

## 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

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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**

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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

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