

Superheroes in Hong Kong's Political Resistance: Icons, Images, and Opposition

Dan Garrett, *City University of Hong Kong*

In June 2013, explosive claims and illicit revelations of domestic and global American intelligence surveillance operations, hacking, and collaboration with US Internet and information technology behemoths rocked the world. Simultaneously, the mysterious emergence in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of runaway American intelligence contractor Edward J. Snowden at the heart of the intrigue shoved the small enclave to the fore of global geopolitics. Claiming to rely on Hong Kong's respect for the rule of law and tradition of dissent to shield him against American retaliation and extradition, the dubious protagonist's statements ingratiated himself to local political groups who petitioned Hong Kong and central Chinese governments not to send him back to the United States. During "Defend Snowden"¹ demonstrations at the US consulate in Hong Kong involving hundreds of supporters, placards bearing the image of US President Barack Obama parodied, mocked, and ridiculed the leader of the free world using iconic adaptations of Captain America, George Orwell's "Big Brother," and Shepard Fairey's Obama "Hope" visuals. Instead of an icon of "American freedom and ideology" (Serwer 2008) and an "idealized American nation" (Dittmer 2005, 627) Captain America, American president Barack Obama, and the United States of America were symbolically transformed into a signified Orwellian caped crusader threatening the world. (See figure 1.)

The appropriation of the Captain America superhero sign, and other foreign superheroes such as Batman and Iron Man, in Hong Kong's new social movements (NSM) as devices of visual mobilization, dissent, counter-hegemonic resistance, and identity formation has been an increasingly salient phenomenon in recent

years. As noted by Di Paolo (2011, 1), "superhero stories are at their most popular and evocative when they respond to particularly turbulent political times, especially those marred by war and social unrest." This has especially been the situation as identity politics in the HKSAR between pro- and anti-regime forces have virulently come to the fore. American and Japanese superheroes and cinematic superhero narratives such as *300*, *The Matrix*, *V for Vendetta*, *Ultraman*, and *Kamen Riders* are being used as subversive popular culture icons in Hong Kong's struggle for democracy, human rights, social justice, and in the rejection of mainland communist values and identity.

METHODOLOGY

Hong Kong's relation to the mainland is defined by the "One Country, Two Systems" (OCTS) policy; formally another region under control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Hong

Figure 1

Placard at a "Defend Snowden" Rally in Hong Kong Presents US President Barack Obama as an Orwellian Big Brother Captain America, June 2013.



Photo by Daniel Garrett. (Color online.)

Kong is accorded much policy leeway and some autonomy. Less than 20 years after Hong Kong transferred from British to Chinese control, the HKSAR is a deeply divided society (Guelke 2012) where Peoples Republic of China (PRC) identity and nationalization projects are incomplete (Abdoolcarim 2007) and ever more contested (Garrett 2013). This contestation plays out in many arenas, including, not least, the area of popular culture, in which social actors frequently use superhero images appropriated from American and Japanese media.²

Murray Edelman (2001) has argued that iconic images are frequently used to shape public political perceptions. More directly Khatib (2013, 1) has observed that “The image is at the heart of political struggle, which has become an endless process of images battling, reversing, erasing and replacing other images.” To this end, more and more scholars are contemplating the empirical and symbolic uses and roles of images in post-modern and NSMs such as those occurring in Hong Kong and elsewhere (Corrigan-Brown 2012; Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013; Philipps 2012). Superheroic images are of particular relevance to nationalist struggles, as has been clearly demonstrated by Jason Dittmer (2005, 626; 2013) who notes that superhero narratives play an important role in the creation of symbolic meaning associated with territorialities and collective identities. While Dittmer focuses on Captain America and US nationalism his argument also applies in the case of HKSAR.

example, while most Hongkongers do not dispute they are “Chinese” many *do* distinguish themselves from “that type of Chinese”—an allusion to mainland Chinese identities perceived as inferior to the Hongkonger identity because of their differing norms and political system. Through classical and new superheroes narratives, such as *Attack on Titan*, younger subaltern Hongkongers are increasingly expressing everyday resistance as “Defend our Hong Kong land.”³

BACKGROUND

The return of the British Crown colony of Hong Kong to Chinese communist sovereignty in 1997 was highly controversial. Demonizing political rhetoric was used by American, British, and Chinese commentators and officials during the latter half of the transition period (1984–1997) that frequently framed the event in apocalyptic discourses of good and evil, communist repression, and calamity. Metaphors such as Free World and Bamboo Curtain, “Berlin of the East,” “base of subversion,” and, perhaps most infamously, *Fortune Magazine’s* the “Death of Hong Kong” (Kraar and McGowan 1995) were regularly invoked in official and media discourses. One anticommunist US senator even went as far as to declare that the United States had to protect Hong Kong from communist tyranny (Helms 1997).

Today, despite the PRC’s broad adherence during the past 16 years to the OCTS framework protecting Hong Kong’s

Increasingly embedded within Hongkongers’ activism are visual signs to Asian and Western classical and new superheroes such as Batman, Iron Man, Kick Ass, Super Mario, and Ultraman who are perennially depicted as challenging the power and ideologies of the dominant local “patriotic” forces, that is, pro-Beijing political parties and “red tycoons.”

Subaltern Hongkongers’ consumption of antiauthoritarian popular culture superhero texts such as the *Matrix* trilogy or *V for Vendetta* texts contribute to contemporary constructions of Hong Kong as a space and identity distinct from socialist China. Likewise, Dittmer’s (2013) transnational nationalist superhero notion is applicable in grasping the subaltern construction of Hong Kong NSM youth and political radicals as defenders of the “city-state.” This is primarily mediated through the Japanese anime and manga series *Attack on Titan* that has been reimagined locally as *Attack on China*. These popular culture notions of superheroes and supervillains and Manichean universes, combined with the historical anticommunist sentiments in Hong Kong (Loh 2010), have contributed to the iconic constructions of mainlanders, China, and the CCP as enemies of the “Hong Kong people.” These enemies, often presented in stereotypical supervillain and henchmen forms, then become important in not just defining, maintaining, or positioning Hongkongers’ own nativist identities, but in providing benchmarks to contrast the competing mainland value system (and society) (Eco 2012). For

liberal freedoms, rule of law, and limited representative governance, the HKSAR remains a field of political and ideological contestations between communist and anticommunist forces. Frequently cast as Asia’s Global City, Hong Kong is also known as a “City of Protests” where more than 50,000 political and social justice street actions have transpired since the Handover (Information Services Department 2012a, 2012b; Lee 2013). China’s general steadfast tolerance of Hongkongers’ demands for greater democracy and vigorous political resistance to perceived mainland and communist encroachments demonstrate the successes of the OCTS ideology. The expanding conflicts between residents and the ruling regime(s) also indicate significant cultural, economic, and political problems in the society that increasingly threaten to derail the unprecedented project. Since 2010 political polarization and anticommunist sentiment has surged in Hong Kong as politics have become more radicalized, and younger and more vocal activists have entered the fray. Increasingly embedded within Hongkongers’ activism are visual signs to Asian and Western classical and new superheroes such as Batman, Iron

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Superheroes and Hong Kong

Superheroes and the superhero genre, Western and Eastern, are no strangers to Hong Kong, which has a long history of consuming and producing comics and caped crusaders (Wong 2002). Recently, Hong Kong has also posed as an exotic site for several global and Western superhero movies ranging from *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (2003) to *The Dark Knight* (2008) to *Push* (2009). Superhero spies and spy dramas are also very familiar to the city evidenced by many Western movies and television series showcasing the territory such as James Bond (*You Only Live Twice* (1967), *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974), and *Die Another Day* (2002)), *Johnny English Reborn* (2011), *Spy Game* (2001), *I Spy*, *The A Team*, and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* Hong Kong has also hosted annual animation and comic fairs, one of the largest in Asia, for 16 years where superhero comics and characters are popular fixtures. Therefore, not only are superheroes accepted in local popular culture, they are increasingly invoked in protest discourses as icons, signs, and symbols of local, national, and international politics. They are also frequently observed in Hongkongers’ off- and online statements of political solidarity and protest acts directed toward the Chinese state by mainland and foreign Chinese dissidents.

Hong Kong is a highly mediated and visually literate society where a broad range of traditional and untraditional American, Asian (mostly Japanese), and other superhero/supervillain characters or series have been observed, including The Avengers, Batman, Bruce Lee, Darth Vader, Darth Maul, Death Note, Dragon Ball Z, Hell Boy, Hit Girl, Iron Man, James Bond, Judge Dredd, Kamen Rider, Kick Ass, Naruto, Street Fighter, Saw, Spiderman, Superman, Super Mario, the Joker, the *Matrix* trilogy, Terminator, Thor, Transformers, Two Face, X-men, and V. Some of these characters appear in protest mobilizations for annual political rituals such as the decade(s)-long iconic July 1 democracy marches and the June 4 candlelight vigils in remembrance of victims of the 1989 military crackdown in Beijing by the CCP.

Some superhero characters, mostly notably the Super Mario *Super Anti-Brainwashing Bros. for Hong Kong Players* series, tar-

get single-issue political topics such as opposition to the Hong Kong special administration region (SAR) government’s mandated moral and national education (MNE) scheme for primary and secondary students. During the 2012 anti-MNE movement campaign, for example, Hongkongers’ fears over the SAR government’s plan to institute mandatory mainland-style patriotic education for their primary and secondary school children erupted. The anti-MNE campaign largely led by a newly emerged civil society student group called Scholarism but also widely supported by other civil and political society groups—saw months-long demonstrations, huge rallies of 90,000 and 120,000 supporters (Bai 2012; Lai 2012; Lau, Nip, and Wan 2012; Bradsher 2012), hunger strikes, school boycotts, and occupation of the square in front of the Hong Kong government headquarters before the authorities partially relented and relaxed the scheme. More than 20 distinct iterations of the Super Mario anti-MNE visuals were noted during this period. Other, more provocative and symbolically subversive anti-MNE visuals were evidenced during the anti-MNE campaign including one which showed Neo from *Matrix Revolutions* calling for a revolution against the communist invasion. (See figure 2.) Both Morpheus and Neo are in another image, depicting the scene from the first *Matrix* movie where Neo is asked to make a choice between the red and blue pills, framed by the message: “Free Your Mind! Against Brainwashing Education.” The insinuation here is that Hongkongers have a choice to accept the false reality(ies) of the government or become aware of, and fight back against, communist manipulation of Hong Kong’s political system and society.

Figure 2

Matrix-oriented Anti-Moral and National Education Protest Visual at the Hong Kong SAR Government Headquarters during the September 2012 Student Occupation of Tamar Square.



Photo by Daniel Garrett. (Color online.)

Figure 3

Screen Capture of June 2013 *Attack on China* Video Mashup of Japanese Anime and Manga Series *Attack on Titan*.



(Color online.)

“WE ARE HONGKONGERS!”—SYMBOLS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Increasingly, icons, images, and narratives appropriated from Asian and Western superhero genres and wider popular culture are assuming the symbolic labor of opposition to Chinese hegemony and creation of insurgent Hongkonger identities. Notably, Edelman (2001) identifies the critical role of iconic images in the socialization of youth, the cultivation of fear, the construction of enemies, and the constitution of power relations in society. Likewise, Dittmer (2005, 2010, 2013) recounts how popular culture icons and stories like the superhero genre are fostering imagined communities, national identities, and representations of place and society. This section examines the role of superhero narratives in the realization of Hongkongers' counter-hegemonic struggle to defend and assert their nativist identities.

Attack on Titan/Attack on China (Shina)

In mid-2013 the Japanese anime and manga series *Attack on Titan* (*Shingeki no Kyojin*) (Isayama 2010) became symbolic for many Hong Kong youth and radicals regarding the SAR's dire cultural and political situation, imperiled local identity, and perceived dystopian future under China's OCTS socialist ideology. (See figure 3.) Indicative of the ongoing culture wars within the territory and with the mainland, (re)surfacing virulent anticommunist and antimainland sentiments manifesting in underground online visuals and YouTube mashups⁴ of the anime series soon emerged. Provocatively titled *Attack on China*⁵ in its most subversive rendering, mainland China and Chinese *and* the CCP were cast as gigantic, mindless, humanoids devouring Hong Kong. In general, this signified Hongkongers' existential fears about communist assimilation, mainland integration, and threats to their “way of life,” the Hong Kong “System,” and their core values that are seen as differentiating them [Hongkongers] from “China.” Ultimately, the signification extends to Hongkonger's identity and the notions of Hong Kong as a place called “home”—a concept seen continually endangered by an ever-accelerating

cultural, economic, social, and political integration with communist China and perhaps best exemplified by the tens of millions of mainland tourists who flood the small enclave of 7 million every year. This has been accompanied by the popular declinist culture meme, “The City is Dying, You Know.”⁶

Visually, evidence sustaining Edelman and Dittmer's notions on the use of iconic images and the superhero genre for constructing enemies and nationalist superheroes as part of assembling political identities are found robustly situated in the imagery and narrative presented in the *Attack on China*

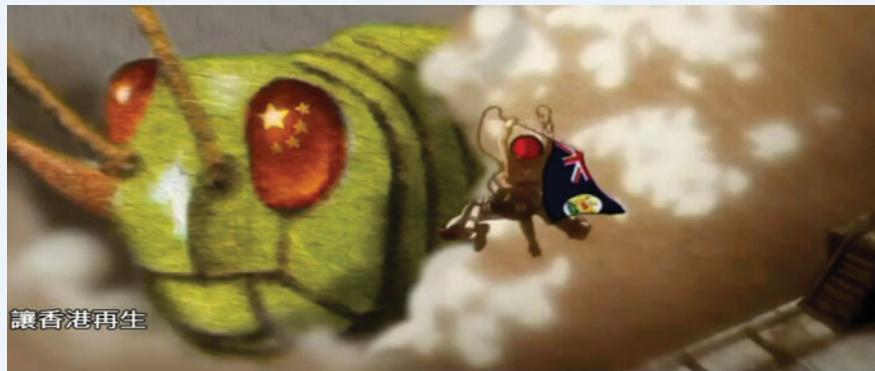
(*Advancing Locusts* in Chinese) video. The *Attack on China* video, collaboratively produced by more than 100 members of the SAR's infamously rowdy online community, the Hong Kong Golden Forum (Hong Kong Golden hereafter), visually co-opted a range of symbols from the *Attack on Titan* series trailer and constructed them as new iconic *Attack on China* signs and imagery salient for the local political context. These were subsequently used in the new visual work to frame vividly mainlanders as the enemy, denote the Hong Kong “city-state” and OCTS ideology under mainland communist (Titan) attack, and portray the Hong Kong Golden “Brothers” as nativist/national saviors, that is, nationalist superheroes.

Arguably, the most succinct and compelling visual rhetorical rendition of this nationalist act was the depiction of a diminutive Hong Kong (signified by the “Lion and Dragon” flag favored by the nascent Hong Kong Autonomy Movement) ringed by three concentric walls (each named after key political dimensions protecting the liberal pseudo-democratic enclave) surrounded by masses of approaching red (communist) Titans, each bearing the PRC's “five-star sign.” The outer wall of the city-state represents the OCTS ideology (implicitly positioning “Two Systems” as OCTS dominant aspect). Next, Hong Kong's rule of law and human rights protections under the basic law are illustrated. Finally, nestled within the inner-sanctum was the Hong Kong way of life symbolized by Hongkongers' “core values” and superior “civilization” (as compared to the mainland.) Other iterations of this scene have the walls reordered but substantively reflect the same symbolic meanings. In one case, the official HKSAR emblem is utilized as a sign for Hong Kong.⁷

Significantly, the various mashups of *Attack on Titan* denoted the SAR's *only* hope as these youth and unaffiliated political radicals who represent, according to the Chinese authorities and their supporters, Hong Kong independence and separatist movements. The walled city's⁸ heroes, ostensibly embodying Hong Kong autonomy and independence sentiments, were signified bearing colonial flags as nativist “standards” and icons of collective identity when defending

Figure 4

Screen Capture from *Attack on China Mashup*; Huge ‘Titan Locust’ Signifies Mainland ‘Invaders’ Attacking Hong Kong Repelled by “Hongkonger first” Autonomy and Independence Forces.



(Color online.)

Hong Kong from the *Advancing Locust* Titan invading force. (See figure 4.) As opposed to the sympathetic rendering of the city’s “heroes,” derisive mainland stereotypes and negative icons of mainlanders as locusts and corrupt raiders were incorporated in the video with the humanoid Titans becoming gigantic locusts with huge PRC flag-stained eyes. The call for Hongkongers to take up arms against invading forces was mirrored in the lyrics to the video’s theme song: “It’s time to defend our Hong Kong land. End this adversity. Repel the invaders without fear. Guard against Chinese Communist Party.”

The marginalization of Hong Kong’s mainstream prodemocracy movement, which has been in existence since the 1980s, in these superhero resistance narratives, as seen in their total absence in the struggle to defend Hong Kong, represents a move toward more confrontational identity politics independent of the contemporary political system and mainstream politics. Online mobilizations in late 2012, for example, called for a large New Year’s Day protest on January 1, 2013 and demanded the resignation of the incumbent leader of Hong Kong who was commonly perceived to be an underground communist party member. Called “The Hong Kong Revolutions 2013,” numerous online mobilization visuals enlisted superhero icons embroiled in Manichean battles as part of the revolutionary political rhetoric. Superheroes like *V for Vendetta*, the *Transformers’* Autobots and Decepticons, and Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort denote grand good versus evil narratives, in other words, “good” prodemocracy forces versus “evil” antidemocratic pro-Beijing hoards.

After confrontations between the police and radicals carrying out nonviolent traffic stoppages, a scene emerged where seemingly hundreds of police surrounded a lone protester the League of Social Democrats’ radical legislator Leung Kwok-hung—better known as “Long Hair”—was captured by local media. Soon afterward the iconic image was appropriated by Hong Kong’s subaltern online counterpublics (Fraser 1990, 67) who transformed the radical legislator into differ-

ent superhero icons standing down oppressive security forces such as: Neo from the *Matrix Trilogy*; Desmond Miles from *Assassin’s Creed*; *The Hulk*; Rambo; and Thor. In later preparations for the 2013 annual July 1 “democracy” march in Hong Kong initial iterations of online mobilizations using the *Attack on Titan* trope invoked the concept of “Battle of Hong Kong.” More recently, a new comic series published by a youth-centric radical prodemocracy group adopts this theme under the title: *War of Hong Kong Independence*.

As rhetorical and street-level confrontations between the regime and counter-hegemonic

Figure 5

Photo of the ‘Red Giant’ and Creator, Activist Artist Kacey Wong, in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong, at the July 1, 2013 Democracy March.



The Giant Signifies “China” via Use of Red Paint and Yellow Stars; Hongkongers Represented as Small Humans Clutched in the Giant’s Right Hand. Photo by Daniel Garrett. (Color online.)

Figure 6

Hong Kong's "Supervillains" Banners at July 1, 2013 Democracy March.



Chief Executive CY Leung (center) as a "Cheating Iron Man"; Former Head of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) Timothy Tong (right) as a "Greedy" Joker. Visual allusions to CY's Suspected Communist Ties and Tong's Plying of Mainland Officials with liquor. Photo by Daniel Garrett. (Color online.)

forces have intensified in 2013 about issues of Hongkongers' patriotism (code for their suitability to "lead" the SAR), plans for nonviolent civil disobedience to force Beijing to grant universal suffrage (Occupy Central), and the diminishing prospects for greater democracy, more insurrectional notions using the Titan theme have emerged such as *Attack on CCP*. Surrounding the July 1, 2013, march were online visuals and T-shirts depicting "riot porn" from recent popular struggles in Brazil, Syria, Turkey, and elsewhere under the slogan: *We Dare to Fight*. These sentiments and themes were ostensibly visually displayed in the forms of effigies (of a red giant symbolizing the Titans), placards, and other protest paraphernalia, several using superhero or supervillain tropes. (See figures 5 and 6.) For example, placards bearing messages like: "Chinese colonists get out!"; "Better dead than red"; "Say NO to China. Say YES to Hong Kong."; and, "Nice day for a revolution." Hong Kong's "supervillains"—Hong Kong SAR government officials and "redder than Mao" patriots who are seen by prodemocracy forces as not representing Hong Kong or Hongkongers and "destroying Hong Kong"—were a prominent counterhegemonic protest visual.

300, *The Matrix*, and *V for Vendetta*

Other weighty adoptions of superhero narratives used by Hongkongers to construct, defend, and assert an exclusive territorial narrative and identity include *300*, *The Matrix* trilogy, and *V from Vendetta*. Briefly, a common theme these stories have with the *Titan* epic is a small group (Hong Kong) refusing to submit to a colossus alien power (communist China) seeking to assimilate them and their way of life. In *300*, the

scene "This is SPARTA!" where Spartan King Leonidas kicks the Persian emperor Xeres' messenger into a pit after failing to be coerced, co-opted, or intimidated by the vast Persian empire, can be read as resonating with the explicit message from Beijing that without China, Hong Kong would cease to exist. This, in fact, is a favored rejoinder of many pro-Beijing supporters when confronting demands for faster and greater universal suffrage. It also mirrors the old Chinese communist line that without the CCP there would be no new China. And indeed, since 2003 Beijing has sought to placate Hongkongers with huge financial inducements, trade, and tourism arrangements to quell social unrest and demands for universal suffrage.

Similar to Leonidas' verbal rejoinder to Xeres' parlay, "Submission, now that's a bit of a

problem," many Hongkongers have resisted assimilation and the overwhelming of tiny Hong Kong with more than 100 million mainland tourists since 2003. And just as with Leonidas' expression of a litany of Persian slights, Hongkongers' have their own list of mainlander transgressions of Hong Kong's social, legal, and political norms that have grown so severe that a former senior Chinese official essentially told Hongkongers recently to love China or get out (Cheung and Lau 2012). The Spartan example is also captured in an online mobilization image for the July 1, 2012, democracy march by the group Keyboard Frontline where the newly installed chief executive is kicked off a platform representing Hong Kong by a "Spartan" Hongkonger who shouts: "This is our HONG KONG!" Other renditions of this trope simply "photoshopped" the chief executive's head onto the body of the Persian being kicked into the pit by Leonidas.

In the same vein, although the anti-authoritarian masterpieces *The Matrix* Trilogy and *V for Vendetta* signify material and symbolic struggles over weighty dangers posed to Hongkongers' freedoms and way of life by Hong Kong's competitive authoritarian political system (Levitsky and Way 2010), they can only be scantily considered here. These superhero texts have been interpreted as role models of subaltern resistance against Chinese cultural and political encroachments into Hong Kong. This has manifested most fiercely and prolifically in street confrontations with Hong Kong's security authorities who are perceived as increasingly denying Hongkongers' freedoms to protest and speak out against the local and Chinese regimes. Most certainly, the Hong Kong police commissioner and officers have been signified as Agent

Figure 7

On-line Mobilization Visual for 2013 New Year's Day "Hong Kong Revolutions" Protest Shared over Facebook.



Author: Unknown. (Color online.)

Smith and ordinary agents of the Matrix (which is ultimately a signification of the authoritarian Chinese communist state and its mindless and controlled minions).

The V visual narrative also denotes these agents of control similarly and asserts that Hongkongers should be free without the “nightmare” of communism. Hong Kong manifestations of Vonline visuals quote the catchphrase of contemporary revolutions: “People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people.” One of many online protest visuals for the “Hong Kong Revolutions” protest adopted the *V for Vendetta* movie poster situating Hong Kong’s chief executive as a candidate for V-style regime change. (See figure 7.) Singularly proclaiming their love for Hong Kong—and explicitly rejecting the mainland authorities’ charge that Hongkongers should “Love China, Love Hong Kong”—they have even recreated the HKSAR’s official emblem, replacing it with an image of Guy Fawkes and visibly marking out references to the PRC or the HKSAR (the SAR being a PRC entity not seen as “Hong Kong”). Like the heroes in the Matrix, they also seek to “wake up” their fellow Hongkongers from their false consciousness; as one online visual incorporating a

photograph of a Hong Kong protester facing a line of police officers reminded them: “You must know this, no matter what post you are, you must remember, YOU ARE THE PEOPLE OF HONG KONG!”

CONCLUSION

Using Murray Edelman’s notion of icons and Jason Dittmer’s nationalist superhero subgenre, this article offered a preliminary empirical and symbolic accounting of how some Hongkongers’ (re)interpretation of American and foreign superhero icons and narratives have constituted counter-hegemonic political discourses of resistance in opposition to hegemonic PRC notions. The role of these icons and imagery in residents’ construction of “Hong Kong” as a distinct entity from socialist China was discussed. The examination of the superhero genre as locally mediated revealed salient nativist narratives corrosive of China’s OCTS ideology—and especially its all-or-nothing “One Country” worldview. Notably, the construction of China and its clients administering the HKSAR as alien and threatening Others is significant. More importantly, however, the embracement of superhero narratives exalting rejection of submission (sovereignty and by extension patriotism and identity to the alien) and advocating the active promotion of assertive nativist identities portends identity conflicts and politics between Hongkongers and their sovereign will become more intense. ■

NOTES

1. Formally known as the “Rally to Support Edward Snowden in Hong Kong” as described by Inmedia.HK.
2. Visual data were collected by the author through off- and online participant observation in Hong Kong generally between 2012 and 2013 encompassing more than 50 demonstrations, marches, rallies, or protests. No specific distinction among putative genres, that is, editorial cartoons, comic strips, comic books, or graphic novels, are made as the operative consideration is the employment of superheroes in iconic political contexts. No claims to representativeness are made. However, local and Chinese regimes’ reactions to counter-hegemonic visual discourses, such as those embodying superhero counter-narratives opposing China’s rule, have denoted them as of substantive concern.
3. This phrase “Defend our Hong Kong land” comes from the chorus of accompanying *Attack on China* theme song which contains many references to the territory as an entity separate from and under “invasion” by China. See Bad Canto (2013).
4. Mashups are creative remixes (Lessig 2008) of existing audio, visual, and textual content that produce derivative artistic, cultural, or political products which, through juxtaposition, construct novel meanings and perspectives. Cultural and political mashup works can operate as “tools of political advocacy, forms of political protest, and modes of political commentary” (Edwards and Tryon 2009). *Egao*, a Chinese strain of mashup/remixing culture popular in Hong Kong (also known locally as *kuso*), is a popular form of online subversive speech (Gong 2010; Huang 2006).
5. *Attack on Shina* is also observed sometimes. *Shina* is a derogatory term used to refer to China. Originally having its nexus in Japanese nationalist usage, the term has also been adopted by others using it as a slight against communist China.
6. This meme is a quote from a popular 2011 Hong Kong television drama, *When Heaven Burns*, broadcasted by a local television station. In December 2011 the show was banned on the mainland over alleged allusions to the 1989 Tiananmen square crackdown and the banned mainland religious dissident group the Falun Gong (Lin 2011). The quote became iconic for many dissident Hongkongers, especially the younger generations, as “hit phrase for young people disillusioned with Hong Kong society” (Ng et al. 2011). Intertextual references to the slogan can be found in protest paraphernalia and as subversive tags in public spaces in the City, and on Hong Kong universities “democracy walls.”

7. This usage would probably not probably be acceptable to the majority youth and radicals embracing the *Attack on China* theme as they differentiate between *Hong Kong* and the *Hong Kong SAR*—the latter being a construction of *Hong Kong* servile to communist China.
8. This signifies a *Hong Kong* separated from socialist China. The walls represent the OCTS ideology that prohibits, in theory, the introduction of the socialist system in *Hong Kong* for 50 years (2047). *Hong Kong*'s "System," as part of the "Two Systems," is popularly (yet mistakenly) perceived by *Hongkongers* as protecting the former colony from the socialist system. In reality, the inverse is true. China feared the subversive and corrupting influence of the capitalist enclave.

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