

Lin Xu, 2021

Volume 7 Issue 2, pp. 13-31

Received: 02nd December 2020

Revised: 26th March 2021; 10th April 2021; 19th May 2021

Accepted: 24th May 2021

Date of Publication: 15th July 2021

DOI- <https://doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2021.72.1331>

This paper can be cited as: Xu, L. (2021). Focus Groups and Interviews Analysis: The Status Quo and Prospects of Hong Kong Economy. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(2), 13-31.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS: THE STATUS QUO AND PROSPECTS OF HONG KONG ECONOMY

Lin Xu

Faculty of Social Science, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
astridrs7012@hotmail.com

Abstract

Violent protests and COVID-19 have caused the downturn of Hong Kong's economy. Under this circumstance, local youngsters are facing a colder job-hunting season. It aroused the author's interest that in Hong Kong, a unique economy, how young people see their current life, the city's state, and future. The point of this research lies in whether the young generation in Hong Kong is holding the same thoughts regarding the topics of the Hong Kong economy and what factors are influencing their thinking patterns. With Social Representations Theory, the analysis is conducted based on the answers from the chosen twelve local interviewees, aged between 23 and 30. The conclusions are: the interviewees' attitudes toward different economic topics are influenced by their educational background, careers, gender, and living experience; what young people think may not be in line with or even go against the commonsense knowledge. These answers can be social representations of local youngsters in the sample regarding the Hong Kong economy at this stage. They can contribute to larger-scale surveys with local people and the application of Social Representations Theory in the future.

Keywords

Hong Kong Economy, Social Representations Theory, Local Youngsters, Interviews, Status Quo and Prospect

1. Introduction

Since the year 2014, numerous violent demonstrations have shattered the peace of Hong Kong, which affects the normal operation of all walks of life. Many are wondering: what has gone wrong with this city? Can the problems be precisely identified and corrected? What are the public's views on them?

To better answer the above questions, Social Representations Theory has been taken as the basis and one-to-one interviews have been chosen as the means to explore Hong Kong people's views on the current social problems. As "'identity' as an academic concept was first proposed by Freud & Cronin (1973) in the field of psychology" (Jia, Shao & Zhang, 2020: 127), this study focuses on the young locals' views on the economy and economic policies. The reasons are the following: Firstly, the economy is one of the foundations for social development, especially for Hong Kong, a city being regarded as a matured or advanced economy in Asia since the 1970s. Taking economy as the research focal point can help grasp the roots of people's negative emotions and the key to Hong Kong's current problems; secondly, due to the particularity of Hong Kong's political system, the analysis from the perspective of the economy will contribute to the future development of Hong Kong society under this framework of the "one country, two systems". This study will analyze in detail the general trend and characteristics of Hong Kong people's views on the current economic status and policy of this city, as well as their forecasts for its economic development. Here, the status quo of Hong Kong's economy refers to the current local economic situation, with a focus on the chosen topics like housing prices, land policies, wealth gap, and market issues. On this basis, the relationship between citizens' psychology and urban development will be concluded, and new ideas for solving the existing social problems will be provided. In this process, it will borrow the previous social reports and survey results from relevant institutions and books on Hong Kong's economic and policy issues.

2. Theory

Social Representations Theory has been used in this study to explore social problems and people's widespread beliefs about them. In the foregoing related studies, Social

Representations Theory has already been described in a relatively complete way. “In general, a social representation is the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behavior of actors which conditions an object for a social group” (Wagner et al., 1999: 103). Here, three aspects included need to be stressed for the comparison of the interviewees’ answers:

the first premium of our SR approach is that what shapes social behavior is shared social knowledge. This is true in two connected senses. On the one hand, what counts is not our idiosyncratic experiences but our knowledge of things that are experienced at a collective level. The third premise that we want to propose here is that SR social practices. Fourth, SR is not only embedded in social practices but also constitutive of these practices—and hence of social reality” (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011: 731-735).

From the above summary, it can be concluded that Social Representations Theory is a theory based on people’s psychology, social cognition, and social behavior, which can be applied to different social groups and social phenomena. Besides, representations about the public sphere are a key factor in the overall constitution of public spaces (Jovchelovitch, 1995a: 95; Wagner et al., 1999).

In this study, the links between demographic characteristics and social representations can be drawn through the interviewees’ gender, careers, educational background, and living experience. The interviewees from diverse academic backgrounds, careers, and ages have been selected to ensure the validity and representativeness of the samples. Twelve Hong Kong citizens have participated. Their basic information is listed in the following table. The Hong Kong citizens here refer to those with permanent residence qualifications in Hong Kong, including immigrants and residents.

Table 1: Information of the Interviewees

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Education	Career
Ashly	Female	24	Bachelor: Mainland China (Economics) Master: HK (Marketing)	-
Flora	Female	23	Bachelor: HK (Economics) Master: HK (Social Science)	-
Hin Yang	Male	25	Bachelor: the UK (Law) Master: HK (Social Science)	Local Think Tank Researcher

Cho Yan	Female	23	Bachelor: HK (Psychology) Master: HK (Social Science)	-
Maggie	Female	24	Bachelor: Mainland China (Global Business) Master: the UK (Economics)	Broker in a Japanese Multinational Enterprise
Yuting	Female	23	Bachelor: Mainland China (Global Business) Master: HK (Social Science)	-
Angie	Female	26	Bachelor: Taiwan (MICE Management)	Customer Service Representative in a Chinese Real Estate Company
Jason	Male	26	Bachelor: the US (Economics) Master: HK (Social Science)	-
Lida	Female	27	Bachelor: HK (Chemistry)	Laboratory Technician
Harry	Male	24	Bachelor: HK (Accounting)	Member of an International Bank
Douglas	Male	30	Bachelor: the US (Clinical Medicine) Master: HK (Music)	Doctor in a Local Public Hospital
Rene	Female	23	Bachelor: HK (Economics) Master: HK (Social Science)	-

(Source: Author's illustration)

The twelve young locals, aged between 23 and 30, are either friends or relatives of the researcher. The reasons why the twelve are chosen are: first, they have different educational backgrounds but are all university graduates, who can analyze economic issues in relatively comprehensive ways; here being comprehensive means they can see one topic from different angles with their professional knowledge gained from their careers and majors. Second, they have different living experiences, like in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan, and abroad, some of whom are immigrants while some are indigenous. The personal experience ensures that the sources of their information are not only mass media or hearsay but also their true feelings. Third, gender sometimes can also play a role in shaping people's minds, so seven females and five males were chosen as interviewees in this research. In a word, from the

perspectives of education, careers, gender, and living experience, the chosen interviewees represent the young citizens of Hong Kong, from whom the views about Hong Kong's economy can be directly collected.

3. Methodology

In this research, the method of interviews was adopted, which is standardized and open-ended. The reasons are as follows: "First of all, this open-mindedness allows the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up. Second, this reduces researcher biases within the study, particularly when the interviewing process involves many participants" (Turner, 2010: 756-757). The implementation of this method has been divided into different parts, namely: selecting participants, pilot testing, constructing six effective research questions, implementation of interviews, and interpreting data.

Additionally, in terms of the subjects and topics of the investigation, the representative Hong Kong economic and policy issues have been chosen from the investigation of Poon's book (Poon, 2005) and specific interview questions regarding housing prices, land policies, wealth gap, free market, and economic prospect were picked as the topics to investigate.

3.1 Topic 1: Hong Kong's Housing Price and Land Policy

Hong Kong has the world's least affordable housing market, according to the research of the real estate firm CBRE. The average price per square foot is USD 2,091 in Hong Kong, which is significantly higher than that in Singapore and Shanghai which came second and third in the Global Living report (Ng, 2019). To ease the contradiction between population explosion and limited land in urban areas, the "Hong Kong 2030 Plus" plan has come out, which is "a comprehensive strategic study to update the strategic development strategy and provide a spatial planning framework to guide the future planning, land and infrastructure development and the shaping of the built environment of Hong Kong beyond 2030" (Hong Kong Planning Department, 2016). Besides, Bedspace apartments, Tong lau have also become alternatives for many poor people. Middle-class and college graduates, if lucky enough, can draw lots to live in public housing estates, which are offered by the government for lower-income residents. The housing issue is a perennially hot topic in Hong Kong, especially for young people, and there are not only land policies but also other factors that cause such fierce competition in the housing market.

Of the twelve interviewees, only one considers the current housing prices in Hong Kong reasonable given that they are basically in line with those in other super-tier cities, and the rest of the interviewees believe that the houses are unaffordable for young citizens like them if without financial support from family. For the land policies, all hold the view that Hong Kong has adequate land for urban residents, but resulting from some factors of reality and history, the supply of land and houses is insufficient and the contradiction has been intensified.

Among the factors thought to be contributing to the soaring housing prices, the local government administration was chosen as the most decisive one by nine respondents. Some generally point out that the present governmental policies are of little significance for offering more affordable houses for normal citizens like them since the Hong Kong market is set to be a free one, which means the government can only play a very limited role in it (Jinghui, Harry, Maggie); others give examples on problems emerging from the mediocre performance of the government, such as the low land utilization (Flora), insufficient housing supply (Douglas), and the economic bubble created by the real estate developers and house flippers (Rene). All these have further dashed the hopes of those who had planned to own a house when young. After sorting out the responses, it can be found that the current housing prices in Hong Kong are influenced by a series of factors, among which government policies, supply problems, house flippers, and land use are relatively prominent, and these four factors can be seen as intrinsically linked.

For interviewees, the government's role is awkward, because the ownership of land is not entirely in its hands. As a seaport city, Hong Kong currently only develops about 30% of the land, while the other 70% is either under the control of real estate developers and indigenous people or can only be left as green land because of requirements and protests from social groups like environmentalists. On the other hand, in different regions, the prices of houses vary greatly. The housing prices in Central District and Yuen Long District are different. There exist both mini rooms of only 20 square meters and "luxury houses" of hundreds of square meters, old houses of 10,000 HKD per square foot and new houses of 50,000 HKD per square foot; for a 400-foot rental apartment, the rentals can range from 15,000 HKD to 80,000 HKD (Angie).

Therefore, some only hold the wait-and-see attitude towards the plan. Besides, with the increasing number of immigrants from Mainland China and abroad, many "pencil towers" (slim, pencil-like apartment buildings) and "public houses" have been built to release the land pressure. However, according to the interviewees, the application threshold for public housing is very high, and the eligible young people in Hong Kong need an average of five to six years to apply for one. The significance of this plan is hence quite limited. Also, the growing number

of house flippers, coupled with the lack of housing supply, has resulted in the soaring house price, which makes the interviewees more desperate about buying a house of their own. Based on the above factors, Hong Kong's current housing and land resources are in the eyes of the interviewees still in quite short supply, which cannot be solved in the short term.

From the perspective of interviewees' social identities, "buying a house" seems to be a common "problem" and a "persistent disease" for Hong Kong society, which stays almost unaffected by their educational background, careers, and salaries. However, for the reasons behind the high house price, opinions differed. For example, Cho Yan, who lives in Yuen Long District, belongs to the indigenous. Yuen Long District has large green areas, and the houses there are not so densely located compared with those in the urban center areas, so Cho Yan is more sensitive to the impact of environmental factors on the house price. Hin Yang, a local think tank member, has more chances to make contact with government staff, so he tends to relate the house price more with government policies. Angie, who works now in a real estate company, can obtain the information inside the company and from her customers. She finds that the price of housing is also associated with the social stability and the marketing strategy of real estate sellers. Last year's social movement and the current epidemic have eliminated the desire and weakened the consumption-ability of some citizens, resulting in a sluggish real estate market and a slower business in her company.

Unlike in Hong Kong, Mainland China's "land use rights" legislation has distinguished transferable "land use rights" and inalienable "land ownership" (Lai, 1995). Hence, in terms of land planning, Lida, a new immigrant, has a sense of confusion about the land system in Hong Kong through newspaper reports, intermediary advertisements, and colleagues' sharing. She gets to know that there is public and private land belonging to the indigenous residents of Hong Kong. This land system is reminiscent of the situation of the Republic of China in the last century; Yuting, who has life experience in Mainland China, has also learned that the land of Hong Kong's indigenous people could not be used without permission, so that the government cannot fully control the allocation of resources, and even are indulging people.

From the above analysis, conclusions can be that the participants share opinions about the status quo of the housing price and land policy in Hong Kong, but have their ideas about the reasons behind it. Despite the similarities in the responses, their respective emphases are various, which can be linked to personal experience and social background. To be more precise, ecological influence, careers, and changes in residences are all influential. It tells that both internal and external factors are influencing citizens' judgments and perspectives. In any case, there is a general expectation in the society that government urban land policy in supplying

land should have a major bearing on the housing market, especially in making housing more possible by the general working class. “It is included that political economy of the urban land market has made the land supply model too subjective and dependent on government agenda, which is not a healthy development towards a more optimal urban land policy” (Li, Wong and Cheung, 2016: 991).

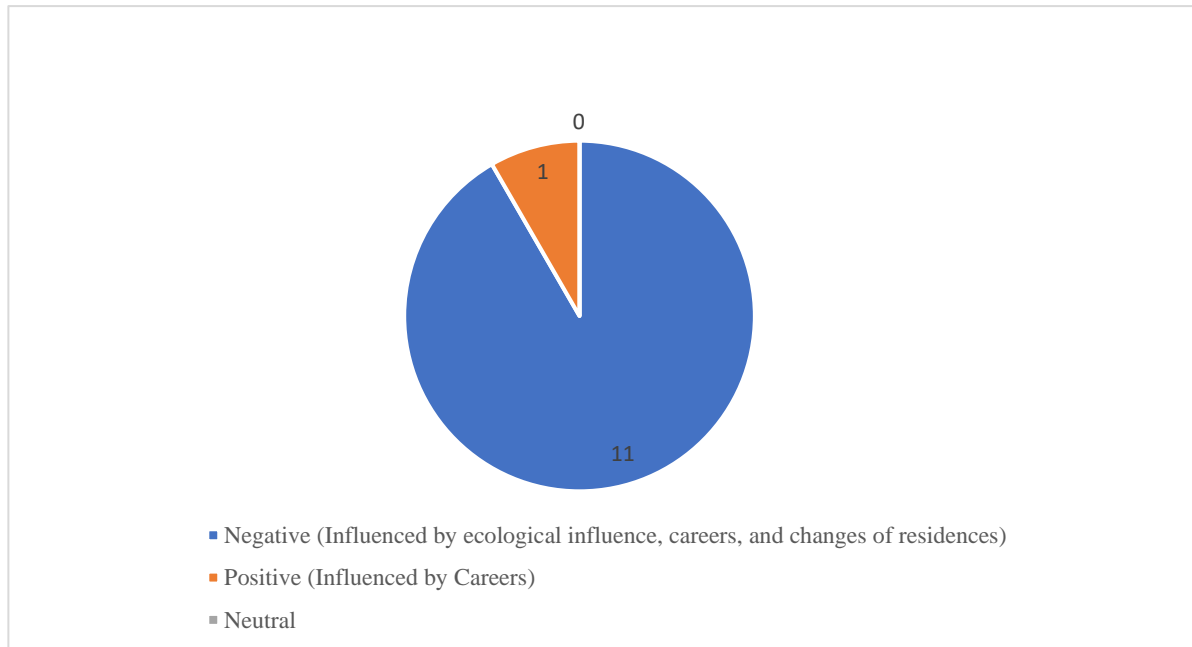


Figure 1: *Interviewees’ Attitudes toward Local Housing Prices and their Social Representations (Sources: Author’s illustrations)*

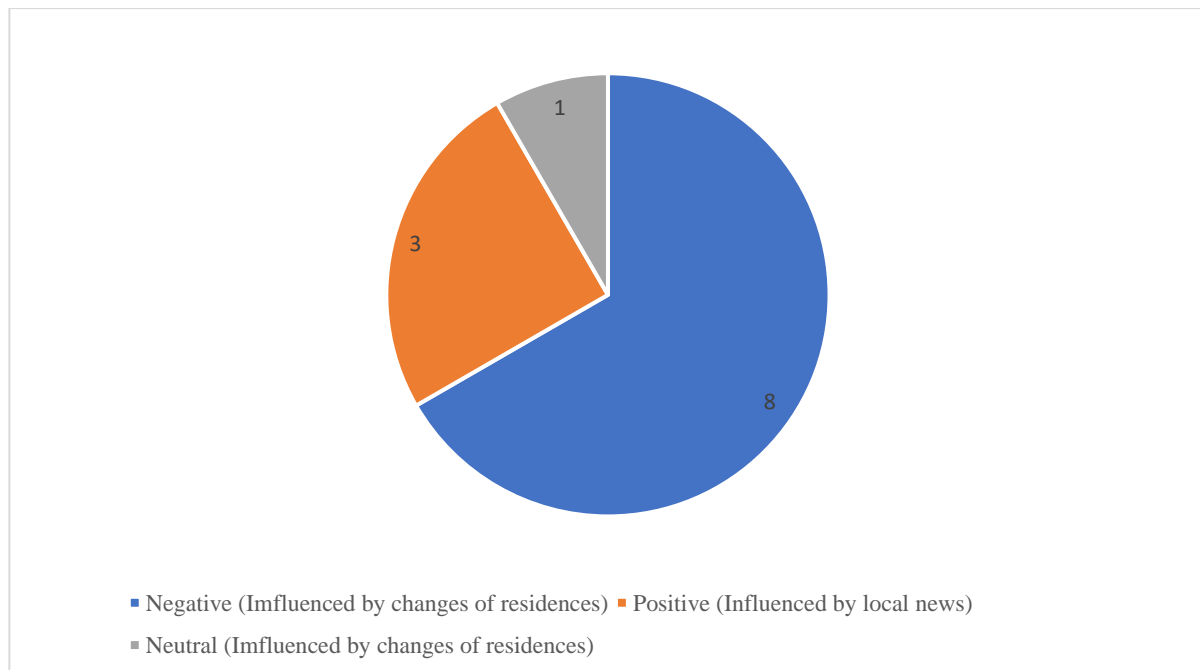


Figure 2: *Interviewees’ Attitudes toward Local Land Policy and their Social Representations (Sources: Author’s illustrations)*

3.2 Topic 2: Hong Kong's Tax Policy

“Hong Kong’s tax system is always the most successful the world has ever seen. The burden is exceptionally light, yet the government has generally operated at a substantial surplus.” (Littlewood, 2010: 65). However, Hong Kong is at the same time one of the cities with the largest gap between the rich and the poor in the world: “Hong Kong’s wealth gap has widened to a historic high, with the richest household now earning about 44 times what the poorest family scrapes together, despite government efforts to alleviate poverty” (Yau & Zhou, 2017). There appear to be some contradictions between low tax rates and the large wealth gap. The opinions of 12 interviewees on the connection between the two and the implementation of relevant policies are hence investigated.

From the interview results, all the twelve participants hold a positive attitude towards the current tax rate in Hong Kong, seeing that the tax rate is quite low in their work and life. Rene and Harry, for instance, deem that the tax rate of Hong Kong now can attract more talents and investment to Hong Kong and stimulate their competition. Their views come from people around them and market research. In contrast, there are views that the current low tax rate will have some negative impacts: Cho Yan agrees that Hong Kong’s cumulative tax system is reasonable and the tax rate is low, but she inclines to the view that the tax burden of the middle class is the heaviest since they cannot apply for public housing, which is common in her neighborhood in Yuen Long District; Lida proposed that this tax system certainly reduces the pressure of ordinary income people, but it is said in TV news that people with high income do not fulfill their social responsibilities.

From the responses, it can be concluded that careers and educational backgrounds have a certain impact on the interviewees’ attitudes. Those who get paid on their positions at the current stage tend to stay positive about the tax rate while the not-yet-graduates are more pessimistic about it because it is in their eyes one of the causes for the wide wealth gap. Explanations can be that on the one hand, those who have jobs are quite satisfied with their after-tax income which is proved in the next question, so they would not like any changes in the current tax system; on the other hand, none of the graduates belongs to the unemployed, some of whom have outstanding academic degrees and very decent jobs. Therefore, there are few complaints about the salaries since they match what the academic investment and the low tax rate is to some extent like the payoff for the future middle or upper class’s hard work. However, for the interviews who have not graduated yet, it is hard to say what the future will be like so their attitudes are more conservative and more influenced by what they learn in class; besides, since they do not have much job market experience, they incline to be more objective,

who can analyze the tax-and-wealth issue from the perspective of neither the employers nor the employees.

Based on diverse opinions, the interviewees were further asked if they have any suggestions for narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor. Their answers can be divided into two categories:

1. The government and enterprises should offer more resources, including subsidies, land and education resources;
2. The government should adjust the tax standard and social security means:

It is interesting to notice that among those who have offered their suggestions, the women in this sample tend to pay more attention to the diversity of resources support while males focus more on the direct tax and social security reform. One explanation can be that “females were higher than males in extraversion and tender-mindedness” (Feingold, 1994: 429). It is hard to say which part hits home, but it may explain why females incline to steady and slow measures while males prefer some more direct and time-saving ways to narrow the wealth gap.

Besides, there are noticeable differences in interviewees’ attitudes towards Hong Kong Government tax rebate programs (2011: Scheme \$6,000, 2018: Scheme \$4,000; 2020: Scheme \$10,000). Some consider them meaningful because they can benefit people who experience income reduction in the economic downturn like taxi drivers. But eight respondents deem that such schemes are of little practical significance.

No chosen males have shown approval to this kind of tax rebate program. Again, it indicates that such indirect remedies proposed do not fit their thinking patterns, which means when the local government can reform the tax system and make the rich pay more for their living, it will be more likely in the eyes of the males in the sample to narrow the wealth gap. For five female interviewees, such programs are exactly the kind of subsidies they urge for, so it can be an effective but roundabout way to help the citizens. It should be noted this gender difference applies not to all interviewees, with three males agree with the programs; in other words, it can be seen as a general but not absolute trend, which can contribute to the explanation for the gender differences in social representations of ways of problem-solving. Besides, only a few interviewees think that these programs can solve the pressing need of citizens. Combined with the suggestions put forward by the interviewees which focused more on other areas other than tax policies, conclusions can be that in the view of the local people, the alleviation of the gap between the rich and the poor in Hong Kong should not only rely on temporary palliatives

like the tax rebate programs, efforts should be put in different fields to improve the lives of the poorest parts of society.

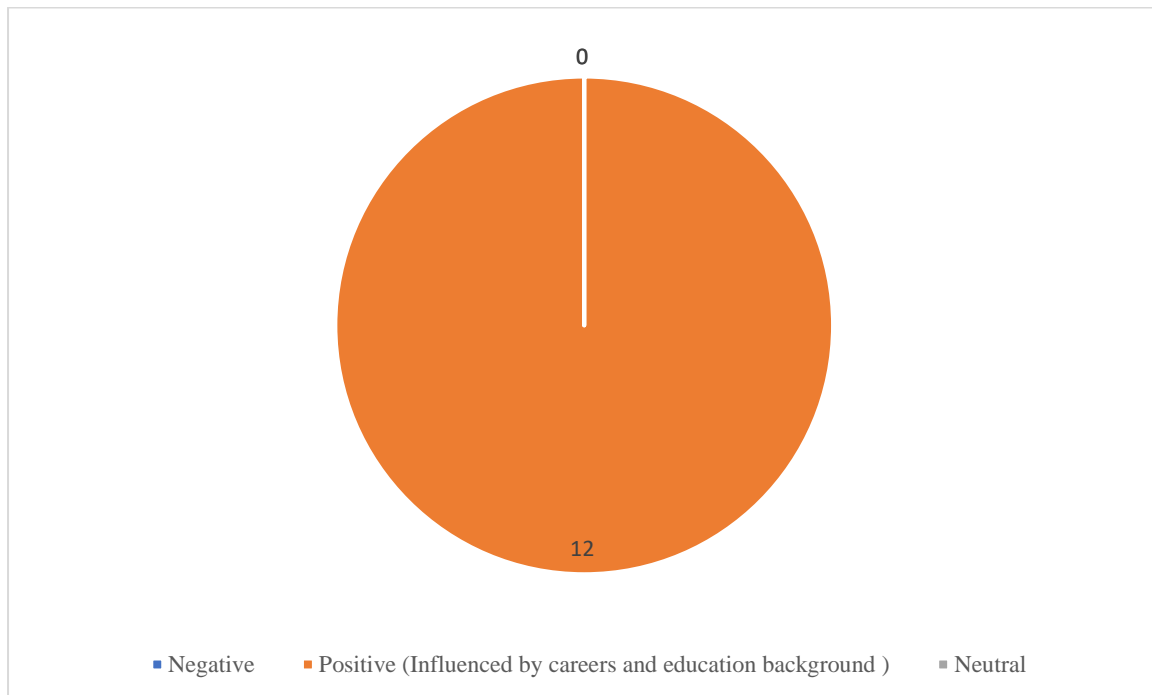


Figure 3: *Interviewees' Attitudes toward Local Tax Policy and their Social Representations*
(Source: Author's illustration)

3.3 Topic 3: Salary in Hong Kong

Interestingly, despite the wide wealth gap, interviewees' perspectives on their salaries are not so pessimistic. Those who have already worked all expressed satisfaction with their salary, such as Maggie, who works now in a Japanese investment bank company in Hong Kong. Some think that their salary is reasonable in the industry, but it is far worse than that in Hong Kong's "star industries". It reflects that the current income of the interviewed Bachelors and Masters is satisfying, which is at least not a root cause for their complaints about the economic dilemma.

However, when it comes to Hong Kong's minimum hourly wage, opinions vary. Some views are that the minimum hourly wage stipulated by Hong Kong's current laws is not low, at least it can serve the needs of survival. For example, Cho Yan knows from her relatives that there are not many people willing to work at the lower level, but the current demands for such jobs are still large, hence the minimum hourly wage in Hong Kong can attract a certain number of people compared with that in other cities. Interviewees also point out the possible existing problems related to the minimum hourly wage: Hin Yang and Jinghui hold that the current minimum hourly wage was too high: The average income of college students is 15,000 HKD, and that of the dishwashers is over 20,000 HKD. Academic degrees have thus become less

valued or even negative assets since the educational pay is not directly proportional to the return. Therefore, working hours legislation is required unless market reform is conducted or government raises salaries. Another suggestion is to set different hourly wage standards for people with different educational backgrounds, to both maintain the value of higher education and secure the quality of life of the people at the bottom of society.

To sum up, it is not difficult to find that, although not a decisive factor, the local salary also affects the wealth gap in Hong Kong. As for the satisfaction degree of the current income, the influential factor here can be the educational background. The interviewees have all obtained advanced degrees and it can be seen from their answers that their education spending is directly proportional to their income; on the other hand, from the perspective of social representations of income distribution equality, more effort should be made to increase the value of academic degrees so that youngsters like the interviewees will be more satisfied with their financial rewards.

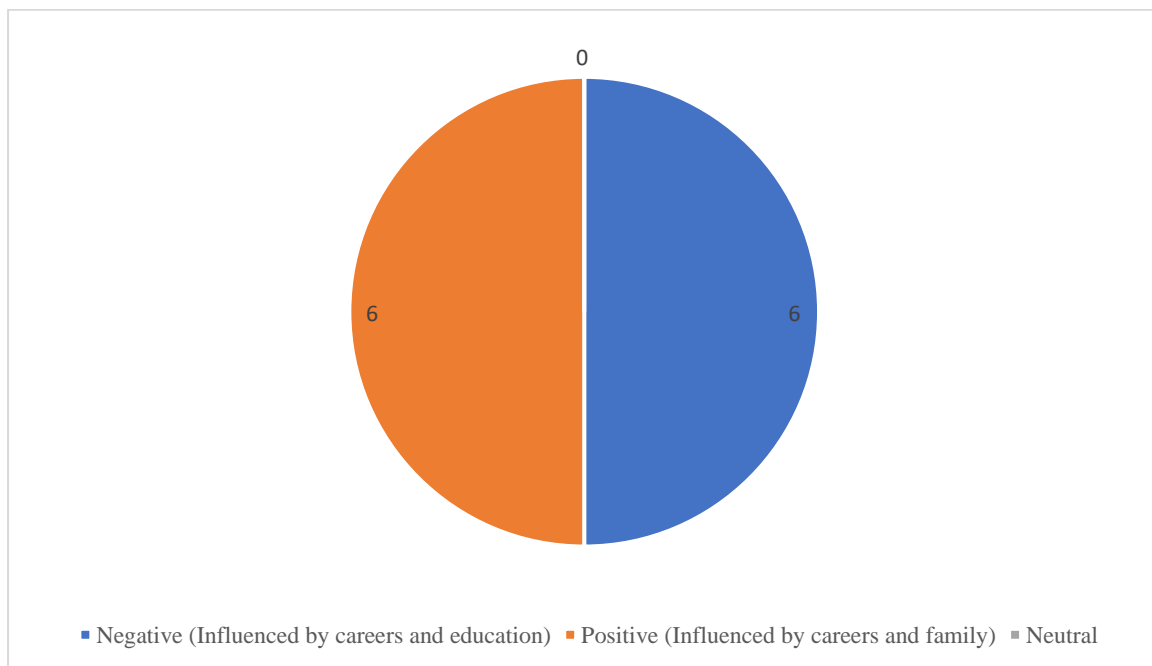


Figure 4: *Interviewees' Attitudes toward Local Salary and their Social Representations*
(Source: Author's illustration)

3.4 Topic 4: Hong Kong's Corporate Competitiveness

As one of the freest economies around the globe, Hong Kong is attractive as the regional headquarters for transnational companies. According to the Census and Statistics Department, in 2018, Hong Kong was home to 1,530 regional headquarters for transnational companies in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, many Chinese Capital Corporations also choose to settle down in Hong Kong for "going out". Compared with the two, what are the advantages and

disadvantages of local enterprises? In the current context, what kind of enterprises would local people like to join in? The answers are various.

What the interviewees agree most is that competition in the Hong Kong market is completely free, where the government treats all enterprises equally and no kind of protectionism can be found. Yet the market competition is still fierce. At present, both Internet technology, e-commerce enterprises in the Mainland, such as Baidu, Alibaba, and the mature Internet business system abroad, have far exceeded the local enterprises in Hong Kong. Because Hong Kong has not been fully transformed into a technology port, local enterprises have lost many opportunities to break through their shortcomings and market restrictions. As a result, some of them have to choose to expand their business in the Mainland, which objectively leads to the loss of local talents. It also undermines some people's confidence in the healthy development of Hong Kong's economy.

Most of the above concern the weaknesses of Hong Kong local enterprises, but in fact, not everyone is pessimistic about their competitiveness. Angie, who has working experience in both the Mainland and Hong Kong's local enterprises, summed up that the local enterprises have their advantages: Since most of the local enterprises are small-scale and have a limited number of employees, every employee has equal opportunities for further training. That is to say, the personal development of employees will be paid attention to by the enterprise. This makes Hong Kong's enterprises more humanized than those in the mainland, which is also conducive to attracting more talents for their long-term progress. Although there is a certain development gap for Hong Kong's local enterprises in the field of the Internet, the financial, legal, and medical industries can win the race.

To sum up, views are shared about the deficiencies of the local enterprises regardless of social identities; with richer working experience in different places, interviewees tend to find out more advantages of those enterprises. To put it simply, the free market in Hong Kong is full of both opportunities and challenges. If local enterprises make good use of it, there will be more room for advance and transition of the negative attitude from the local people towards them. Under the current wave of science and technology, only by adjusting the development direction in time and keeping up with the pace of the competition can local enterprises have a greater possibility of survival in the future.

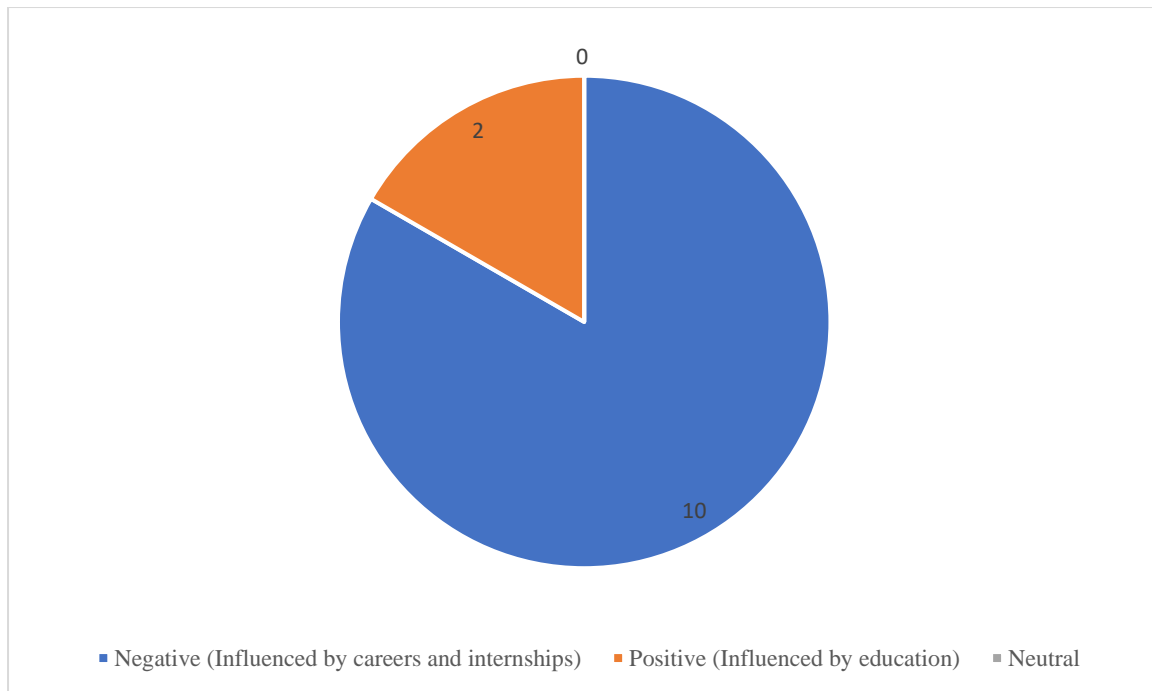


Figure 5: Interviewees' Attitudes toward Local Corporates' Competitiveness and their Social Representations (Source: Author's illustration)

3.5 Topic 5: The Relationship Between Hong Kong Government and Business

After analyzing the competitiveness of local enterprises in Hong Kong, more questions about the relationship between Hong Kong's business and the local government have emerged. The current situation of Hong Kong's business is not very optimistic: "There has been the hangover of bankruptcy and recession in Hong Kong. Although the government has issued many rescue measures, Hong Kong's business development has shown a relatively large downward trend compared with the same period of last year" (Lu & Yan, 2020). To avoid large-scale bankruptcy or layoffs, the SAR government will set up more than HK \$25 billion Anti-epidemic Fund to support industries that have been hit hard by the epidemic" (Luo, 2020). Besides, it has also offered various funding schemes to small and medium enterprises to help fight the economic downturn. Each scheme meets different business needs, such as guarantees for bank loans and financing for SME development projects. (GovHK, 2019).

In this case, the respondents expressed their opinions on the relationship between Hong Kong's local business and the government, and the answers can be divided into three categories: the students who are about to graduate this year hold that government and the business development maintain a good relationship since the government management is transparent and the business development is very free; Those with local full time working experience in the economic downturn think the government should strengthen the management and control over the business development to reduce risk and loss; Those having worked in Taiwan,

Mainland China and Hong Kong believe that the government is not doing enough at present, which stirs up dissatisfaction. Again, the views here are more or less related to the work experiences of the interviewees.

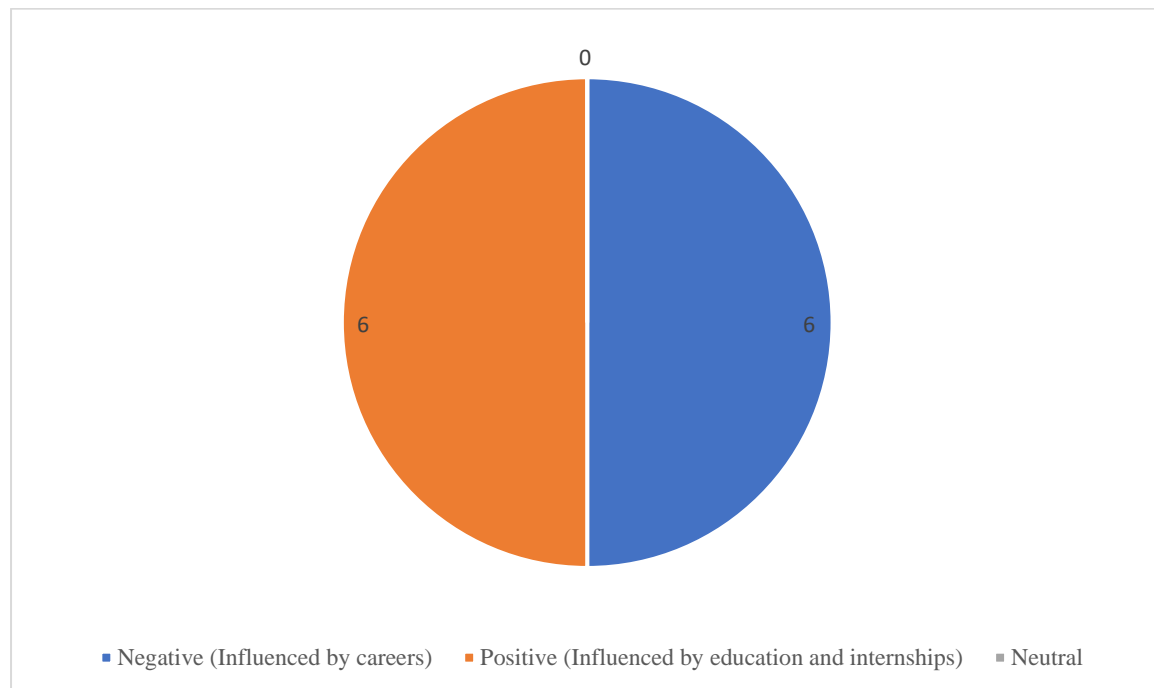


Figure 6: Interviewees' Attitudes toward Local Government-Business Relationship and their Social Representations (Source: Author's illustration)

3.6 Topic 6: Hong Kong's Economic Status Quo and Prospect

The above analysis emphasizes Hong Kong's current economic situation. As Hong Kong's young people who have entered or are about to enter the workplace, the twelve respondents have different views on the most serious economic problem in Hong Kong at present and different expectations for future economic development. In addition to the housing, land, employment problems, and social wealth gap, Hong Kong's industrial structure, and strength also attracted the attention of the respondents. It can be observed that regardless of the social background, most of the respondents think that there exist economic problems in Hong Kong and the economic structure of Hong Kong needs some adjustment. This is not only to better cope with the economic downturn at present but also for the healthy development of Hong Kong's economy in the future. When it comes to the perspective of Hong Kong's economic prospects, apart from the analysis of Hong Kong's economy itself, some interviewees also compare it with that of the mainland Chinese cities. Here, the living background affects the interviewees' views again. Those who remain pessimistic and neutral have at least five-year living experience in Mainland China and can feel the differences between cities directly.

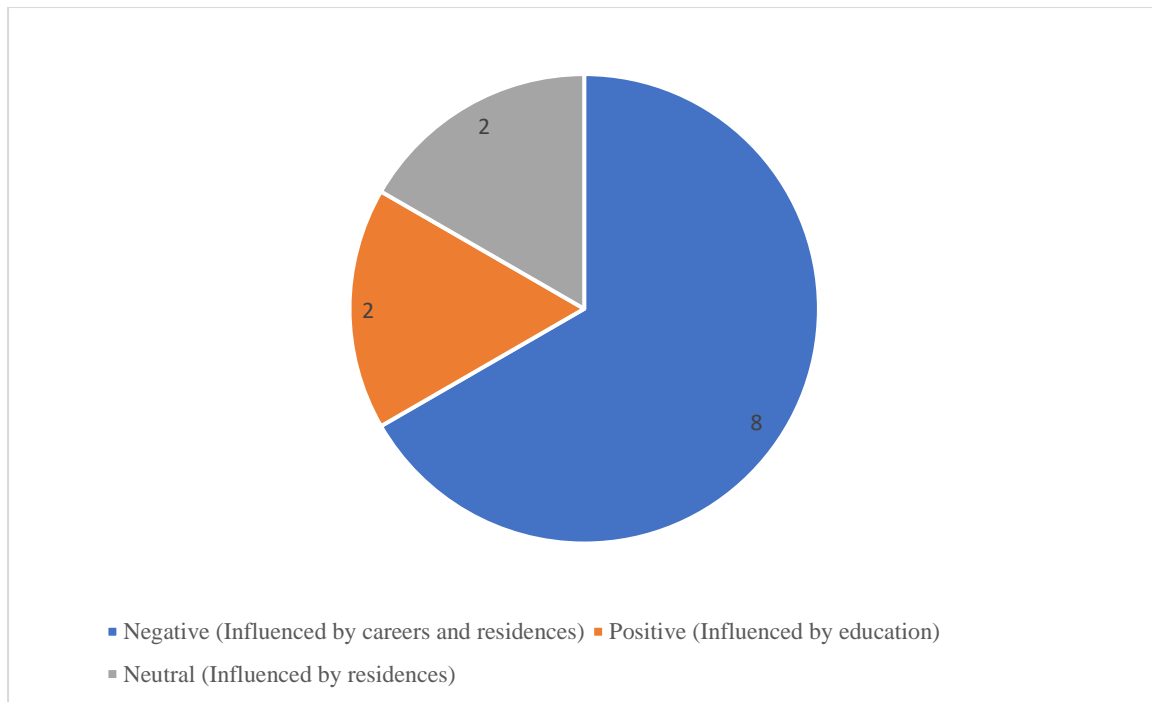


Figure 7: Interviewees' Attitudes toward Local Economic Status Quo and Prospect and their Social Representations (Source: Author's illustration)

4. Discussion & Conclusion

With the above six topics, the interviewees' views on the current development of Hong Kong's economy are more clearly demonstrated. To be more specific, in terms of housing prices and the wealth gap, pessimistic views are shared among the participants while they are satisfied with the present tax rate and income. The living experience in Mainland China and Hong Kong affects the judgments towards Hong Kong's economic prospects, the enterprises' competitiveness, governmental management, and people's ways of expressing their opinions. Gender, careers, and income also play a role in influencing the thinking patterns of the interviewees when answering the questions about the reasons behind the economic phenomena. As for the political conflicts, no obvious difference has been found between the interviewees' attitudes since all of them are not for the violent demonstrations. It shows that their attitudes on this topic are not influenced by gender, careers, education, or living experience.

In this paper, twelve young Hong Kong citizens give their own opinions on different aspects of Hong Kong's economy. Based on their cognition, it can be concluded that people's opinions and thinking patterns may be influenced by educational background, careers, living experience, gender, etc. It is in accord with what Jovchelovitch defines Social Representations Theory:

“The theory of social representations offers the crucial elements needed to address these issues, first, because it theorises lay knowledge in relation to the cultural, historical and social frameworks of the context under consideration.The symbolic dimension of social representations is central to understand how people express identity, develop patterns of behavior and engage with significant others. And last, but not least, because social representations are themselves symbolic phenomena produced in, and constitutive of, the public arena” (Jovchelovitch, 1994: 75).

“With the practice of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ stepping into deep waters, some deep-seated contradictions in Hong Kong society have become increasingly prominent” (Feng, 2020: 118). It is thus worth further exploration towards the attitudes and thoughts of locals regarding Hong Kong’s economy. Due to the limitations of time, place, and other factors, many interviewees are limited, but their perspectives are representative because certain trends can be summarized from their answers. For the record, the interviewees are only a tiny part of Hong Kong's young people and the conclusions cannot represent the opinions of all local youngsters, so they cannot explain why several participants in the protests are in their twenties. Similarly, because this is a tiny portion of the population, whether the differences in the above four social representations between the respondents are still convincing for a larger scale of the population relies on more interviews and further analysis.

REFERENCES

- Elcheroth, G., Doise, W. & Reicher, S. (2011). On the Knowledge of Politics and the Politics of Knowledge: How a Social Representations Approach Helps Us Rethink the Subject of Political Psychology. *Political Psychology*. 32, 729 - 758.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2011.00834.x>
- Feingold, A. (1994). Gender Differences in Personality: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(3), 429-456. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.429>
- Feng, Q-X. (2020). The Historical Evolution and Practical Experience of the Central Government's Strategy of Governing Hong Kong. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*. 8(6), 114-120. <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v8i6.5062>
- GovHK. (2019). Support for Business to Fight Downturn. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.hk/en/business/supportenterprises/localenterprises/fightdownturn.htm>

- Hong Kong Planning Department. (2016). Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030. Retrieved from https://www.hk2030plus.hk/document/2030+Booklet_Eng.pdf
- Jia, D., Shao, H-X. & Zhang, C. (2020). Construction of Cultural Identity through Language Education of Junior-Senior High Schools in China during 1949-1997. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 8(5), 127-137. <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v8i5.4930>
- Jovchelovitch, S. (1994). Vivendo a vida com os outros: intersubjetividade, espaço público e representações sociais. In P. Guareschi & S. Jovchelovitch (Eds.), *Textos em representações sociais*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Jovchelovitch, S. (1995a). Social representations in and of the public sphere: towards a theoretical articulation. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 25, 81–102. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1995.tb00267.x>
- Lai, W. C. (1995). Land use rights reform and the real estate market in China: a synoptic account of theoretical issues and the property rights system. *Property Management*, 13(4), 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02637479510099288>
- Li, K. W. (2012). *Economic Freedom: Lessons of Hong Kong*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1142/8286>
- Li, L.-H., Wong, S. K. K., & Cheung, K. S. (2016). Land supply and housing prices in Hong Kong: The political economy of urban land policy. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 34(5), 981–998. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263774X15614699>
- Littlewood, M. (2010). The Hong Kong Tax System: Its History, It's Future and the Lessons It Holds for the Rest of the World. *Hong Kong Law Journal*. 40, 65-84.
- Mizuoka, F. (2018). *Contrived Laissez-Faireism: the politico-economic structure of British colonialism in Hong Kong*. Berlin: Springer Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69793-2>
- Ng, J. (2019). The Unstoppable Housing Market in Hong Kong. Retrieved from <https://cbk.bschool.cuhk.edu.hk/the-unstoppable-housing-market-in-hong-kong/>
- Poon, A. (2005). *Land and the Ruling Class in Hong Kong*. British Columbia: Richmond.
- Turner, D. W. (2010). Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754-760. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-3/qid.pdf>

Wagner, W., Farr, R., Jovchelovitch, S., Lorenzi-Cioldi, F., Markova, I., Duveen, G., & Rose, D. (1999). Theory and Method of Social Representations. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2(1), 95-125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-839X.00028>

Yau, C. & Zhou, V. (2017). The wealth gap in Hong Kong hits a record high. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/hong-kong-wealth-gap-problem-2017-6>