

## MASTER'S THESIS

### Serving Up Nostalgia: Identity Politics in Hong Kong Foodscapes

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## Abstract

Since 2010, nostalgic local eateries have emerged as a new trend in Hong Kong's dynamic foodscapes. Instead of being a new culinary invention, this trend is a renaissance of Hong Kong's local food culture, a revival of local eateries and dining experiences of the past. Serving romantically reimagined old-time dishes, from *dim sum* to wok-and-toss dishes, these nostalgic eateries are commonly spaces condensed with visual cues of old Hong Kong: retro neon signs, checked floor tiles, vintage light fixtures, to name but a few. Notably, this trend coincides with a series of social upheaval, including the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in 2019. All taking place in the same decade, this nostalgic trend in Hong Kong foodscapes is more than just another marketing gimmick, but rather represents an interlacing of nostalgia articulations and political change. Exploring the nostalgic foodscapes through different entry points, this thesis attempts to map out the trajectory of nostalgia in negotiating Hong Kong subjectivity, and by extension the role of nostalgia in Hong Kong identity politics, and to argue that nostalgia can be a new mobilizing force in recent political discourse of Hong Kong nationalism. By rethinking nostalgia in relation to history and memory, this thesis first emancipates nostalgia from its modernist and postmodernist critiques as being created for capitalistic consumption, and unearths its potency in being a powerful mobilizer that can bridge the past and the present. Then, through the analysis of nostalgia discourse in recent local foodscapes, this thesis shows how nostalgia enables the manifestation of characteristics of Hong Kong subjectivity and is mobilized as a place-making strategy that reimagines Hong Kong as a Home. Finally, by looking at the role of nostalgia in major social movements, this thesis illustrates how nostalgia can be activated and instrumentalized as tactical resistance for collective activism.

*Keywords: Hong Kong, nostalgia, foodscapes, collective activism, identity politics*