't be able to discuss with people because the topic might be sensitive. You can find

this kind of materials in the “yellow shops”. We also have groups and apps about yellow shops, I think this is also a kind of protest arts. We didn’t have this in the past, which we had to hand information to others by hand or the internet, but now we can just place it somewhere and people will grab it. In some sense, these publications are consuming the movement, because people have to pay for it and it is a commercial company, but it serves the same purpose... to keep up the heat. And when we talk about consuming the movement, there are more and more... so you are saying the importance of the protest arts. So how do people recognize which is a “yellow shop”, usually they look at the appearance [of the shop]. There are more shops that might not be supporting the movement, but they put up protest arts from our camp, this is a very interesting phenomenon. People are realizing how influential the protest arts is. It becomes the icon of the movement. Even our chief executive or some government officials said that they believe we are well-trained and well-paid because of the high quality of the protest arts. This is interesting how powerful the protest arts is. I would say other than the frontline fighters, protest arts fighters are as important as the frontline fighters. This is why the authority is targeting [people who contribute in] protest arts, they are arresting us or trying to take us down, because we are as powerful as the frontline fighters. I believe not everyone has the courage or can be a frontline fighter, not everyone can be a protest arts creator or distributor as well. But I hope that after people reading our posters, they will find that there are more that they can do, so they will try to do something within their capability. I think that is very important. We are human, we have limitations, therefore we are not comparing with each other. But it is important to know what you can do to contribute and you will not regret years later when things are settled. For this I would like to add a little piece of personal reflection. About changes, as I said, after the Umbrella movement, I was really disappointed in the political situation in Hong Kong, I just shut down myself in some sense. Whenever there are political discussions, I will be like “Forget it, Hong Kong people are not ready, they care themselves more than everything. There is nothing we can do.” I always had that thought in my mind after the Umbrella movement. And then here comes this movement, I kind of realized what change can bring even if you participate in a very very minor action. I can see that everyone is doing the best they can to contribute. This is not healthy, of course, but people are blaming themselves for not participating enough. This was not how Hong Kong people were, because Hong Kong people were used to care for themselves the most. What I want to say is that, when I started printing out the stickers and putting them at the back of the bus seats, I started noticing that there are people doing similar things, and I didn’t see this before. I will not brag but I can see how small little steps can influence others. This is what protest arts is aiming for. You do a very little step and then you try to contribute and distribute a little bit to others, no matter if they are physical posters or only an idea, but you can still influence people. Now I can see more stickers, because the stickers are from different people, [you can see] from the printing, from the graphics, there are more than one or two people doing this. People from different parties doing the same thing, it is just like I am no longer using Octopus [card], this is not what can stop the MTR company from making a large amount of money. But this is a sign for me and to other people, this little inconvenience reminds me of what I am doing for the whole movement and to keep the fire inside me. And also to the others is like, when I put the coins inside the money box, it has a sound and this sound may make another person realize that they can do more. Or they might realize that there are still some other people who are trying to do something to contribute to the movement.

I think that is it for today, thank you for taking your time for the interview.

APPENDIX 4

Excerpt of coding for qualitative textual analysis

12.03.2020 Interview 3

Let's start with the first question. Have you ever been active in any political activities?
Yes, you mean before this movement? Before this movement, I think... not really that active. Just... maybe I'll take part in distributing some news, or sometimes when there are activities maybe I'll go out, but not as active as this time. For the Umbrella movement, I have been going out to the Hong Kong island side, not to stay there for a very long time. But I'll go there after school or when there are protests I'll take part in it, but not really that active like this time.

I see. How did you start participating in this particular movement?
Actually, if we go back to last year... or in 2018, when they were discussing the act, I wasn't really noticing the whole thing. To be honest, because when the Umbrella movement... how it ended, I don't really have high hopes in Hong Kong's political environment, and in Hong Kong people, because they were not ready yet. So I was pretty hopeless with Hong Kong's situation. So when people go out and protest on the 9th of June, that was the first really huge protest, I didn't participate because I don't believe in protest anyway. And people reacted to the "Fishball Revolution" I don't believe in protests anymore and so-called peaceful protests, so I didn't go out on the 9th of June. But after that, people started saying that we have to stop it with whatever it costs, so on the 2th of June, at that time I felt like the situation this time has changed. People are not only protesting and go home and look at the news and do nothing, people are really going to stop the act. So I actually went out that day and things evolved so that was the first time I really participated in the current movement.

How do you think the whole thing is related to yourself and people around you?
So... if we fast forward to today, people are saying that there are less large activities or gatherings, maybe it's because of the virus but I can see that people around me for both parties, the people who support the movement and people who are not supporting, things have been changed, the way of living has changed. Like now we always said, we have to support the yellow camp, for our choices in shopping, maybe the shops and restaurants... all kinds of different things, we are having the mindset of supporting... to pay those who are supporting our side or anti-China. In this way, people are changing their lifestyles. This is very different from what it used to be, because people are now using their money wisely, and when they do every minor thing in life, they think before action. They really will think like "Oh! What will the consequence be if I do blah blah blah or if I purchase blah blah blah", so this is a very awakening kind of lifestyle I believe. So this is what we haven't been seeing in the past.

Yeah, that's amazing. Can you talk about activities that you have been involved in?
Hahaha, that will be a little bit sensitive. For promotion work on its own, I have been brainstorming slogans and also to find some creators who will help us to turn those ideas and slogans into drawings... into distributing work. And also I have been trying to distribute the protest arts in different ways, like printing them out and distributing them to people that are protesting. Or we have been printing stickers, I will give it to my friends and tell them to distribute it or I will stick them on buses so people who are taking the bus will see them. Also the Instagram story thing, I will post my work or the works that I got from the Telegram groups onto my Instagram stories for people to read. I have been forwarding news on Facebook. And for the yellow shopping thing, in the past I would not take a snapshot before dining, but now I will do it as a promotion for the shops that support our camps, and that's what I am doing now. And may be actively liking and forwarding the Instagram accounts that focus on the promotion work.

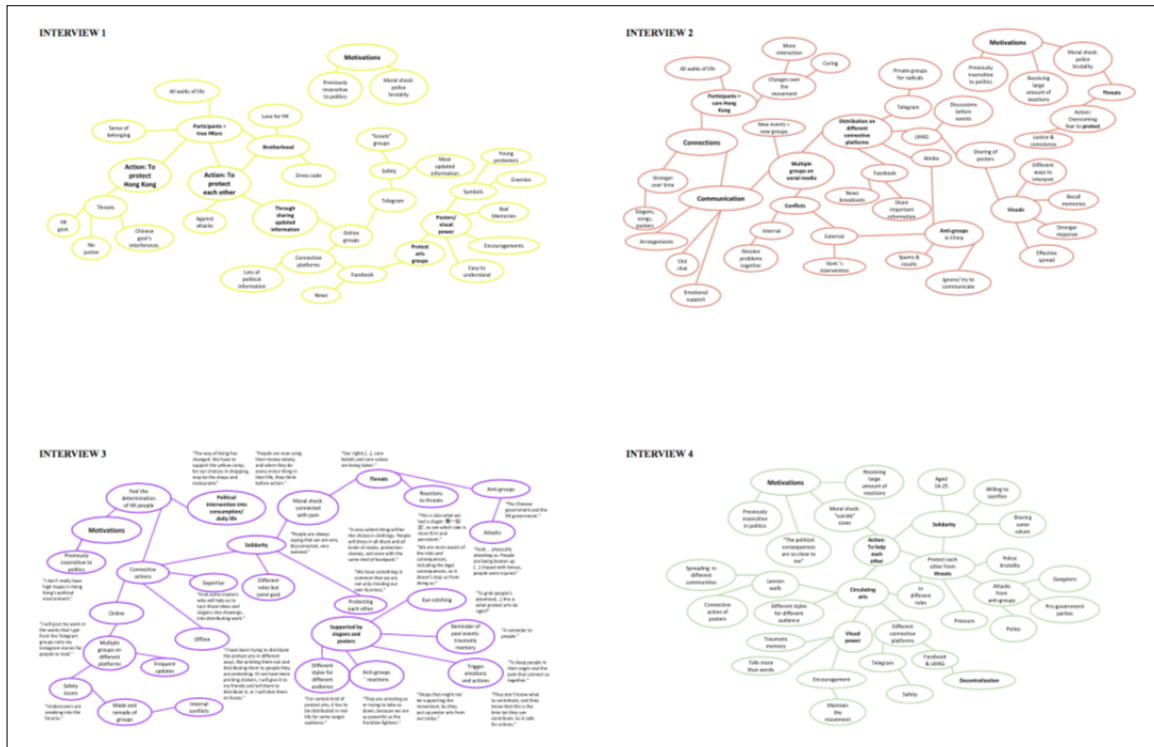
I would love to talk more about the protest arts with you later. But I also want to ask when you go to a demonstration, there are a lot of people beside you, can you find anything that you guys have in common?
A very salient thing will be the choice in clothings. People will dress in all-black and all kinds of masks... protection sleeves, and even with the same kind of backpack to try not to be identified. I think in some sense, Hong Kong people are wearing more black than they have ever did. I mean not only on protest day, I didn't really notice

Handwritten notes and codes:

- previously not active.
- changes in attitudes
- Feel the determination of HKers.
- 2,600 injured. 7,019 arrested. Moral shock.
- Support people in the same group.
- closely related to yourself.
- changing lifestyle to react to anti-groups.
- offline distribution.
- online distribution.
- encourage change of lifestyle through visuals.
- online sharing
- Solidarity shown in clothings.

APPENDIX 5

Spider diagrams for pre-category



Combining similar categories and the subcategories



APPENDIX 6

Overview of themes, categories, subcategories and quotes

Theme	Category	Subcategories	Quotes
Recruiting members in the Anti-ELAB movement	Interests in politics	Previously active in political activities	
		Previously inactive in political activities	
		Adapting skills to protest	
	Moral shocks	Police brutality	
		Suicide cases	
	Other motivations	Peers' experiences	
		Public discussions	
		The scale of the protest	
		Anger	
	The formations of groups and anti-groups	Participants	All walks of life
Different roles are equally important			
Groups		Public	
		Private	
		Anti-groups	
Interactions with anti-groups		Threats from anti-groups	
		Reactions to threats	
Made and remade of groups		Frequent in-group conflicts	
		Resolving in-group conflicts	
		Temporary groups for specific purposes	
		Eliminating members	
Limitations of platforms		Safety concerns	
		Government's intervention	
		Scale	
Multiple platforms		Different platforms for different communicative purposes	
		Existing networks	
		Interlinked with each other	
		Adapting new platforms	
Multiple groups		Different groups for different purposes	
		Extremely frequent communication	
		Effective allocation of information	
		Information overload	
Solidarity: "We are 'hands and feet' of each other"		"We are not only minding our own business"	The idea of "hands and feet"
	Things share in common		
	Support and worries for each other		
	Leaderless movement	Have to trust each other	
		Avoid mistrust	
	Shown in different ways	Dress code	
		Commenting or sharing posts	
	Self-defencing connective actions	Threats	
Reactions to threats			

	Group protects themselves together	Share protest information online	
		Demonstrations	
		Political interventions into daily life and consumption	
Protest posters as a tool for recruiters	A peaceful way to contribute		
	Distribution	Online	
		Offline	
	Roles of posters	Visual information are more reliable	
		Spread of core values, slogans and information	
		Spread to other countries	
		Cover what cannot be covered in mass media	
	Different design styles	Target at different audience	
		Target on different platforms	
		Remixes with icons and symbols	
		Remixes with popular culture	
	Visual power	Allow different interpretations	
		Breaking down complex messages	
		Ridicule opponents	
		As an encouragement	
		Connect and reconnect people	
		Traumatic memories	
		Recall memories of particular events or individuals	
Trigger emotions			
Trigger actions			

APPENDIX 7

Original samples of visual analysis

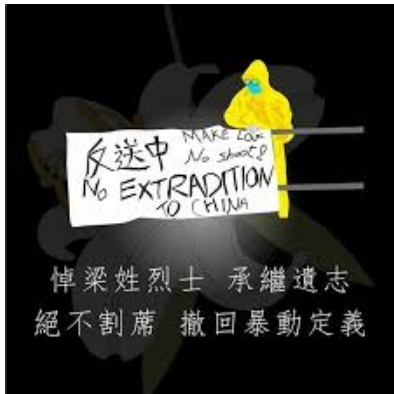


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

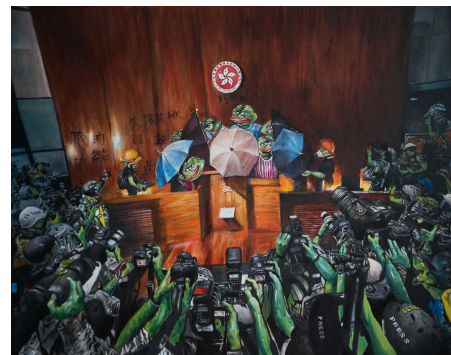


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

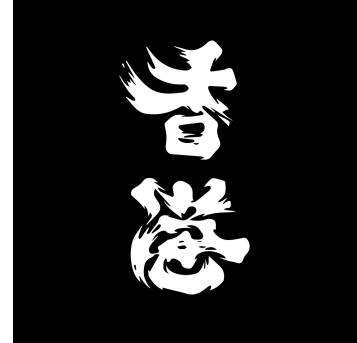


Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

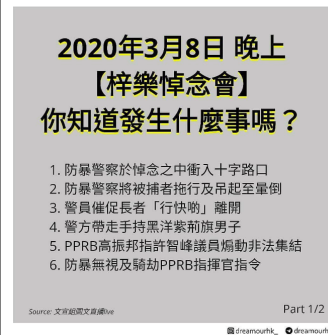


Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16





Fig. 17



Fig. 18

APPENDIX 8





Excerpt of coding for critical visual analysis

	Image 1	Image 2
1		
	<p>black</p> <p>(img.1)</p> <p>2 meanings - Hong Kong - keep it up.</p> <p>→ symbol that seen in everywhere.</p> <p>- hatless</p> <p>- hoodless</p> <p>→ no identity</p>	<p>a huge backdrop</p> <p>black blue</p> <p>people in diff. creatings</p> <p>support each other</p> <p>symbol of protesters</p> <p>向後望一望 我哋全部都睇度</p>

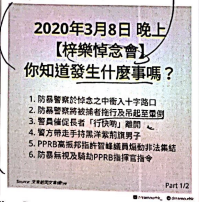

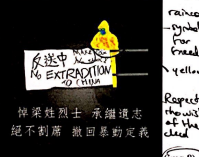

solidarity

- * no one is alone
- * we all feel the same.
- * created after people committed suicides.
- encouragement

CS Scanned with CamScanner

6		
7		
	<p>One of the most recognizable slogans of the movement</p> <p>(img.13)</p> <p>White spray of the Yellow protesters' HKS emblem</p>	<p>(img.14)</p> <p>fight for future.</p>
	<p>The Chamber in the LegCo complex</p> <p>(img.15)</p> <p>Umbrella: typical equipment → to protect protesters' identities.</p> <p>historical context: just introduced to the whole world - the opening of the legislature council</p>	<p>young protesters.</p> <p>Batman: icon of fighting against crimes</p> <p>Mulder coat?!</p>

CS Scanned with CamScanner

3		
	<p>Informative.</p> <p>2020年3月8日晚上【梓樂悼念會】你知道發生什麼事嗎?</p> <p>1. 防暴警察於悼念之中衝入十字圍口</p> <p>2. 防暴警察將被捕者拖行及吊起至圍頂</p> <p>3. 警察舉起死者「打倒喇」圍頂</p> <p>4. 警方將死者手腳綁於圍頂欄杆上</p> <p>5. PPR 高層將死者屍體轉運和拍法無忌</p> <p>6. 防暴無視及限制PPR指揮官指令</p> <p>Part 1/2</p> <p>(img.5)</p>	<p>audience with different occupations.</p> <p>meme icon</p> <p>empower</p> <p>informative</p> <p>(img.7)</p> <p>informative appeal</p> <p>use of different shapes → clear view of what individuals can do</p>
	<p>recall memories</p> <p>開一開, 在包圍內?</p> <p>police pushing a man down to the ground.</p> <p>trigger capacity of connect people</p> <p>Chow Tsz-lik</p> <p>(img.6)</p>	<p>water cannon of the police</p>
4		
	<p>black background</p> <p>梓樂殉難 承繼遺志 絕不割席 撤回是助兇</p> <p>(img.8)</p> <p>Solidarity</p> <p>frustrating event: best suicide case in the during the movement.</p> <p>trigger nature.</p>	<p>blue = opposite camp.</p> <p>blue covering the whole picture → focus of the police/government</p> <p>press, suppress!</p> <p>Opposite to what the police says as 'friendly to press'</p>

CS Scanned with CamScanner

APPENDIX 9

Overview of Panofsky's three levels of meaning

Fig.	Primary level	Secondary level	Third level
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - black background - Man in yellow raincoat, with a face mask and safety goggle, standing in front of a fence - A banner saying 'no extradition to China' & 'make love no shoot!' - Chinese captions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leung in this picture, is the first protester who committed suicide case of the movement - Black background to commemorate Leung - Symbolising the moment before he jumps off from a shopping mall - Convincing the police to stop fighting against the protesters with bullets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - yellow raincoat has become a symbol to sacrifice one's life to fight for democracy - Recalling traumatic memories to trigger audience's emotions - Emphasize the importance of sustaining the solidarity and carry on Leung's wishes
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a frog in a red jacket looks annoyed & looking away in disgust with hand up to the side of her face - some logos and words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lists of pro-china restaurants - Pepe: symbolic icon of the protesters refusing to support these restaurants - stating the reason of why they are pro-china 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - remix of popular memes - Demonstrates these restaurants are not in favour of the protesters and they suck - Encourage audience to boycott the list
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an elderly man with goggles and a gas mask, holding a walking stick high - He wears a yellow vest - 'justice', 'no riot only tyranny', 'if we can choose, we rather enjoy the rest of our life. However, there is one thing that we have to fight for!' - Big yellow fonts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the man is a member of the group Protect the Children - He is trying to protect young protesters by putting his body between the protesters and the police - Yellow colour represent the protesters who are known as the 'yellow-ribbons' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - elderly volunteers sacrificing their stable life to protect the young protesters, in order to uphold the important values in the society - Solidarity between young and elderly protesters - A strong contrast between the power: vulnerable elderly with walking sticks and police with tear gas bullets - Triggers moral shock
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a woman in pink cardigan sitting in a nice room while white men in uniforms and helmets are beating boys and girls up outside the window - the woman doesn't seem to care about what is happening outside - another woman in green and a yellow towel is tearing in front of the same group of men in uniform, who are waiving their batons behind the shields 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'a caring mother' was used to describe the woman on top, she is the chief executive of Hong Kong who was wearing the same cheongsam and cardigan on a tv interview - while 'rioter' was used to describe the woman at the bottom, who is a mother who who was trying to convince the police from firing tear gas at the students - the men in uniform are riot police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use sarcasm to illustrate two women - one who calls herself the mother of HongKong but ignores the police brutality - One who were being called a rioter but stood in front of students to prevent clashes
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - many men in black with black face mask standing behind a guy in white, all in different ages - The guy in front of the crowd has a pair of goggles and an umbrella in his hand - Men in black are patting the guy in white's shoulders - Black is the salient colour - Some Chinese characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the men in black are protesters (black bloc) - The guy in white is a protester (goggles and umbrellas are typical equipments for protesters to protect themselves) - The caption says "Take a look at your back, we are all here with you" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protesters will always back each other up - The group of protesters have diverse identities and ages, but they all stand together - Suggest high level of solidarity between protesters - Serves to encourage protesters who are depressed or feeling lonely in the movement

<p>6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many frogs in a conference room - Some are holding umbrellas and some are holding cameras - They wear helmets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - painted by a Russian artist - they are in the Chamber of the LegCo complex in Hong Kong: the Hong Kong emblem and the logo of the legislative council - The frogs are Pepe the frog: the movement icon in Hong Kong - Pepe holding umbrellas: protesters - Pepe holding camera: press - demonstrates the storming of the legislative council on 1 July 2019 - The event was live broadcasted worldwide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - illustrating the historical moment with the symbolic icon of the movement - The protesters in Hong Kong connects with other parts of the world through their symbolic icon of the movement: Pepe - this painting was allowed to be shared and distributed freely: show the support of some international artists
<p>7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'the future is young' in red - A black figure throwing a molotov cocktail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - batman: a character who is being known for fighting against crimes and bad people - Can assume that he is throwing a molotov cocktail to some villains instead of good and ordinary people - the caption indicates that the future belongs to the younger generation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Symbolises the young protesters are young heroes who fight against bad people: - black bloc; Molotov cocktail; young
<p>8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - yellow is the salient colour - Diagrams in different colours - Two meme icons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - instructions for people with different occupations to maximise their contributions in the 2020 Legislative election - The meme icons represents confusions - Emphasis on the colour yellow → presence of the protesters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage people to participate in the movement within their capabilities - Serves to simplify complicated instructions for people who are lazy to read
<p>9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - black background with white fonts - two Chinese characters placed vertically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the word 'Hong Kong' (vertical) - the word 'Keep it up' (horizontal) - get different meanings when one look at the symbol from different angles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combining 'Hong Kong' and 'keep it up' through a special font design to encourage protesters - Black background represents the protesters
<p>10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a scene in a train station - illustrating something with numbers - Men in white are attacking other people, including a woman and a man in black, with batons and other weapons - Some people are trying to escape - A man in black in bleeding in a corner - 2 men in blue uniform are walking away from the scene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - shows the details of the 7.21 Yuen Long station attack - men in white are thugs, they were attacking civilians on the train and in the station indiscriminately - Men in blue uniforms were police and they were accused of walking of a crime scene and didn't protect citizens from brutal attacks - numbers showing the statistical data, including injuries, arrests, time taken for the police to arrive etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to persuade audience that the attack is a collaboration between thugs and the police force - Hong Kong citizens are abandoned by the government and therefore they have to unite and help themselves - Brings moral shock to audience and recall their memories about the traumatic event - Serves to keep people's anger and emotions and motivate them to act against injustice - happening in a train station which is part of a lot of Hongers' everyday life, symbolising they no longer have their normal life