

MASTER'S THESIS

An identity formation through collective action in a new social movement in Hong Kong: a case study of the post-80s anti-express rail link youth

Wang, Jieying

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**An Identity Formation through Collective Action
in a New Social Movement in Hong Kong
– A Case Study of the Post-80s Anti-Express Rail Link Youth**

WANG Jieying

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Principal Supervisor: Dr. LEE Alice Y. L.

Hong Kong Baptist University

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the collective identity formation by a group of young people who actively engaged in the anti-express rail link (anti-XRL) protest. It started from the end of 2009 and is regarded as a new social movement. This group of youths, without party or class base, organized and actively participated in the movement with a slogan “post-80s”, which signifies the new social force constituted by the youths rather than refers to the people within a specific age range. A qualitative approach is adopted in this case study with in-depth interview, participant observation and document study as the major research methods, analyzing different dimensions of the anti-XRL post-80s identity formation. Three research questions: what is the post-80s collective identity; how did they form the collective identity through the movement; and why did they form the post-80s identity through this particular new social movement, are answered.

Findings show that, this is a group of youths embracing dispositional commonalities and sharing social values towards different social problems. In the movement, they gradually formed and consolidated the sense of solidarity against the authorities, and the respect for individuality and citizen empowerment, through various collective action plans, verbal tactics, organizational and communication forms. In addition, several forms of new media were utilized by the youths to create their own discourse field, alternative to the hegemony of mainstream media. An autonomous and initiative role and independent thinking were held by the post-80s during interaction with other movement players, while the movement youths took side with the people. Staying an ambivalent and equal relationship with mainstream media, the post-80s activists were influenced by mainstream media coverage in terms of action planning and self perception. Rather than facing the mainstream representation of the anti-XRL youths passively, the young activists utilized their own discourse field to negotiate, reconstruct and reinforce their expected post-80s identity, as responding to stereotyping in mainstream media.

Theoretically, this research includes the relational dimension (interaction between the post-80s with other entities) as one of the important factors in the process of the post-80s collective identity formation, which has been overlooked by previous scholars. Practically, through an in-depth look into the micro and dynamic perspective of this group of young activists, this research is hoped to contribute to policy makers’ better understanding on this type of the young generation, and to the academic field of social movement and youth study in Hong Kong.

Keywords: new social movement, identity, post-80s

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
Chapter One Introduction	1
1.1 Research Purpose	2
1.2 Research Significance	3
1.2.1 Theoretical Significance	3
1.2.2 Practical Significance	6
1.3 Definition of the Research Subject – The Post-80s	9
1.4 Organization of the Thesis.....	12
Chapter Two Literature Review	14
2.1 Traditional Social Movement Theories	14
2.2 New Social Movement	16
2.2.1 Different academic versions of new social movement	17
2.2.2 Debates on the newness of new social movements	18
2.2.3 Characteristics of new social movements.....	19
2.3 The Root of Identity Seeking	22
2.4 Collective Identity	24
2.5 Collective Identity Analysis	26
2.5.1 Emotional investment.....	29
2.5.2 Cultural practices.....	30
2.5.3 Organization and network as culture	34
2.5.4 Relational dimension of collective identity	35
2.6 New Media Use as Culture	36
2.7 New Media Use and Social Participation.....	37

2.8 New Media and the Youth Generation	39
2.9 Framing Identity in New Social Movement	42
2.9.1 Collective action framing	42
2.9.2 Identity field frame	44
2. 10 Movement-Media Relationship	46
Chapter Three Conceptual Framework	50
3.1 Conceptual Framework	51
3.2 Analytical Dimensions of Collective Identity Formation.....	51
3.2 Analytical Dimensions of Collective Identity Formation.....	52
3.3 Emotional Investment.....	53
3.4 Cultural Practices	55
3.5 Text and Framing	59
3.6 Organization and Communication Technology.....	61
3.7 Relational Dimension	63
Chapter Four Methodology	66
4.1 The Case Study.....	66
4.2 Semi-Structured Interview.....	67
4.2.1 Sampling procedure.....	68
4.2.2 Interview procedure.....	69
4.3 Participant Observation	71
4.4 Document Study	72
4.4.1 Framing analysis.....	73
4.4.2 Facebook groups.....	76
4.4.3 Newspaper	77
Chapter Five The Anti-XRL Movement	79
5.1 Hong Kong as a Post-industrial and Democratic Society.....	79
5.2 The Anti-Express Railway Link Movement.....	80

5.3 The Anti-XRL Movement as a New Social Movement	83
5.4 The Post-80s as Movement Major Player.....	86
Chapter Six Emotional Investments	90
6.1 Personal Dispositions, Experiences and Values	91
6.1.1 Caring about social affairs.....	92
6.1.2 Movement experiences and personal life	95
6.2 Shared Memory and Social Wrongs.....	98
6.2.1 Criticizing the education system.....	99
6.2.2 Historical/political questions never get answered	101
6.3 Grievances and Oppositional Consciousness	103
6.3.1 Home, community, production and livelihood.....	105
6.3.2 Government, system and society	110
6.4 Cognitive Liberation.....	114
6.4.1 A fresh generation with less historical burden	115
6.4.2 Conviction on the influential role taken by the young generation.....	116
6.4.3 Capabilities accumulated from experience.....	117
6.5 Why did the Post-80s Form their Collective Identity through the Movement	119
6.5.1 Contextual factors.....	119
6.5.2 Personal factors	123
6.5.3 Summary	125
Chapter Seven Cultural Practices.....	127
7.1 Performance.....	128
7.2 Spatial Meaning.....	129
7.2.1 The Legislative Building	130
7.2.2 Murray Building	134
7.2.3 Parade of “Protecting the Choi Yuen village”	136
7.2.4 Choi Yuen village.....	139

7.3 Cultural Narratives	143
7.3.1 Universal-value narratives – human and nature	143
7.3.2 Historical narratives – movement continuity.....	147
7.3.3 Worldly narratives – people cannot live without consuming	150
7.4 Empathy.....	152
7.4.1 Individual Empowerment	153
7.4.2 Considerate to the public	156
Chapter Eight Text and Framing	162
8.1 Diagnostic Frame	164
8.2 Prognostic Frame.....	170
8.3 Motivational Frame	175
8.4 Presentation of Frames in Different Media	179
8.5 Identity Fields.....	180
Chapter Nine Organization and Communication	183
9.1 Organization	184
9.1.1 Network based formation	185
9.1.2 Individual contributing negotiation	189
9.1.3 Fully-discussed decision making.....	192
9.2 Communication	195
9.2.1 Interpersonal communication	196
9.2.2 Various forms of communication via new media technologies.....	198
9.2.3 The controversial role of Facebook	201
9.2.4 Facebook opens an alternative information pool.....	203
9.2.5 Facebook as an emotional outlet	205
9.2.6 Shortcomings of Facebook communication	207
9.2.7 The power of human agency	209

Chapter Ten Relational Dimension of Collective Identity	215
10.1 Post-80s with the Victims and Other Protesters	216
10.2 Post-80s with Political Parties	221
10.3 Post-80s with Civic Organizations	223
10.4. Relationship between the Post-80s Activists and Mainstream Media.....	225
10.4. 1 Mainstream media in Hong Kong and in the anti-XRL movement.....	225
10.4.2 Journalists in the anti-XRL movement.....	229
10.4.3 Mainstream and independent media	232
10.4.4 Ambiguity and dynamics between movement Actors and mainstream media...	233
10.4.5 When the post-80s meet the mainstream coverage on them.....	237
Chapter Eleven The Collective Identity of the Anti-XRL Post-80s	244
11.1 The Bringing forward of the Slogan “Post-80s”	244
11.2 Collective Identity of the Anti-XRL Post-80s	245
11.3 Post-80s In-the-Making	249
Chapter Twelve Conclusion.....	252
12.1 Limitations.....	254
12.2 Directions for Future Research.....	255
References	257
Appendix A	267
Appendix B.....	280
CURRICULUM VITAE	285