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Food Boundaries, Pandemic, and Transborder Relations: Hong Kong's Food Localism and Colored Consumption

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine food localism through the changing transborder relations between Hong Kong (HK) and China. Before the 1980s, HK was still a city producing much of its own food. Since China's economic reform and opening, an increasing amount of fresh food from China has been crossing the border into HK. The availability of cheap vegetables and meat intensified market competition, and the rapid urbanization and internationalization of the local economy have contributed to the rapid decline of local food production. At the turn of the millennium, HK witnessed a revival of interest in local vegetable production. Both civil efforts and government-led programs have boosted the momentum of local agriculture, with a focus on organic food production. Despite the fact that HK still largely relies on imported food from China, there has been a subtle moral boundary between "local food" and "food from China", which sees locally grown food as cleaner and safer. During the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in early 2020, there was increasing demand for fresh local food. Such a wave of local food consumption coincided with a political economic

development, namely the "yellow economic circle" which emerged during the 2019 social protests, supporting local production and democracy and opposing pro-China businesses and red capital. Despite the ambivalence of these colored economies, food localism keeps evolving along the blurred lines between the local, the translocal, and the global, and is part and parcel of the ongoing contestations of HK's transborder politics.

Key words: Food localism, Transborder politics, Coloured consumption, Yellow Economic Circle, COVID-19 pandemic

I. Introduction

China is the main source country of Hong Kong's fresh food imports, including 94 percent of its fresh pork and 92 percent of its fresh vegetables (Huang, 2016). While HK relies mainly on food from elsewhere, this does not mean that HK is not producing any food. Fifty years ago, HK was a city producing more than half of the fresh vegetables its people consumed. Today, it still has a large number of farms lying fallow in the New Territories.[1] Since the turn of the century, more farmland has been used for organic food growing, and there is a perceptible enhanced awareness among younger people about the relationship between organic food, sustainable agriculture, health and environmental protection. In the 2000s, food scandals plagued China and alarmed HK people about the unscrupulous ways of food production in China (Yang, 2011; Holdaway and Husain, 2014). As a result, in HK a moral food boundary was often set against unsafe food from China. This article seeks to examine the changing discourses of this food boundary between HK and China, along with the city's transborder relations. It will look into how the consumption of locally grown food has been affected by the COVID19 pandemic and how a new local economy driven by the social protests in 2019 has brought varied impacts on food localism. The article draws on data from online research on relevant literature, website data, news reports and interviews with local organic farmers,[2] self-identified pro-democracy families[3] who support the development of anti-China consumption, and food delivery businesses. We will map an emergent foodscape

[1] The New Territories constitutes one of the three major land areas of Hong Kong. It lies in close proximity to China and shares a border with Shenzhen. It is the region that contains most of the farmlands in HK.

[2] We interviewed five organic farmers who have engaged in local organic food production since the 2000s. Besides one female farmer who is over 70, the others are in their mid or late 50s.

[3] We interviewed eight families in September and October 2020, whose profiles are provided in the appendix attached to this article.

politicized by increasingly tense transborder relations and shaped by raised awareness of the importance of home-based food production and local food consumption.

In the following sections, we will first elaborate on the global food localism movement and major changes in HK's food production in the past few decades. This will be followed by sections examining two major factors that have brought recent changes to people's eating habits and consumption: (1) the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in late January 2020 has forced people to stay home; (2) the 2019 social protests have generated a new subsector in HK's political spectrum, namely the "yellow economic circle", which represents a politically motivated consumption politics, aiming at supporting the pro-democracy movement and local production, and challenging the hegemonic influences from China. We will unravel the problematic intertwining of food localism and political localism and unpack the overlapping as well as contested boundaries between localists' stress on local consumption and the development of local agriculture.

II. Food Localism and Eating at Home

Since the 1980s, food localism has gained momentum worldwide and has become a global food movement for sustainability (Goodman, DuPuis and Goodman, 2012). As a critical discourse of and activism against globalization, food localization supports small-scale community agriculture, ecological farming, consumption of locally grown food, and reduction of food miles. Industrial food growing and animal raising methods have degraded the environment at an alarming rate since the 1960s. Today, agriculture is a major source of greenhouse gas and contributes to half of the world's methane emission (UNEP, 2020). Excessive application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in farming has led to severe soil and underground water contamination. In China, agriculture is one major factor in environmental pollution,

and half of the nitrogen fertilizers which farmers use on the farmland are lost, leading to serious problems of soil degradation (FAO, 2020).

The food localism movement has been promoted by people looking for an alternative food production and consumption system (Goodman, DuPuis and Goodman, 2012). The trend of globalization and market liberalization has made food consumption increasingly polluting. Food imports rely greatly on the use of fossil fuels. Reducing food imports and encouraging local food consumption will reduce food miles and food costs. In the U.S. and Europe, local food networks and organizations have striven to lobby different levels of government to create a better policy environment for the survival of independent food corporations and cooperatives (Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2014; Gross, 2014; O'Neill, 2014; Lang, 2013; Gottlieb, 2010). Democratic food institutions (such as food policy councils) have been created to encourage ecological community-supported agriculture (CSA) and food gardens, expand farmers' markets, increase income for small-scale farmers, ensure fairer access to local foods for the poor, and create a social atmosphere that generally supports local and seasonal food consumption. Food justice has been acknowledged as a goal for constructing an alternative food system based on local production, buying and sourcing (Gottlieb, 2010). Such justice seeks to mend class divides and class-based health inequality, boost local pride and identity, and halt environmental degradation (Cobb, 2011; Hinrichs, 2003; Winter, 2003; Weis, 2007). "Coming home to eat" has been a slogan encouraging people to buy food produced within a certain distance from home so as to reduce food miles, and to cook and eat at home (Nabhan, 2002; Adamson, 2009). This sort of localist campaign not only works for environment-conscious individuals and families, it also speaks to people with low incomes, as food localism is often considered a class-based movement "grounded in socio-economic status" (Lang, 2013).

In HK, since the turn of the century, there has been increasing interest in food growing and eating local organic food. Health-conscious eaters are catching up with the global food localism movement to search for safe and good food from HK. Within this trend, we see the rise of a new batch of younger farmers growing organic food. In her previous studies (Chan, 2016), the lead author of this article has argued that food localism in HK often revolves around the transborder politics between HK and China, and the moral boundaries set up by customers between food produced locally and that from across the border are part of the rising awareness of local food consumption.

III. Grow Local, Eat Global: HK's Food Production and Consumption

1. Changes in Local Food Production

Before the 1980s, HK was still a rice and vegetable producing region. Many local indigenous villagers were farmers before they entered the industrial sector in the 1950s and 1960s. Rice farming in indigenous villages has been warmly remembered by old villagers. Indeed, HK used to produce famous rice varieties and export them to other parts of the world. Yuen Long Simiu rice (元朗絲苗米) was one of HK's renowned heirloom rice varieties (Zheng and Wong, 2005; Lau, 2013: 51). HK food production loomed large from the 1950s to 1970s after the inauguration of China's new communist regime, as the British HK government began to encourage local production in order to reduce HK's dependence on food imports from China. Food production peaked in those decades. In this period, huge numbers of refugees from China provided the necessary labor for local farming. To increase local fresh vegetable produce, rice lands were gradually turned into vegetable farms. In the 1960s and 1970s, local vegetable production supplied over 50 percent of local consumption (Chiu and Hung, 1997: 86). However, since the 1980s, with the opening up and economic

reform in China, cheap vegetables from China have flooded HK. On the other hand, HK's agricultural industry began to decline at that point. Besides the competition of cheap produce from China, another main reason was the aging of local farmers and lack of interest from the younger generation to take up this labor-intensive work. Many old farmers were also unwilling to let their children work in the agricultural sector. By the 1980s, most HK youths had a chance to receive free secondary school education and aspired to white-collar jobs. In the three decades from the 1970s to 1990s, HK witnessed a major structural change in the economy, turning from an agricultural, industrial and trading city to a service-oriented economy, with prospering financial and property markets. Moreover, rapid urbanization in the New Territories after the 1960s had turned over an extensive amount of land for housing and transportation infrastructure development (Hayes, 1993; Cheng, 2019).

By the mid-1990s, local production only contributed to 17 percent of local consumption, and this ratio continued to decline. At present, local vegetable production met around 2 percent of local consumption demand (AFCD, 2020). In spite of this, there has been a spike in local farming — especially leisure farming. Many families bring their children to do leisure farming on the weekend for educational purposes. Moreover, a new scene has emerged in HK's agricultural development since 2000 (KFBG, 2007). An increasing number of younger farmers began to engage in organic farming in pursuit of sustainable agriculture and an alternative lifestyle (Lau, 2013; Cheng, 2009, 2019). The HK Agricultural, Fisheries, and Conservation Department (AFCD) also launched an organic farming scheme in 2000 to encourage local farmers to convert from conventional to organic farming. Since then, HK's organic production has increased. Although the amount of organic produce is limited and it constitutes only a very small proportion of local

consumption, it has initiated a new momentum for local food production.[4]

2. The "Moral Border" in Food Consumption

With the increased number of local organic farms since the 2000s, more people have had a chance to consume local organic products. Farmers' markets have sprung up in the city.[5] While food localism has been a global food movement aiming at reducing food miles, food localism in HK is two-sided. People turned to consume local organic veggies due to health and food safety concerns. At the same time, consumers tend to regard local production (regardless of whether it is organic or not) as more ethical, producing cleaner and safer food, while food production in China is seen as something subject to the control of unscrupulous producers who only eye profits. There has been a persistent mistrust about food from China, especially because of the incidences of food contamination. Local farmers have also confirmed that whenever there was news of food poisoning or chemical residues left on vegetables, their sales in the farmers' markets would increase. HK local food production and consumption has often been embedded in the transborder food politics between HK and China. Over the past decade, a number of well-educated young people have become organic farmers. They did so due to their ideals — preserving farmlands in the New Territories to resist the mainstream development trend that supports endless urbanization and property development, which only favors the profit-snatching property developers and house-building tycoons. The

[4] In 2014, the HK government announced a plan to launch a new scheme, the Agricultural Park, to mark the new approach in maintaining and developing local agriculture. Details can be obtained in the consultation document, *The New Agricultural Policy* (FHB and AFCD, 2014).

[5] There are around seven farmers' markets in the city, most of which open on Sundays. Some organic farms also are open for direct purchase during the weekend (https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/hong-kongs-best-farmers-markets-organic-produce/).

well-educated farmers considered their actions part of the social movement to defend rural spaces and bring alternative development. It is also an integral part of the cultural identity of HK. By producing local foods, they hope to attain global cultural citizenship and to redefine HK's relationship with China and the world (Chan, 2016).

3. Eating globally in HK

Essentially a trading and finance city, HK relies on goods from elsewhere. The main source countries of HK's imported goods are: China (45.2 percent), Taiwan (9.7), Korea (6.9), Japan (5.9), and the US (4.2). Among these, 4.2 percent are foodstuffs, with a total value of 197.5 billion HK dollars (around US$25.3) in 2018, doubling the value in 2008 (CSD, 2019). Indeed, 95% of HK's food supplies are imported (HKTDC, 2018). Its biggest food imports source countries are China (23 percent), the USA (14), Brazil (10), Japan (5), Chile (5), Thailand (5), Australia (4) and the Netherlands (4) (Blazyte, 2019). As a food trading hub, HK people have all along been enjoying all sorts of imported foods. HK is also well known for being a food paradise, with a wide range of restaurants providing cuisines from around the world. Despite being a small city, HK has over 14,000 restaurants and 1,000 bars and pubs (HKTDC, 2018). In normal times, many of these open till or beyond midnight, and it is well known that HK citizens have a die-hard habit of eating out. The limited awareness among the general public about their food consumption carbon footprints will not help change people's habits of eating out and purchasing imported food products. Although there has been enhanced awareness among middle-class families, local organic farmers have often complained that they were not stable customers. One farmer said, "There are many highly educated people who would like to support me, but they do not often cook. They do not eat at home much, or do not have time to cook. These people also travel a lot. Every year, during long holidays, such as summer vocation,

Christmas times and the Lunar New Year, many will not be in HK, and my veggies lie there." Eating out and frequent travel have characterized many people's living style, and this does affect the sales of local food produce. One new impetus that has brought changes to this situation is the coronavirus pandemic, which has forced people to stay in HK and stay home.

IV. Pandemic-led Changes in Eating Habits

1. "New Normal" in Eating

The "new normal" brought by COVID-19 has changed many aspects of our everyday lives, including how we eat. HK is one of those world cities where one will see streets packed with people and restaurants. Eating out is a basic habit for many people, as there are restaurants on almost every street, and they stay open late. But the pandemic has made it risky to eat out. Citizens are advised to stay home as much as possible, reduce social contacts and follow the principle of social distancing. In July, when HK was hit by a third wave of the pandemic, restaurants were thought to be one breeding hub of the disease, as a number of chefs and restaurant workers tested positive for this coronavirus. The government thus imposed a drastic measure, forbidding restaurants from hosting eaters, and customers could only make takeaway orders. The policy sparked such intense criticism that the government was forced to reverse it one day after its implementation (Yu, 2020).

What we would like to point out here is that the pandemic has made many stay home and feel less comfortable eating out. This has had a direct impact on eating habits. A survey (Ipsos, 2020) conducted in March 2020 in HK showed that the demand for raw food ingredients has spiked. Around 60 percent of respondents said that they spent more on frozen food, and 54 percent spent more on fresh food. Another study also projected that COVID-19 would be changing people's eating habits permanently. A survey (Nielsen, 2020) that studies consumers across

eleven markets in Asia (including the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia) finds that the pandemic has definitely changed many Asians' eating habits; the majority of people in HK, China, South Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam will rethink and re-prioritize eating at home. Across Asian markets, average weekly sales of online food groceries and takeaway food services have increased 20 to 25 percent since January 2020. The study predicts that this new lifestyle will bring important changes to the food landscape in Asia. People are now more cognizant of what they are eating and will reassess the sources of their food. We also talked to a number of HK families. All of them have eaten more at home since the pandemic outbreak and cooked more. Only one family, the youngest one, relied mainly on take-away meals.

2. Pandemic-induced Home Eating and Delivery Services

Restaurant businesses have been hard hit by the pandemic; many in the sector have had to seek new ways of continuing their businesses (Farrer, 2020). Yet, while onsite eating at restaurants has dwindled, online food shops and food delivery services have thrived, and new online fresh food platforms have emerged. The sales of such businesses as a whole have also increased. For example, the online sales of VMO's (Vegetable Marketing Organization) food delivery mobile app[6] that promotes and sells local organic vegetables and fish have multiplied. The number of orders has increased from 30 per day in 2019 to around 120 per day this year. The total sales of the first ten months of 2020 were around 5.7 million HK dollars, which was three times that in the same period of

[6] VMO is a statutory body established in 1946 to assist in the rehabilitation of local vegetable farming in postwar HK. Its major duty is to regulate the sales of vegetables. It packages high quality and local organic produce to be sold in supermarkets. Its "Local Fresh" mobile application was officially launched in May 2018; details can be obtained from the VMO webpage (http://www.vmo.org/en/index/page_order/item_products/).

2019.[7] Other online grocery shops that sell local organic food include Local Farming Society, Plant Right Now, Order Local Organic Vegetables, AuLaw Organic Commons, The Pioneer Farm, HKFYG Organic Farm, Innolife, VegGo, and Happy Families. Besides the above, a number of food services sell both organic and conventional produce as well as local and imported foodstuffs. These include Jou Sun, Food 2 homes and Vege Gal.[8]

A staff member from VMO stressed that shopping online has become a new trend for HK households. It was first a response to COVID-19, as people were required to engage in physical distancing, and many wanted to avoid going to crowded "wet markets". Now, more people have got used to this new habit, and it continues to be a local consumption pattern. However, there is also keener competition, as more parties have entered the business since the middle of the year. Another problem for its marketing has been the limited varieties of local produce. A local group[9] which started to link up with local organic farmers in 2017 and assisted them in selling their produce both in a shop and through delivery service also witnessed increased demand for local produce and expressed the belief that some regulation of production patterns

[7] The information was provided by VMO.

[8] The online links of these e-shops are listed below: 1. Local Farming Society (本土連農社) (https://www.facebook.com/localfarmingsociety/). 2. The Plant Right Now (濃作物) (https://www.plantrightnow.com/). 3. Order Local Organic Vegetables (本地有機菜訂購) (https://www.facebook.com/%E6%9C%AC%E5%9C%B0%E6%9C%89%E6%A9%9F%E8%8F%9C%E8%A8%82%E8%B3%BC-137116216819206/). 4. AuLaw Organic Commons (歐羅有機共同體) (https://www.aulaw.org/). 5. The Pioneer Farm (菜園農業先鋒) (https://zh-tw.facebook.com/choiyuenpioneer/). 6. HKFYG Organic Farm (青協有機農莊) (https://www.organicfarm.hk/). 7. Innolife (環圃休閒村) (https://www.innolife.hk/crop_subscription.php). 8. Veg Go (送菜) (https://www.facebook.com/veggohk/). 9. Happy Families (快樂家庭網上商店) (https://happyfamilies.hk/tc/c/23). 10. Jou Sun (早晨) (https://www.jousun.com/ch/). 11. Food 2 homes (快餸屋) (https://food2homes.com/collections/fresh-vegetables). 12. Vege Gal (菜菜芽) (https://www.facebook.com/vegegal.hk/).

[9] Tin Yeah (田嘢) aims at promoting group purchasing and green consumption in HK (https://www.facebook.com/tinyeahtinyeah/posts/721382981394940/).

among farmers might help expand the market of organic produce.

Those who do not take the trouble to cook can get delivery services that provide cooked food or ready-to-cook meal packages. Many eateries began to provide meal deliveries. A number of high-end restaurants offer three-course meals in ready-to-cook packages with videos of cooking instructions by chefs. People who buy take-away meals might encounter a problem. During lunch and dinner hours, many people gather outside the eateries to wait for their meals and have to line up in long queues. It was said meals delivery might take two hours to deliver after the order was placed.

Some business collaborated with local groups to help the old and poor. One food catering business collaborated with a district councilor to provide lunchbox deliveries to the elderly living in Causeway Bay. In that way, the elderly could avoid going out to buy food (Apple Daily, 2020a). From February to June 2020, schools in HK were closed, affecting hundreds of food caterers providing lunchboxes for school children. To survive, some of them started to deliver lunchboxes to companies (HKET, 2020) and households (Next Magazine, 2020). Others created new businesses by offering frozen ready-to-eat meal packages. This met the demand of employees who work either in their office or from home. As a whole, online grocery shopping and meal deliveries have become a popular trend and gained more business in the midst of the pandemic.

3. Stay Home, Dine in: Home Cooking in the Midst of a Pandemic

The pandemic has led to increased consumption of local organic produce. Farmers who we talked to confirmed that their sales have increased since February this year. Some have been assisted by newly formed online delivery shops to sell their produce. In the past, they could not easily sell all their produce, as many people went overseas

during the summer and winter holidays (Christmas, New Year, and Lunar New Year). This year, since the outbreak of the pandemic, not only could farmers sell their produce, they were unable to meet demand. One organic farmer stressed that many of her customers consuming local organic vegetables are health- and environment-conscious middle-class, willing to pay more to protect the local economy and agriculture. "A majority of them are people who love HK and would like to see HK have a better and sustainable future. However, even though they would like to support us, they don't have the time to cook." Another farmer also lamented, "The younger generation usually supports local agriculture; however, they do not cook."

The pandemic is the biggest force in recent years to make people change their lifestyle. "One customer told me that she finally got more time to stay home and start making her own meals at home." The farmer also found that young couples (in their 30s to early 40s) are now more willing to cook. After learning from online or TV cooking classes, they tried out cooking themselves. Some of these classes teach people to do simple meals with fresh and seasonal food ingredients, appealing to health-conscious people who are new to home cooking. One culinary instructor explained to us: "It is most important to demonstrate how to cook meals in 15 to 20 minutes, making sure that such cooking won't make people sweat." The pandemic has become a catalyst changing people's way of eating: stay home, cook food, and dine in. Moreover, with all the travel bans across many countries, HK people who are often "on the move" are now retreating to home. Travel takes time; without travel, people spend time on food. The HK government has been advising people to maintain physical distancing, reducing their social gatherings, including big family gatherings. Thus, there have been fewer incentives to return to parents' homes for weekly dinners[10] or

[10] This practice is a part of HK's family culture, in which adult or married children of

engage in social meals. The pandemic-induced constraints have "squeezed out" time for people to stay home and dine in. Many who would like to avoid going out and going to the wet market now resort to online grocery shopping and home-based food production.

V. Food Boundaries, Political Divides: Local Vegetable Consumption as Resistance

Ever since the half-year-long social protests happened in 2019, consuming local organic produce has acquired a new layer of political meanings for some organic food eaters — supporting social protests and resistance politics. Some have explicitly said that buying local organic produce was not merely consumption for health reasons, it also implied supporting local farmers and was an act of resistance (Chow, 2020).

1. HK 2019 protest movements and the yellow economy

In the second half of 2019, HK experienced an unprecedented series of anti-government protests alarming China and the rest of the world. The series of protests was originally sparked by public opposition to a governmental proposal to amend the extradition law in HK with the intention to allow extradition between HK and China. This opposition soon developed into a full-scale social movement calling for democracy in HK and universal suffrage for electing the Chief Executive. The protests did not succeed in bringing about institutional changes, but revealed deep divides in the society between the pro-protest and anti-protest citizens, represented by two color labels: the yellow faction and blue faction.[11]

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a family who have moved out of their parents' home will visit the parent's dwelling places on the weekend to have dinner together with the parents and their own siblings.

[11] The color labels of the factions in the democratic movement first appeared in the Occupy Central Movement or the Umbrella Revolution in 2014. While the pro-democracy protestors wore yellow ribbons, those opposed to the movement and supported the police to restore "order" used the blue color, i.e. the color of the HK

The social protests started in June 2019, and continued throughout the rest of the year. Economic activities were seriously disrupted, as many shops were forced to close due to the protests, police operations like shooting of tear gas, and suspension of the MTR service. Tourism dropped tremendously. By July, it was clear that some shops supported the protestors and hung posters and messages in their shops to show their stances. Some eateries even provided young student protestors with free meals. These shops' names were immediately captured by pro-movement netizens who promoted business for them and called them yellow shops. They also urged citizens not to go to shops and restaurants that were pro-Beijing or supported the government and the police. Some pro-China Chinese tea restaurants were particularly targeted. The bakeries and restaurants of a leading food and beverage company were boycotted by protestors and supporters of the movement because one of the shareholders of the company openly criticized young protestors.

The concept of the yellow economy soon gained momentum, and many in the yellow faction invested great interest in it, including starting Facebook pages, websites or mobile apps to map out geographical locations of yellow shops and eateries: examples include Hong Kong People and Hong Kong Shops (港人港店), Wolipay (和你pay), Eat with you (和你Eat), Words of Mouth (信), WhatsGap, HK Shop List (香港良心Guide), and NeoGuideHK (新時代消費地圖). Pro-movement netizens also organized some promotional campaigns to encourage shopping in yellow shops, such as the Day of Thanks (全民黃店感謝日) on 10 October 2019 and 2020, Shopping Spree Day (爆買黃店日) on 26 October 2019, and the Golden Week (五一黃金週) from 1 May 2020 to 7 May 2020. These campaigns always resulted in long queues of customers outside the yellow shops (Apple Daily, 2020b;

police uniform (https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/hong-kong-protests-guide-yellow-ribbons-blue-ribbons-and-all-other-colours-9775324.html).

Lung, 2020).[12]

Yellow businesses are then put under the concept of a "yellow economic circle" (YEC), which refers to a rally of businesses that openly support the protests and pro-democracy movement. YEC serves at least two levels of purposes. First, these businesses make it a priority to help young protestors who have financial difficulties or who have been fired by their companies because of their participation in the movement. For example, a local mask factory opened two physical shops in HK's commercial districts to sell face masks and other items decorated with slogans and cartoon figures that reminded people of the protests (Apple Daily, 2020c). The company hired around 50 protestors at a salary slightly higher than the market rate. The shop aimed at promoting local production and creating jobs for the young people in the yellow faction, which will also expand the YEC. Another example is a webshop selling non-"made-in-China" products, including Hong Kong products and imported items. It works with local designers to develop new cross-over products, and hires protestors (Standnews, 2020).

Secondly, supporters of the yellow economy believe that by making use of people's consumption power to support yellow shops and boycott blue shops, they will finally bring a change to HK's political economy, which has been infiltrated by red capital (including from China-based enterprises and tourists from China) and controlled by big enterprises. The YEC is thus considered to reflect "people's political awakening" and to be a way to resist the powerful state-initiated "red economic circle" which has been for years compelling businessmen and other sectors (such as entertainment artists) to take

[12] Information on these shops can be obtained from these links: Hong Kong People and Hong Kong Shops (港人港店) (http://www.weahker.com), Words of Mouth (信) (https://www.wordsofmouth.net/), Hong Kong Leung Sam Guide (香港良心 Guide) (https://hkshoplist.com/), NeoGuideHK (新時代消費地圖) (http://neoguidehk.com).

sides and express their loyalty to the CCP (Lam, 2019; RTHK, 2020; Shen, 2020) and blacklisting public figures who support democracy. In other words, YEC aims to rebuild a local economy connecting local production, local capital and local people who support democratic political reforms, to guard against political and economic encroachment by China.

In June 2020, a few young people established a webshop, Naapzaap (納雜), selling local agricultural produce and products of HK brands. One of the founders said that he was furious every time he heard people say that HK had no choice but to rely on material supplies from China. He and his friends began to feel a HK identity strongly since the Umbrella Movement in 2014. Their intention in opening the webshop was to try to found a local economy supporting locally produced products, and with a focus on foodstuffs. Through this business, they discovered that HK actually still produces a lot of food products. For example, HK has at least five to six different soy sauce brands. They also contacted local farmers to help them sell their produce, hoping that more HK people would eat HK vegetables. Within a few months, the webshop has already obtained enough support to open a physical shop in Taipo to serve the community. The founder explained that its success was due to the political awakening of HK people (InmediaHK, 2020).

2. Characteristics of Localism in HK

The localist movement in HK did not start recently. Ever since the 1990s, pending HK's return to China and throughout the two decades after 1997, HK people have been stressing its distinctiveness and trying to preserve its local characteristics and identity. Many are afraid that this distinctiveness will disappear (Abbas, 1997). Unlike localism movements elsewhere which often carry a sublime mission for environment conservation and against blind globalization, HK's

localism always involves the transborder politics between HK and China. Despite its main concern of transborder politics, HK localism spans a wide spectrum of different attitudes (towards things local) and multiple aspirations for future development. For example, it may include discussions of local identity, collective memories and histories, as well as activism towards heritage preservation. Yet, quite a number of academic discussions consider it mainly a political movement guarding local identity and autonomy (Law, 2013; Yeung, 2016; Wong, 2017; Kaeding, 2017). Others examine the types of localist political organizations and their differences, from soft localism to hardliners (Kwong, 2016). So and Ip (2019), on the other hand, provide a succinct analysis of how the localism movement has evolved along the identity politics and transborder relations with China in post-1997 HK.

We interviewed eight self-identified yellow families and asked about their buying and eating habits. Although they all supported the development of YEC, none of them said there have been drastic changes in their purchasing habits during the past few months. One reason for not ordering local produce from online shops is that online vegetables, usually the organic ones, are a few times more expensive than ordinary vegetables at the wet market. Also, it is not convenient to buy online, as one has to wait for the delivery at home and does not see the real products when placing the order. However, they will buy local vegetables if they see them in the market even when the price is higher, because local vegetables (whether organic or not) have less pesticides and are safer. One informant who was fond of visiting yellow shops to buy other things said: "I always go to the same vegetable store at the wet market close to my home. The owner is also yellow. But she also sells veggies from China. She told me that local vegetables, especially organic vegetables, are not always available. I will buy some when I see them at the market. But I cannot do this everyday, as they are more expensive." All of these families in principle support the YEC

concept and its development. They believe buying local vegetables will help develop the local economy. However, they are not restricting themselves to consuming solely local foods. It is not surprising to hear these narratives of the families. Although they generally support the 2019 protests, and the demand for liberty and democracy in HK, they do not adhere to all the suggestions provided by the pro-movement netizens. They download apps which provide YEC information, but do not completely rely on such information to conduct their daily consumption, as that might result in significant inconvenience.

VI. Unpacking Localism and Colored Consumption

As mentioned above, worldwide, localism has gained support since the 1990s. Originating from advocacy against unchecked globalization and the unsustainable global food economy, food localism urges people to consume local food, reduce food miles and protect the planet by preserving farmland, recovering soil health and supporting small-scale community agriculture. Indeed, localism is often a kind of green economy, stressing green consumption, which is ideologically loaded with a concern for sustainable development. However, the localist movement in HK has been fed by an anti-China or anti-mainland sentiment (Ma, 2015; So and Ip, 2019), and the YEC economic campaign that has emerged since last year is mainly concerned about delinking HK from China, rather than having anything to do with anti-globalization, or having particular reference to environmental concerns. The yellow economy is thus more about being anti-China and anti-CCP, rather than anti-globalization.

YEC is still much in the making and will be shaped and re-shaped by HK's political development and transborder politics. While it seems unrealistic to totally fend off influences (whether political, economic or cultural) from China, the YEC serves as a platform for those in the yellow faction to channel their frustrations about the political reality of

HK today. Yellow consumption is thus an expression of resistance in people's minds to resist pervasive political oppression. For example, one informant stressed: "It is an escape from the general oppression, the injustice and the hopeless situation that we are facing." YEC to him is anything but "pro-China". He consumes vegetables from USA and fruits from Japan. Now HK people do not have a chance to choose their political leader; they should at least have the freedom regarding how to spend their money. A retired middle-class male informant agreed that the YEC provided him with a space to vent his frustrations about HK's social and political development.

A female informant expressed that YEC is not different from other consumer campaigns such as boycotting brands that are selling products made in sweatshops or with cruelty to animals, or supporting fair trade products. These global consumer movements are also backed by political ideologies and social justice. She emphasized that people of the blue faction are free to visit blue shops, while the yellow ones should also enjoy the freedom to do their shopping. Those who criticize them may not understand all these functions of the YEC.

On the other hand, despite that fact that some yellow shops have tried to link up with local farmers and help sell their produce, local farmers are not particularly eager to apply the color labels to their products. They wish to focus on growing food and provide the local populace with clean and safe food. For them, it is more important to keep agriculture alive and to help preserve the environment as long as possible. One farmer said, "What we are concerned about is the development of agriculture, whether we still have access to farmland. These years, we have no lack of customers." Although farmers may have different political views, they don't wish to mix politics with growing food. "If I claim that I am yellow, does that mean I should not sell my veggies to those in the blue faction?" Another farmer said that although he did not mind being labeled "yellow", it would be

problematic if new online businesses began to check the political stance of farmers. One delivery shop promoting organic consumption added that some consumers were more concerned about "yellow" than "green" consumption. One farmer commented, "Perhaps the YEC may help support the young farmers who recently entered the field. But how long this passion can last is questionable."

Local farmers whom we talked to would not wish to see an over-politicization of local food production and consumption, and do not believe that the YEC will help enhance HK's agricultural development. Most importantly, local farmers need to have stable access to farmlands, and some even aspire to cross the border to farm in nearby provinces in China. DuPuis and Goodman (2005) have made observations about the problematic "geographical fetishism" and how "unreflexive localism" may fall prey to populist irrationality and perpetuate confrontational politics. Localism can be a site of new inequality and hegemonic domination. Commercialized strategies for promoting local sales may uphold localist slogans and use them against "others", leading to radicalized exclusion and xenophobia. To DuPuis and Goodman (2005: 362), justified localism should be inclusive rather than exclusive:

> *A reflexive local politics of food would entail taking into account ways in which people's notions of ''right living,'' and especially ''right eating,'' are wrapped up in these possessive investments in race, class and gender.*

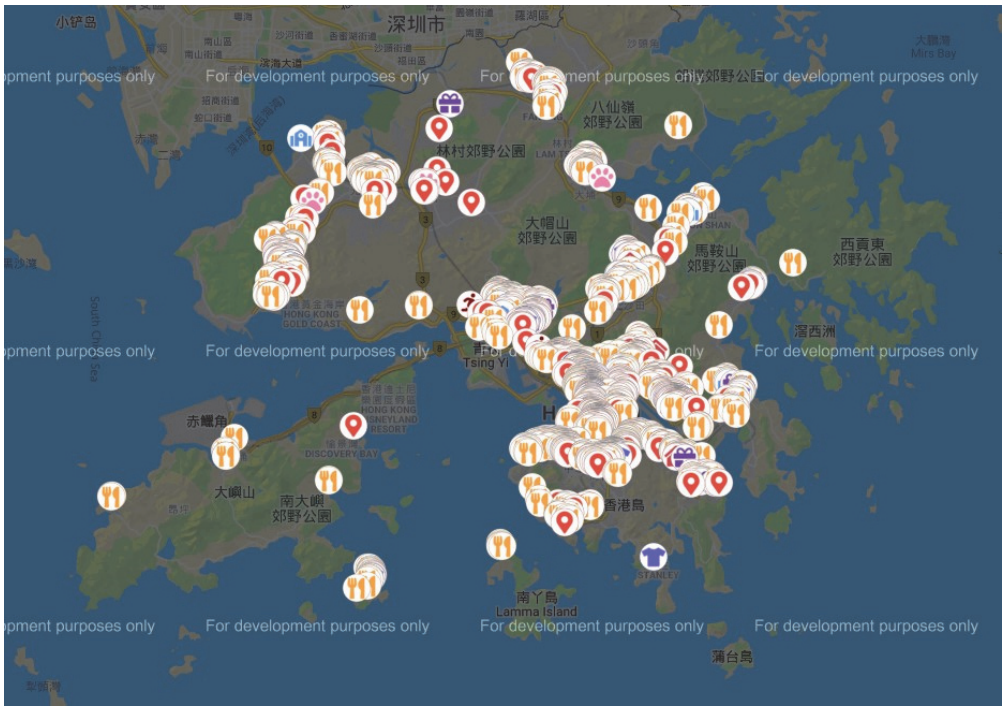
One farmer also provided deep thoughts:

> *I do not see sustainable agriculture and food localism through political borders. We should actually consider the concepts in terms of the distance, rather than fixed national or city borders. To me, it makes more sense to sell my produce to some parts of Shenzhen, rather than to the Central District, which is farther away from my farm.*

VII. Conclusion: Future of food localism in HK

HK's localism and the local food movement have been continuously embedded in and have revolved around its transborder politics. In the past, many turned to local organic foods because of the risks that food from China may entail, and their mistrust of China's food production. More recently, continuous politicization of localism has overshadowed the localist movement and rendered it a more narrowly defined social current. As stressed, localism in HK originally developed from the cultural sentiment that highlights the local identity and supports the maintenance of the local way of life. The YEC is a new development from the 2019 social protests and has formed a new strand of political and economic localism that keeps shaping itself through political happenstances and different attitudes towards China and HK-China relations. How it will garner different political forces and transform will be molded by the dynamics of the local and translocal. How to draw the boundary for the local will inevitably entail a politics of exclusiveness and inclusiveness that fuels debates between moderate or radical localists.

Food localism is related to a resistance against the detriments brought by globalization and unsustainable agriculture. Some part of the YEC has shown concern for the development of a local economy stressing local production, including food production. However, there are still many blurred lines between the local, the regional, and the global. At the same time, local consumption has been increasingly shaped by the colored representations of contested political positions and ideological struggles. Whether it is green, yellow, blue or red, none of these will provide a perfect answer for HK's upcoming economic challenges, especially when considering the malicious influences of the pandemic and global recession.



Catering and Food
Fashion & Accessories
Gift, Florist & Toy
Pet Shop
Medical & Health
Education & Tutorial Center
Sport Shop
Others

Map 1. Yellow Shops and Eateries in Hong Kong

Note: Many pro-movement netizens have been active in providing apps and websites with information on yellow shops and eateries.
Source: Adapted from HK Shop List (香港良心 Guide), https://hkshoplist.com/maps.php.

Figure. The Tai Po Farmers' Market

Note: The Tai Po Farmers' Market was established in 2005. It opens every Sunday for the sale of local organic veggies (http://hongkongfarmersmarket.org/news.php)
Source: Author.

Appendix: Profiles of Interviewed Families

Family	Members	Political inclinations
Family 1	Husband and wife in their 60s	The couple are long-term supporters of the Democratic Party in Hong Kong. At first, they did not agree with the use of violence in the protests, but have become increasingly sympathetic towards the radical protestors due to police brutality.
Family 2	A couple in their 40s	The couple described themselves as "Hong Kong pigs", which means they were not interested in politics at all. However, since the 2019 protests, seeing all sorts of injustice and police violence, they were "awakened" and became pro-protests. The wife participated in some demonstrations and is a keen shopper in yellow stores.
Family 3	A mother over 60 with her daughter in her 40s	They are long-term pro-democracy supporters. Yet they seldom joined street marches or protests. After learning that they can support the movement through consumption, they began to purchase things at yellow shops.
Family 4	Single-parent family with the mother in her 40s and an adolescent son and an adolescent daughter	The mother has turned from a police supporter to a pro-movement protestor after witnessing the Yuen Long citizen attack on 21 July 2019 and other brutal acts of the HK police. The mother does grocery shopping and cooks for the family.
Family 5	A couple in their 30s	A young couple who took part in protest marches occasionally. Both husband and wife go grocery shopping and share cooking duties.
Family 6	Middle-aged couple in their 40s with a small child	This middle-aged couple has been active since the 1997 return of HK's sovereignty in supporting pro-democracy protests.
Family 7	Single-parent family with the mother in her 40s and a small child	The mother is a non-active pro-democracy supporter and rarely takes part in protests or demonstrations. She continues her support through patronizing some yellow shops.
Family 8	A single female in her 40s	The interviewee has started joining pro-democracy protests since 2019 due to police brutality. She always buys vegetables in organic shops out of health and food safety concerns.

Source: Author.

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香港的食物本土主義與跨境政治：新冠疫症與顏色消費

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摘要

本文從香港與中國的跨境政治變化探討二十年來食物本土主義在香港的發展。自上世紀 1980 年代中國改革開放以來，香港便越漸倚賴從中國輸入的廉價食材，本地農業生產迅速下降。1990 年代末，在本地環保及崇尚有機耕種人士，以及政府的推動下，人們對本地農業再度產生興趣。事實上，香港人對本地及中國生產的食物一直持有微妙的道德界線，視前者更清潔、更安全。2020 年疫症爆發，人們對本地新鮮食物的需求不斷增加，出現大量網購平台。這股需求結合了 2019 年社會運動產生的「黃色經濟圈」，為食物本土主義、顏色消費、跨境政治帶來新的衝擊和發展。

關鍵詞：食物本土主義、跨境政治、顏色消費、黃色經濟圈、新冠病毒疫症

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