Framing Processes and Social media: 
A frame analysis of the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement

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This study attempts to investigate the construction and development of oppositional frames in a social movement, though the case study of the ‘Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement’. Inspired by the framing perspective, this study examines the dynamics of the Internet in facilitating the framing processes. In particular, the astheticization of political discourse will be discussed. It is argued that the social media, with its power in transmission of textual, visual and audio messages, has largely strengthened the discursive power of frames by expanding the genre of discourses in the public sphere. Apart from traditional rational-critical discourses, the expansion of emotional-aesthetic discourses has greatly enriched the symbolic resources for political deliberations and critical reflections.

The ‘Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement’ was a long-term struggle carried from Dec 2008 to Feb 2011 in which a wide array of supporters, ranging from the villagers, post-80s generations to cultural artists, opposed against the demolition of the Tsoi Yuen Village in giving way for the HK$69.9 billion Guanzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) in Hong Kong. The movement is practically significant as it triggered one of the most remarkable collective actions in which over ten thousand citizens surrounded the Hong Kong Legislative Council in opposition of the funding towards the XRL project. It is also theoretically valuable as it has successfully generated and elaborated oppositional frames to challenge the well established developmental discourse in Hong Kong.

The Movement can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, highlighting an ‘Injustice frame’, was dated from Dec 2008 to Oct 2009. In which the villagers demanded no demolition or removal. The movement was then escalated to the second phase, transforming into a ‘Democracy frame’, dated from Oct 2009 to Jan 2010. Over ten thousand citizens were aroused in opposition of the funding towards the XRL project. However, the XRL construction fund was still approved on 16th Jan, 2010. This decision has brought the movement into the third phase, constructing a ‘Choice frame’, dated from Jan 2010 to Feb 2011. In this phase of the struggle, the villagers and activists fought for establishment of the first ecological village in Hong Kong – the New Tsoi Yuen Village. A community composed of the villagers, professional architects, environmental specialists, and the post-80s youngsters united to redevelop a new living place with an environmental conservative and ecological lifestyle.

In this paper, I will firstly review literature on framing study and then investigate the frame development and transformation throughout the prolonged Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement. Furthermore, I will also discuss the aestheticization of the framing processes and its impacts, by investigating the expanded genres of discourses brought about by the aestheticized tactics employed by the movement actors.
I) Framing Study and the Cultural Turn in Social Movement Study

The concept of framing, inspired by the works of Herbert Blumer (1969), Turner and Killian (1987), and Erving Goffman (1974), is rooted in the symbolic interactionist and constructionist principle. Scholars in this tradition state that meanings do not naturally or automatically attach themselves to the objects, events, or experiences we encounter but arise through interpretive processes mediated by culture. For Goffman, frames denoted ‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify, and label’ occurrences within their life space and the world at large (p.21). Frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the interpersonal processes through which people understand what they are doing and how they find the ideational, moral, and emotional resources to keep doing it.

In the context of social movements, framing refers to signifying work or meaning construction engaged in by social movement activists and participants and other parties, such as the antagonists, elites, media, countermovements, relevant to the interests of social movements and the challenges they mount. In social movements, meanings are typically contestable and negotiable and thus open to debated and differential interpretations. The verb ‘framing’ employed by social movement scholars denotes an active phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. Movement actors are defined as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers (Snow & Benford, 1988). Different actors attempt to attach meanings with different events, activities, places, and actors. Hence, mobilizing grievances cannot be simply redeemed as natural occurrences nor arising solely from material conditions. These grievances can be viewed as the resultant of meaning negotiating process.

It is a general consensus among social movement scholars that the study of social movements and collective action took a ‘cultural turn’ in the 1980s. The rediscovery and reemphasis of culture is in fact a response to the relative neglect of the relationship between meaning and mobilization, and the role of interpretative processes in mediating that relationship, by the dominant resource mobilization perspective on social movements that emerged in the 1970s. This so called ‘cultural’ or ‘discursive turn’ has comprised two relatively distinct approaches between the European and US scholars. The European approach has been widely refereed as the interpretation of ‘new social movement (NSM) theory’, while the cultural turn in the United States is the ‘framing’ perspective (Williams, 2004). New social movements scholarship emerged as a response to, as well as an interpretation of contemporary European social movements, such as the Greens, that were focused on cultural, moral, and identity issues, rather than on economic distribution. Influenced by Marxist theory, European scholars generally believe that social movements are the labor-socialist movement. By contrast, NSMs were often thought to be more like ‘moral crusades’ (Eder 1985). These ‘post material’ pursuits appeared as a new phenomenon and thus the cultural component of new social movement theory had to further examine the content of movement ideology, the concerns motivating activists, and the cultural arena in which collective action was focused. In the NSM approach, instead of material interests and economic distribution, cultural understandings, norms, and identities were the focus of investigations.

Although many critics questioned whether there was in fact anything ‘new’ in the social movements themselves, or the social conditions that helped to produce them, Williams (2004)
stated that the study of social movements in the US gained much from new social movement theory. Firstly, the NSM theory has provided important supplement to the political reform oriented perspective that was characteristic of structural approaches such as resource mobilization by focusing on ‘culture’ as an arena of action. Secondly, the NSM theory contributes to connect between the forms of collective action and the historical moments and societal formations in which they existed. In the United States counterparts, the cultural turn in social movement study has been geared toward ‘bring meaning back in’ and has focused on the ways in which movements have used symbols, language, discourse, identity, and other dimensions of culture to recruit, retain and mobilize members. The best known of these culturalist approaches is the ‘framing’ perspective.

The link between framing and social movements was first noted in an exploratory study conducted by Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina (1982). They attempted to examine the conditions under which authority is defined as unjust and challenged. The framing perspective was then further developed with a more systematic conceptualization and elaboration of ‘frame alignment processes’ (Snow et al., 1986). Since then there has been a rapid development of research on framing and social movements. McAdam and Snow (2010) explained that the proliferation of framing perspective on social movements was not only the consequence of the rediscovery of culture in social sciences in the 1980s, but also the development of a conceptual architecture which has facilitated more systematic theorization and empirical assessment of framing processes and effects.

II) Collective Action Frame, Framing Processes and Social Movements

The agentic Collective Action Frames and frame development

Viewing ‘framing’ as a meaning construction process suggests that ideas and meanings are actively produced, maintained and contested by movement actors. The framing perspective views movements as signifying agents engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for protagonists, antagonists, and bystanders. Social movement adherents and their leaders ‘frame, or assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists’ (Snow and Benford 1988:198). ‘Collective action frames’ can thus be viewed the resultant products of this framing activity.

Consistent with Goffman (1974) ’s original conceptualization of frames as ‘schemata of interpretation’, collective action frame also performs this interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the ‘world out there’. However, in contrast to everyday interpretive frames, ‘agency’ and ‘contention’ are implied in this process of meaning construction in collective action frames of social movements. It is agentic in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations and movement activists. Movements are also contentious in the sense that there are interpretive frames generated which are not only differ from existing ones but which may also challenge them (Benford and Snow, 2000).Thus collective action frames are action-oriented set of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of social movement organizations (SMOs).
Collective action frames are constituted by two sets of characteristic features: one concerns their action-oriented function, i.e. core framing tasks of SMOs (Snow & Benford, 1988), the second feature refers to the interactive and discursive processes that attend to these core framing tasks and thus are generative of collective action frame (Gamson, 1992).

Building on Wilson’s (1973) decomposition of ideology into three component parts, Snow & Benford (1988) identify three core framing tasks which are ‘diagnostic framing’, ‘prognostic framing’ and ‘motivational framing’. Among these three tasks, diagnostic frames aim at identifying the problems and making attributions regarding who or what is to blame. On the other hand, prognostic frames help to articulate an alternative set of solutions to the problem. Finally, motivational frames provide a rationale to urge people to engage in collective action.

On the other hand, framing processes can be furthered conceptualized into three sets of overlapping processes, namely, discursive, strategic, and contested processes (Benford and Snow, 2000). Firstly, discursive processes refer to the speech acts and written communications of movement members that occur primarily in the context of, or in relating to, movement activities. Two interactive and discursive processes contribute to the generation of collective action frames, namely frame articulation and frame amplifications. Frame articulation involves the connecting and alignment of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion. On the other hand, frame amplification involves accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others.

Secondly, strategic processes refer to framing processes that are deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed. For this strategic process, frames are developed and deployed to achieve specific purposes such as recruiting new members, mobilizing adherents, acquiring resources, and so forth. The strategic processes were initially conceptualized as ‘frame alignment processes’ (Snow et al, 1986). The third one is the contested process. Under the constructionist perspectives, it is generally agreeable that the development of collective action frame is a contested process. Activists are not able to construct and impose any version of reality they would like to their targets, rather there are a variety of negotiations, challenges and struggles generated by the counterframing processes by movement opponents, bystanders, and the media. Counterframing aims to challenge, undermine or neutralize the movement’s diagnostic and prognostic framings.

The sets of interrelating processes suggested by the framing perspective has indicated the multiple roles of the Internet as an informal public sphere, mobilizing agent and an oppositional frames conveyor can be more thoroughly investigated. It is also argued that the framing is actually an essential part of public deliberation and framing is not only an attempt in framing an issue but also framing social groups (Pan and Kosicki,1997). In this study, the role in cultivating informal discursive communities through social media is discussed as it is crucial in accumulating discursive as well as mobilizing powers throughout the movement.

III) Framing as a strategic action in public deliberation

Framing, deliberation and discursive communities
With the proliferation of interactive electronic media, the constitution of public discourse is increasingly democratized. With the explosion and widespread nature of talks and conversations, there emerges an imaginary and discursive space where issues and opinions can be discussed, confronted and formulated. Aligned with Snow’s (2004) argument that framing processes are embedded in the discursive context and political context, Pan and Kosicki (1997) also claim that such talk has a structural underpinning. The public arena that serves as the infrastructure for public deliberation is structurally arranged (Dahlgren, 1991). However, such structuring can be enforced discursively through political actors manipulation of symbols. Political actors can skew the flow of information and opinions in public deliberation toward their advantage by discursive means. Public deliberation, therefore, is in fact an ideological contest and political struggle in which actors in the public arena struggle over the right to define and shape issues, as well as the discourse surrounding these issues.

Gamson (1996) described framing as a discursive process of strategic actors utilizing symbolic resources to participate in collective sense-making about public policy issues. Riding on this conceptualization, Pan and Kosicki (1997) have further argued that framing is an essential part of public deliberation and framing analysis connects the normative propositions of deliberative democracy and the empirical questions of collective decision making. To elaborate their argument, they firstly characterize framing as strategic actions in public deliberation and then expand the conceptualization with two key concepts, namely ‘discursive communities’ and ‘web of subsidies’.

Public deliberation is generally understood as a process of collective and open reasoning, and discussion about of public issues or policy. It is a fundamental idea for political communication research because of two propositions: firstly, public deliberation is the essence of democracy as a normative ideal. Secondly, it is obvious that political communication is increasingly being democratized. There is a proliferation in opportunities for public participation in producing political discourse not only in the media but also in deliberating institutions. Hence, citizens’ participation opens up public deliberation and makes it more inclusive. With the expansion of the media which provides abundant political information and symbolic resources to the citizens, they can therefore talk about public policy issues by making use of the symbolic resources available to them. Such discussion in the public arena constitutes the public opinion that is closely monitored by and influential to media and government officials (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Therefore, Pan and Kosicki argue that participating in public deliberation inevitable involves the discursive practices of framing an issue, which is not the exclusive province of political elites or media.

As Gamson (1992) demonstrated, people construct their understanding of issues by tapping into the symbolic resources that are available to them in their everyday lives, as conveyed through their experiential knowledge, popular wisdom, and media discourse. They combine such symbolic resources differently across varying situation. In other words, individuals strategically filter the information as well as to communicate with others. Moreover, as political talks take place not only in private but also public arenas and these discussions are viewed as ‘the elementary building blocks’ of political participation (Katz, 1995). A frame is an idea through which political debate unfolds, and political alignment and collective take place (Snow and Benford, 1988). Therefore, the construction, generation and elaboration of a frame are in fact strategic issues to different political actors. Hence, Pan and Kosicki (1997) stated that the act in
framing an issue is actually to participate in public deliberation strategically, both for one’s own sense making and for contesting the frames of others.

Riding on the boundary-defining nature of the framing process, Pan and Kosicki (1997) argued that framing can also be seen as a means for community building, although the nature of resulting community is hardly traditional, but is a discursively bound aggregate, capable of collective action in deliberative politics. For example, Terkildsen, Schnell, and Ling (1998) showed that while media incorporated interest groups’ frames in reporting the abortion debate, they also created their own based on their professional ideology of objectivity and balance. Others have also argued that U.S. media, driven by their commitment to journalistic professional values often end up covering policy debated in a strategy frame. It has demonstrated that each category of actors in public deliberation employs the established and shared conventions and norms. As a result, their framing efforts reproduce themselves as a ‘discursive community’. The boundary notion of discursive community yields the possibility of discursive political alignment. That is, actors in different categories may be bounded into a shared policy position through what is called ‘frame alignment’ (Snow et al., 1986). Pan and Kosicki thus argued that framing then involves defining and redefining the actors-speakers themselves. Thus, they believe that framing and social movement identities are closely related and successful framing requires making clear boundaries separating one form others.

As a consequence, framing not only frames an issue but also frames social groups. In other words, frames of an issue also frame framers and consolidating a sense of collective identity. In this case, not only the public discourse is shaped but also the discursive communities involved. Through the process of ‘frame alignment’ (Snow et al., 1986), actors in different categories can be bounded into a shared interpretive position and thus yield the possibility of discursive political alignment.

IV) Cultivation of Discursive Communities

In this section, the importance in cultivating discursive community will be investigated, by investigating the role of In-Media Web in the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement. The texts generated by the civic journalists and activists will be examined so as to understand the discursive process in the movement. Its role in expanding the issues and resisting the government discourse will then be presented. The texts generated by the civic journalists and activists will be examined so as to understand how the deliberative and reflective issues are expanded in this discursive process.

Apart from the expansion of themes and issues, the genres of discourse were also expanded in the discursive process. Apart from rational-critical discourses, the activists have also successfully expanded the genres of counter discourse through inclusion of personal and cultural issues in their online deliberations. In this regard, I will argue, in later parts, that there was an aesthetization of public sphere and this expansion of genre has largely enhanced the mobilizing power in the new social movement which focused on identity building processes.
The formation of online discursive community was crucial in the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement, especially in the formation of counter-frame to oppose the dominant discourse. The online discursive community has effectively pushed some unnoticeable issues into the media and public agenda. Without the contribution or intervention of the discursive community in the Internet, the issue of the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen would not be able to sparkle the vigorous reactions of the public in defending the village or in opposing the construction of the railway.

In 2008, Hong Kong was facing the global financial tsunami and economic downturn, therefore, the announcement of the XRL project was generally welcomed by the public. It is believed that these constructions can help to boost up the economy by providing more job opportunities. Moreover, it is also believed that it is very important to enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong by integrating and connecting with China. Therefore, the XRL as a connection to the national railway network in China, was not questioned or doubted by the mainstream media. The topics reported by the local mainstream media were quite consistent with the governmental discourse which highlighted the strategic importance and economic benefits of the rail link. Therefore, when the residents in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen were informed to vacate so as to give way to the rail link, the grievances and appeals of the villagers were downplayed and ignored by mainstream media and general public.

In this movement, the cultivation of the discursive community was initiated by an alternative media, the Hong Kong In-media Web (www.hkinmedia.net). The In-media Web was the first media who paid attention on this issue when Chu Hoi Dick, a core member of In-Media, spotted the plight of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen after reading articles the Concern Group posted on the internet. By February 2009, he contacted the chairlady of Tsoi Yuen Village Concern Group, Ms Ko Chun Heung, to see how In-Media can intervene in this struggle.

The Hong Kong In-media Web (hkinmedia.net)

Hong Kong In-media Web (hkinmediahk.net) is a local portal website in Chinese, which sought to facilitate public engagement in citizen journalism. The core founding members were mainly social movement activists, independent intellectuals, and journalists engaged in social movements and publishing independent magazines during the 1990s. The Web was established after the mass rally on 1 July 1, 2004, which was one of the most remarkable demonstrations in Hong Kong. The appeal of the ray was to oppose the legislation of Article 23 which strengthened the Hong Kong government’s powers to restrain freedom of speech and association. The founders saw the confrontation as a turning point in Hong Kong’s recent democratic struggles. Hence, they decided to set up various alternative media platforms in response to shrinking autonomy and freedom in mainstream corporate media and to the thriving political voices on the Internet.

The structure of hkinmediahk.net is formally nonhierarchical in terms of authority, though it maintains an editorial team for daily management. The website users can contribute and publish their stories, commentaries, and videos instantly without editors’ approval. The website served not
only as a pool of information exchange but also a mobilizing agent in different forms of social actions ranging from signature campaign to mass protests. Its citizen journalists and media activists are involved in a wide range of local and international issues. They extensively covered the 2005 anti–World Trade Organization (WTO) protest and presented a more complete picture of the anti-WTO organizations than most mainstream media.

After actively engaged in the local historical conservation movement, the campaign against censorship, and community movements, inmediahk.net has already become one of the most popular alternative media, particularly in Hong Kong’s social and cultural movement issues.

V) The Case: Chorological Reconstruction of the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement

The ‘Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement’ was a long-term struggle carried from Dec 2008 to Feb 2011, in opposition to the reclamation of their homeland in giving way to the Hong Kong Section of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL). The XRL project was announced in October, 2007 by the Chief Executive as one of the ten major infrastructure projects\(^1\). The railway scheme was then gazetted under the Railway Ordinance on 28 November and 5 December 2008. The detailed design of the rail was commenced in January 2009 and according to the Administration’s plan, the construction of the rail would start in end 2009 and for completion in 2015-16.

According to the government, the strategic importance and economic benefits of XRL were summarized in three main points. First, XRL will shorten the journey time between Hong Kong and Guangzhou significantly from about 100 minutes to 48 minutes. The XRL is of great strategic importance as it connects Hong Kong with the domestic, regional and national railway network in China. XRL will therefore expedite the formation of a one-hour living circle in the greater Pearl River Delta (PRD) region. Second, the Hong Kong Section of XRL will also become part of the national rail network by connecting the Beijing- Guangzhou Passenger Line and Hanzhou-Fuzhou- Shenzhen Passenger Line. Journey time between Hong Kong and various major Mainland cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing, will be greatly shortened. Third, it was claimed that the XRL will save the public 40 million hours per annum with an Economic Internal Rate of Return of 9% per annum in real terms. Taken into account time saving to cross-boundary rail passengers and other general road users, and cost saving to operators arising from the rail, the economic benefits were estimated to be about $83 billion in 2009 prices.

<See Photo 1 in appendix>

Along the 26-km long underground rail corridor of XRL, there will be eight ventilation buildings and emergency access points. An emergency rescue station (ERS) and stabling sidings (SSS)

\(^1\) The 10 major infrastructure project were divided into 3 categories: 1) Transportation Infrastructure: South Island Line, Sha Tin to Central Link, and Tuen Mun Western Bypass & Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Link; 2) Cross-boundary Infrastructure Projects: Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link; HK-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. HK-Shenzhen Airport Co-operation, and HK-Shenzhen Joint Development of Lok Ma Chau Loop; 3) New Urban Development Areas: 1) West Kowloon Cultural District, Kai Tak Development Plan, and New Development Areas.
would be located at Shek Kong of Yuen Long. Therefore, the site occupying by Tsoi Yuen Tsuen has to be reclaimed. Hence, around 150 households with a population of 500 residents in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen would be affected and it marked the 2-year struggle of the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement.

In reviewing the prolonged duration of struggle, the movement was heightened from a small-scale, localized residents’ movement to a large-scale social movement. Throughout the two years, the movement can be divided into three phases.

**The first phase: Dec 2008 – Oct 2009**

Although the announcement of the XRL project was made in October, 2007, the 150 households with a population of 500 residents in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen were not aware that they would be affected until one year later. They were first informed to vacate before November 2010 on 11 November 2008 as the site occupying by Tsoi Yuen Tsuen has to be reclaimed.

The villagers were shocked and discontent with this sudden notice and they criticized that the public consultation had only lasted for two months after the gazettal on 28 November 2008, and very little information had been provided to the affected residents. In order to oppose their displacement, the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Concern group, composed of villagers refusing to vacate, was formed in December 2008. Out of the 150 households in Tsoi Yuen village living there by that time, around half of the households refused to settle with the government compensation and insisted not leaving. Although there were several demonstrations conducted by the villagers, these struggles were downplayed by mainstream media.

By February 2009, Chu Hoi Dick, a core member of In-Media, spotted the plight of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen after reading articles the Concern Group posted on the internet. He contacted villagers and launched this opposition campaign.

By March, the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Support Group was established by a group of activists who concerned the development in local rural areas. With the intervention of the Support Group as well as inmedia.hk, there were some articles posted on the internet. Some of these articles were also published on the supplement or cultural pages in a few mainstream media. These articles were mainly criticizing the inadequate public consultation, the unfair treatment towards non-indigenous residents in New Territories regarding this costly railway.

Despite the vigorous oppositions from the villages, there was a revised version of the XRL plan after rounds of consultations in two month, but only minor adjustments were made and the location of the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen remained to be reclaimed.

Apart from some struggles, the first “Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Guided Tour” was launched on 31 May, 2009. These guided tours attracted more outsiders to explore more stories and histories of the

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2 The estimated construction cost of the XRL was announced to be 39.5 billion Hong Kong dollars in December 2008, but the cost has increased to 62.9 billion in June 2009 due to inflation.
village. With the intervention of these activists, the struggle of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen received a bit more attention from the mass media and politicians.

The debate and discussions regarding the cost effectiveness of the rail link started to boom since September. By October 2009, rail experts from the Hong Kong Professional Commons – a think tank of a group of engineers affiliated with the Civic Party, linked up with activists to support the villagers. They started a campaign exposing flaws in the XRL project including its choice of West Kowloon for its terminus. They challenged that West Kowloon is not an ideal terminus as it is not the commercial heart of Hong Kong. Hence, they put forward an alternative proposal by suggesting moving the terminus from West Kowloon to Kam Sheung Road in the New Territories. According to the group, this alternative proposal can reduce half of the construction cost as well as the amount of land to be taken and thus Tsoi Yuen Tsuen can be saved from demolition. However, the alternative plan proposed was quickly denied by the MTR experts as well as government officials although they failed to provide any solid evidences to illustrate how infeasible these alternative plans are.

<See Photo 2 in appendix>

**The Second Phase: Oct 2009 – Jan 2010**

According to Yip Po Lam, one of the core members in the Tsoi Yuen Support Group, two political actions were very critical in escalating the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement from a local residents’ movement to a larger scale social movement in Hong Kong.

First, on 18 October 2009, there was an event named ‘Thousand people vigorously support Tsoi Yuen Tsuen” which invited people to gather and take a photo to show their support to Tsoi Yuen villagers. This was considered by the core organizers as one of the remarkable event demonstrating the online mobilization power in the movement.

According to Yip, this event was mainly mobilized through the Internet, email, In Media forum and facebook. In the beginning, they were not very enthusiastic towards the number of participants as it was the first time for them calling for a larger scale action. To their surprise, there were finally about 800 supporters and 100 villagers joining this event.

“By that time, there was very few exposure of the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen story in mainstream media. Thus, we did consider that the mobilizing power was solely from the Internet. We sent email to the previous participants of the guided tour in Tsoi Yuen Tusen. Also, we invited people to come mainly through In Media Web and facebook. I was quite pessimistic towards the number of participants of this event, I predicted there would be around 200-300... to our surprises, it turned out there was around 800 ‘outsiders’ joined this event.”

(Yip Po Lam, Personal Interview, Aug 2011)

<See Photo 3 in appendix>
The second one was the first protest held in urban area in November 2009. After the “Thousand people vigorously support Tsoi Yuen Tsuen” event, the organizers became more confident towards their mobilizing power, they decided to hold the first demonstration in the urban area. Moreover, they realized that there were a few media coverage regarding the Tai Kok Tsui residents whose were living in buildings affected by the construction of the rail. They believed that there is a chance to unite the affected residents along the proposed route of the express railway.

On 29 November 2009, a protest was initiated by ‘Stop Express Rail Funding Coalition”, which was composed of Tsoi Yuen villagers and members of 23 social, political and cultural groups such as university students, green groups, Christian groups and residents’ groups. The protest turned out attracted around 2000-3000 protesters. Among the participants, some claimed that they sympathized with the villagers of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen, while some were concerned about the huge cost of the railway project and some were discontent with the consultation process. Quite a number of participants in the march were the residents in Tai Kok Tsui, as there would be a tunnel build under their buildings and they were worried that the railway would threaten the structural safety of their buildings.

After the peaceful demonstration, about 100 people stormed into the Central government offices. They staged a sit-in with the demand of ‘No to express railway, no to funding approval” and demanded a meeting with Chief Secretary Henry Tang Yin-yen and Secretary for Transport Eva Cheng. At midnight, there were still 30 protesters remaining at the entrance to the main wing of the government offices. Police and security guard removed them by 1am. Due to the relatively large number of protesters in the march as well as the conflicts in front of the government offices, this protest has captured much more attention from the mass media as well as the public to look into the XRL project as well as the struggles of Tsoi Yuen villagers.

On 1 December 2009, members of the Legislative Council’s public works subcommittee approved the HK$66.9 billion funding for the rail way by 12 votes to 8, with one abstention.

There were many online promotions to mobilize citizens to surround the Legco building on 18 December 2009 – the date for the Legislative council to vote for the budget of the railway project.

Moreover, over 1000 demonstrators were mobilized to sit and wait outside the Legco building, putting pressure on the councilors to vote against the funding of the controversial project. With the ‘procrastination strategy’ - a delaying tactic by asking a questions top keep on debating so as to postpone the vote , used by councilors from the pro-democracy camp, they succeeded to postpone the vote to 8 January 2010. Debate was then continued on 8th, 15th and 16th in January 2010. With these series of marathon debates and meetings, more and more citizens gathered to surround the Legislative council. In supporting the demonstration, a group of participants performed a "prostrating walk" by kneeling down and touching the ground with their heads every 26 steps (to symbolise the length of the rail link).

On 16th January 2010, funding of this project was finally approved by the Council at 31 votes to 21. All 31 votes were from the pro-government political parties and functional constituencies while the 21 oppositional votes were from the pan-democratic camp. Disappointed and furious demonstrators blocked the car of Ms Eva Cheng, the Secretary for Transport and Housing Bureau and the chief official in charge of the project. The angry crowds requested a conversation
with Ms. Eva Cheng by blocking her cars for two hours. At last, she had to return to the Legislative building. Apart from Eva Cheng, more than ten legislative councilors who had voted ‘yes’ to the project were also stuck in the legislative building for over six hours.

**The Third Phase: Jan, 2010 – Feb 2011**

After the approval of funding on 16 January, villagers had to choose from insisting the “No Move, No Demolition!” appeal or compromising. They had to decide whether they accepted the compensation from the government before 28 February 2010. According to Chu Hoi-dick, there were a series of meetings among the residents as well as the core activists. They understood that if they were to insist on the original appeal and refused to move, it would imply not only that they were giving up the compensation but also would be facing more and more vigorous clearance actions from the government. In order not to give up the chance for the Tsoi Yuen community to be reestablished, they had to compromise and dramatically shift their strategy. Instead of maintaining the community at Tsoi Yuen Tusen, they were willing to re-establish the agricultural community by building up the New Tsoi Yuen Tusen.

On 23 Feb, 2010, the Tsoi Yuen Concern Group held a press conference in which the chairlady, Ko Chun-heung said the remaining families would compromise and sign up for compensation packages if the government could aid them in reestablish a village under the Agricultural Land rehabilitation Scheme which had been implemented since 1988 in encouraging utilization of fallow agricultural land for productive farming. Ko said the government should provide roads, sewage, water and a power system for the new village.

In this phase, the major task for the movement activists was to sustain public’s support and to ensure the establishment of the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen. This was a very challenging task in moving the 47 households\(^3\) to a new village in which involves many processes, namely, land hunting and purchasing; application for farming licenses; as well as village planning and house building and etc. As all these procedures took much more time than expected, the activists and villagers had to strike very hard to defer the demolishment of the village and hence their appeal at this phase was shifted to “Build First, Demolish later!”

On the other hand, in order to promote the alternative lifestyle embraced by the movement, the ‘Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Livelihood Place’ was established in March 2010. A number of the post-80 generations were attracted to join in the farming activities with the villagers. Apart from organic farming classes provided, the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen guided Tour continued to introduce to the public about the history and struggle of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen.

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\(^3\) Initially, there were 89 out of 150 families that agreed to join the reconstruction, but finally only 47 households moved to the temporary housing in the new site in Apr, 2011, while other families moved to public houses or other villages beforehand.
In order to establish the ecological village in reviving the agriculture community and suggesting a sustainable mode of developmentalism, the movement activists attempted to construct a ‘Choice frame’ by stating the possibility in expanding the choice of life and mode of city development. To achieve this, there were two major obstacles to be tackled: first, they need to strike for farming licenses for all the families so as to build a ‘farming village’; secondly, they have to purchase and find a suitable farmland to build the village in which there were many political and economical negotiations with the government and Heung Yee Kuk (the Rural Council), a statutory advisory body representing establishment interests in the New Territories, especially the indigenous residents.

Hence, from March to June 2010, villagers were working hard to get their farming license approvals and hunt for a suitable farm land to build their new village. 59 farming licenses, out of 86 applications, were approved finally in Aug 2010. Upon approving the farming licenses, the next task that villagers had to work on is to seek and purchase a suitable land for the establishment of the ‘New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen’.

To actualize this project, a group of scholars and architects volunteered to help in constructing a green and healthy village. Each household would delegate a representative to work in the common farming style, who would assume a role in purchasing, farming, packaging and selling produce while a company controlled by the villagers has been set up to handle the proceeds, splitting any surplus among the shareholders.

At the same time, the government granted not much room for extension of the clearance and the villagers were requested to sign a letter in promising to move out before 15 October 2010 or the government will not release their cash compensation. Hence, the villagers and activists appealed for “Build First, Demolish later!”

In order to defend the village from demolition before the establishment of the new village, a Tsoi Yuen patrol team with a 100-strong ‘defense force’ was established by 31 Oct 2010 which was composed by the post-80s generations.

On the other hand, in hunting of the site for the new village, Mr. Lau Wong-fat, the chairman of Heung Yee Kuk, a power broker in the New Territories and executive councilor, acted as the middleman to help the villagers in purchasing a 145,000 square fit site with HK$18 million in Oct. However, there was an argument in the right to use a private road connecting the new village to the main road was not yet cleared.

15 October 2010 was the deadline for villagers to vacate but as the government has promised to adopt a human approach to evictions, lands officers put up notices outside the village to warn them to leave the latest by 1 November 2010. On 4 November, hundreds of police, highways and lands officers arrived to start taking back vacant properties told the remaining residents they must be out in two weeks. Yet the villagers had been hoping they would be able to stay until new homes were built but that could take six months even if they can resolve a dispute that is holding up with the deal.

On 13 November, a march were took place from Causeway Bay to Government Headquarter, 800 protestors joined. Their slogan was “Stop Clearance! Build first, Demolish later!” On 18 November, 300 people were mobilized to monitor and witness the government’s land clearance
operation in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen. From 19 Nov to 22 Nov, villagers and supporters stayed outside Murray Building. These protests had successfully forced the government in abortion of the clearance operation so that they could buy time and gain support in order to negotiation with Heung Yee Kuk in sorting out the private road deal in the new villager. The villagers said that the road owner in August initially asked for HK$200,000 for the use of the road but it was later raised to HK$500,000 and in December, the amount was even raised to HK$5 million.

From November 2010 to January 2011, there were quite a lot of conflicts and physical clashes between the MTR officials and the members of the ‘patrol team’, the conflicts drew the attention from the mass media and the public. During the Lunar New year from 5-6 February 2011, there was a larger scale mobilization of a cultural event in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen called ‘Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Woodstock: An Arts Festival among the Ruins’.

All these collective actions did generate pressure towards the government and Heung Yee Kuk as the private road issue was dramatically resolved after these series of mobilizations. On 10 February 2011, Lau, chairman of Heung Yee Kuk claimed that all 18 landowners who owned parts of the private road had agreed to keep it permanently open after a mystery benefactor bought the access rights for the Tsoi Yuen villagers.

With the major deadlock resolved, villagers approached the government with a proposal for moving to temporary housing by mid-February 2011.

VI) Contribution of the Discursive Communities:

Expansion of discursive issues in public sphere

While the mainstream media downplayed their struggles in the early stages, the In-media Web was the first media paying attention to the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen issue. The first project that marked the intervention of In-Media in the movement was a “Media Activist Workshop organized jointly by Hong Kong In-media and inmediahk.net. In order to expand the issues to be investigated in this residents’ movement, the participants were asked to work on a report series focusing on different dimensions of the Express Rail Link.

Chu, the in-charge person of the workshop, designed to invite participants in that workshop to investigate the XRL project and its impact on Tsoi Yuen Tsuen. In the workshop, the participants were divided into groups and they were asked to investigate and write stories about XRL and its impact on Tsoi Yuen Tsuen. Later, apart from these citizen reports, Chu, as the website editor, also provided steady updates of the latest developments throughout the campaign.

Phase I: the construction of the ‘Injustice’ frame:

In this initial stage of the movement, the residents and activists uphold the demand of ‘No Move! No Demolition!’ By this stage, the residents and the activists attempted a strike for a re-consultation and relocation of the emergency rescue station and stabling sidings of the railway.
They tried their best in defending their homeland and made a clear stance that the compensation from the government could not replace their homeland.

In order to express their demand on preserving the village, the residents, with the assistance of the movement activist, used various means to fight for an amendment of the railway route. Hence, in this phase, the movement frame mainly highlighted firstly, the injustice consultation process for the villagers; and secondly, the unfair treatment between indigenous and non-indigenous residents in New Territories.

**i) Injustice towards Residents in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen: inadequate consultation**

In the very beginning of the movement, the articles posted on inmediahk.net were mainly focus on the unfairness towards the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen residents. In the initial stages, articles were pinpointed inadequate consultation of the rail way project and one of the major themes was the injustice demonstrated during the consultation process, especially towards the one if the railway’s key stakeholder – Tsoi Yuen Tsuen residents.

The first article, titled as *'The neglected eviction'*, regarding the struggle in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen appeared on inmediahk.net on 8 February 2009. It was written by one of the core organizer of the movement and an editor of In-Media, Chu Hoi-dick. In this article, two main themes can be identified which were: 1) residents of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen were the sacrifice of major infrastructural projects; 2) the non-indigenous residents were suppressed and discriminated.

For the first theme, Chu firstly framed the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen as the ‘victims of major infrastructural projects’ in Hong Kong:

“Recently, there are a few articles publishing on mainstream discussing ‘projects launch’ every day, such as launch of new land for auction, launch of Bruce Lee’s Museum, Science Park phase III, the most remarkable project launch would be the ‘ten major infrastructure projects’….. It is quite horrible that the mainstream media are generating an atmosphere that it is very important to kick start these projects as soon as possible. However, the kicking off of these projects are actually ‘killing’ some people, how come our society become so inhumane?

One of these victims affected by the launching of these projects are the 500 residents living in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen. .....They were treated far more unfairly than those residents affected by urban renewal scheme. Firstly, they got no notification at all before 11 November 2008 when the government has already announce the construction project will be launch by the end of 2009. After that, they were given only two months to voice out their oppositions towards this arrangement. Secondly, the government released information on the area to be reclaimed but no further information was released. Third, official of the Land Department has already intruded into the village to start measurement procedures even the consultation period was not over. Fourth, the elderly in the village were so worried and depressed for this eviction but the government provides no support for them.

(by Chu Hoi-dick, 8 February 2009 on inmediahk.net)
In fact, in a personal interview, Chu reviewed that his rationales behind his decision in getting involved in this movement echoed with the two themes in this article:

“I find that the plight of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen have illustrated two major social issues which are noteworthy and meaningful to be questioned by movement activists. Firstly, it demonstrated the unfairness of the top-down implementation of ‘infrastructural project’. In Hong Kong, people seldom challenge infrastructure construction projects. It is generally believe that development is good and the infrastructure projects will bring economic benefits to the society. Second, this struggle is interesting to me as it involves the conflict of interests among the residents in New Territories. The imbalanced power relation between indigenous and non-indigenous residents is a historical issue which was avoided to be discussed and handled by our society.”

(Chu Hoi-dick, Personal Communication, Feb 2010)

From his article, Chu also attempted to highlight the injustice towards the residents by attacking the consultation process. He stated that it was the ‘minimal level of consultation’. It is because according to the Railway Ordinance, opponents rejecting a rail link construction project may write directly to the Secretary for Transport and Housing to express their views and opinions within two months. However, unless there was very strong opposition, the Chief Executive can still authorize the schemes with or without any changes.

In fact, this top-down consultation process was one of the items to be accused by the resident in the first phase when the ‘injustice’ frame was constructed. This accusation was later further established with a more comprehensive investigative report conducted by Chu.

In an investigative report posted on inmediahk.net 10 Mar 2009, Chu Hoi-dick compared comprehensively the public consultation process of the XRL project with two other previous proposed infrastructure projects including the projects of Central- Kowloon Route as well as Redevelopment project of Kwun Tong town centre.

In Chu’s account, the Central- Kowloon Route was quite a well consulted project. It was a road widening project aiming to relieve traffic congestion on the existing east-west roads across Central Kowloon. Although there was no reclamation of land, the land department did involve and interacted with the residents in Yau Ma Tei who would be affected by the construction works. The budget for the project was HK$10 billion and there unofficial consultation lasted for 2 years in which the Yau Ma Tei residents and district councilors were involved since the beginning of the public consultation.

The second case was the redevelopment project of the Kwun Tong Town Center, a HK$30 billion project in transforming Kwun Tong into a commercial and retail hub for eastern Kowloon. For the consultation process, the Urban Renewal Authority first launched a series of workshops to explain the project details to the residents in Jan 2006. Three proposals were suggested for public consultation from Aug to Oct 2006. The selected plan was then open for public discussion.

For the XRL project which cost the government HK$66.7, the consultation was carried only in two phases. The first phase was conducted from 30 May to 10 Jul 2008, and the second phase was from 11 Sep to 4 Nov 2008. The targets of consultation were mainly Rural Committees of Kam Tin, Pak Heung and Sun Tin. There were 18 meetings with these committees which are
composed of mostly indigenous inhabitants. For the first phase of consultation, it was actually a series of road shows at six MTR stations and each road show lasted for only 5-6 days. However, none of these road shows was held at stations along the West rail line where Tsoi Yuen Tsuen located at. Moreover, throughout the whole consultation process, there was no clear indication of the exact location of land reclamation nor any explanation to and meetings with the residents of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen. The residents were not notified until 28 Nov 2008, after the railway scheme was gazetted under the Railway Ordinance. The Tsoi Yuen Tsunen villagers were only given two months to voice their oppositions.

By comparing the consultation processes launched before the three projects, Chu stated that the XRL project was the worst. Not only the stakeholders or affected parties were not thoroughly consulted, there was minimal room for the public to participate in this costly construction.

Comparison of the three projects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Central- Kowloon Route</th>
<th>Kwun Tong town centre</th>
<th>XRL project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department in-charge</td>
<td>Highways Department</td>
<td>Urban Renewal Authority</td>
<td>MTR and Highways Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Budget (HK$)</td>
<td>10 billions</td>
<td>30 billions</td>
<td>66.7 billions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Official period of public consultation</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation with key stakeholders (Consultation period)</td>
<td>Residents in Yau Ma Tei (2 years)</td>
<td>Residents in Kwun Tong (15 months)</td>
<td>Residents in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen (2 months)</td>
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(Chu Hoi-dick, 10 Mar 2009 on inmediahk.net)

ii) Injustice towards non-indigenous villagers

In the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement, another major criticism from the activists in reinforcing the ‘injustice frame’ was the unfair treatments towards the non-indigenous Tsoi Yuen Tsuen inhabitants. There were quite a number of articles contributed in pinpointing the unfair treatments and policies favoring the indigenous residents. Moreover, the activists have also reconstructed the subjectivity of these indigenous residents by highlighting their contributions towards the agricultural industry in Hong Kong.

Indigenous inhabitants refer to the residents in the New Territories of Hong Kong, whose ancestors were inhabitants there before the commencement of British rule in 1898. By granting the indigenous inhabitants with special rights and promised to preserve their customs by the colonial government, the British colonial government leased the New Territories from the Qing Dynasty. However, when the sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China in 1997, these special rights were preserved under
the Hong Kong Basic Law. The issue of the creation of this privilege class and the social cleavage between indigenous and non-indigenous residents, hence, becomes a complicated task which is not solved until now. This social cleavage was in fact a historical issue generated by the British colonial government.

One of the privilege enjoyed by the indigenous inhabitants is “Ding Rights”, referring to the right for every male descendant is eligible for a free land lot and a right in building a three-storey’s ‘permanent building’ with 700 square feet per floor. On the contrary, non-indigenous inhabitants, like the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen residents, were only allowed to build two-storey’s ‘temporary building’, or ‘squatters’ with 400 square feet per floor. Moreover, if the government has to reclaim the land from an indigenous village, the government is obligated to assist in the resettlement and build new houses for the affected residents. Therefore, the cost of compensation is usually higher and the oppositions are also more vigorous whenever the government has to reclaim land from indigenous inhabitants for development.

Another investigative report, conducted by Chu Hoi-dick, aiming to expose the injustice imposed on non-indigenous villagers, was posted on In-media web on 11 April, 2009. The article was titled as ‘non-indigenous residents are not worthless sacrifice’. In this article, Chu accused that the land reclamation was particularly unfair to non-indigenous residents for two reasons: first, it was not reasonable to reclaim agricultural land than wasteland. Secondly, he discovered that all the 50 affected households who need to vacate from Tsoi Yuen Tsuen were non-indigenous residents.

Firstly, illustrating with aerial photos shot with the GIS (geographic information system), Chu questioned the criteria in the land clearance for the XRL project. It was found that there was actually a lot of wasteland which were used as scrap car yards or open storage along Kam Sheung Road. There would far less pollution and less residents affected if these areas were chosen. However, these wastelands were not picked but a lot of agriculture lands were chosen to be reclaimed.

“.... by Oct 1982, chairman Lau Wong-fat successfully gained approval through legal procedures that owners of farmlands in New Territories did not need to pay for charges if they converted the land usages from farmlands to open storage areas. Henceafter,a lot of farmlands owned by indigenous residents soon turned into open storage so that the owners could earn around $10 per square foot for leasing their land. Meanwhile, most of the residents living in non-indigenous village kept farming to sustain for living as most of them were not land owners. Although these indigenous villages have been established for over 50 years and these residents contributed so much in supporting local agriculture, it is still very obvious that the choice of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen as the emergency rescue station (ERS) and stabling sidings (SSS)sites for the XRL was a discrimination on non-indigenous residents.”

(by Chu Hoi-dick, 11 April 2009 on inmediahk.net)

Secondly, Chu further indicated that the injustice treatments towards non-indigenous residents was actually a ‘usual practice’ in all kinds of rural planning of the government. It is because there would be much less resistances received if the lands of non-indigenous villages are reclaimed as these lands were not protected by law and the procedures in relocating the residents were also more simple and ‘convenient’. The lands owned by indigenous residents were well
protected by land policy as indigenous residents enjoyed ‘ding’ right. Therefore, if the land is to be reclaimed by the government for any construction projects, the government has to locate another site for relocating the village for indigenous residents. Moreover, the negotiations with the residents in indigenous village will be very difficult. Firstly, most of the indigenous residents prefer to sell their lands to property developers in which they could gain huge economic rewards. Secondly, the bargaining powers of these indigenous residents are higher as they could seek help from Heung Yee Kuk which acquire political power in the Hong Kong political system.

On the contrary, non-indigenous inhabitants do not have any bargaining power in defending their homes as their houses were regarded as ‘temporary building’ or ‘squatter’, the government hence can conveniently compensate the non-indigenous inhabitants by arranging them to move into public housing apartments.

‘All the government land planner involving in town planning in the New Territories understand that ‘indigenous villages’ are ‘no go area’, in which some areas must not be picked while some may be picked if there are no better choices; not only the area of ‘indigenous villages’, even the nearby areas should be avoided as it would affect the expansion of the village. Under these invisible rules and policies, residents in non-indigenous villages are the most unprotected group, their land are just a bit more valuable than wasteland owned by the government. Some of their homelands established over for decades are even perceived less valuable than the graveyard of indigenous villagers. As the government has to provide extra compensation if graveyard of indigenous villagers were reclaimed, but non-indigenous villagers would not get these kinds of extra compensation even their homelands were removed.’

(by Chu Hoi-dick, 11 April 2009 on inmediahk.net)

**Phase II: the construction of the ‘Democracy’ frame:**

The second phase of the movement was considered as the ‘climax’ of the whole movement as it was evolved to an “Anti-Express Rail Movement” in Oct 2009 to Jan 2010. In this phase, a ‘democracy frame’ was used as this local resident issue was already amplified into a public issue in Hong Kong. The construction of the railway is not only doing injustice to the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen residents but the whole project was in fact a product produced by the undemocratic political structure. In this phase, the ‘Stop Express Rail Funding Coalition’ was formed which aimed to request for the abolishment of the functional constituencies in the Legislative Council.

**i) The Democracy Frame: Fighting for Democracy and abolishment of Functional Constituency**

**a) Functional constituency in Hong Kong**

In the political system of Hong Kong, a ‘functional constituency’ is a professional or special interest group involved in the electoral process for the Legislative Council. Eligible voters in a functional constituency may include professionals as well as other designated legal entities such as organizations and corporations (Loh, 2006).
The concept of functional constituencies in Hong Kong was first introduced in the 1985 election to Legislative Council with the agreement of Beijing. The first functional constituency was not created until 1991 with 14 seats consisted of Heung Yee Kuk, Urban Council, Regional, and 11 industries. After transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, the functional constituencies were increased in 30 seats consist of 28 functional constituencies. Currently, only 30 of the 60 Legislative Council seats are directly elected by the people, through geographical constituencies (which are elected by all eligible voters according to geographically demarcated constituencies), with the other 30 elected by 28 functional constituencies.

The functional constituency system is criticized as it violates the principle of universal suffrage by granting a minority too much power and influence. Moreover, the right of corporations and legal entities to vote is also controversial, as it gives some individuals multiple votes. Loh (2004) argues that the Functional Constituency system is a colonial “executive-led” model which has led to the formation of a government and business alliance which favors the interests of business and professional elites. However, with a vision of universal suffrage, Hong Kong people are more politicized than ever before. She doubted that whether the current functional constituency system which favored the interests of the large business conglomerates still worked in maintaining effective governance.

Regarding the XRL project, the funding of the project was firstly approved by the Legislative Council’s public works subcommittee on 1 December, 2009. It was then put for debate by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in December. It was understood by the movement activists that the chance for rejecting the budget was slim, if not impossible. Even the opposition was backed by most of the elected legislators, the funding would be pushed through by the functional constituencies which dominate the Legislative Council. Hence, in this phase, the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement was aligned with the Anti-Express Rail Link Campaign, in which the movement frame was attenuated as a ‘democracy frame’ demanding for parliamentary democracy and abolition of the functional constituency system.

**ii) Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement: Striking for democratic urban development**

In this phase, the movement frame was not just focusing solely to the injustice faced by the residents in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen, but was articulated to a broadened scope towards the society at large, highlighting the social exclusion and inequality brought by the luxurious construction of the Express Railway. With the boarding of scope, the movement frame was evolved to a ‘democracy frame’. With the frame, the construction of the Express Rail Link was framed as a injustice infrastructure favoring the benefits of the upper class, and this luxurious project was in fact a product generated by the undemocratic political system in Hong Kong. As the funding of the project was to be approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council on 18 December, 2009, the movement organizers attempted to gain more publics’ attention by challenging the undemocratic political system, in particular of the Functional Constituency system.

In a movement pamphlet published by the “Stop Express Rail Funding Coalition” in Jan 2009, it was clearly shown that the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement was aligned with the Democratic Movement in Hong Kong:
“Once there is no universal suffrage for the Hong Kong Government, Hong Kong people can never gain equality in political power. The minority privileged classes will continue to use various way in cheating and oppressing the people, so as to take away all the benefits from them... (The Express Rail Link) has exposed clearly the harms done by this devastated political system....

The undemocratic nature of the HKSAR government has empowered the authority in oppressing the ordinary people --- even though over half of the direct elected legislators voted in opposition to the funding of rail link, the funding will still gain approval by the legislators from the functional constituencies. It is because the representatives from the functional constituencies would surely protect the privileged classes who would gain most benefits from the XRL project....

... The Anti Express Rail Movement was initiated by a group of elderly Tsoi Yuen residents. The ‘Home defensive’ movement kept escalating and, in this critical moment, is now tightly connected with the Democratic Movement in Hong Kong.” (Stop Express Rail Funding Coalition, 2009)

In the development and formation of the democracy frame, the activists attempted to emphasize the unequal and harmful consequences brought about by the construction of the XRL, which was initiated and approved with an undemocratic political system. In this process, two main themes were highlighted: 1) uneven geographic development, and 2) unfair consumption of public treasury.

a) Uneven geographic development

In order to articulate the movement frame of ‘democracy’ appealing to a broader scope towards the society, the frame was evolved in highlighting the social exclusion and inequality brought by the luxurious construction of the Express Railway.

Instead of generating more wealth and income to the general public, the movement organizers highlighted that the major consequence of the Express Railway was to strengthening polarization in urban development. The design of the rail ink was in fact redistribute even more wealth to the upper class and hence further reinforcing their economic power. In this process, local communities, historical and cultural heritages were uprooted, giving way to the development of the cosmopolitan city.

From Oct 2009 onwards, the social exclusion and socio-economic inequality provoked by the design of XRL project was one of the major fronts to be challenged. In order to fight against the injustice geographic development, the state-led policy in the undemocratic land reclamation and urban development became the major enemy to be attacked. In order to articulate these issues so as to construct the ‘democracy’ frame. The construction of XRL, especially the arrangement of the West Kowloon terminus, was articulated as a project of uneven geographical development in favor of the developers and the upper class.

In an article titled “The Express Rail link: the uneven dot, line and plane” posted on InMedia Web on 30/10/2009 by Sword, which was actually written by professor Tang Wing-Shing, the uneven geographical development induced by the Rail link was illustrated in this way:
“... the HKSAR Executive Council and Eva Cheng (Secretary for Transport and Housing) have clearly stated that: the terminus of the Express Railway must be located at West Kowloon. To accomplish the West Kowloon region project is the main reason for the government and the MTR Corporation in constructing this rail link. Hence, the alternative ‘Kam Sheung Road’ proposal suggested by the Professional Commons could be rejected by the government promptly in just an hour .... In fact, the spatiality of the Express Rail link can be viewed as a distribution of dots and lines. Dots refer to the train stations and the ‘benefits’ and ‘gains’ brought along; lines refer to all those supporting facilities such as tunnels, ventilations, emergency rescue stations – the ‘damages’ and ‘losses’ brought by the construction. The dots and lines have to come in a package.

As government insisted that the terminus must be located in West Kowloon, the dots and lines has to be arranged in a way that the benefits are transmitting to West Kowloon. This kind of ‘uneven geographic development is very obvious in the case of the XRL project. The rail way will be widely affecting many areas in Hong Kong, including Mai Po, Ngau Tam Mei, Tsoi Yuen Tsuen, Tai Mo Shan, Tsuen Wan, Sam Tung Uk Tsuen, Greenkoll Court, Wonderland Villas, Mei Fu, Nam Cheong and Tai Kwok Tsui, and more that 5000 households are affected. With noise and other kinds of pollution, these areas may be largely depreciated in its rental value, or even losing chances for future re-development because of the underground tunnel. On the contrary, there is only a single station gaining benefits from the XRL – the West Kowloon area. Not to mention the 6.9 billions spent on this ‘paradise’, the West Kowloon is absorbing much resources from many of the rural and urban areas. The insistence in building the terminus at West Kowloon region is implying a very large scale of redistribution of resources, and intensification of uneven geographical development. (by Tang Wing-Shing, Inmedia, 30/10/2009)

Similar arguments regarding social exclusion and inequality regarding the uneven geographical development can easily be found on the articles posted on Inmedia Web. In a 12-page information broadsheet “Do you know about the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail? ” produced by the Tsoi Yuen Concern group in 2009, the social exclusion of lower classes can be shown in the Q and A session in the pamphlet. In which, one of the questions raised in challenging the railway was “Is the Express railway built for me?” The answer was:

“It depends on what social class you are belonging to. The terminus of the railway is located at West Kowloon region, and the target customers are upper class tourists or business trip travelers. The current fare for travelling from Guangzhou to Kowloon is around HK$230. While the estimated fare for the future Express Rail will be around HK$400. The ‘one hour life circle’ embraced by the government which highlights the convenience in integrating city lives between Guangzhou and Hong Kong, is actually not affordable for average citizens.

In the same pamphlet, another article titled as “The issue of Justice of the XRL – mobility vs spatiality”, written by Ip Yam-chong, also highlighted the social exclusion and inequality issues:

“... ‘Spaces of flow’ connects places and turn them into important nodes, but how about the places not being connected? These omitted places are excluded.
Express Railway maybe the most typical example. In order to maximize its speed, a dedicated corridor with limited stops is adopted, consequently, the new rail cannot connect to the original railway network. Like the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail, there is only one stop in West Kowloon in the Hong Kong Section, and the next two stations will be at Fu Tian and Long Hua in Shenzhen. The rail will then stop at Hu Men in Dong Guan and the terminus at the other end lies at Shi Bi in Guangzhou. In the Hong Kong section, the rail passes through New Territories but not a single station would be located there. Residents in the New Territories have to go back to take the train at the West Kowloon terminus. Obviously, the New Territories West region, composing with a higher proportion of grassroots population, is excluded.....

What are the consequences of these spatial exclusion and uneven development: Development? Integration with the Pearl River Delta region? Competitiveness? If you are sensitive with spatial issue, you will find that most benefits are not going to the West Kowloon Cultural District but the luxurious properties that ‘grew’ from the land of West Kowloon region. And this Express Rail Link can speedily bring a lot of cash-rich buyers from mainland to purchase these flats.”

b) A cost ineffective investment using huge Public Treasury

Apart from the unfairness and inequality brought about by the rail link, the sky-high record of investment on this construction is another front to be articulated in challenging the undemocratic political system. The movement activists argued that the HKD$ 69.9 billion funding, approved by the legislators from the pro-establishment camp and the functional constituencies, was not only unjust, but in fact cost ineffective.

According to the government discourse, the construction of this high-speed rail will not only allow Hong Kong to have better social and economic integration with cities in the Pearl River Delta and other major cities in the Mainland, but will also facilitate and promote business and tourism. It was also expected that the project will create about 5,500 employment opportunities during its construction and another 10,000 during its operation, and hence generating huge social and economic benefits in terms of employment and development opportunities in a long run. It was also expected that the rail will carry about 99,000 passengers daily in 2016, similar to the current cross boundary traffic at the Hong Kong International Airport.

In defying the government discourse, the activists are not only arguing this investment was favoring to the developers and upper classes, but also the investment itself was not a cost effective infrastructure the city at large. When the Hong Kong Section of the express rail link was announced by the Chief Executive as one of the ten major infrastructure projects in October, 2007, the estimated cost for the ‘dedicated passage’ design including a covered tunnel passage was HKD $30 billion. In October 2009, the cost has been escalated to HKD 57.3 billion and the figure soon further rose to HKD$ 69.9 billion. This meant that the cost for this 26 kilometer long portion of railway was HKD$ 280 million per kilometer and hence the most expensive railway in the world.

The huge cost induced by the ‘dedicated passage’ was particularly criticized by the Hong Kong Professional Commons which was an interest group composed of several professional groups including engineers and transportation planners. The groups of professionals presented an
alternative routing plan which involved the building of a Kam Sheung Road station instead of locating West Kowloon as the single terminus along the rail and it was inconveniently located for the majority of Hong Kong people.

In questioning the cost effectiveness of this enormous investment, they challenged the estimated traffic by the government. The government expected that there would be 99,000 passengers daily in 2016, but the movement activists stated that there were always over estimation whenever the government would like to convince the legislators/ publics in constructing infrastructures:

“The government estimated the daily passenger for the Airport Express in 2011 would be 75,000, but we have only 28,000. The government estimated daily traffic of the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor in 2011 would be 46000 vehicles per day, but it is only 7000 vehicles using it per day!” (Stop Express Rail Funding Coalition, 2009)

The movement activists also attempted to frame the XRL as an abuse of public treasury by comparing it with the construction of Hong Kong Disneyland Resort. The resort was well received by the general public as a cost ineffective ‘white elephant’ project and an unfair joint venture with the Walt Disney Company. It was built by the Hong Kong Government and the Walt Disney Company in 2003. In this joint-venture, the Hong Kong government has invested HKD$ 24 billion and owned 53% of its share, while the Walt Disney Company has just invested HK$ 2.45 billion but owning 47% of its share. Moreover, the theme park has reported a net loss every year since it opened, a net loss of HKD$ 1.6 billion was recorded in 2009.

“...... The Disneyland resort is a negative asset to the Hong Kong government. The government is going to invest 66.9 billion to construct the express rail, while MTR Corporation is just required to pay a small amount of franchise fee and it can already gained the right of operation for 50 years. The government is now going to invest three times more than the Disneyland, as well as signing the unfair treaty ...... if the XRL cannot meet the expected estimation of passenger traffic, it is going to be a permanent negative asset of the Hong Kong people.” (GreenSense, 2009)

Phase III: the construction of the ‘Choice’ frame:

i) The New Tsoi Yuen Chuen and the defense for the choice of rural lifestyle

Despite the fact that there were more than ten thousand demonstrators surrounding the Legislative Council, the HKD$66.9 billion budget plan was approved. Despite of anger and disappointment, the Tsoi Yuen Concern Group announced their plan of the (re-)establishing the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen in Feb, 2010. This announcement marked the shift of movement demand from “No Move, No Demolition!” to “Build First, Demolish later!” in which they demanded the government to promise them not to demolish the Tsoi Yuen Tsuen until New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen built.

The establishment of the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen was an ambitious project as this was the first ecological village in Hong Kong. In fulfilling the dream of a new land, two more groups were
established, apart from the original Tsoi Yuen Tusen Support Group and Concern Group, in supporting the new village development in March 2010. The first group was the ‘Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Livelihood Place’ composing mainly of a number of the post-80 generations who was actively involved in the anti-XRL campaign. They started organic farming at the farmland near Tsoi Yuen Tsuen. Guided tours and organic farming workshops were also conducted for the general public who were attracted to pay a visit to Tso Yuen Tsuen after the anti XRL campaign.

The second group formed was the ‘Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Eco-community Building Studio’ which was composed by a group of architectural experts and scholars, in helping the villagers to design and plan for their new ecological and agricultural village.

In this phase, I argue that the movement activists were attempting to construct a ‘Choice frame’. This frame highlighted the defense of the rural lifestyle and it suggested that a democratic society should defend and provide diversified choices of lifestyle other than confining to life choices provided by the capitalistic mode of development.

The idea in establishing the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen was in fact carrying three important messages in constituting the ‘Choice’ Frame underpinning by the ideology of “Sustainable Development”: 1) ecological lifestyle; and 2) participatory democracy in land development; 3) preservation of agricultural community.

**Design and layout of the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen:**

*a) A new village embracing ecology*

According to Wong Wei-jen, a professor of architecture at the University of Hong Kong as well as the designer of the New Tsoi Yuen Chuen, the design of the new village embraced environmentally sustainable principles carrying five characteristics (Lai, 2010): firstly, the original and existing landscape features were retained when they were planning for the construction, such as the original water system, trees and fish pond. By doing so, the villagers attempted to preserve the original natural environment as much as possible, so as to show their respect to the nature. Hence, after series of discussions between planners and villagers, they decided to keep the two old longan trees. Although this may reduce the size of farmland, this decision was actually benefiting the village by providing a cooling effect to the village with more greenery reserved.

Secondly, the structure and orientation of houses were carefully planned in order to provide an energy-saving and low carbon living environment to the villagers. In order to reduce energy consumption for air conditioner, all houses would be facing south-west to facilitate ventilation as summer breeze usually come from this direction in this region. There would be bigger and more front windows while smaller and less back windows so as to ‘trap’ the wind. Moreover, there would be grass planting on the roof to provide a better insulation effect and water pond would be built in the front yard to collect rain water. In order to satisfy different needs of different households, three types of designs were provided for the villagers to choose.

<see Photo 4 in appendix>
Thirdly, no cars would be allowed to get into the residential area and they would be kept at the entrance. In doing so, more lands and resources could be reserved for public areas. More importantly, less concrete and bitumen would be required in road surfacing. This would largely reduce the need for water draining, as the soil ground itself would already serve as the best and natural water draining system.

Fourth, 40% of lands in the new village would be allocated for public use, in which 10% being used for road and other 30% being used as commune farm land and public meeting areas. Villagers will be taught organic agriculture that would become part of the income of the village. In the past, the Tsoi Yuen villagers knew nothing about organic farming although they had been farmers for decades. With the aid of the Tsoi Yuen Support Group and the Tsoi Yuen Livelihood Place, organic farmers were invited to conduct workshops for the villagers.

Finally, there would be a collective ecological infrastructure – the sewage water recycling system. Some trenches would be built along the roads in the village to collect and recycle rain water and grey water from the households. The ‘grey’ water would be directed to the ecological pond, which was converted by the fish pond. This sewage system can help to filter the waste water for farming.

b) A new village embracing democracy

Although there was a group of professionals and scholars helping in the design and planning of New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen, the new village was in fact practicing a mode of participating planning which involves series of negotiations and discussions among the 47 households. This democratic and participatory planning was another important feature of New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen.

These negotiations and meetings of the new village development were lasted for 8 months (from March 2010 to August 2010). In over 30 meetings, the scholars and villagers came together to plan and design for their new village with the above mentioned characteristics embracing ecological principles. As claimed by Wong Wen-jen in an interview:

“*We are involving as consultants, the villagers are the real agents. Therefore, before the planning, we had to ‘let the bullets fly’ for a while (the bullets refer the opinions of the villagers).”* (Land Justice, 2012)

He stated that in order to better understand the lifestyle and needs of the villagers, the group of scholars and their research assistants spread questionnaires to and conducted interviews with the villagers. After understanding the composition of family members and their expectation on houses, the planners proposed three prototypes of houses in New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen. All the 47 households had chances personally with Wong to express their own needs and expectations on their future homes, and each household met with the consultants at least six times. Finally, riding of the three prototypes, there were 47 unique styles of housing confirmed to fulfill different lifestyles and needs of different families.
As shared by the activists and villagers, there were many difficulties and hard times in this prolonged participatory planning process. One of the most frequent cited examples was the agreement on ‘car-free’ environment.

“It was really a difficult decision for us, especially the car owners, for not allowing cars to enter the village. We used to think that it was more convenient and ‘modernized’ if we can park our cars in front of our own houses. However, after rounds of debates on this issue, some villagers worried about safety of kids and elderly if cars are allowed to enter the village. Moreover, the planners also convinced us the public areas could be enlarged if they did not need to reserve lands for driving lanes and parking slots. So, we finally reached the consensus for parking cars at the entrance of the village.

(Fung Yu-chuk, Residents of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen, Personal interview, July, 2011)

Another difficulty was the consensus among the villagers in contributing lands for public area and spending money in building public facilities. In the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen, 40% of lands would be allocated for public use, in which 10% being used for road and other 30% being used as commune farm land and public meeting areas. According to Wong (Land Justice, 2012), the villagers were initially reluctant to contribute so much for public areas as their compensation from government was even not enough to cover the expenses in constructing their houses. However, the scholars and planners spent much them in explaining the importance of public areas in maintaining and cultivating the sense of belongings in a commune, and they finally reached consensus for this arrangement.

Throughout these negotiating and compromising processes, the villagers did learn a lesson in enhancing their sense of ‘publicness’. Moreover, this was also a very valuable chance for an actualization of democratic and participatory planning project, which was an important theme carried forward from the second phase of the movement.

c) A new village embracing agriculture and sustainable mode of economy

The third element constituting the ‘Choice Frame’ constructed by the activists in the third phase was the idea in revitalizing agricultural community in Hong Kong. The establishment of the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen was in fact a very ambitious project to advocate and demonstrate to the society that agriculture can be an alternative way out from the confined lifestyle provided by the capitalistic mode of development.

It is not hard to understand that agriculture has long been abandoned in this highly commercialized and urbanized Hong Kong city. In fact, agriculture was once thriving in the 1950s when a large number of immigrants came from Mainland China to Hong Kong. By that time, many of these immigrants became farmers and helped securing food supply for the Hong Kong people under the colonial government. However, since 1980’s, the government began to rely on imported food and local farmers were no longer important source of food supply. More importantly, with the rapid urban development, urban planners did not mind uprooting farmland to make way for development. For those rural areas not yet allowing for urban development, land developers have been stocking up these farmlands and waiting to profit from future developments in the past twenty years.
The New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen would uphold the lifestyle of ‘combination of agricultural and living’, and a farmland commune system would be adopted. This system was the idea raised together by the intellectuals in the ‘Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Eco-community Building Studio’. The collective farming mode as a farming commune could enhance the productivity and effectiveness since there could be a better division of labor. For example, villagers who can drive can help in the transportation, those who have sales experience can deal with sales of crops, experienced housewives can help in food processing and experienced farmers could of course involve in farming activities.

In consistent with the ecological principle, organic farming would be practiced by the farmers in the new village. In fact, farming without the use of artificial insecticides and fertilizers was a very new concept to the Tsoi Yuen farmers. With the workshops provided by organic farmers invited by the Tsoi Yuen Livelihood Place, the Tsoi Yuen villagers started to adapt to this new mode of farming.

According to Chu Hoi-dick, the ultimate goal in building this Tsoi Yuen farming community was to illustrate the possibility of life choice which could be sustained by a localized economy. This farming community attempted to sell their organic crops to the Pak Heung neighborhood through the online platform. The farmers would plant vegetable, fruit, herbs according to the need of the market, and this system created job opportunities to the community so as to help themselves in self-sufficiency.

“(the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen) demonstrates how to live and root in local community .... It shows that there are possibilities and diversity in lifestyles .... this is not a sole problem in Hong Kong, but a global problem brought by the myth of developmentalism.

Since the 80s, the agricultural industry started diminishing, there was almost no farming activity in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen as well. Rural village is composed of living, production and community organizations. And now, the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen attempts to re-articulate these three elements. According to statistics, local crops production was 194,000 tonnes in 70-80, and it was significantly dropped to 16,000 tonnes in 2009 while the area of farmland was largely shrink from 13,336 hectares to 6002 hectures. The abandon of agriculture and farmland was after all the consequences of developmentalism.” (Chu Hoi-dick, 5 July, 2010, on inmediahk.net)

VII) The Aestheticization of Framing Processes

The expanded genres of discourses in the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement

In the previous parts, it showed that online discursive communities have largely expanded the issues for public’s deliberations which was crucial in the frame generation and development. In order to break through from the dominate frame of ‘economic integration’ introduced by the government, the movement activists attempted to bring up issues such as ‘unfairness towards non-indigenous residents’, ‘democratic and participatory planning’, ‘ecological and agricultural lifestyle’ and etc., in developing the ‘injustice’, ‘democracy’ and ‘choice’ frames in different phases of the movement.
In this part, I attempt to argue that, apart from the expansion of issues, the boundary of the political discourse was also expanded in the framing process. Apart from typical rational-critical political discourse, the activists have successfully expanded the boundary of the counter discourse’s genre through process of aestheticization. By injecting aesthetic elements such as sensual-emotional and cultural components into the political discourses and actions, the mobilizing power as well as the critical reflexivity of the movement has been greatly magnified.

The aestheticization of political discourse is not a new phenomenon. Aestheticizing techniques such as addressing the public by sensuous-emotional appeals and the sympathetic staging of personal qualities of social actors are well known in the late modern social conditions. What appears to be a new development would be the massivity and intensity with which aestheticization in recent years with the extensive use of the Internet and social media.

The differentiation and interplay of discourses

One of the main features of the process of modernization is the differentiation of social practice into a number of specific type of discourses and related fields of action of a more or less institutionalized nature (Habermas, 1984). Science, for instance, is a strongly institutionalized field of practice which derives its legitimacy and its criteria of validity and relevance from a specific type of discourse which solely answers to the cognitive rationality of action and the related search for truth. Hence, the distinction between these fields of practice and type of discourse has been a crucial foundation for development of the institutions and the everyday life practice of modernity.

According to Nielsen (2008), political practice comprises both formally and informally institutionalizes forums and types of agents, operating with the basic premise on the struggle for power to the allocation of societal resources and to the social distribution of life opportunities. Within the normative framework of democratic political culture, political discourse is about conquering the definition of power over society’s common concerns, and the contending political agents’ struggle to close and determine the social formation of meaning on their own premises. The discourse is, therefore, to a high degree intrinsically goal oriented.

In contrast to the universal and goal-oriented political discourse, aesthetic discourse is characterized by its non-directed nature. The field of aesthetic practice comprises both the highly institutionalized expert culture of art, the heterogeneous field of popular culture, creative amateur activity, and the general charging of the late modern life-world with experiential appeals to senses and emotions. The purpose of aesthetic practice is to challenge established formations of meaning and, hence, aesthetic discourse attempts to open the social formation of meaning in an undetermined way, thereby encouraging the agents of aesthetic practice to perform the autonomous and pleasure-motivated seeding process between a specific phenomenon and a non-existing overall concept which characterizes the process of aesthetic experience. In other words, political discourse operates according to the determinative judgment which aesthetic discourse works in the mode of reflective judgment.

In other words, aesthetic discourse is capable of activation intellectual as well as emotional and sensory forms of experience and thus represents a more nuanced potential for Bildung (Schiller,
Bildung is a key concept in German philosophy which conceptualizes human growth processes which integrate the development of individuals’ sensory, emotional and intellectual potential and make them capable of reflective on themselves in terms of their embeddedness in and obligation toward the social and cultural context.

Despite the distinction between the fields of practice and types of discourse, Nielsen (2008) further argued that these differentiations are involved in a complex and mutual interplay in which they engage in more or less conflictual relations with one another. The dynamics of these interplay form a basic condition of the social practice of modernity and if it takes place in ways that allow the maintenance of the respective discursive domains, it may productively stimulate the fields of practice involved. However, if the balance between discourses is challenged and some forms of discourse are marginalized by the other, problematic and dedifferentiation consequences may arise that make society as a whole poorer in terms of the variety of types of knowledge and reflection.

**Dynamics of aestheticization in politics**

Aesthetic practice can be understood as a sub-area of social practice where we relate to artefacts from the perspective of an aesthetic-expressive rationality of action (Nielsen, 2005). There is an overall tendency towards aestheticization in the late modern society. First, the intensified process of individualization leads to destabilization of traditional forms of life and identity (Beck, Gidden, Lash, 1994). Late modern individuals works on balancing and stabilizing their identity through ongoing identity-seeking processes. Hence, the virtue of aestheticization in its distinct channeling of the need for orientation and sensual experiences is becoming progressively more important. Aesthetic practices are in privileged positions in helping individuals to look for relief by channeling their identity work into collective frameworks. Additionally, aestheticization became prominent as ‘attention’ in the late modern society is a scare resource. In order to gain more attention, the means of intensified sensory and emotional appeals are employed to compel attention.

A crucial dimension of the relationship between the aesthetic and the political is characterized by the dispersion of the appeal to the sensory and emotional qualities of experience to all relations in society and which implies transcending discursive and institutional borderlines. The prominent principle of aesthetic intervention in the political process consists in the use of aesthetic effects by political agents in establishing themselves in struggling interests and formation of compromises. The articulation of interests and the positioning in the political power play, hence, imply an aesthetic or performative dimension. Nielsen (2008) argues that the crucial question in revealing the aesthetic intervention of politics is whether the intervention is a dialogic, challenging appeal allowing the process of aesthetic experience to unfold, or it is just merely a monologic and tranquilizing approach appealing to regressive fascination.

On the contrary, if an aesthetic intervention of politics is a dialogic and challenging process, the intervention should be taken place into the experience-processing interplay between the two levels. In which the aesthetic discourse should be able to create new insights and ways of
experiencing as well as reflection to the political field. The intervention should be capable in contributing to opening up established formations of meaning, to the renewed processing of the conflictual experience of society, and, hence, to the further development and transformation of political-cultural consensus. Similarly, in his study of the aesthetic movement Bravú, Giadas (2010) also claims that the intervention of aesthetic productions such as music, literature, poetry and etc. in the political area helps to illustrate a political ideal. Through their involvement in processes of cultural mediation, the members of the Bravú movement have contributed to the expression of a political ideal. Through the emotional and intellectual responses that have been encouraged by their work, this ideal becomes more than an abstraction or a vague idea but a set of real manifestations. The artistic creations of the Bravú movement constitute an aesthetic sublimation of sociability, in the form of representation that feed the normative construction of society thereby helping to modify social practices.

**Aestheticization of Discursive processes in the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement**

In order to draw more attention and support from a wider public, movement actors usually borrow preexisting frameworks, stories and legacies in the cultural toolbox in constructing the events (Swider, 1995). In the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement, apart from the traditional political actions such as demonstrations, petitions, hunger strikes and etc, there were quite a number of cultural or even spiritual-oriented actions employed by the activists.

These aestheticized actions captured not only the attention from mainstream media but also the eyeballs of the general public. In challenging the dominant discourse of economic developmentalism, the movement activists attempted to question whether the competitive pursuit of capitalistic mode of developmentalism could override community lives and neighborhood networks. They strove very hard to urge the publics’ reflection on the future direction of development in Hong Kong. Therefore, they attempted to construct a counter-discourse in presenting a widened scope of social development by taking cultural heritage, human relationship and environmental sustainability into consideration during development processes.

In order to arouse these reflections, a number of cultural or aestheticized actions were carried out throughout the movement. Among these actions, the *Prostrating Walk* as well as the *New Year Woodstock Festival* will be discussed.

**i) Prostrating walk**

In the second phase of the Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement, there was a series of ‘Prostrating Walk’ performed before the budget bill of the XRL project was brought to the Legislative Council for allotment. Imitating the ritual prayers performed by Tibetan pilgrims, a group of post-80s students embarked on an action to prostrate around Legislative Council building on 16 to 18 December, 2009. Holding rice in their hands, walking with bare foot, a group of post-80s youngsters walked and bowed down their heads onto the ground in every 26 steps. The dramaturgical and humble walks captured not only the attention of the media but also sympathy and support from the general public. The action was then escalated, more and more ‘penance
walkers’ joined in the ‘Prostrating Walk across the five district’ from 5 to 8 January, 2010. Later, they prostrated again around the LegCo building in a similar fashion during the protest from 15 to 16 January. These novel and eye-catching prostrating walks, on one hand, earned much sympathy and support from the general public, and on the other hand, greatly reinforced emotional connections within the supporters of the movement.

<see Photo 6 in appendix>

Differing from the traditional political action, the peaceful, slow and humble prostrating walk was very expressive in nature. It effectively delivered rich symbolic meanings in gaining attention and triggering reflection among the general public. In fact, this tactic was not entirely new as it did appear in the Anti-World Trade Organization Rally in 2005 in Hong Kong. Impressed by the mediation walk performed by the Korean peasants in the Anti-WTO Rally, the activists admitted that their ‘new’ tactic of prostrating walk was actually adapted from the peasant’s eye-catching performance.

“We were so impressed by their new methods in struggles, they have greatly widen our scopes ... social movement could be like that!” (Fredie Chan, personal communication, July 2011)

The action was a very expressive one carrying rich symbolic meanings. In the prostrating walk, the penance walkers bowed down their heads onto the ground in every 26 steps, signifying their opposition towards the 26-kilometer’s express rail link. Every penance walker held seed and rice in their hands which symbolized future’s hopes and fruits are in their hands. They walked slowly, peacefully and silently in announcing their strong opposition towards the rapid urban development which destroyed human networks and demolished the natural environment. They urged the government to slow down and plan for a more sustainable and humanistic mode of development. Here is an excerpt of the Declaration made before the ‘Prostrating Walk across the five district’ from 5 to 8 January, 2010.

“The bulldozing mode of urban development has destroyed the diversity in local communities; detached human from their lands; People and their homes attached with the land were doubtlessly uprooted and abandoned. All these losses are caused by the black-boxed town planning mechanism; injustice land development and unequal distribution of powers. How can we allow all these absurd urban redevelopments happen again and again?

Rice and seeds are tightly held in our hands, carrying the fruits of future; We are striking to connect with the diverse neighborhoods, and that’s why we come to the five districts. Walking with power in silence, we hope to connect people step by step. Let’s walk together until we meet outside the Legislative Council on 8 January. Let’s join together in defending the fruits planted with hard work, and let’s grasp this very chance for shaping our future.

We are focused, silent and patient, we walked and bowed, crossing the old buildings in the old districts, penetrating the public housing estates and heading towards the rural fields, so as to feel the power of diversity across these areas. Walking with a slow pace, a heavy step and a quiet body, we are paving the path of ideal.
A change of mind is triggered by a step: Let’s irrigate our watertight’s future.”

(Post 80s anti-XRL Youth, 15 Dec 2009)

The highly expressive prostrating walk earned not only sympathy and support from the public but also greatly reinforced emotional connections within the supporters of the movement and hence further consolidated the movement networks. These aesthetic and expressive actions have also created new insights and sparked critical reflections for the movement participants (Giadas, 2010). Through the experience in the prostrating walk, the abstraction of the human-nature connection was brought into a real manifestation, creating the actors strong and deep emotional responses. From the sharing of the participants in the prostrating walk, it was found that they were very emotionally attached and this experience has brought them deep and critical reflections towards the injustice brought by economic mode of developmentalism:

“To me, the seeds in my hands represent everyone’s support and care. I had to protect them with all my strength. I tried my best to stop the construction of XRL – the wastage of 6.69 billion dollars. During the prostrating walk, I felt so sorry when the seeds leaked through my fingers. I felt so powerless as if I could not help to defend people’s belongings...

During these three days, I was so touched as I was like an quarantined specie, with infinite care and endless greetings from my friends. I did not need to handle anything but just to walk. It was not hard for us – the penance walker; it was the effort of people taking care of us. I was so grateful for all of their preparations....

Throughout the 3-day prostrating walk, I kept thinking whether it is a must for us to live with such a rapid pace. We can live well without the express rail link. But we cannot survive without love and care. Human connection is so important and thus it motivates us to strike for a better future.” (Kitty Or, personal communication, July 2011)

“I chose to join the prostrating walk as this is a mental training for me, I hope to reflect on the relationship between man and land through this act.

Many friends of mine did not care about the XRL, but after I joined this walk, they started to pay attention on this issue when they saw me on television. Of course I cannot influence all the people but I can trigger some of my friends to concern more about our society. I hope that our society can become better and fairer. I believe I am doing something meaningful. (Tommy Choi, personal communication, May 2011)

“We are all suffering from the rapid urban development: privatization of public spaces, urban redevelopment project, alienated human relationships. We hope that we can be more united when we realize that we are suffering from the same problem. I hope that everyone can stop and think. Do we really need an express rail link? We have to make a very important judgment which involves a 66.9 billion construction. Do we want a blind development, or more intimate local
ii) New Year Woodstock Festival

In the third phase, through reestablishing the New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen, the movement actors attempted to demonstrated that alternative lifestyle differing form the lifestyles offered by capitalistic developmentalism is possible, and diversified choices of life should be respected and preserved. In this phase, the two major challenges faced by the villagers and activists were firstly, how could they fight for more time for the construction work of the new village; and secondly, how to force the government intervene in the settlement on the issue of the right in using the private road to reach the new village. It was because the villagers were requested to pay for an extra 5 million dollar for the right in using the private road.

In order to retrieve attention and to sustain support from the public so as to accomplish the reestablish project, there were a series of tactics used including the setting up of the ‘Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Livelihood Place’ in March 2010 in promoting organic agriculture; the establishment of the ‘Tsoi Yuen Petrol Team’ in October, 2010 in stopping the government officials from demolishment of the village. The one I would like to highlight and discuss was the ‘Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Woodstock: An Arts Festival among the Ruins’ organized from 5-6 February, 2011.

The ‘Tsoi Yuen Tsuen Woodstock: An Arts Festival among the Ruins’ was a cultural and music festival held on the third and fourth day of Lunar New Year. The organizers and performers of this festival were a loose affiliation of artists, musicians, writers, academics, social activists, and many of them were the post-80s generation of emerging cultural activists. Organized and supported by over 100 cultural artists, this festival was a highly aesthetic resistant tactic which has successfully attracted over 2,000 visitors to join. By that time, the village was in a stage of semi-demolition: filling with barrier fences, bulldozed fields, abandoned houses and rubbles of demolished structures. However, the Woodstock has reinvented this ruined place into a very artistic and energetic cultural district: filling with museums of the literature, sites of art installations and various theatre and music performances.

Artists were invited to express their feelings and thoughts towards various issues regarding the eviction of Tsoi Yuen Tsuen with their artworks or performances. One of the exhibitions was the ‘Hong Kong Literature Museum in ruins”. In fact, the establishment of a ‘Literature Museum’ in the West Kowloon Cultural District has been requested by a group of local literary artists and writers since 2008, but this request was never treated seriously by the government. In this Tsoi Yuen Woodstock festival, this group of literary writers also joined to set up a ‘Hong Kong Literature Museum in ruins” so as to gain some experimental experiences in fighting for a Literature Museum in the future Western Kowloon Cultural District. Hence, 11 units of literary artists were invited to turn a ruined house in Tsoi Yuen Tsuen into the ‘Hong Kong Literature Museum in ruins”, in which they exhibited their artworks, in terms of textual and visual installations.

One of these artworks, for example, was from Ho Sin Tung which was a visual installation named ‘Bury KCR together’. She exhibited the soils that was collected from the ’19 districts’ of
Hong Kong – there was an additional district topping on the existing 18 districts in Hong Kong as she attempted to use the 19th one in representing a district of ‘Home’. Then, in this installation, she mixed the soil from these 19 districts and put them at the corner of the house. Audiences visiting this exhibition could control the toy bulldozer to bury the railway station. This interactive visual installation carried rich symbolic meanings in the opposition of the XRL and it was also embedded with rich political meanings by inviting audiences in resisting or even taking revenge on the injustice development initiated by the MTR Corporation.

<see Photo 7 in appendix>

The two-day Woodstock Festival attracted over 2000 visitors. Apart from the rich symbolic meanings and critical reflections brought by the event, this large scale mobilization served the political purpose in putting pressure for the pro-government institution to get involve to settle the difficulties in establishing the new village, especially the right for villagers in using a private road connecting to their new village.

On 6 February, 2011, the second day for the Woodstock Festival, the participants took a group photo with a bird-eyed perspective, which was later covered in a number of mainstream media, featuring clearly their demand ‘Move right after the settlement of new village’ with huge banners. This photo clearly demonstrated that the villagers did not insist to stay so as to strike for more compensation, as described by some pro-establishment newspaper, but were willing to move if they could settle the private road issue in the new village. On 10 February 2011, Lau Wong-fat, chairman of Heung Yee Kuk claimed that a mystery benefactor bought the access rights of the private road and all the landowners of the private road agreed to keep it permanently open for the Tsoi Yuen villagers. After the major deadlock resolved, villagers approached the government with a proposal for moving to temporary housing by mid-February 2011. However, the villagers were still living in temporary housing up to May, 2012 as there were unresolved problems in sewage system which kept delaying the construction of permanent houses in the New Tsoi Choi Tsuen.

<see Photo 8 in appendix>

Conclusion

This study attempted to reconstruct the frame construction and transformation processes throughout the prolonged Tsoi Yuen Resistance Movement. It demonstrated that the intervention of online discursive communities was crucial in opening up deliberations of discursive issues which was important ingredients for constructing counter-frames. Moreover, the strategic transformation of movement frames is also important in gaining mobilization power during the movement.

On the other hand, with the emergence of social media which has tremendously speeding up the individualization of information, it seems that the aesthetization of movement tactics and expansion of genres of discourse has also largely been facilitated and intensified. Yet, the most crucial question in revealing the aesthetic intervention of social movement is not whether the
movement is becoming more appealing or stimulating, but whether these aesthetic tactics are creating new insights and critical reflections towards the movement actors and supporters. Movement actors should be careful to avoid the anesthetization from receding into process of depoliticization, in which participating citizens are transformed into passive consumers pursuing emotional and pleasing appeals.
Appendix

Photo 1: The Express Rail Link  (Source: MTR Corporation Limited)

Photo 2: The alternative Kam Sheung Road Proposal  (Source: The Profession Commons)
Photo 3: “Thousand people vigorously support Tsoi Yuen Tsuen” on 18 October, 2009  (Source: Inmediahk.net)

Photo 4: The New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen  (Source: hkstories.net)
Photo 5: Ecological design of houses in New Tsoi Yuen Tsuen  (Source: hkstories.net)

Photo 6: Prostrating Walk  (Source: www.epochtimes.com)
Photo 7: Bury KCR together (Source: www.hosintung.com)

Photo 8: “Move right after settlement of the new village” (Source: Inmediahk.net)
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