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<th>Understanding student political identity in Hong Kong: What socio-economic classes tell us about student activism</th>
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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Cottet, Caroline</td>
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UNDERSTANDING STUDENT POLITICAL IDENTITY IN HONG KONG

What socio-economic classes tell us about student activism

Caroline Cottet
Introduction

I think I am very lucky to be a student in Hong Kong. There are not many restrictions on what we think and what we say. You can freely choose your identity – and even change it if you want!

Chloe Wong, student
University of Hong Kong, 2013

Collective identity has always been a fundamental concept to understand political behaviors. The power of such identity was probably best understood by Benedict Anderson, who looked at it on a national scale (2006). He called it *imagined communities* in order to underline its intangible and collective dual-nature. The power of this collective identity has been shaping history, making it possible “for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (Anderson 2006:7). Student collective identity is no weaker, especially in Asia where the students have been at the forefront of major revolutions, protests and regime-changes. The examples speak for themselves: South Korean students ousting the military government in the 1980s, the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989, the overthrowing of Suharto in the late 1990s, and so on. Thus, leading to a strong definition of student activism, as a “collective action by university students directed toward (and often against) the ruling regime” (Weiss et al. 2012:2). Yet Hong Kong seems to stand apart from those heroic battles. “The Hong Kong students [have] far more limited aspirations” (Margold 2000:2). What is it about their collective identity that limits their ambitions towards political activism? According to Stephan Ortmann, there are two facets to this identity weakening: the first would be the complex history and relations with China, and the second would be the loss of an independent and strategic position (2012). One of the consequences is the loss of collective identity as a shared community
That is to say, the construction of political identity is no longer a collective one. I will be showing this through the example of socio-economic classes. Class is a very important component of political identity, most famously instrumentalized by Marxist theories on the class struggles. Conversely, politics are also an important contributing factor to the identification of class. According to Barker, a class refers to the “classification of persons into groups based on shared [conditions of] inequalities with economic, social, political and ideological dimensions” (2003:436). This mutual influence can be seen in Hong Kong. For example, former Chief Executive Tung Chee-Hwa expressed in his 2004 Policy Address: “We appreciate [the middle class’] values and beliefs, as well as their aspiration to participate in politics”2. Additionally, numerous political theories on activism and classes show a correlation between social status and political participation. Yet such a trend is rather complex when applied to Hong Kong students. By looking at the students’ political identity through socio-economic classes, I will be discussing the nature of the construction of such an identity. This is crucial to understand why the political behavior of Hong Kong students is so different from other Asian countries, and hence why the efforts to fight for democracy are not student-led. In order to understand the specificities of Hong Kong, a survey has been carried out in four major post-secondary schools: Hong Kong University, City University, Polytechnic University and the University of Science and Technology. The collection of primary sources has resulted in 37 filled-in surveys and 5 interviews. The valuable information has informed me of interesting trends regarding political identity and classes. In a first part, I will be placing students into class-categories, based on the definitions of lower, middle and upper classes given by the Hong Kong citizens in 2013 via a survey encompassing more than 1,000 respondents. This classification will show that there is no correlation between class categorization and political activism among Hong Kong students. In a second part, I will be classifying the students based on what they think their class belonging is. This will show very different results, with an apparent trend that links class consciousness and political behavior. This case study will enable me to discuss, in a third part, the meanings for political identity construction among Hong Kong students. The core idea behind this study is that student political identity is unique, and cannot be understood via mainstream political theories. This will further be discussed in concluding remarks.

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1 Interview carried out on November 2nd, 2013 (all names have been changed)
Part 1 – Applying the definitions of socio-economic classes

Theoretically, class is one of the strongest political factors shaping identity (Bernstein 2005). The major theory based on the class belonging is the structural-functionalist theory. According to Goel (1980), the political behavior of a person is dictated by his or her social position. In this process, the individual thoughts do not play any major role. Instead, political opinions and activities are predetermined by a person’s social status – which is by-and-large its socio-economic class. Goel considers financial situation, professional status, but also age and level of education to influence political activism. The survey conducted for this study was only aimed at university students in Hong Kong. As a result, age and level of education are roughly the same among all sampled students: ranging between 18 and 28 years old, and between Bachelor and PhD degrees. All the respondents are young adults with tertiary education. Those factors are not stark enough to be considered, and will not be taken into account. Among the major components of Goel's theory will then be considered: household type and professional financial attributes. According to him, people with better social positions will make better political decisions (Goel 1980:116). “Better” is a very subjective term – perhaps too subjective to judge. However, this proposition infers that there is a difference in political opinions and decisions, based on their socio-economic class. Inevitably, this also implies that their political attitudes would be different, and lead to differences in political activism. For that reason, the structural-functionalist theory implies that political behavior is affected by financial assets and income. This theory will be tested on students in Hong Kong.

In order to evaluate the validity of the theory, we must group students in socio-economic classes, which begins with a definition of the term. Classically, the scholars who have developed the fundamental thoughts of social classes are Marx and Weber. The two thinkers had opposing arguments. Karl Marx considered classes to be defined by one’s possession of production means. In other words, the more an individual owns in an industry, the higher they are in terms of social classes. However, students would most likely not possess such assets. This would then mean looking at their parents’ assets. Unfortunately this is not possible: when posing the question, students have generally either refused to answer, or didn’t know the value of their parents’ assets. Let us turn to the alternative classical definition of socio-economic classes. Conversely, Weber considered social class to be attributed to one’s attitudes of consumption (Weber 1946). Yet the concept of consumption has greatly evolved since Weber’s days. Fordism has propelled capitalism and consumerism in the second half of the 20th century. As a result, consumerist behaviors are likely to be very different today than they were in the 1940s. Typically, students tend to consume in quantity rather than quality, regardless of their financial means (Stearns 2006:144). Specifically in Hong Kong, the youth culture of consumerism has
greatly evolved in the past few decades due to the Westernization of the market (Watson 1997). The atypical consumerist behavior of students has been highlighted with the contemporary proliferation of anti-consumerist movements. On a worldwide scale, this has been observed via the students’ strong participation in organizations like AdBusters – the largest consumerism denunciation movement⁴. Specifically in Hong Kong, protests of students and scholars have occurred to condemn unethical mass-sales for profit. This can be illustrated through the Anti-Apple Campaign that has been ongoing for the past couple years in Hong Kong [see photos 1, 2 and 3]. Led by students and scholars, this movement hopes to unveil the inhumane working conditions and to call for a boycott of the brand⁵. These examples show that evaluating the socio-economic class of students based on consumerist behaviors can be very misleading in this century.

Photos 1, 2 and 3: Anti-Apple campaign in Hong Kong

Turning to more contemporary definitions, Barry Jones’ encyclopedia of political economy considers a class to be a stratification of the society, through which the individuals are placed into hierarchical
categories (Grant 2001:161). Most commonly, this division leads to three large groups: lower, middle and upper classes. It appears to be the most universal classification of societies. This is, of course, a simplified picture. Country-specific definitions of socio-economic classes can lead to many more categories. For example, the United Kingdom uses the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) for population census. In such classification, there are 8 different categories which are then broken down into 17 sub-categories, based on the professional occupation. In the United States, sociologists have most popularly categorized American societies into 6 socio-economic classes based on wealth and capital (Gilbert 1998, Thompson and Hickey 2005, Williams et al. 2005). Other countries would most likely have their own classifications as well. This is to show that social stratification tends to be country-specific, even though the trends can always be simplified into the three broad categories: lower, middle and upper. In Hong Kong, there is no official classification. However, the Bauhinia Foundation, a local think-tank, carried out a survey during July 2013, in order to understand the definition of socio-economic classes according to the Hong Kong citizens. A particular emphasis on middle-class specifically was chosen, in order to define the classes' delimitations. Based on the definition of middle-class, one can easily deduce the definition of lower and upper classes (anything lower or higher). The results of this study was that Hong Kong people generally agree that a “monthly income for the middle class [...] is between HK$30,000 and below HK$60,000”. Also being considered are the type of housing and the value of owned assets. The Bauhinia Foundation study shows that Hong Kong people consider property ownership to be an important factor.

Therefore we have classified into middle class the students whose household monthly income is between HK$30,000 and HK$60,000, and living in an owned private property. The breakdown of the participating students can be seen in figure 1. According to those factors, 8 students out of 37 have been found to be part of the middle class. This is equivalent to slightly less than a third – which is exactly the proportion of middle class citizens found by the Bauhinia Foundation study. 18 students have been classified into “lower class” and 4 in “upper class”. 7 students have not been classified because too little information about their household was given (either the monthly income, the type of residence, or both were missing). Based on such groupings, the results are rather deceptive. Figure 2 shows that there is not much difference in the answers given by students of different classes, as grouped by the chosen definition of socio-economic class. The variation in answers follows no particular trend. For example, from the graph upper class students seem to show less support for university students being actively involved in politics. From this trend, we could deduce that students from upper classes are less participative in Hong Kong politics. However this is not true, as they concomitantly show more interest in joining a political party and consider themselves more politically active. All groups seem to show similar satisfaction with the evolution of politics in Hong Kong, and
their participation in clubs and societies is of 50% in all categories. From these responses, it is not possible to draw general trends. This shows that grouping students into socio-economic classes is not conducive to predicting their political awareness and activism.

Figure 1: The students sample
Division into socio-economic classes

Figure 2: Political opinions and activism among students of different socio-economic classes

Source: Survey

3 However, Karl Marx himself never wrote his intended chapter on “Classes” in Capital (1887). Comments and explanations throughout his works have been compiled into a probable structure of his vision of classes by Dahrendorf (1959, chapter 1) and further analyzed by Rummel (1977, chapter 5).

4 AdBusters is a Canadian-based non-profit organization, mainly aimed at anti-consumerism and pro-environment movements. Students are among the most important actors of the movement (https://www.adbusters.org/about/adbusters)

5 The Anti-Apple Campaign has been particularly loud in Hong Kong, but also takes place in other areas of the world. Their actions in Hong Kong have received wide international press coverage. See Daily Mail Reporter (2013)
6 Office of National Statistic, United Kingdom (2010)

7 Bauhinia Foundation (2013)
Part 2 – The variable of class consciousness

Let us now turn to the second aspect of class categorization: class consciousness. Instead of classifying students based on the financial and professional backgrounds of their parents, we will now be considering the socio-economic class in which they consider themselves to be. According to Erik Olin Wright, the political attitude is shaped by one’s class consciousness (1985). Thus, an individual’s political behavior would not be determined by his or her socio-economic class as defined by society, but as defined by the individual him/herself. The results are inevitably very different, and maybe to some extent more interesting. In fact, the Head of the Hong Kong Transition Project, Michael DeGolyer, noted that responses from Hong Kong people in surveys might not reflect the truth but tends to reveal greater truths. He took the example of voting: although 80% of the respondents said they would vote in the next elections, factually only 55.6% did. This shows that the concept of voting is socially desirable. What can we learn from this? It makes no difference which class each student technically belongs to. However the difference in answers is reflective of what students think is best, socially. To this end, the survey included a question: “Which socio-economic class do you consider yourself to belong to?” Based on this, new groupings have been created, as translated into figure 3. In this scenario, 9 students consider themselves to be “lower class”, 14 from “middle class” (slightly more than a third), and only one from upper class. A few interesting results come out of these numbers. Firstly, the correlation between class consciousness, financial income and property ownership is not always seen. Half of the students who consider themselves middle class in this situation have attributes not corresponding to the definition of middle class given by the Bauhinia Foundation study. In effect, 7 out of 14 students answered being middle class while coming from families with either a monthly income under HK$30,000 and no property ownership or a monthly income over HK$60,000 and property ownership. The second interesting observation is that more than a third of the surveyed students do not know how to characterize themselves (as opposed to 2.4% in the Bauhinia Foundation study). Based on those numbers, it is interesting to see how self-definition of class belonging might affect political behavior.

Let us start with the question: why would there be such a difference between class as defined institutionally and class as defined by the individual for the individual? To begin with, there are political stereotypes linked to certain social classes. Students tend to like considering themselves as middle class probably to avoid the bad connotations of the other groups. Lower classes are often considered inactive in pushing politics forwards because they are too concerned “with issues of the present, such as wages and insecurity of employment” (Ng 1986:307). On the other hand, upper-class citizens in Hong Kong are considered to be apolitical – usually because the content with their current situation
demotivates them from any change. Dennis Chang, a City University student, said about this issue: “it is not cool for students to say they are upper class. It makes them look and sound posh, arrogant even”\textsuperscript{11}. Alicia Ng, currently studying in Polytechnic University, concurred by explaining how different stages in life correspond to different wants. According to her, students ideally want to be middle class, in a way of blending in. However, professionals would probably want to be upper class, as a sign of success and wealth\textsuperscript{12}. Those responses are very enlightening in understanding possible reasons for such behavior. Of course, those stereotypes about classes might or might not be true. Needless to say, the focus here is not so much on the factual truth, but rather on the perception by Hong Kong students and their consequent political behavior.

In comparison with the class attributions in section 1 of this paper, the numbers show a much stronger influence of class belonging on political activities with this grouping. Since only one student replied being from the upper class, those answers will not be representative enough to be considered. The rest of the answers are schematized in figure 4. From this representation, the most important observation is the limited political awareness and activism from the students who do not affiliate themselves with any class, in comparison with the others. Lower and middle class students would appear to give a stronger importance to being politically aware, as a citizen's duty. Those students are also more assertive with regards to what they think is right or wrong. Thus we could here deduce the idea that class belonging is an important factor for political activism among students. Although on the other hand, the results show a difference – but the answers overall align. This lack of distinctively differing responses among the students will be the object of a further discussion in part 3. The second observation that can be drawn from figure 4 is that students considering themselves to be lower class show a greater political activism. This is counter-intuitive when comparing the results with the society-analysis aforementioned. In Hong Kong, the middle class tends to be the one believed to be the most politically active. Let us remember that those results are not representative of facts, but perceptions.
Therefore the middle class might or might not be more politically active; but the students who consider themselves from lower class evaluate their activism higher. They show most confidence in being politically aware and considering to join a political party. They also show the strongest political tolerance by being the most accepting of communist thought being expressed. These observations could lead us to Marxist thoughts: would considered-lower-class students be more politically active? Possibly. But those results cannot prove so because the difference between answers is too little. Although the lower-class consciousness shows more dedication and activism to politics, the range in which they sit is all the same. For example, to the question “I consider myself politically active”, there is a gradation within the answers of the different groups. Yet they all lay between 2 and 3 – meaning that they disagree with the statement. Thus there are some nuances in political trends, but not sufficient to see completely different attitudes.

Let us go back to the idea of class perception. This concept of class consciousness is particularly interesting in Hong Kong. Regardless of the society’s reality, it would seem that Hong Kong citizens have great aspirations for social mobility. They would like to believe that social status and class are not based on social ascription but rather on the individuals' achievements (Tsang 1992). This can be seen through the increasing quota of educated citizens throughout the years, as shown in figure 5. In the same vein of thought, the Bauhinia Foundation found that the young people in Hong Kong (aged between 18 and 25) were showing a strong desire to be part of the middle class. In the same study, more than half of the participants expressed some importance to political participation by the middle class citizens. This means that people in Hong Kong generally agree that the middle class citizens should be politically active. Bearing in mind that most young people expressed an
aspiration to become middle class citizens, this could be an explanation as to why lower-class students are more politically active than others. They probably consider that being middle class means acting and being like a member of the middle class – hence being politically active. Interestingly, the recorded answers from the students show that the people who consider themselves to be middle class are not more active. Thus, there might be a myth in the political activities of middle-class citizens. Or at least among students of Hong Kong. Let us now turn to the meanings for student political identity.

Figure 5: Population aged 15 and over by educational attainment

A sharp increase in post-secondary schooling

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8 Survey carried out in 2004 by the Hong Kong Transition Project
10 The Bauhinia Foundation 2013, p.34
11 Interview carried out on November 1st, 2013 in City University of Hong Kong
12 Interview carried out on November 2nd, 2013, in Polytechnic University of Hong Kong
13 Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong, 2011
14 The Bauhinia Foundation (2013)
Part 3 – Students and political identity

In the first part of this paper, we have established that there is no strong link between socio-economic class and political activism among students. In the second part, we have however established a link between class consciousness and political activism. This section will thus be dedicated to the explanation of the results, and to their meanings for student political identity. Indeed, there was more of a trend between class consciousness and political activism, than with class attribution. The socio-economic class choice shows that students do not respond to an externally constructed identity (i.e.: class as dictated by the society) but rather self-formulate their own identity. Chloe Wong, a student from the University of Hong Kong considers it to be the major advantage of classes. “No one truly agrees on what is middle class anyway. I can be whichever class I like, as long as I invent a new definition for it”\textsuperscript{15}. She is right in saying that there is no agreement on class definition. Typically, the range of income chosen by the Bauhinia Foundation to defined middle class was approved by 45.5\% of the respondents only – a majority as the rest of the interrogated citizens scattered their opinions between “under HK$10,000” and “over HK$200,000”\textsuperscript{16}. In a more extreme (and perhaps ridiculous) way of showing that class definition is very personal, Financial Chief John Tsang announced middle class to be a lifestyle: drinking coffee and watching French movies\textsuperscript{17}. This is to say that students have the grounds to set their own definition of socio-economic class in Hong Kong. More importantly, it shows a defiance of overarching authority: showing the ability of defining oneself, rather than to fit into pre-defined categories. On the other hand, one might argue that this is only reflective of erroneous results from the Bauhinia Foundation to define classes in Hong Kong.

Yet this self-definition of students’ identities, as opposed to collective identities, is a trend that would make sense considering the circumstances. As figure 5 showed, there is an annual increase of students accessing post-secondary education. This results in what Stephan Ortmann calls the “massification of the university system” (2012:97) which results in a fast size-increase, and identity dilution. Thus it is not surprising that political identity is increasingly shaped by students on an individual level rather than as a community. Such phenomenon can be observed for example in South Korea, where 80\% of the population has access to post-secondary education. Figure 7 shows the gap between the education levels of Hong Kong and Korea, but also underlines the idea that Hong Kong is attempting a fast-development of education attainment rates. There is also the idea that identity is strongest when the group confronts a ‘common enemy’. This traditionally reinforces cohesion – and would make student identity a true collective strength. In that sense, students “can be seen as a barometer of government performance and an indicator of how much the community accepts certain measures” (Yip 2011:92). This would be aligned by the idea that the status quo in Hong Kong is
comfortable enough to prevent public contestations (Cheng 2014). In addition to the absence of need, the strong presence of governmental institutions and parties in Hong Kong limit the power of student activism and demotivates participation as would argue Ian Weinberg and Kenneth N. Walker (1969). This list of causes is not exhaustive but shows some key reasons for the preponderance of individual identity forming, as opposed to collective.

![Figure 7: Distribution of the youth population, aged 18-35 by educational attainment (highest level attended) in 2012](source: Hong Kong Population Census 2012, p.44 and OECD 2012, p.13)

However, this is only referring to the *formation* aspect of political identity. As shown in part 2, even when political behavior and opinions differ, it is by very little. Even though the study took place in four different universities, interrogating random students on campus, covering 5 years of post-secondary studies, with the participation of students from eight different departments, the students’ answers do not differ by much. This is shows in figure 6: the answers have been placed on a diagram to show the trends. The answers from the students have been grouped into larger categories: “political optimism”, “political awareness”, “political activism” and “political tolerance”. For each category, a set of question has been chosen. For example, political activism was calculated by considering the answers to 12 different questions, including “I have considered joining a political party”, “I generally take part in demonstrations or marches” and “others consider me politically active”. Additionally, the opposite of some questions have also been taken into consideration. For example, in the category of “political optimism” we have taken into account questions such as “Hong Kong is changing in a
positive way” but also the opposite of the question “I have no confidence in the Chinese government”. To this latter question, the more the student agrees, the more politically pessimistic he or she would be – hence the calculation of the opposite to find the degree of optimism of the interrogated person. As a result, figure 6 shows that there is a homogeneity among the students’ responses. In general there is little to no political optimism among the students, there is quite a bit of political awareness and tolerance, which means that they are interested in the topic, but hardly any political activism. This lack of activism is somewhat normal – typically political activism concerns 10% of all post-secondary students (Huang 1999:194). Nonetheless, those trends show a great homogeneity among students, even though they might be formulating their political identity on an individual basis as discussed previously.

![Figure 6: Trends in students' political responses](image)

Why would students have generally similar political behaviors and activism if they do not have a collective identity? Probably because their influences for shaping this identity are all the same. The concept of collective identity is defined by Alberto Melucci being “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals [...] concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the actions takes place” (1995:44). This means that student identity could be a social construct on an individual basis that links them to a bigger ideological group. However, students’ do not necessarily take part in political activism by identifying and labeling
themselves as student – which is another challenge to understanding student political identity (Weiss et al. 2012:189). That aside, the students’ political identity has been in a great transition and evolution due to the political handover and changing external influences from the United Kingdom to China (Cheung 1994). It would seem that the different generations in Hong Kong have lived in such different environments that the students would naturally adopt a different political attitude in comparison with the older generations. Furthermore, this historical aspect seems to be important for students as they classify the mass media to be their first source of political influence (see figure 7). This infers that the students follow very similar influential forces. They also influence each other, as the second ranking influential factor is “friends and peers”, as seen on figure 7. As a result, it does make sense that students overall share political attitudes, even though they do not shape their identity as a community.

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15 Interview carried out on November 2nd, 2013 in Hong Kong University
16 The Bauhinia Foundation, 2013, p.22
Conclusion

As rightfully expressed by Philip Altbach: “Student political activism is a highly complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. It is very difficult to explain and even more problematic to predict. It is not surprising that there is no over-arching theoretical explanation for it” (1989:97). Through this paper, we have shown that common social attributes that shape political activism, such as socio-economic class, do not apply to students in Hong Kong. This echoes Altbach’s idea that mainstream political theories often fail to understand and predict student activism. However, we have also shown that some patterns can be identified – such as the influence of class consciousness on students’ political behaviors. Overall, the results of the survey show that students tend to be politically influenced by the identity that they choose for themselves, rather than merging into pre-defined categories. Thus, the political identity of students in Hong Kong does not correspond to a pre-defined model. In fact, scholars have repeatedly noticed a sharp evolution and change in Hong Kong student activism (Ford 1996, Margold 2000, Ortmann 2012). This can be explained by the replacement speed, as individuals only remain students for the length of their degrees. As a result, students only have this status temporarily. Some analyses of student activism have actually focused on generations as the unit of change. This difference in student political identity through time would be particularly striking during the years during and after the handover (Bray and Lee 1997:5, Lee and Sweeting 2001, Morris et al. 2001:197). According to the aforementioned authors, these fluctuations are entirely due and consequent to the change of political relations with the Mainland. Such observations illustrate the idea that there is no pre-constructed student identity but rather that it stems from individual thought, which then merges with a larger group. How does this impact the activism of students in Hong Kong and the political change? Chances are, this characteristic of students’ political identity in Hong Kong probably weakens the political actions. One of the most influential political movements for protesting is the planning of Occupy Central 2014. Yet so far, the leading actors are teachers, professionals and political parties. The lack of presence – let alone leadership – from the students in the battle for democracy in Hong Kong is somewhat abnormal, when thinking back at the phenomenal role of students for regime change throughout the Asian continent. This does not mean that political protests and change cannot occur in Hong Kong. It does mean however that such change will probably not be led by the students.
Annex Section

Annex 1: Survey template: Survey for university students of Hong Kong

1) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong is changing in a positive way</td>
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<td>It is important for people to take part in protests</td>
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<td>I might get into trouble for being at a protest</td>
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<td>Politics is so complicated that I cannot really understand what is going on</td>
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<td>I know the different political parties in Hong Kong</td>
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<td>In order to get elected most candidates for political office have to make fake promises</td>
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<td>‘Democracy’ is a concept that I understand</td>
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<td>If a communist wanted to make a speech favoring communism, he should be allowed to speak</td>
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<td>I believe that the Chinese government has a strong influence on Hong Kong</td>
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<td>HK laws are laws which protect the rich people</td>
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<td>The minority should be free to criticize decisions taken by the majority</td>
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<td>If a communist is legally elected as legislator in HK, the people should allow him/her to take office</td>
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<td>I have considered joining a political party</td>
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<td>University student unions should be actively involved in political issues of HK</td>
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2) Context information

Are you from: Hong Kong / Mainland / Other

University: Bachelor: Y1 / Y2 / Y3 / Y4 Master: Y1 / Y2

Studying: □ Arts □ Business, Economics, Management
□ Education □ Engineering
□ Languages, Translation □ Law
□ Medicine, Health □ Science
□ Social Sciences □ Other:

Student organization involvement (can choose more than one answer)

□ Student Union committee member □ Club committee / Society committee member
□ Hall committee member □ None
□ Other:

Organization involved outside of campus (can choose more than one answer)

□ Religious organization □ Youth organization
□ Political organization (for young people in general, not only students)
□ None □ Other:
Monthly household income: □ Below $10,000 □ $10,000 – $19,999 □ $20,000 – $29,999 □ $30,000 – $39,999 □ $40,000 – $49,999 □ $50,000 – $59,999 □ $60,000 – $69,999 □ $70,000 or above □ I don’t know □ Prefer not to answer

Type of family living quarter: □ Public Housing (Housing Authority/Society) □ Home Ownership blocks □ Private housing owner blocks □ Private housing rental blocks □ Other: □ Prefer not to answer

Which socio-economic class do you consider yourself to belong to? □ Upper □ Middle □ Lower

Family size: Below 3 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 6 / 7 / Above 7

Are you a registered voter in Hong Kong? □ Yes □ No □ I don’t know
Have you voted in the last student union election? □ Yes □ No □ I don’t know

What is the best way for students to be involved in politics? (Can choose more than one answer)
□ Elections
   (ex: voting, encouraging others to vote, taking part in the campaign)
□ Social actions
   (ex: donating to an organization, taking part in protests, getting a community together etc.)
□ Political lobbying
   (This means: to try influencing the decision of government officials by various means.
   This includes: having meetings, sending letter, gathering petitions, or even offering financial packages)
□ Political commentary
   (Criticizing politics via publications, participation in online debates, open letters etc.)
□ Other:

For you, which way is most comfortable to express political ideas? (Can choose several answers)
□ Student organization □ Political party □ Local government representatives
□ Mass media □ Social networks, blogs, forums □ Other:

Should “Students” be a part of the Functional Constituency of the Legislative Council? (Either independent or linked with the Education) □ Yes □ No □ I don’t know

If not, why?
□ Students should not involve themselves in politics
□ Students are not mature enough to take political decisions
□ The functional constituency of the LegCo is not very efficient in making political change
□ Other reason:

Do you follow the news? □ Everyday □ A few times per week □ Rarely □ Never

If so, how?
□ TV □ Radio □ Newspapers □ Magazines □ Online news
□ Talking with people □ Blogs/forums □ Social Networks □ Others:
3) Please indicate how much to agree or disagree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I generally take part in...</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations or marches</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Occupying a place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strikes (not going to class or to work)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public seminars/meetings</td>
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<td>Petitions (signature collections)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>As a citizen of Hong Kong, I should be/feel...</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politically aware</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Concerned about civil and human rights in HK</td>
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<tr>
<td>More actively involved in political issues of HK</td>
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<tr>
<th>No confidence in the Chinese government</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td>No confidence in the Hong Kong government</td>
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<th>The following statements best describe my political activities...</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politically active</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Silent but concerned about politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others see me as politically active</td>
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<tr>
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<th>When I vote, I base my choices on a candidate’s...</th>
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<th>Neutral</th>
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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eloquence (meaning the ability of a person to express themselves well)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relations with China</td>
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<td>Record of past performances</td>
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<td>Educational level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Charisma (a person’s attractiveness or charm, to create popular devotion &amp; enthusiasm)</td>
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<td>Others:</td>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>Mass media</td>
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<td>Religious organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Political men/women and parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-governmental organizations (like green groups, think tanks, civil societies etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall, I am satisfied with the actions of the current Hong Kong government</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
## Annex 2: Survey overall responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong is changing in a positive way</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for people to take part in protests</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>I might get into trouble for being at a protest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics is so complicated that I cannot really understand what is going on</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the different political parties in Hong Kong</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to get elected most candidates for political office have to make fake promises</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Democracy' is a concept that I understand</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a communist wanted to make a speech favoring communism, he should be allowed to speak</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the Chinese government has a strong influence on Hong Kong</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK laws are laws which protect the rich people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The minority should be free to criticize decisions taken by the majority</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a communist is legally elected as legislator in HK, the people should allow him/her to take office</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have considered joining a political party</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>University student unions should be actively involved in political issues of HK</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Are you from:*

- Hong Kong (31)
- Mainland (6)
- Other (0)

*Age average: 23*
Universities:
City University (10) / Polytechnic (7) / Hong Kong Uni. (3) / Uni. of Science & Technology (17)

Bachelor (27)  Master (5)  PhD (2)  No answer (3)

Studying:  
1 Arts  15 Business, Economics, Management  
0 Education  9 Engineering  
1 Languages, Translation  1 Law  
4 Medicine, Health  2 Science  
4 Social Sciences  0 Other

Student organization involvement (students could choose more than one answer)
2 Student Union committee member  15 Club committee / Society committee member  
1 Hall committee member  18 None  
2 Other

Organization involved outside of campus (students could choose more than one answer)
6 Religious organization  6 Youth organization  
1 Political organization  18 None  
2 Other

Average monthly household income: 23,800  
4 I don’t know  4 Prefer not to answer

Type of family living quarter:  
7 Public Housing (Housing Authority/Society  
4 Home Ownership blocks  
15 Private housing owner blocks  
7 Private housing rental blocks  
1 Other  
2 Prefer not to answer

Which socio-economic class do you consider yourself to belong to?  
1 Upper  
14 Middle  
9 Lower  
13 No answer

Average family size: 3.9

Are you a registered voter in Hong Kong?  
21 Yes  13 No  2 I don’t know  1 No answer

Have you voted in the last student union election?  
8 Yes  28 No  0 I don’t know  1 No answer
What is the best way for students to be involved in politics? (Students could choose more than one answer)
29 Elections
22 Social actions
12 Political lobbying
13 Political commentary
1 Other

For you, which way is most comfortable to express political ideas? (Students could choose more than one answer)
10 Student organization
6 Political party
6 Local government representatives
10 Mass media
27 Social networks, blogs, forums
0 Other:

Should “Students” be a part of the Functional Constituency of the Legislative Council? (Either independent or linked with the Education)
16 Yes
12 No
9 I don’t know

If not, why? (Students could choose more than one answer)
1 Students should not involve themselves in politics
7 Students are not mature enough to take political decisions
6 The functional constituency of the LegCo is not very efficient in making political change
0 Other reason
25 No answer

Do you follow the news?
7 Everyday
24 A few times per week
6 Rarely
0 Never

If so, how? (Students could choose more than one answer)
25 TV
5 Radio
21 Newspapers
5 Magazines
30 Online news
14 Talking with people
10 Blogs/forums
20 Social Networks
0 Others
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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrations or marches</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupying a place</td>
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<td>Strikes</td>
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<td>Public seminars/meetings</td>
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<td>Petitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Politically aware</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concerned about civil &amp; human rights in HK</td>
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<tr>
<td>More actively involved in HK political issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>More worried about personal and family prospects (than about political issues)</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>No confidence in Chinese government</td>
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<td>No confidence in HK governmnt</td>
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<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>Silent but concerned about politics</td>
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<td>Others see me as politiq. active</td>
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<td>Unwilling to openly express my political views</td>
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<td>Do not have time for politics</td>
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<table>
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<th>When I vote, I base my choices on a candidate’s...</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<td>Mass media</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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SEPTEMBER 30TH

The semester has just started, and I have been told that I will have to do a field research for the course of “Special Topics in Asian Studies”. This is very interesting because, unlike most courses, this one requires primary sources. I will begin by going the readings for the various weeks of the course. Additionally, I will be going to the library in order to have additional documents on the topic. Hopefully, I will be able to find a topic that is a bit unusual. In the reading that we had for week 1 (about participant observation and field work) I looked at the various methods to carry out field work. It was very interesting to read about the various methods and the outcomes. Unfortunately, I cannot speak Cantonese. I would have appreciated to be an observer in a student organization on campus. But there is no political organization carried out in English on campus. So instead I will create surveys and conduct interviews. Collecting information from individuals would be a very different way of informing my paper, in comparison with the usual research papers based on academic readings that we are asked to do in university. I am very much looking forward to it.

OCTOBER 7TH

After having gone through several texts on student activism in Asia, I finally found one that is specifically on Hong Kong. In fact, it was published by City University (at the time called City Polytechnic University of Hong Kong). This publication particularly caught my eye because it is specifically on post-secondary students’ political activism, in the context of the handover of Hong Kong. The thesis was published in June 1994, by Chau-kiu Cheung (the full reference will be included in the bibliography). The introduction of the thesis includes some theoretical framework. This is giving me some ideas about the way I might want to base my own paper on similar theories. I have come across some statements about the theories, suggesting for example that there is a positive correlation between socio-economic class and political activism. Being myself not completely convinced by this, I will be testing those theories based on a sample of students in Hong Kong.

OCTOBER 14TH

Having no experience in surveying, I have done a first attempt. This survey has served as a trial. Here below are the copies of the English and Chinese versions. The translation has been done by a friend of mine – hence not very official.
# Anonymous questionnaire for City University students

## Personal Information

- **Field of Study:**
- **Year:**
- **Gender:** Male / Female
- **Country of Origin:** Hong Kong / Mainland / Elsewhere
- **Scholarship:** Student Loan / Merit-based scholarship / Need-based scholarship / Prefer not to answer

## Political Activism

**Do you personally take part in political activism?** (Pick as many as you want)

- [ ] Street protests
- [ ] City University Student Union
- [ ] Other organization (specify):
- [ ] Organization outside CityU:
- [ ] Online (blog, forum, networking etc.)
- [ ] Take part in a political party
- [ ] Funding (organization, political party etc.)
- [ ] Other:

**How do you participate?**

- [ ] Please tell me how you take part
- [ ] And why you don't do it regularly

**Reasons:**

- [ ] Never thought about it
- [ ] No interest in politics
- [ ] Too busy with schoolwork
- [ ] Too busy with job, hours per week: ___________
- [ ] Family is opposed to it
- [ ] No hope for change in Hong Kong
- [ ] Afraid for future career/employability
- [ ] Other:

## Political Beliefs

- **Change is possible in Hong Kong:** Yes / No / Maybe
- **Students have a strong political power:** Yes / No / Maybe
- **Only politicians and political parties have the power to change things:** Yes / No / Maybe
- **I can get in trouble for being politically active in Hong Kong:** Yes / No / Maybe
- **Student political activism is:** Increasing / Decreasing

## Contact Information (optional)

- [ ] I am interested to know the results of this survey
- [ ] I am interested to take part in further interviews about this topic
The positive outcomes were the following:

- It was very easy to find people to fill it in, once I found the right spots in City University (I had over 40 answers in less than an hour)

- People were pleasantly surprised when I told them that I had a Chinese version of the questionnaire, for the ones not too comfortable in English

- The first sketch enabled me to drop down the keys questions that I needed to answer

- The questionnaire was short enough (one page) for the volunteers to be willing to fill it in

- I discussed the questionnaire with Prof. Ortmann and it was very encouraging to have such positive feedback from him

However, there were also some downturns:

- When counting the answers, I found that there were significant differences in answers depending on who used an English questionnaire and who used a Chinese one. I now have realized that the translation between the two has not been perfect, and therefore the understanding of the questions was different. For example, the proposition “I will get in trouble for taking part in a protest” was translated to “If I participate in a protest, I could get grabbed by the police” (in Chinese) which has a more extreme meaning.

Assuming that all the students in Hong Kong are studying in English, I will be sticking with only one version of the survey in English. This will make it much easier and less biased.

- Although the survey was successful at being short, the questions were a bit too vague. I was asking the students themselves whether they were politically active, rather than asking them more precise questions (such as “Did you vote in the last elections?"

For the next survey, I will need to be getting more into depth of the questions. Also I will need to include some indirect questions. For example, instead of asking whether the students view themselves as politically active, I will be asking some questions hinting towards it.

- The answers that I gave them as options were too strict. Most of the questions were yes or no questions, instead of proposing a gradation of agreement of disagreement. Thus, I couldn’t really get a sense of what mattered more or less to them.

Next time, my questions will have five options, for the students to indicate whether they more or less agree.

- Having them answer in groups was very convenient to have a lot of answers in a very short time. Based on this method, I would approach groups of 5 to 10 students and distribute the survey to everyone. Unfortunately, it quickly turned out that they were all looking at each other’s’ papers, and copying on one another. This means that groups would generally all answer the same things, which was probably not representative of the truth.

For the next survey, I will only be approaching people one by one, making sure that they will be answering on an individual way.
Therefore learning from those mistakes, I will now sketch out a better survey. I will base my new survey on one used for Cheung’s research in 1994. This survey has been used for a similar purpose, all across Hong Kong universities. This is particularly interesting for me, because I have never studied marketing or survey-conducting. Therefore I will be using this resource extensively to inform myself on the methods and on the phrasing of the survey questions. However, I need to adapt it to my topic. I first need to look in depth at the theories, and to consider the major components. For example, if a theory looks at social status and its relationship to political activism, I need to look at the criteria that are considered to define the social status. This could for example be income of the family or the level of education. Based on those criteria, I will be designing the questions. Following with the mentioned examples, these questions would be “Which degree are you pursuing? Which year are you in? What is the average monthly income in your household?”

October 21st

I have now sketched out a survey. This will be the first draft though; I still would like to improve it before carrying it out to several hundred students. The survey I have drafted out is very much influenced by the one used in Chau-kiu Cheung’s publication of 1994. It is convenient because the survey used by Cheung was designed by specialists in the field. Therefore I have faith that it was designed in a methodical way. However, I changed it around to answer my questions for the paper. Not only am I not arguing the same thing, but additionally, the questionnaire needs to be adapted to the 21st century. The questions in Cheung’s document do not take into consideration the importance of social media, internet campaigning etc. As I believe that such means of political activism have become important components of student activism, it is important to include them in the survey.

October 28th

The first draft of the survey has been tested of a small pond of students. Being an English mentor, I was able to have my students fill in the first draft of the survey to give me some feedback on the type of questions and on the way it felt. They generally felt that:

- The questions were interesting and thought-provocative (which is a great plus)
- However the language is a bit too complex for non-native English speakers. They particularly had issues with the vocabulary describing criteria for elections (ex: eloquent or charismatic)
Also there were some questions about the question “Should students have a seat in the Legislative Council?” They thought I should be more specific, and say that I am referring to the Functional

I was afraid that the survey would be too long (three pages), but they seemed to say that it was alright.

Now I have made the amendments. With the new and improved version, I will be starting out the ‘real’ survey in the universities.

**November 4th**

The better survey has worked very well. I started by getting some answers in City University. Going to the cafeterias or in waiting areas, I was able to find people on their own rather easily. The survey is a bit long – it takes 10 minutes total. However, when I approach people, I only tell them that it will last 5 minutes, that way they are more likely of accepting. Additionally, I bought candies as a reward. In all universities the students are very happy to discuss the issue further in the form of a short interview. I promised them that it would be kept anonymous, so I had very few negatives responses. Only a few students from the Mainland refused to talk to me – probably being afraid that I might not really be a student. Other than that, everything went fine. For the moment I only have 20 responses on the survey, so I will spend another weekend going on campuses. Although this survey is much longer than the previous, I think the questions are more thorough and will be more interesting to analyze.

**November 11th**

The first draft of the paper is almost done and I now have to prepare for the presentation on Thursday. All the interviews have been finalized (5 total) and I have collected a total of 37 surveys. Unfortunately I don’t have any recording of the interviews. In order to ensure that the students were as honest as possible, and as open as I would like them to be, I preferred not to scare them with a recording machine.

**November 18th**

The presentation went well! I now have to focus my paper a bit more. I should choose only one theory, instead of trying to cover so many. So I will probably specialize on the concept of socio-economic classes and political activism among students. I think this has the most interesting results.


Cheung, C. (1994) Political Attitudes of Tertiary Education Students during the Transition Period in Hong Kong: A test of Democratic Dynamics in Youth, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist College Printing Press


Daily Mail Reporter (2013) “Campaigners reveal horrific injuries they say were suffered by staff forced to work under terrible conditions in factories where Apple touchscreens are produced”, article from November 25th, 2013 (available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2513283/Anti-Apple-campaigners-reveal-injuries-suffered-staff-supplier.html#ixzz2mToqJS5E, last accessed: 06/12/2013)


Tsang, W. (1992) *The Class Structure in Hong Kong*, Occasional Paper Series, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong


