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Cosmopolitan Food Localism: Emergence of Global Local Food Movements in Postcolonial Hong Kong

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Hao-Tzu Ho

Abstract

Various forms of local food movements across the world have a shared goal of addressing the social and environmental implications of transnational, industrial, and corporate food systems. This thesis examines this trend manifesting in an under-studied context, Hong Kong, where educated young urbanites have been growing food and advocating the revival of agriculture since the 2010s. Research undertaken to date tends to view such campaigns as local resistance to the global. In affluent societies, the activism is regarded as part of the urban middle-class privilege of choosing 'green' lifestyles. However, grounded on fourteen months of multi-sited fieldwork, this thesis recognises distinctive features of the Hong Kong case. This thesis aims to contribute towards the anthropology of food and the anthropology of cities, and enhance the knowledge of locality, food localism, alternative food movements, sustainability, environmentalism, neoliberalism, and cosmopolitanism in East Asia.

Hong Kong is often described as a metropolis where 'East meets West'. Hybridity and multicultural encounters brought about by colonisation and the city's position as an international financial hub are seen as natural and ordinary, whereas the meaning of 'local' is contentious. Food localism cultivated in such setting is underpinned by imported elements and trans-local interactions as opposed to anti-globalisation rhetoric or 'anti-China' sentiment that pervades Hong Kong since the 1997 handover. Localness is defined not by a sense of territoriality but a mentality that this thesis conceptualises as *cosmopolitan food localism*. Young farmers and activists formulate localness through reconnecting to the land and restoring social relations. A form of living that they envision, 'sustainable living', entails carving out alternatives to the current one ruled by neoliberal governmentality. Concerned with a low quality of life and soaring costs of living, educated young people do not self-identify as the middle class, nor becoming farmers a pursuit of postmaterialist values.

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Emergence of Global Local Food Movements in Postcolonial Hong Kong

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2019

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Declaration

This thesis is my original work and a product of my own research endeavours and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration with others except as explicitly indicated in the text. No part of this thesis has been submitted to Durham University or any other University or similar institution for any degree, diploma or other qualification. I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

I certify that my thesis does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 100,000 words for the relevant Degree Committee.

Some of the ideas and materials in this thesis have been, or are in the process of being, published:

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Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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Last but not least, this thesis is me expressing my love to my family. We who are pursuing degrees abroad are sometimes portrayed as a brave group of people as we face the challenge of surviving in an unfamiliar environment and fighting against emotional

vulnerability. The difficulties which our parents face are often underestimated. It is they who endure several years of worrying about and missing their children while pretending they are not, enabling us to concentrate on our studies. It is they who are truly courageous. I am not saying this only because of the Chinese ethics of filial piety but because of love. Mom and Dad, I am proud of you. I am also extremely grateful to my brother for taking care of everything in my absence. We doubted this day might ever come, but here we are.

I hoped this statement could run for longer as I have more names in my mind, but because the allotted space for acknowledgements is limited, I must wrap it up now.

<div align="right">

Ho Hao-Tzu
University College, Durham
April 2019

</div>

Note on Transliteration

In writing about Hong Kong, it is clearer to indicate the local, Cantonese pronunciation of words cited in the text. Cantonese phrases, slogans, or commonly used vocabulary is given in italics and romanised using the Yale system with additional descriptions added in brackets when explanation is necessary. Directly quoted conversations and the contents of signs, banners or leaflets were originally in Cantonese and printed in Chinese; the English translations are mine, except for direct quotations. Chinese terms in quotes from published works stay in the form used in the original publication. Names of streets and places in Hong Kong are indicated according to the system in the GeoInfo Map designed by the Lands Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government (https://www.map.gov.hk/gm/?lg=en). Chinese names of places outside Hong Kong (e.g. Guangdong, Shenzhen) are given in pinyin, in line with the official spellings of the People's Republic of China. Other Mandarin terms are either in pinyin (e.g. qi, ziran) or in long-used English conventions (e.g. guanxi) and written romanised. Chinese names are provided in the traditional Chinese order: surname followed by first name, and comply to individual preference, or in cases of public figures (e.g. Deng Xiaoping), have been written in their widely used form. Chinese characters are listed in the glossary at the end of the text.

All monetary figures in this thesis are in Hong Kong dollars, unless otherwise indicated. The exchange rate in 2016-2017 was approximately HK$ 10.5 to GBP£ 1. This thesis uses British spelling, unless quoting from sources that use American orthography, in which case the original has been retained.

Chapter One:

Introduction

'Asia's world city'

In 2007, a farmers' market selling local food opened at Central, Hong Kong's bustling central business district which attracts many international visitors and events. The market was located against a backdrop of numerous transnational chain stores, such as the sandwich brand Subway. It was also close to several iconic buildings, including business and leisure complexes, high-end hotels, and colonial heritage sites. Next to the market were the piers from which ferries would depart to outlying islands. The market was connected by a footbridge to a building complex comprising offices, a metro station and a luxury shopping mall showcasing international brands and high-end supermarkets. Right below the footbridge is a harbour front and the Victoria Harbour promenade. This was another iconic space, often used as the venue for large-scale events.

Figure 1. The farmer's market is located in front of a Subway shop.

By the time I conducted fieldwork, except for a few elder farmers who have farmed their whole lives, there were young and middle-aged farmers selling their produce, who used to be teachers, journalists, office workers, or business managers. The market was open twice a week on Wednesdays and Sundays, hosted by different organisations each day. On Sundays there were around twenty stalls, a third of which were looked after by young farmers with some representing farms owned by elder farmers. One or two stalls were reserved for handicrafts, community services, or social enterprises. On Wednesdays, except for a member of staff from the host organisation, there were only middle-aged and elderly farmers. In addition to vegetables, there was a stall selling organic soap and cleaning products.

On one occasion when I was on my way to the farmers' market, from the moment I stepped out from the metro station, I noticed that there were many more people than usual. To reach the market, I had to cross the long footbridge. This usually takes five to ten minutes, but that day I spent almost half an hour, moving extremely slowly among curious and excited crowds who had come for an international car-racing event. The open-air footbridge was covered with banners to prevent people without tickets watching the competition from the bridge. On several banners there was a slogan: 'Hong Kong, Asia's World City'. I finally arrived at the market, but found it closed due to the race. I then had to spend another thirty minutes crossing back over the footbridge. Along the way, I saw more crowds standing by the huge window of an Apple flagship store, attempting to watch the race for free. Nowhere in the vicinity was the closure of the market advertised, as if it was not expected that anyone would come. Compared to a farmers' market, a car-racing festival probably fits better against the Hong Kong skyline.

However, the farmers' market had arguably become part of the landscape of this area. It opened at eleven in the morning, but before half past ten there would already be a long queue extending along the footbridge. Before the market officially opened, farmers were required by the organiser to cover their products with a piece of cloth and advise early-bird customers that they were yet allowed to pick vegetables. This was to ensure that customers who arrived on time had a fair opportunity to buy high-quality products. At 11 am sharp, the organiser would sound a gong to announce the opening of the market. All vendors would uncover their produce, and the site was suddenly filled with sounds of buying and selling. Housewives bargained with vendors or asked for recipes, some accompanied by their domestic helpers from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines or other Southeast Asian countries. Quite a few domestic helpers came along with a shopping list, purchasing items

required by their employers. Frequent customers made orders in advance, paying quickly and leaving with bags of vegetables, giving farmers more time to chat with new customers. The vibrant atmosphere, however, would not last long. Business started to slow down after lunch, since local people would mostly come to shop for vegetables in the morning and use the afternoon for other activities. In the afternoon, the flow of people remained, but most were foreign tourists who would take photos, ask how to get to the piers or the lavatory rather than buying food.

Postcolonial configurations and 'localness' after 1997

It has been widely shown that 'localness' is a social construction rather than something ready-made and clearly defined (Feagan 2007; Hinrichs 2003; Sage 2003). This term is particularly problematic in the case of Hong Kong where every issue has 'a global dimension' and '[the] "local" is a matter of degree' (Merry & Stern 2005: 400). As a British colony for one-and-a-half centuries, Hong Kong once served as the British Empire's Far Eastern trading port, where goods were transited, bought and sold. Its modern history has unfolded amidst rapid economic growth within a cosmopolitan environment, facilitated by its status as a free port with access to complex networks of peoples, goods, and socio-cultural dynamics. The city is depicted as 'a melting point of East and West' (Birch 1984: 236) where 'locals' met foreign merchants, administrative officers and immigrants; some came and left, while others settled in the city. Those born and bred in Hong Kong did not account for most of the population until the approach of 1997 (Yeh 2010). 'Local people' are a composite group of residents who have spent some time abroad as tourists or expatriates with multiple identities, along with Hong Kong passport-holders, many of whom no longer reside in Hong Kong and only visit their ancestral places at the Lunar New Year or other festivals (Chan 2001; Chun 1996; Hayes 2006). 'Hong Kong people' are, therefore, 'more than a resident, yet less than a people' (Evans & Tam 1997b: 9; Lee 2008: 250; Turner 1995: 22).

Hong Kong self-identifies as international and cross-cultural (Szeto 2006). The city proudly presents itself as a place where East and West not only meet but also 'successfully integrate'; it is 'simultaneously Chinese and western', 'international and cosmopolitan' and characterised by 'diversity and inclusiveness' (Tam 2001: 51); 'local consciousness' is featured as a form of openness and self-reflection (Law 2018). However, there is awkwardness in relation to postcolonial encounters between Hong Kong and its 'motherland'. Since Hong Kong's sovereignty was handed over to the People's Republic

of China (hereafter, PRC) in 1997, the political transition has been gradually reified by the border-crossing of people, goods and capitals. At the border control point between Hong Kong and Shenzhen (Guangdong Province in South China), there are always long queues of office workers, students, visitors, shoppers and businessmen from both directions. Nevertheless, constant interactions and closer relationships have provoked more friction than integration, as exemplified by widely documented 'anti-China' sentiment or 'anti-mainlandisation' discourses (e.g. Downes 2018; Kwong 2016; Lam & Cooper 2018; Lo 2007; Xu 2015) against tourists, immigrants and products from *daailuk* ('mainland China'). The term *buntou* (localness/localism/localist: literally 'native soil' or 'original land') has arisen and is part of heated debate.

On the Lunar New Year's Eve, I paid a visit to a flower market—a must-do activity during the festival period. When following the crowd, weaving through rows of stalls selling snakes, cartoon idols, flowers or other plants and New Year decorations, it was difficult to ignore several stalls where political parties were broadcasting appeals for democracy and *buntou yingtung*, 'local consciousness/identity'. This resonates with a fear that Hong Kong will decline as a result of being 'swallowed whole by China', which has become a popular discourse when people imagine Hong Kong to be an enclave within but separate from China (Tam 2001: 50). Faced with the Chinese state and a growing border-crossing population, Hong Kong is described as positioned between two colonisers, one from the West and the other from the North (Chow 1992). The handover is thought to have left Hong Kong in a state of 'incomplete decolonization' (Law 2018: 14). Therefore, the residents of the city have called for the building of 'local consciousness' and mobilised localist movements against 'recolonization' (Law 2018: 32; see also Lo 2007).

Newcomers from mainland China face social exclusion (Law & Lee 2007), and the 'local' has become a criterion for categorising people. Among the radical factions of localist discourse, several high-profile civil groups are convinced that the social and economic problems in today's Hong Kong are the consequence of the influx of mainland tourists, immigrants and 'red capital'. These groups, portrayed by scholars as xenophobic, parochial and nativist (Cooper 2018; Lam 2018; Veg 2017) explicitly and openly endorse an attitude that prioritises local interests and rejects cross-boundary interactions (Law 2018). They accuse China of implementing 'sinocentrist neo-colonialism' (Szeto 2006: 271); in response, they declare their mission to be the protection of the interests of locals and Hong Kong ways of life (So 2016), such as objecting to Mandarin on the grounds that Cantonese is a 'purer' form of the Chinese language (Veg 2017: 330).

Despite propagating their agenda as counter-hegemonic against Chinese nationalism, these groups created a sense of local superiority and regional nationalism: 'Hong Kong nationalism' (Lam 2018), a term which first appeared in a local university student journal (Editorial Board of Undergrad (HKUSU) 2015). This 'nationalism' perceives mainland China as foreign (Kit 2014; Lam 2018) and entails patriotism for Hong Kong in its own right (Kwan 2016; Ma 2007; Ortmann 2018; So 2016). Such narratives perceive the 'local' to be not in opposition to the global, but rather Chinese from the other side of the border. The food market is enmeshed in this political tension: foodstuffs imported from mainland China is criticised as categorically unsafe, even though 92 per cent of vegetables come from there (Census and Statistics Department (HKSAR) 2017; Chow & Yiu 2015).

Thus, the recent proliferation of literature studying postcolonial social development overwhelmingly concentrates on localism in relation to sovereignty, identity politics, political and juridical reforms (e.g. Chan 2016; Chung 2015; Fung 2001; Kaeding 2017; Kwan 2016; Kwong 2016; Lai 2018; Lam 2018; Ortmann 2016; Tse 2014; Veg 2017; Wong 2017). There remains a noticeable gap in existing scholarly investigations: localist narratives emerging from the campaigns for local agriculture, which have been a highly visible social phenomenon that has attracted much media attention, are under-discussed, with only a few exceptions (e.g. Cheng 2009; Huang 2018; Lau 2013; Lou 2017). Amidst postcolonial geopolitical tension, any discourse regarding the local, such as the advocacy of local food, is immediately associated with anti-China sentiment or a statement of Hong Kong as an independent political entity, with no attention to the nuances of different assertions or interpretations of localness. This thesis, on the other hand, will elaborate on the fact that practitioners of the 'local-food movements' take distinctive approaches to finding or building *buntou*.

Contestation over localness

As a highly internationalised contemporary metropolis characterised by capitalism, consumerism, and developmentalism, Hong Kong is thought to have nothing to do with agriculture. However, this thesis reveals a new 'foodscape' (Adema 2009; Domingos et al. 2014) that has emerged in the last decade. The 'post-handover generation', defined in this research as those who were born from the 1970s to the 1990s, forms alternative versions of localness through joining the ranks of farmers, despite the physically demanding work and low financial rewards. They do not take up farming as a pastime as other members of the urban middle class do. They are not descendants of agricultural families, but are well-

educated and qualified for better-paying jobs. Since becoming a farmer is a high-threshold life choice in Hong Kong, as will be illustrated in later chapters, some young people who are unable to become farmers themselves took part in the movements as activists.

This thesis will centre on young farmers and activists and their 'local-food movements'. The term *local-food movements* is used instead of *local food movements* or the singular *local food movement* because the hyphen underlines that while the movement arises at a local level, it is particularly important that it focuses on local food. Also, the plural form of 'movements' is adopted to highlight heterogeneities and dynamics in thought and action across individual practitioners.

The resurgence of interest in farming signifies more than an idyllic life episode in which the urban middle-class population pursues green lifestyles. Instead, young farmers and activists seek to address the issue of high costs yet low quality of life. They advocate *wingjuk* ('sustainable') *farming* as opposed to *organic farming*. They believe that organic farming has negative social and economic implications, while sustainable farming is socially and environmentally friendly and capable of empowering grassroots communities and increasing the resilience of the city. They sourced references from diverse cultural contexts and agricultural paradigms across the whole globe and tailored the techniques and knowledge to local weather conditions and sociocultural environments.[1] Through incorporating foreign ideas, they formulated a new set of farming practices, and took agriculture as an entry point to promote the agenda of 'sustainable living' and articulate their opinions on *buntou*. In the process of cultivating localness from the soil, they created a new version of localism that entails appreciation for both local food and grassroots culture. This version of localism is intertwined with a sense of belonging to the place and community one was born and bred in, but does not involve rejection of trans-local ideas and interactions or exclusion of border-crossing populations.

Against the background of a historical juncture when Hong Kong residents are 'learning to belong to a nation' (Mathews et al. 2008), this research unpacks narratives on localness, aiming to enhance our understandings of the multi-vocality of localism. This thesis examines how localness is imagined, constructed, articulated and contested, and

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1   They take inspirations from Natural Farming from Japan, permaculture from Australia, Friendly Farming from Taiwan, Bio-dynamic Farming from Germany, and various alternative food initiatives ranging from Community Supported Agriculture in North America, the Slow Food Movement in Italy, and the worldwide Fair Trade agenda, Farm-to-Table advocacy, environmentalism, peasant movements across India and Latin America as well as traditional Chinese farming techniques. See Chapters Four and Five for further reviews on these ideas and other initiatives that were not mentioned by my interlocutors, but which are prevalent terms in global food movements and academic discussion on related topics.

clarifies nuanced differences when the term is adopted for different agendas and discusses to what extent the notion of *buntou* used in local-food movements resonates with the global trend of 'eating locally'. This thesis responds to the argument that locality in contemporary societies is dissolved as a result of globalisation (Appadurai 1996), demonstrating that localness emerged from local-food movements is not underpinned by resistance to globalisation, but rather a belief in the bond between humans and land. Based on this philosophy, young farmers and activists sought to discover alternative forms of living that challenge existing social norms. This activism showed that globalisation in the context of Hong Kong is taken as natural, everyday and 'useful' for the development of transformative ideas.

To make the abstract question more manageable, this research began with empirical curiosity: in such an urbanised, modernised, and materially abundant city, why do people who are qualified for white-collar jobs in air-conditioned offices choose to toil in the fields? Why is the position of farmer attractive to young urbanites, given that it is perceived as laborious, low-status, and might trap people in financial difficulties owing to the high costs of living? Do they object to material satisfaction and have little interest in economic reward, even though it is essential to their survival? Why does locally-produced food matter to them in a highly commercialised city where all kinds of goods can be easily acquired through the market?

Theoretical inspiration: politics of incorporation and exclusion

Since the 1990s, the phenomenon of globalisation—that trans-local mobilities and exchange of human, goods, and ideas create new spatial possibilities and dialectical relationships between the local and the global—has been studied extensively (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Ferguson 2006; Giddens 1990; Hannerz 1996; Ong & Collier 2005; Tsing 2005). However, simultaneously, the globalised world is 'the contested terrain of competing definitions' (Harvey 1996: 309). Rather than being regarded as a neutral description of the context of contemporary life, globalisation is largely considered an external and hegemonic force that creates unhealthy and unjust food systems and threatens local communities. As the world system of food unfolds, alternative food initiatives proliferate as counterweights, seeking resistance, transformation, or reconstruction of local values (Hendrickson & Heffernan 2002; Holt & Amilien 2007; Lien & Nerlich 2004; Marsden & Franklin 2013; Roos et al. 2007). Paradoxically, local food campaigns tend to

be globally interconnected (Edelman 2014; Lien & Nerlich 2004), and as Möhring (2008) argues, the revival of local food is an inherent effect of globalisation.

The preference for local food is often coloured by over-emphasis on locality (DuPuis & Goodman 2005; Gupta 1999; Marsden & Franklin 2013; Moore 2010) and even nationalism (Yuk Wah Chan 2016; Hui 2014; Winter 2003). When 'food localism' discourses become prevalent, the 'local' is presented as a homogeneous notion (Hughes et al. 2007). DuPuis & Goodman (2005) point out that 'unreflexive localism' leads to a purified, moral and harmonious image of the 'local', which is nonetheless often the site of inequality and a battlefield for power. Local food is seen as socially and culturally embedded; as a result, it simultaneously entails exclusion of non-local food (Brunori 2007) or 'food neophobia' (Capiola & Raudenbush 2012; Wilk 2008)—an uncritical reluctance to consume foreign food. In radical cases, food localism is mingled with hometown bias, in-group favouritism (Reich et al. 2018), and risks evoking xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment and other exclusionary arguments (Heise 2008; Stănescu 2010).

The fascination with local food leads to a situation in which the quality of food is defined by its location, and border-crossing food constantly causes alarm about the loss of tradition (Hinrichs 2003; Kirwan 2004; Marsden et al. 2000; Renting et al. 2003). The 'place-of-origin' label embodies the consumption pattern of well-off consumers who search world-wide and order high-quality food directly from its place of production (Smythe 2014). 'Food traceability' (Jin et al. 2017; Liao et al. 2011)—labelling that includes the provenance of food—is used by food providers as an indicator of distinctive quality. The idea of *terroir* (Parker 2015; Trubek 2008; West 2013) defines the taste of food by its origin. In a nationalist tone, *terroir* is interpreted as 'the soul of the country' (Guy 2002: 34; see also Pratt 2007) in which food is cultivated, sharing soil, climate, culture, history, traditional knowledge, skill and ethics, and thus a unique quality and taste.

This thesis will point out that despite an appreciation of the value of the local, the particular version of localism conceptualised by young farmers and activists is fundamentally distinct from the politics of anti-globalisation and a rejection of cosmopolitanism (cf. Theodossopoulos & Kirtsoglou 2010). Currently, mainstream interpretations of food localism tend to take it as a reaction to globalisation and the industrialisation of the food system, used by grassroots groups as a weapon to articulate resistance to global capitalism and demand local participation and control over resources (e.g. Ayres & Bosia 2014; Changfoot 2007; Cohen et al. 2005; Feagan 2007; Norberg-Hodge et al. 2002; Renting et al. 2003). However, this is not mirrored in the case of Hong

Kong. Rather than seeing globalisation and neoliberalism as forces from outside forming a partnership antagonistic to small farmers, neoliberalism in the context of Hong Kong is not something far-flung but local and ordinary.

Cosmopolitanism is conceptualised as a mindset that entails openness, curiosity, empathy and respect for differences in culture and values, and connotes world citizenship transcending kinship or national bonds (Appiah 2007; Beck 2006; Cheah 2006; Delanty 2012a; Held et al. 1999; Nussbaum 1996; Vertovec & Cohen 2002a; Werbner 2008a). As reviewed earlier in this introduction, this attitude is regarded as a disposition shared by residents in Hong Kong. However, the widespread discontent with post-handover border-crossing interactions seems to contradict this observation. On the other hand, the integration of imported ideas, collaboration with people from different backgrounds and critical assessment of stereotypes are still evident in local-food movements. This state of mind springs from both the contemporary situation of globalisation and historical context of colonisation, as will be depicted in Chapter Two.

Facing similar issues to other highly populous, modernised, industrialised and capitalised metropolises, the younger generation in Hong Kong cooperated with their global counterparts to seek more 'desirable'—healthier, more meaningful and sustainable —ways of living. Rather than echoing anti-globalisation discourses, these movements are responsive to domestic structural constraints on everyday concerns around food, housing and a sense of lacking control over one's own life. Boundary-crossing dynamics underpin the movements; localness cultivated in the process is inherently trans-local. The case of food localism in Hong Kong puts the dichotomy between the local and the non-local into question, epitomising that localism and cosmopolitanism are not always in conflict.

Drawing inspiration from scholarly accounts of food globalisation, cosmopolitanism, localism, food activism, as well as alternative food initiatives, concepts of community and sustainable living, this thesis discusses the implications of the resurgence of interest in agriculture among young urbanites. Investigating day-to-day struggles, choices, strategies and negotiations behind the idea and action of growing and consuming food locally, this thesis takes farming and food as a window on metropolitan living. Watson & Klein (2016: 3) argue that a scholarly focus on food is 'a key way into the study of modern life'. In this spirit, this thesis examines 'the effects of broad societal changes on eating patterns and vice versa' (Mintz & Du Bois 2002: 104; see also Mintz 2008), aiming to demonstrate how seemingly regionally specific phenomena and mundane pieces of food culture are linked to significant issues of our time (see also Watson & Caldwell 2005).

'Take the metro to the field': fieldwork in the metropolitan setting

This research builds upon ethnographic fieldwork carried out from the beginning of 2016 to spring 2017 over a total of fourteen months across three parts of Hong Kong: Hongkong Island, Kowloon Peninsula, and the New Territories, as indicated in Figure 2. Hongkong Island and Kowloon Peninsula were ceded to Britain after the Opium Wars during the mid-nineteenth century. The New Territories, which border Guangdong Province in the PRC, were leased to the British Empire from 1899 until decolonisation in 1997. Before becoming a British concession, this Qing Dynasty-controlled area extended as far as a road called Boundary Street, which separated it from British-ruled Hongkong Island and Kowloon Peninsula (Hughes 1976). Every morning, farmers from the Chinese zone would cross the border to sell vegetables or flowers at market. Today, the plaza is still the site of an annual governmental farmers' market, while Boundary Street has become a normal street within bustling Yau Tsim Mong District in the middle of Kowloon Peninsula. Agricultural land only remains in the northern part of the New Territories or some areas on Lantau and other outlying islands. Since the handover, border-crossing between Hong Kong and Shenzhen has become many people's daily routine, and Hong Kong receives large numbers of tourists and immigrants.

Figure 2. Map of Hong Kong. Retrieved from 'GeoInfo Map' (www.map.gov.hk) by the Lands Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government. The names of the areas have been added by the author.

Farming activities in today's Hong Kong are entangled with urban life. Farmers, farm workers, customers and activists are all urbanites; sometimes farmland is just a road away from high-rise residential buildings and shopping malls. Although an increasing number of anthropologists do fieldwork in urban settings, the methodology of such research still evokes curiosity. Fieldwork in the city seems to be obligated to justify itself (Weszkalnys 2010). The title of this section is borrowed from Passaro (1997), who conducted fieldwork among homeless people in New York City where the researcher had to take the metro to the field. She was advised against studying this kind of topic, because such fieldwork is considered uncontrollable and unmanageable. However, an opposing view is that city-dwellers will soon outnumber inhabitants of rural areas (Nonini 2014a), so shifting our foci to cities is inevitable in the modern world (Jackson 1987, noted in Peirano 1998). Despite anxieties over carrying out fieldwork in the city, Geertz's (1973: 22, original emphasis) reminder largely relieves the worry: 'anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, towns, neighbourhoods…); they study *in* villages'. By this, he means that anthropologists do not claim to produce an ethnography of a village but rather take the village as the context of their study. In the same spirit, Weszkalnys (2010: 18, original emphasis) believes that what is achievable is an ethnography *in* a city rather than *of* a city.

In a monograph on anthropological accounts of neoliberalism, Greenhouse (2010: 2) argues that 'the true political science for the twenty-first century may well be ethnography' because anthropology is 'the science of contextualization' which deals with 'experience-based inquiry into the interpretive, institutional, and relational makings of the present'. In this regard, 'anthropology' is more than a label referring to a discipline. It signifies a methodology (the approaches that ethnographers take to obtain empirical data) and an epistemology (the ways that ethnographers perceive the world). Therefore, be it in urban or rural environments, anthropologists follow core epistemology, methodology and ethics to collect data and generate knowledge. This is not to say that ethnographers do exactly the same things regardless of the context. Researchers have to tailor methods to the settings they are working in, but this does not mean that once anthropologists begin work in metropolitan environments, experiences developed from research in rural settings suddenly become irrelevant.

In what follows, I demonstrate how my fieldwork is designed to study contemporary lives *in* rather than *of* Hong Kong. Instead of regarding the city as something given and inhabited by a monolithic collectivity of 'Hong Kong people', this thesis seeks to think beyond the top-down interpretations and provide a richer and more accurate portrait of the

studied people and phenomena. I planned my fieldwork with a goal in mind: paying attention not only to people's actions, thoughts and motivations, but also the social surroundings that they are coping with.

Defining field sites

When drafting my research proposal, I received well-intentioned advice, encouraged me to focus on clearly-defined groups or organisations, such as farms, farmers' markets, or non-governmental organisations (hereafter, NGO). I have often been asked where exactly in Hong Kong was my field site? Those who raised this question felt that 'Hong Kong' is too broad to be an appropriate field site. Underlying this impression is an assumption that Hong Kong consists of three distinct parts: Hongkong Island is the urban area; Kowloon Peninsula is also fairly urban; and the New Territories is a huge and remote world, still covered by greenery. According to this logic, 'urban farming' can only happen on Hongkong Island and Kowloon Peninsula. Initially, I took a similar approach and planned to base myself in a single village. However, as my knowledge of the context of Hong Kong evolved over time, I learned that staying in a single spot or with a single group would lead to incomplete understanding and misinterpretation.

No site in this city exists on its own but is created in the process of interactions between residents, as well as between locals and broader communities outside Hong Kong. For example, farm visitors and workshop participants usually live far from the farmland but enter the New Territories for farm events. Some of them stayed and became members of farm staff; some of them started up rooftop farms on Hongkong Island or Kowloon; some of them came back and forth, spending half their lives farming, and the other half working in offices in skyscrapers; some of them went back to city life after a period of time as a farmer. As a result of convenient transportation and high housing costs, even farm workers that work in the New Territories commute daily from different corners of Hong Kong by metro, bus or bicycle, rather than renting a place near the farm. The agenda of reviving local agriculture is made possible by the engagement of urban inputs, entailing human resources (e.g. young farmers and enthusiastic urban dwellers) and financial support (e.g. donations, sponsors and farm income from various activities). Although a small proportion of farm workers and farmers had experience of living in rural villages, they had been studying and working in the city for extensive periods of time. Shoppers at farmers' markets are not only housewives from the neighbourhood but also middle-class urbanites who travel from different parts of the city. Meanwhile, farm products are sold

both at farmers' markets and in downtown organic shops, displayed together with books, magazines and flyers regarding issues of land, food and culture. Without this promotion and interpersonal networking, far fewer people would be aware of the existence of these farms. Farms, farmers' markets and local-food restaurants tend to identify themselves as strongly attached to the countryside and grassroots communities, but these organisations would not exist without support and resources from urban elites.

It is the continuous blurring of the urban-rural dichotomy and the co-presence of social classes that creates local-food movements. Several farms explicitly declare a mission to 'rebuild the relationship between urban and rural'. The blurring of the urban-rural division and inhabitants' high mobility across the whole city on a daily basis has become the reality of today's Hong Kong. In this regard, the city is not as huge and fragmented as the 'three parts' theory sees it. Rather than taken it as an unmanageable monster metropolis, the city should be considered as an integrated site. Hence, instead of confining my explorations to a specific site, different corners of the city comprised the 'field site' of this research.

My interlocutors do not stay at a single site but move around in and beyond Hong Kong, to work, to eat, to meet people, to access entertainment, to grow food, and to attend various activities. I therefore had to move with them. Because the network involves different groups of people and organisations, I had to work with wide-ranging groups and organisations rather than sticking to a single group of people or organisation. Despite this research starting in Hong Kong, the more I learned about local contexts, the more I became aware that local-food movements that appear single-sited are deeply linked to many other places. With this in mind, I not only visited different parts of the city, but supplemented the single-sited investigation with a short trip, travelling with my interlocutors to Taiwan. Considering issues of time and budget, I did not manage to travel with every interlocutor. As an alternative, I conducted interviews and referred to printed documents.

It has been widely pointed out that anthropologists no longer confine their research to bounded and enclosed cultures, localities, or communities because all of these have been more or less integrated into a larger system (e.g. Friedman 2002; Sahlins 1999; Werbner 2008). In accordance with this view, 'place' does not necessarily imply fixity, boundedness, and lack of movement (Feld & Basso 1996; Feuchtwang 2004). To accommodate the trans-locality of the 'local', anthropologists increasingly take a 'jet-setting, in-and-out-of-the-field' approach to fieldwork (Werbner 2008b: 22; see also Colson 2008). In this regard, Gupta & Ferguson (1997: 39) suggests that anthropological insights are gained not from a

simple commitment to 'the local' and the specific, but through an 'attentiveness to epistemological and political issues of location' created by trans-local interactions.

To delve into local-food movements dotted around the city, I had to travel on the metro, buses, and even airplanes when accompanying some interlocutors to attend events outside Hong Kong for a 'multi-sited' ethnography (Falzon 2009; Marcus 1995). Hence, my 'field site' was constructed and revealed *en route* (Clifford 1997) and made of well-connected yet disparate pieces, which appear fragmented but are actually inseparable parts of a wider whole. In addition to integrations within the city, the 'field site' that unfolded in front of me is a space constructed by connections to the wider world beyond the city's geographical boundary.

Selecting interlocutors

In the middle of the fieldwork, after becoming capable of sketching a more holistic picture, I started to see the different lines that made up the whole network of local-food movements. My investigations involved diverse groups and a wide demographic of people: hobby farmers who picked up food growing after retirement; holiday farmers who only garden during their free time; senior farmers and experienced farm workers who consider agriculture a means of making a living and show little interest in its social and political connotations. I also consulted dozens of farm and farmers' market volunteers, regular customers, elder farmers, cooks, office workers, artists, researchers, school teachers, writers, journalists, NGO workers, and the participants, instructors and hosts of agriculture- and food-related workshops, courses, festivals or film fora. What I learned from them all helped me grasp a more rounded picture.

However, to avoid generalisation, confusion and misinterpretation, I narrowed the scope of this thesis down to young farmers and activists, examining the concept of local food and sustainable living unfolding from their standpoint. Other groups represented diverse concerns and agendas. For example, not every group attaches metaphorical and political meanings to farming and local food. Nor are they concerned about concepts like a 'sense of belonging', 'cultural heritage' or 'local consciousness'. For many local food supporters, gardening and consuming local food is a personal choice of lifestyle due to their concerns over unhealthy food, environmental degradation and the industrialisation and commercialisation of agriculture; they not necessarily link agriculture to everyday struggles of surviving in Hong Kong. It would be more productive to analyse their cases from other perspectives that lie beyond the scope of this thesis. Each group has its

particularities and is worthy of thick descriptions. The ambition of addressing multiple groups risks homogenising their uniqueness and sacrificing the depth of ethnography, which is vital for achieving comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, this thesis might lose focus and my arguments become biased if the data was manipulated to fit the peculiar situation of certain groups. Hence, this thesis concentrates on *nungching*, from whose perspective I illustrate how the idea of *buntou* is negotiated and to what extent this concept underlies proposals of alternative ways of living.

It is argued that 'consumerist culture is so pervasive in today's Hong Kong that most people do not stop to consider the environmental impact of their behaviours or to question whether material consumption makes for a satisfying life' (Harris 2012: 10). This statement is echoed by *nungching*, with refers to young urbanites who take up farming not as leisure activity but as a livelihood and cultural critique—a critical reflection on the existing social order. The first part of this term refers to farmers or agriculture; the second part indicates youth. *Nungching* signifies a hybrid group of people who have multiple identities: young food growers, well-educated urbanites, researchers, and agriculture activists. In 2016, only 31 per cent of the Hong Kong population had a higher degree (Census and Statistics Department (HKSAR) 2016), but among over 100 interlocutors in this study, over 90 per cent had a university degree; the remaining 10 per cent worked or are working in jobs with a wage level at least twice that of farmers. In the local-food movements, not only do recent graduates and young professionals play an essential role, but also people who have achieved success in other professions, including administration, finance, medicine, education, journalism, design, art, literature and publishing, and wide-ranging academic fields such as sociology, anthropology, social work, geography, architecture, urban planning, marketing, economics or geology.

More precisely, *nungching* in this thesis not only refers to people in their twenties or thirties. The phrase 'young farmer' is defined as people aged 45 or under. This range was framed by considering the agricultural history of Hong Kong. Between the late 1970s and 2000s, there was a significant recession in agriculture. People who were 45 years old in 2016 when I conducted the fieldwork were born in 1971. As they grew up, Hong Kong was a city focusing on modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation, which were accompanied by the decline of agriculture. As a result, unlike their elders, those aged between 40 and 45 (born between 1971 and 1976) have little experience of agriculture; their life experiences are closer to people now in their twenties and thirties. Those under 45 years old are similarly unfamiliar and unskilled in terms of farming, and a majority of them

were introduced to farming less than four years ago. They tend to agree with people who are in their twenties or thirties when it comes to sustainable farming and local food. The upper age limit of 45 was drawn according to my fieldwork findings: many farmers were within the bracket of 40 to 45 years old, and quite a number of them were over 50 years old, but no one was between 45 and 50 years old, so I see no reason to expand the age-range upwards. All in all, although people over 40 years old are usually not categorised as 'youth' or 'young people', they are included in the category of 'young farmer' in the context of this thesis.

It is worth noting that two ethical considerations shape the writing style of this thesis and the use of ethnographic data. On the one hand, this thesis documents my interlocutors' comments on politically sensitive issues such as attitude towards immigrants and the Chinese government, disputes over land development projects, criticism about agricultural policies and local government's political orientation of neoliberalism, and discontent with social inequality and the monopoly of business elites. To protect my research participants, I removed descriptions of the individuals/groups/farms/organisations/activities that might expose people's identity. When stating believes or opinions that are shared by many of them, I adopted generic terms such as 'a young farmer', 'many young farmers' or 'young farmers and activists' to anonymise the data. However, for the depth, richness and thickness of ethnography, when it does not, to my best knowledge, cause harms to my interlocutors, I provide more details when the topics are not so sensitive, and portraits of particular persons or depiction of specific settings are necessary for readers to understand the contexts. On the other hand, the principle of anonymity and confidentiality remains when analysing life stories and social relations. These areas are not necessarily politically sensitive. However, some of my interlocutors prefer to keep a low profile and not to disclose their personal life, such as what they did for a living, education and family backgrounds, and organisations or activities that they have joined. Sometimes, they felt uncomfortable to share their privacy, such as personal struggles, awkward interpersonal relationships, or judgements of others. They were willing to contribute to my research data as long as those data are not linked personally to them. In these cases, I refer to the same person's opinions in different parts of this thesis or embed different interlocutors' life episodes into a story or an argument, rather than presenting it as data coming from a single person or organisation. This strategy is applied except for situations in which the persons or organisations are public figures, have published relevant information, or expressed that they are happy to reveal the details.

Overview of this thesis

Cosmopolitan food localism

With the premise that 'local-food movements' are influenced by globalisation and the colonial legacy, this research examines how localness is negotiated through imported ideas regarding farming and eating. This thesis suggests that while localism is often a victim of nativism, which conceives the local as necessarily good, progressive, pure and moral, the localism grown from local-food movements embodies a de-territorial while simultaneously rooted interpretation of localness. I conceptualise this view as *cosmopolitan food localism*. From this perspective, the 'local' is inclusive and distinct from 'unreflexive localism' (DuPuis & Goodman 2005) or 'defensive localism' (Winter 2003) which indicate an attitude of resisting change and being reluctant to interact with the 'non-local'.

From the viewpoint of cosmopolitan food localism, localness is cultivated by cultural critique and social reform. Young agricultural practitioners strive to carve out new possibilities alternative to the existing system controlled by powerful corporations, colonial-style government-business collusion and 'developer hegemony' (the dominance of land developers) (Poon 2011). They reflect on norms of neoliberalism, developmentalism and consumerism, and call for reconstructing human-land relationship and practising 'the art of living', which they consider an effective approach to address social predicaments ranging from soaring housing rates, long working hours, to limited access to safe, fresh and affordable food. The revival of agriculture became the focal point of initiating social reform, thereby building new ways of living. In this regard, movements that appear to be 'postmaterialist' in fact respond to real-life struggles shared by many major cities in the world. Local-food movements are therefore about survival, rather than a green, ethical lifestyle for the well-off or sentiments with nativist or xenophobic undertones.

From this point of view, local food is a medium through which people imagine and construct the 'local' not in opposition to, but in line with, a widely adopted maxim: 'thinking globally, acting/eating locally' (Fieldhouse 1996; Fitzgerald 2016; Huey 2005; Mason & Whitehead 2012; Thompson et al. 2008), which epitomises 'a local-in-the-global' (Roos et al. 2007: para. 29). Rather than retreating to the countryside and withdrawing from city life, young urbanites in Hong Kong take agriculture as the cornerstone of forward-looking transformation instead of a symbol of 'the good old days'. This approach of local food activism is neither an echo of anti-globalisation discourses or replication of postmaterialist narratives that entail urban fantasy and nostalgia for natural, traditional, pre-industrial or rural forms of living.

Thesis structure

In this **introductory chapter**, I provided an overview of this thesis, including stating the primary arguments, how this research was inspired by theories and empirical observations, how the field sites are defined, and how fieldwork interlocutors were selected and conceptualised. **Chapter Two** sets out the context of the primary field sites and spells out my research journey. This chapter demonstrates how the research data was compiled and what rationales guided the strategies for collection. Through stating my ontological, epistemological and methodological reflections, I further elaborate on the social fabric of the field sites: this chapter will review the historical transformation from agricultural to urban landscape, and the colonial legacy and its influence on the complexity of the term 'Hong Kong people'; the analysis is followed by a description of the revival of farming activities in one of the world's most crowded cities and a clarification of similar concepts. **Chapter Three** will discuss the theoretical framework and key themes that this thesis speaks to. Chapters Four to Seven constitute the main ethnographic body of this thesis. Chapters Four and Five profile young farmers and their social surroundings. **Chapter Four** provides a detailed portrait of young farmers and the local-food movements. This chapter demonstrates that the movements incorporate foreign influences and integrate 'traditional' elements, so are transformative and future-oriented rather than nostalgic and rejecting social development and economic growth. This chapter explains the historical shifts of attention from environmentalism to food activism, as well as elaborating on why localism entailed in local-food movements is distinguished from defensive or unreflexive localism. Food localism implies a rich set of meanings manifest in narratives about human-nature relations. From the point of view of urban campaigners, 'nature' is the antithesis of the concept of 'city'. Having delved into the discussion of what 'nature' is perceived to be, this chapter reconsiders assumed division between 'Eastern' and 'Western' views of nature and argues that these thoughts are more likely to be dialectical and mutually influential on each other. **Chapter Five** illustrates the implications of growing local food and the meaning of becoming *self-sufficient* and *self-sustainable*. The function of **Chapter Six** is to discuss why postmaterialism is not the most appropriate framework with which to analyse the food activism in Hong Kong. Along the same lines, this chapter points out that the movements were initiated out of practical concerns for survival, and therefore are distinct from countercultural movements or urban affection for a lost Eden. In **Chapter Seven**, I elaborate on the extent to which the local-food movements shape trans-local communities and how the case of Hong Kong contributes to the literature that examines

diverse uses and interpretations of the term 'community'. **Chapter Eight** will collate arguments made throughout the thesis and highlight the core argument. This chapter will also discuss the contribution of this research and how it might inform future studies of urban life.

Chapter Two:

The Context, Ontological, Epistemological, and Methodological Reflections on Fieldwork

A project on agriculture in Hong Kong?

As a former British colony, a model of economic miracle, and a highly urbanised place, Hong Kong is known as one of the most liberal economies and most expensive property markets in the world. Since tertiary industries such as finance and real estate override other sectors, the absence of agriculture and dependence on food imports are often taken for granted. Not only visitors but also residents of the city are often unaware of the fact that people still work on farmland. Both in and outside academic circles, people introduced to my research found the combination of their city and agriculture curious. In a governmental review of environmental policies and visions of 'a greener future' in Hong Kong from the mid-1980s, there is no mention of agriculture (Environment Bureau & Environmental Protection Department 2011). This remained the same in the latest edition of the report released in 2016, except for paragraphs on reducing food and livestock waste (Environment Bureau & Environmental Protection Department 2016).

From both academic and public perspectives, narratives of the history of Hong Kong often start with the British colonisation in the mid-nineteenth century when the city was transformed from a fishing village to a prosperous commercial entrepôt (Harris 2012). Viewed in retrospect, however, agriculture was one of the principal economic activities, but started to decline post-war as farmland and the farming population shrank, along with rapid urbanisation, modernisation, industrialisation and economic growth. The following section reviews Hong Kong's agricultural history, which has seen a transformation from a rice economy to market gardening of vegetables and flowers and finally to begin regarded as a thing of the past. Moreover, I will elaborate on how agriculture intertwines with other important issues in Hong Kong, including migration, political struggles against the background of the Cold War, urbanisation and the development of agricultural technology, land and real estate development, and the use of limited space in one of the world's most densely populated cities.

The historical transformation from agricultural villages to a modern city

The major agricultural belt in Hong Kong has always been in the northern part of the New Territories. From 1899 to 1997, this area was the buffer zone between China and the British Hong Kong. Unlike Hongkong Island and Kowloon Peninsula, which were *ceded* to Britain, the New Territories was *leased* to Britain for ninety-nine years. Britain's right to rule in this area was limited, so to ensure local support (Chiu & Hung 2000), colonial administrators played safe, adhering to Chinese customary laws and local traditions: village elders were in charge of governance of the area, including land disputes, and subject to surveillance by British officials (Chan 1999; Petersen 1996). As a result, when Hongkong Island and Kowloon experienced rapid change, the villages of the New Territories were preserved and romanticised as isolated 'bearers of tradition' frozen in a 'mythic, imagined past' during colonisation (Merry & Stern 2005: 395). A record of village life in the late 1950s suggests that time 'stood still' and the lifestyle of the 'country people' was 'old-fashioned' (Hayes 2006: 127-9). Even when urbanisation and industrialisation reached the New Territories in the 1970s and 1980s, this area was treated as a 'laboratory' for studying rural Chinese society, dominated by powerful patrilineages whose members controlled land rights and other economic-political matters (Watson 1983). In this area, earlier anthropological explorations and historical studies have documented Chinese lineages in 'walled villages' where extended families or same-surname clans lived in traditional southern China-style houses (e.g. Faure 1986; Faure et al. 1984; Freedman 1976; Hayes 1983; Potter 1968; Pratt 1960; Watson 1983).

These settlers immigrated from mainland China during the Qing Dynasty or earlier, and became the owners of most land in the New Territories. Prior to the 1950s, everyday life in walled villages was centred on the rhythm of rice farming with the help of buffaloes. At that time, 'life was simple, and hard'; 'all portable water had still to be brought from a stream or well … cooking was done with firewood and grass' (Hayes 2006: 128-9). During his visits in the 1950s, Hayes documented that villagers had no access to electricity or convenient schooling for their children and relied on farming, poultry and pig-rearing for their livelihoods; the people were 'straightforward and honest, but deeply laced with suspicion of outsiders, and anything strange or unfamiliar' (p. 132). Since rice-farming was the predominant pattern of agriculture, before 1949, Hong Kong imported vegetables from mainland China to balance the local produce (Potter 1968).

When the British government started to rule the New Territories, for the purpose of governance and labour supply for Britain and other Commonwealth countries, the

government encouraged and funded villagers to migrate overseas. Many of the younger generation went to the UK at that time; most of them worked in restaurants and were able to send money back to their families. With income from abroad, those people who stayed in Hong Kong (usually the elders) no longer had to rely on farming for their livelihood (cf. Watson 1975). They rented spare farmland to mainland Chinese immigrants and refugees who settled among the New Territories inhabitants. Remote regions of the New Territories suffered from depopulation, and were repopulated by new tenant farmers whose absent landlords had emigrated, mostly to the UK and Western Europe (Aijmer 1980; Baker 1997; Chan 2001; Chun 2000; Merry & Stern 2005).

The time capsule of the New Territories was cracked open when waves of migrants and refugees flooded in from mainland China after the end of World War II and the Chinese Civil War in 1949 to escape political turmoil and famine (Merry & Stern 2005). Subsistence farming in the New Territories was discontinued when new circumstances boosted the value of cash crops in the market and post-war immigration in the New Territories encouraged entrepreneurial management of food production (Aijmer 1980). Immigrant farmers who brought agricultural techniques and knowledge from their hometowns replaced earlier New Territories settlers to supply vegetables to the whole city. The original villagers became the landlords of newcomer farmers, no longer dependent on growing food but on rental income and wages or remittances from male family members working in urban Hong Kong or abroad (Strauch 1984). At the same time, irrigation water for rice paddies gradually drained away as a result of the building of reservoirs (Hayes 2006). With cheap rice imported from Thailand and other South-east Asian countries since the 1950s (Watson 1983), rice farming suddenly became uncompetitive. Farmers would rather grow year-round fast-maturing cash crops than staple foods that can only be harvested twice yearly; as a result, from the 1950s onwards, subsistence-oriented rice-growing was gradually converted to market-oriented gardening of vegetables and flowers (Aijmer 1980; Chun 2000; Freedman 1976; Potter 1968). By the end of the 1970s, rice paddies were almost entirely replaced by vegetable gardens, and agriculture in Hong Kong began to be identified as 'urban agriculture' since the 1980s (Yeung 1987).

During the Cold War period, Hong Kong was influenced by the tension between communism and capitalism. Although the city has a long history of importing food and water from mainland China, the British-Hong Kong government wished to avoid dependence on Communist China and therefore endeavoured to build reservoirs and develop local agriculture by subsidising newly-arrived farmers. In 1954, the percentage of

locally grown vegetables consumed in Hong Kong increased tremendously from 20 to 50 per cent, although the colony still relied on mainland China for the rest (Potter 1968).

With the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, it was determined that Hong Kong's sovereignty would be handed over to the PRC. Political tension caused by the iron curtain separating Communist China and British-ruled Hong Kong diminished. During the last few decades of colonisation, the British-Hong Kong government shifted attention away from local food supplies to modernisation and industrialisation, and opened the door to imports from mainland China and the rest of the world (Hayes 2006). Since the 1990s, low-priced vegetables imported from mainland China made local vegetables uncompetitive. This policy orientation has continued since the handover. At the same time, under the social norm of developmentalism, people have become accustomed to contemporary urban life, characterised by higher wages and standards of living (Hayes 2006). Agriculture was seen as a backward industry that does not contribute to economic growth. For children from farming families, more profitable wage-labour employment opportunities in the city or overseas were far more attractive than farming (Aijmer 1980). The New Territories underwent significant outmigration of the farming population towards Kowloon Peninsula, Hongkong Island and the more urbanised areas of the New Territories for jobs in, for example, export-led manufacturing industries such as textiles. When elderly farmers became incapable of doing physically demanding work in the field, agriculture continued to shrink, and farming has been regarded as a symbol of backwardness. This resulted in Hong Kong being far from self-sufficient in vegetable production, at only 2 per cent and still decreasing in 2013.

This thesis does not cover poultry and livestock farming or the planting of fruit trees. Except for wild ones such as papaya, banana and jackfruit, fruits are not grown in Hong Kong because, according to my interlocutors, it takes too long to grow a fruit tree; the returns on investment are too slow. At the same time, since 2006, a government ban on backyard poultry has been in force due to public health concerns around avian influenza. Considering issues of sanitation and environmental pollution, the government no longer issues new licences for livestock farming and has encouraged livestock farms to return their licences. It is illegal to keep even one or two pigs or poultry on a private farm. As a result, poultry and livestock farming are completely absent from the farms established in the last decade. Therefore, this thesis will only analyse vegetable growing and an increasing but still small amount of rice cultivation.

The blurred urban-rural divide

In the 1980s, intensive urban expansion and skyrocketing real estate values (cf. Chan 2001; Smart & Lee 2003) marked Hong Kong's departure from an agricultural economy (Merry & Stern 2005). Abandoned farmland was used for urban expansion. Vast farmland has given way to New Towns equipped with high-rise residential blocks, shopping malls, flourishing marketplaces, and bus or metro stations. Rural areas have been gradually transformed into the urban fringe. Until the 1990s, the growing towns thoroughly disrupted rural life: 'country people with feet covered with cow dung and illiterate' were nowhere to be found (Merry & Stern 2005: 396). Since the last rice paddy disappeared in the 1990s and water buffalo were no longer required for ploughing, life in traditional agricultural villages has been transformed and only preserved in photographs displayed in museums. One farm where I did my fieldwork keeps a water buffalo; it is not raised for ploughing but for education, representing a piece of the past for visitors. All day long, it roams around the pasture. Although some farms have attempted to restart rice cultivation in Hong Kong, they no longer use buffalo but mechanical ploughs. Rice currently consumed in Hong Kong is mainly imported from Thailand and Vietnam, with a small proportion from mainland China and Australia. Some NGOs and young farmers have begun in recent years to revive rice farming, but the yield is still far too low to satisfy the market.

Today, the landscape of the New Territories has completely changed. Although this area is often regarded as rural compared to Hongkong Island and Kowloon Peninsula, the New Territories has been largely covered by modern urban infrastructure; only in outlying parts does farmland still survive, but even here it is due to be developed for construction. Although many 'villages' still stand in silent testimony to the agricultural history of the New Territories, the concept 'village' now indicates more an administrative unit and a home address than a description of landscape and lifestyle. 'Villages' are located right on the edge of the downtown; some are even only one road away from commercial areas dotted with skyscrapers, shops, markets and restaurants. A few areas where traditional village buildings remain are equipped with convenient public transportation links that facilitate people's mobility across the whole city. It usually takes less than a twenty-minute drive from a village to the closest town centre and sometimes it is only a five-minute walk. It takes less than two hours to travel from most points in the city to another, and less than three hours to reach any point in the city, including travelling to outlying islands by ferries. Nowhere in Hong Kong is really remote or rural.

At the same time, 'villagers' are no longer that kind of 'countryman'[2] who appeared in earlier studies on remote agricultural villages, isolated from urban and modern lifestyles. They frequently take buses or the metro to go to work or school, dine in restaurants, shop for food and groceries, meet friends, go to the cinema or other entertainment downtown. Many travel daily all the way from Hong Kong's northernmost point bordering Shenzhen to the south end of Hongkong Island. Even older people who have lived in their villages for a lifetime will visit the nearby town centre at least twice or three times a week for shopping or having meals with friends and relatives. Many current 'villagers' are newcomers from Hongkong Island, Kowloon Peninsula or even mainland China. They moved into villages in the New Territories in recent years searching for more room, cheaper housing and green space. Therefore, it is no longer possible to draw clear lines between 'urban' and 'rural' areas, and the distinction between 'urbanites' and 'countrymen' is no longer relevant.

Colonial legacies and self-identity in present-day Hong Kong

Negotiating localness through encounters with trans-local elements

The core of this thesis, the local-food movements, cannot make sense without understanding the city's socio-cultural contexts refracted by the arrival of the British, the mainland Chinese and people from other parts of the world. It has been pointed out that 'if hybridity is a phenomenon found in all societies in some form or another, Hong Kong provides an intense expression of this social process' (Cooper & Lam 2018: 9). 'Culture' in Hong Kong is regarded as 'the product of its liminality vis-à-vis the PRC, the ROC [Taiwan], and Western mainstreams' (Chun 1996: 120). The city is depicted as 'inter-national' rather than 'international', where a high percentage of the population are immigrants or refugees who regard Hong Kong as a temporary stop (Abbas 1997). The city

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2   The concept of 'countryman' in Hong Kong refers to a particular group of people identified as *yungeuiman*, defined by law and translated into English as 'indigenous villagers' (Lands Department 2014). They are identified as 'indigenous', 'original' or 'native' inhabitants— *pen-ti jen* (Potter 1968), *bendi ren* (Watson & Watson 2004), *punti* (Faure 1986; Hayes 1983), *poon-tei-yan* (Faure et al. 1984)— and distinguished from 'outsiders'—*wai jen* (Potter 1968), *ngoi-loih yahn* (Watson & Watson 2004), *ngoi-loi-tik* (Faure et al. 1984)—who only arrived in Hong Kong from different parts of mainland China after 1949. This category of people might be confused with indigenous people in other societies who are often socially and economically disadvantaged. However, *yungeuiman* usually own farmland or village houses thanks to their exclusive right to inherit ancestral estates and build houses on farmland without going through the procedures of changing the purpose of land use and paying administration fees. These rights were assigned by the British-Hong Kong government as a trade-off between local support and governmental land development projects since the 1970s. Male descendants of the families who settled in the New Territories before the area was leased to Britain are entitled to this privilege, which is still valid today, although few of these landlords now live there.

is also described as a 'borrowed place' existing in 'borrowed time' (Hughes 1976), suffering from all sorts of 'disappearance' (Abbas 1997) caused by colonisation, modernisation, and rapid change in the landscape that weakened the sense of history. As a result, it is widely argued that not having its own 'localness', 'culture', or 'sense of belonging' is an anxiety-evoking issue in Hong Kong.

Having noticed such comment, I consulted my interlocutors about their 'anxiety' over 'identity crisis'. They answered without hesitation that they do not feel anxious about the ambivalence. For them, the 'identity crisis' as seen from an external observer's perspective is the consequence of 'overthinking'. One interlocutor illustrated this with the case of *chachaanteng*, Hong Kong-style 'tea cafes' (translated by Chan 2018). These diners fuse Western cuisine with Cantonese culinary elements. For example, customers can order 'pasta soup'—a variation of noodle soup in which noodles are replaced with pasta— sandwiches with stewed pork or beef deep-fried using soy sauce, French toast dressed with condensed milk and butter, or a glass of Seven-Up mixed with salted lemon. One of my interlocutors elaborated that, 'we already integrate things with different origins and live with that naturally'. Similarly, Klein (2007) argues that in the development of Cantonese cuisine in Guangzhou, the central spirit is to adopt new foodstuffs, ideas and techniques, so global forces feed renewal, not simply threatening the continuity of tradition.

Rather than being considered a 'crisis', the transcultural hybridity of Hong Kong culture, which covers wide geographical and cultural areas from Euro-America to Southeast Asia (Tam 2001), is taken as so normal and embedded in everyday life that people rarely speak of 'Hong Kong cuisine'; this term is only used in Chinese restaurants outside Hong Kong (Cheng 2002: 31). For the overseas Hongkongese community, going to *yumcha*—having tea, *dim sum* and other dishes in the teahouse—'is like going to a church meeting' or 'a family gathering' (Tam 2001: 64). *Gongsik yumcha*, a Hong Kong variation of the Guangdong-style teahouse, epitomises the culture of 'syncretism' and a process of globalisation, which involves the incorporation of non-Chinese culinary forms, restaurant styles and ingredients, as well as the global spread of *yumcha* by the Hongkongese diaspora (Tam 2001). It is the international eating style that fosters local identities. As Cheng (2002: 31-2) points out, Hong Kong people are proud of their food culture, but the pride lies in 'the diversity of choices that mirrors Hong Kong's international profile'. They are 'not shy in showing their pride in the inclusiveness and hybridity of their lifestyle' (Tam 2001: 62).

Instead of feeling troubled by fluidity, ambivalence, instability, or fragmentation, people get along well with integration as an outcome of global impacts and interactions with outsiders. It is in tiny, kitchen-sink pieces of everyday life that the colonial legacy lives on. Many of my interlocutors agreed that different domains of everyday life, such as language, the education system, food culture, population, religion, and architecture are a mix of foreign and local elements. They are aware of the mix and are not bothered by it. In accordance with Hayes's (1983: 127) observation that 'two very different races and cultures [Europeans and Chinese] have somehow contrived a mutually acceptable co-existence', one of my interlocutors said: 'Hong Kong is Hong Kong. It is not closer to anything. We have developed our own character'. For them, 'local culture' is neither Chinese nor Western, but Hongkongese.

Through reviewing the literature on worldwide campaigns for alternative food systems, I will illustrate in Chapter Three that the emphasis on localness epitomises a reactionary response to globalisation. As a notion derived from critiques of globalisation, the 'local' is often used to describe things that are intentionally differentiated from items available globally. However, in postcolonial Hong Kong, localness is defined chiefly in opposition to Chineseness and not with reference to globalisation.

The slippery notion of Heunggongyahn *and its historical formation*
Rather than being self-evident notions, 'Hong Kong identity', 'Hong Kong lifestyle' and 'Hong Kong culture' in relation to the city's relation with the PRC have aroused academic curiosity (e.g. Abbas 1997; Carroll 2007; Cheng 1997; Evans & Tam 1997; Hayes 2006; Hung 1998; Lau 1997; Lee 2008; Siu 1993; Turner 1995; Wu 2014). In these discussions, 'China' is sometimes a political entity and sometimes a cultural and historical collectivity. Far from an identity that is clearly defined and agreed by everyone, the notion of *Heunggongyahn* (Hong Kong people or Hongkongese) (Evans & Tam 1997a; Guldin 1997; Hui 2002; Mathews 1997; Ren 2010; Tam 1997) is subject to polarised interpretations. Some believe that Hong Kong is 'a part of China' and perform 'romantic engagement with a Chinese past' (Cheng 2002: 32). In this regard, *Heunggongyahn* is described as 'Chineseness plus' (Mathews 1997) and 'liberal patriotism' (Chan & Chan 2014) compatible with identification with cultural and ethnic Chineseness (Vickers & Kan 2003). On the other hand, some argue that the city is 'apart from China' (Mathews 1997: 5) and deny 'Chineseness' as an element of *Heunggongyahn*. In this sense, *Heunggongyahn* are portrayed as 'incomplete Chinese' who dropped their cultural roots due to colonisation

(Tse 2014: 1). 'Chineseness' and 'Westerness' are not fixed notions that constitute *Heunggongyahn* but something that can be constantly switched on and off depending on the context (Evans & Tam 1997b: 5). In other words, localness is sometimes pursued by stimulating nostalgic sentiment towards an 'endangered' lifestyle (Choy 2011; also Cheng 1997), sometimes negotiated within 'Chinese nationalism' (Carroll 2007: 237), and very often turns out to be a culture characterised by 'nationlessness' (Chow 1992: 167).

The concept of *Heunggongyahn* took several decades to form. It started to take shape after the Cultural Revolution and left-wing thought reached Hong Kong in the mid-1960s amidst Cold War tensions (So 2016). Worrying that the city would fall under communist control, the British-Hong Kong government crafted a new identity by promoting economic growth and utilitarianism to dissolve nationalist sentiment towards the Chinese state (Chun 1996; So 2016). As a result, a distinct Hong Kong culture was fostered by colonialism and underpinned by unrestrained capitalism (Chun 1996).

From the late 1960s onwards, several waves of the building of 'subjectivity', 'sense of belonging' or 'local consciousness' were heavily influenced by thoughts from the Western world, ranging from the ideology of democracy and people's right to self-determination proclaimed by the United Nations, to Taiwan's liberal resistance movement, the international student movement, anti-war and 'counterculture' movements. These called for dismantling colonialism, class-struggle-style communism and Sinocentric nationalism (Law 2018: 19-21).

Since the 1970s, the economic take-off that brought about the city's prosperity and stability gradually transformed a post-war refugee identity to a local identity, defined as 'Hong Kong Chinese' (Lam 2018). Unlike their parents, the baby boom generation who were born and bred in Hong Kong held a less sentimental view of China and saw Hong Kong as their home. In the final phase of the colonial period, the hybrid nature of Hong Kong culture, the 'international personality' was affirmed with pride and confidence (Law 2018: 26). With roots in the market, consumerism and Cantonese pop culture, the identity of *Heunggongyahn* flourished after rapid economic growth (Law 2018; Ma 1999; Mathews 1997; Mathews et al. 2008; Vickers 2003).

In such a climate, mainland China is presented as socially and culturally backward and authoritarian and thus a counter-example to progress and prosperity of the free and affluent Hong Kong (Law 2018). It has been pointed out that people in Hong Kong are proud of their business achievements, being advanced and polite, and having good taste; they categorise 'Northerners' who speak other Chinese dialects as people who are 'bad-

tempered and unfriendly, talk loudly and have little good taste' (Guldin 1997: 28). An exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of History associates the traditional Hongkongese lifestyle with 'comfort, luxury, and style', whereas the Chinese lifestyle with 'poverty, hardship, and dullness' (Ren 2010: 160). Such a mentality is theorised as 'petit-grandiose Hong Kongism' (Szeto 2006): being proud of the city's experience and ability to succeed between two colonisers and believing that Hong Kong is 'the forefront of Chinese modernity' (p. 261) and able to 'civilize the Chinese in terms of its cosmopolitan and capitalist expertise' (p. 270). Szeto further notes that an imagined community—in Benedict Anderson's (1983) definition—in the Hong Kong style, featuring a capitalist economy, consumerism and pop culture, is expressed with xenophobic overtones to reject mainland immigrants. The discourse of anti-Chinese localism remains pervasive and, this thesis argues, underpins the distrust of food imported from the mainland (see Chapter Five).

This 'Grandiose Hong Kongist' state of mind that sees Hong Kong as 'more Chinese than China' and mainland China as a backward 'other' is not a new invention since the handover but has historical roots in colonial times when the city experienced capitalist reform (Law 2018: 23-4). Hong Kong has long been described as a Westernised metropolis where people live happily thanks to modernisation and economic growth brought about by a neoliberal and capitalist social system, recognised as fundamental to the Hong Kong lifestyle (Carroll 2007; Guldin 1997; Lee 2008; Lilley 1997; Siu 1993). In his promise to Hong Kong of an unchanged lifestyle after the handover, Deng Xiaoping announced: "The horse will go on running; the dancing will continue" (*Ma zhao pao, wu zhao tiao*; translated and quoted in Lee (2008: 222). In colonial times, horse racing was a popular form of entertainment for both upper-class and ordinary people. It was such an essential aspect of everyday life that there was even a widespread joke: Hong Kong was ruled first by Hong Kong Jockey (the organisation in charge of all horse-related entertainment), then HSBC (the bank), and finally by the British governor (Goodstadt 2005). Today, horse riding is only favoured by elite groups, but gambling on horse racing is still popular among grassroots middle-aged men. The financial sector remains the most economically promising, sought-after and competitive industry. The related real estate industry also continues to flourish. This social and historical configuration is the fundamental context to consider when analysing current social change in Hong Kong.

A new urban landscape of going green

The world's most crowded city with no space for growing food?

The 'vegetable revolution' since the 1950s—the replacement of paddy land by vegetable plots—has been accompanied by the transformation of the agricultural landscape into sites for public transportation, housing and industrial estates (Strauch 1984). Post-war immigration brought Hong Kong population growth of 400 per cent (Chun 2000), from 500,000 to over two million. This created an intense need for public housing. From 1960 onwards, villages in the New Territories began to be removed for the planning of seven New Towns equipped with infrastructure and community services, and construction began in the 1970s (Hayes 2006; Scott 1982). In the 1990s, old houses and settlements were designated 'cultural heritage' to serve the tourist industry, separated from the New Town areas and becoming 'the hinterland for history and traditions' (Cheung 2003: 3). The revolution in land-use, followed by disagreements between landowners and tenants in the third quarter of the twentieth century, exemplified the social conflicts triggered by land disputes in today's Hong Kong.

As the land is now thoroughly covered by high-rise buildings and commercial areas, only in the New Territories is it still possible to farm on 'real' land; on Hongkong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula, except for a few small garden plots within the 'concrete jungle' (Harris 2012: 9), food is planted up in the air on rooftop farms. Since Hong Kong started to identity itself as an international financial hub, agriculture has been off the government agenda for at least three decades; in that time, the logic of the market and economic rationality have dominated city planning and development, with little opposition until recently (Huang 2018). As a result, only a fraction of Hong Kong's food supply is locally produced. In 2017, local production of fresh vegetables accounted for only 1.7 per cent of the total consumption (Agriculture Fisheries and Conservation Department (HKSAR) 2018), and Hong Kong became the fourth-largest market for US agricultural exports (Li et al. 2017). Only specific 'wet market' (*gaaisi*)[3] stalls, street vendors, greengrocers, farmers' markets, or high-end supermarket chains provide a small quantity of locally grown vegetables.

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3   A wet market is a grassroots market selling fresh meat, fish, poultry, vegetables, fruits and other food products, as distinguished from supermarkets that serve more middle-class consumers. The floor in wet markets tends to be wet as a result of processing, packaging and displaying food on site. Compared to supermarkets, wet markets are considered to provide fresher, cheaper, more traditional and more 'authentic' foods. The term is now included in the Oxford Dictionary (*The Guardian* 13 May 2016. 'East Asian words make it into Oxford English Dictionary'. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/13/east-asian-words-oxford-english-dictionary-hong-kong-singapore-oed. Accessed: January 2019).

Against this background, however, new interest has arisen in the dust-laden history of agriculture and rural forms of life. Organic agriculture, urban farming and local agro-food have become popular concepts (Vegetable Marketing Organization 2015). Since around 2010, the number of farms of various forms have mushroomed all over the city, seeking to facilitate alternative food systems, especially the localisation of food production. Rooftops on high-rise buildings in the business area have been repurposed for planting herbs and vegetables, teaching and learning agricultural knowledge and skills, organising handmade product workshops and farming events for communities from the neighbourhood. Allotment farming is to be found in suburban areas, and on farmland in the outlying areas, people grow food as part-time or fulltime farmers, or work as administrators in multi-functional farms. Some farms operate commercially, while others undertake various activities: weekly farmers' markets (at which foreign products labelled as organic, Fair Trade or artisanal are juxtaposed with commodities considered local and traditional), workshops, guided tours, film screenings and many other events regarding food and sustainable living. By 2016, there were around forty-five rooftop farms (Pryor 2016) on Kowloon Peninsula and Hongkong Island and 139 leisure farms in the New Territories (Vegetable Marketing Organization 2017). In addition to on-farm farmers' markets, an increasing number (although still fewer than ten) of regular farmers' markets have been unveiled and organic shops are spreading over all Hong Kong.
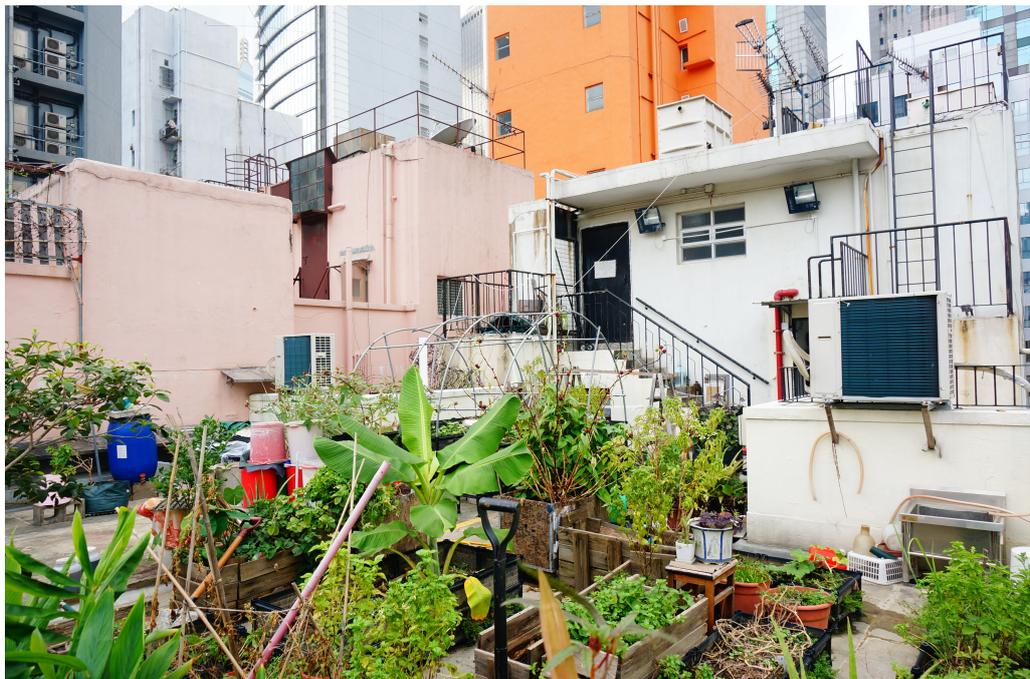
Figure 3. A rooftop farm on a multi-purpose building on Hong Kong Island.

Some people who devote themselves to food activism become farmers, farm workers, cooks, organic/handmade products retailers, or NGO workers. An increasing number of customers show their support for local food sold at farmers' markets, organic food shops, or wet markets. NGOs, social enterprises, and consultancies have been set up specifically to work on farming-related matters. Also, according to the Legislative Council, more than twenty farms have adopted hydroponics and aquaponics. In other words, farming has begun to play a significant role in Hong Kong's everyday life.

Encountering young farmers

It was a hot and humid summer day when I first visited a group of young farmers on their farm in the New Territories. The farm has a website and Facebook page on which they introduce the farm and advertise recent activities and farmers' markets selling farm produce, locally processed food, or imported products produced with environmentally- and socially-friendly methods. Customers or visitors can contact them via WhatsApp (a mobile phone application widely used in Hong Kong), Facebook or email. My first visit to the farm was arranged via email.

On my way to the farm office, which consisted of two huge pop-up tents, I was taking photos of installation art around the farm. After a short while, I ran into a young man. He was riding on a slightly rusty bicycle, wearing a soil-stained long-sleeved T-shirt, loose trousers, and gumboots: he had clearly just finished some hard work and was returning from the fields. I had not realised the necessity of such clothing, and consequently, the first time I worked on the farm, I dressed like someone going for a walk in the countryside; I even wore short sleeves because it was stifling hot. After a day labouring in the field, on the second day I wore long sleeves, waterproof gloves and a hiking cap with face and neck cover—farmers have to cover their skin as much as possible to avoid sunburn, heatstroke, mosquito bites or Red Imported Fire Ants. I also wore gumboots as it is impossible to keep shoes dry. Although this clothing made me swelter, without it I might have given up working in the fields with my interlocutors, as several other volunteers had done after one or two days of physically demanding work.

The young farmer greeted me and accompanied me to the office. When I arrived at the farm, they were just about to have lunch—on a big round table sharing dishes cooked by one of the farm workers, with ingredients grown by themselves or bought from the nearby wet market. They welcomed me to join them for lunch and encouraged me to eat more. In the late afternoon, a young farmer was preparing to collect leftovers from neighbouring

restaurants, markets and herbal tea shops for making compost. As a daily routine, farmers working on this farm push a trolley through streets and wet markets, heading to particular restaurants and shops, greeting the restaurant owners and shopkeepers, bringing buckets of leftovers that usually weigh around 150kg in total back to the farm.

During tea breaks, young farmers read books about food production and consumption, economic systems, alternative lifestyles, the human-nature relationship, Chinese medicine, and spiritual growth. They have college degrees, are familiar with social science jargons, write articles, teach in schools and universities. Some used to work in journalism, banking, or art and design. They have other choices but choose farming as a professional occupation, although they label themselves 'part-time farmers' as they must take on non-agricultural economic activities for supplementary income.

These farmers are not just food growers; as my fieldwork evolved, many overlaps between young farmers and social movement activists unfolded. Another day I wandered onto a farm, offering to help with the work. A young farmer was sitting in front of a laptop, on which was a sticker with a Cantonese slogan quoting from the Umbrella Revolution—a city-wide campaign that arose in 2014 for universal suffrage: 'I demand real universal suffrage'. The farmer was typing a petition to the government about agricultural policy. Many others had participated in rallies for the protection of historic buildings, old neighbourhoods and agricultural land. Although not every young farmer was interested in getting involved in protests, they shared similar concerns over current forms of living.

Wording: nungching*, young farmer, urban farmer*

Literally, *nungching* refers to a neutral depiction of urban young farmers. In everyday usage, however, the term is used with different connotations. Senior farmers and other agriculture-friendly groups argue that these new farmers are unskilled and ignorant novices. Others in Hong Kong use the term to tease and criticise young farmers as idealists who has little realisation of what real life is like and make no substantial contribution to society. Young farmers themselves also adopt the term sarcastically, expressing that they are aware of other people's opinions but do not mind being labelled this way because the label aptly describes their commitment to farming. Given its wide acceptance, this thesis adopts *nungching* to depict newly-emerged young food-growers in Hong Kong.

Although stories about young urbanites returning to the land have almost become a cliché, *nungching* in Hong Kong are distinguished from the stereotypical labels of 'young farmer', 'new farmer', 'urban farmer' or 'returning farmer'. In this thesis, I employ the

concept of *nungching* as distinct from 'young farmer' or 'urban farmer'. The term 'young farmer' usually implies that a person is from an agricultural family and probably lives in the countryside. However, in today's Hong Kong, most households no longer have any connection with agriculture. Only a few *nungching* have parents or grandparents who are or used to be farmers. Even in those cases, the metropolitan youth themselves have no experience of farming at all, and their parents' generation may have given up farming to take other jobs in the city.

'Urban farmer' is another widely adopted term in discussions on alternative food systems or sustainable lifestyles. In the context of such discussions, farming is taken not only as an approach to produce healthy food, but also a free-time activity, a way of de-stressing, or an opportunity to socialise with other members of one's community. Although these features of farming are relevant to local-food movements, the term 'urban farmer' could be confusing because it is associated with leisure farming, rooftop and community gardens, organic food, pensioners, middle- and upper-class people, and high-tech food growing systems such as hydroponics and aquaponics. However, a majority of *nungching* are from humble family backgrounds, and as will be illustrated in Chapter Five, even though they received a good education, they do not see themselves as members of the affluent classes. Moreover, they regard farming as a serious occupation that produces food for the public, not just a trendy element of a 'green' lifestyle. Due to the connotations of 'young farmer' and 'urban farmer', it is necessary to clarify how *nungching* are different from these groups. Having made this distinction, for conciseness, in the following chapters, I will use either 'young farmer', 'urban young farmer', or 'activist'—depending on the context—to refer to *nungching*. This is to distinguish them from elder farmers who live in relatively isolated rural areas and rely on farming for their livelihood.[4]

The innocent anthropologist[5]: my positionality

In spite of focusing on social campaigns, this thesis is not oriented in the same direction as the significant turn in anthropology since the end of the last century to 'activist anthropology' (Ortner 2016: 64)—anthropologists are no longer just researchers and

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4   Some elder farmers remain, and are either the descendants of farmers who immigrated from southern China to Hong Kong during the Qing Dynasty, or Hakka-speaking refugees who arrived in Hong Kong after World War II and Chinese Civil War. Many of them now live in the New Territories; some live close to the farmland. However, they do not have an isolated peasant lifestyle, but frequently go downtown to shop for groceries and *yumcha* in restaurants, and they may even travel abroad regularly.

5   The expression is inspired by Nigel Barley's book *The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes from a Mud Hut*, published in 1983.

observers but are involved in the movements and become full participants. In contrast to backing up certain agendas or ideological stances, readers will find, I hope, that this thesis does not belong to either camp of, for example, globalism or localism, or speak for the discourse of 'Chinese Nationalism' or 'Hong Kong independence'. It does not pretend to be written from an 'objective' viewpoint, as a fully objective study is nothing more than a delusion. This thesis aims to argue that a clear-cut division between polarised extremes of political leanings—such as Left Wing vs. Right Wing, Communism vs. Neoliberalism, Conservative vs. Liberal, Chinese nationalism vs. Hong Kong separatism—involves arbitrariness, simplification or misreading. Hence, such a division is not useful for understanding people's thoughts and actions. The dualism assumes that ideologies, discourses, actions come as a 'package': someone from a specific background must believe particular ideologies; and *vice versa*, a specific kind of thought must justify that person's support for a particular faction. Such reasoning leaves little room for moderate ideas or alternatives that transcend these dichotomies. Consequently, arbitrary judgements, thoughts or behaviours often lead discussions to a dead-end. This thesis reflects on essentialism and attempts to transcend black-or-white interpretations.

The paradox of 'outsider/insider' fieldwork: is one more legitimate than the other?

I am from Taiwan but did my research in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was selected as the primary field site not because of my personal linkages, as in the case of many overseas Chinese researchers who go back to their families' original settlements or parents' hometowns to conduct 'repatriated anthropology' (Peirano 1998). The city was selected because of its position as a 'grey zone' (Knudsen & Frederiksen 2015) between different cultures and social systems. Multi-local influences create a mosaic of so-called 'East' and 'West' traditions. 'Localness' is built through trans-local interactions and cross-cultural experiences. Such social fabrics renders the city an extraordinary case through which to engage with discussions on the global trend of 'going local'.

Whenever fellow researchers learn that I did fieldwork in Hong Kong, almost all of them assume that I am from there. Once when I had a conversation with a Mandarin-speaking colleague, she complimented me on my 'very good Mandarin', taking it for granted that everyone who studies Hong Kong, and does not look like a Westerner, must be from there or at least have some sorts of personal connection with the place. If that is not the case, as I have experienced countless times, people are usually surprised and intrigued to know one's motivations. Such an assumption might make perfect sense for other

disciplines, but as a discipline that has its roots in studying 'others' and exploring differences concerning, as Graeber (2001: 4) summarises, 'ways of organizing relations between people' (for British anthropologists) or 'structures of thought and feeling' (for the North American school), the fact that my anthropologist peers find my position counter-intuitive is worthy of further discussion.

Whether it is more advantageous to conduct fieldwork as an insider or outsider is a long-standing debate in anthropology. Gupta & Ferguson (1997) point out that the nostalgic imperialistic spirit in which researchers from the First World or developed countries set off to explore unfamiliar and exotic places persists in competing academic excellence and positions. This said, there have been extensive initiatives of a plural form of anthropology ('anthropologies') (e.g. Fahim 1982; Restrepo & Escobar 2005; Ribeiro 2006) and advocates of anthropology 'at-home' (e.g. Jackson 1987; Messerschmidt 1981; Peirano 1998). Ethnographers who believe in the value of insider fieldwork argue that insiders have native insights because of familiarity (Kim 1987); native anthropologists are able to decode the psychological dimension of behaviours and 'emotional resonance of symbols' (Turner 1967, quoted in Ohnuki-Tierney 1984: 585). There is a contradiction here. On the one hand, the merit of at-home anthropology has been widely recognised. On the other hand, it is those who do not study their own societies that are expected to explain their choices. Underlying this difference of opinion, I argue, is a hierarchical ranking of fieldworkers.

Although it is rarely admitted, there seems to be a dichotomy between researchers from 'Western societies', the 'First World', 'developed countries', 'the Global North', or 'mainstream groups' and those from 'non-Western societies', the 'Third World', 'developing countries', 'the Global South', or 'minority groups'. It is normal that scholars from the former category study the rest of the world, while it is much less common that scholars from the latter group focus their research on their counterparts—anthropologists who have their origins in former anthropological field sites are prone to go back home for fieldwork, for instance, Peirano (1998) notes that an overwhelming majority of Brazilian anthropologists undertake research in Brazil, and the same applies to Chinese fieldworkers. At an anthropological conference, when a Chinese researcher was asked why he did not conduct research in his hometown, he looked irritated by this stereotype and answered: 'Why not? Not every Chinese scholar must do Chinese studies.' He went on to say that even after he decided to conduct fieldwork on a Pacific Island, he was advised to focus on Chinese communities there in order not to 'waste' his advantage as a 'native

anthropologist' (Narayan 1993) who possesses the exclusive capability of representing an authentic native point of view.

The same does not apply to researchers from a Euro-American background or other areas which traditionally send anthropologists to explore the world. Many colleagues who work or study in universities in the US observe that only studying unfamiliar places, or at least indigenous groups in America, will be considered 'proper' and 'appropriate' anthropological study. This observation is also documented in published works (e.g. Caputo 2000; Greenhouse 1985; Kim 1987; Narayan 1993). In this regard, there is an imagined 'ideal' locale for ethnographic explorations. Those localities are supposed to be outside the society that the researcher is from. Fieldworkers ought to be outsiders, and ideal field sites should be non-Western, non-white, less modernised and industrialised, rural and inhabited by *others*. An underlying assumption is the ontology of the anthropologist who is usually from the First World (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). If a researcher comes from those 'ideal' field sites, they are expected and encouraged to carry out fieldwork 'at home'. Simultaneously, these researchers tend to reinforce such expectations by going home to study their own societies. The Chinese scholar I quoted above is probably one of only a few exceptions. What is implied in these goes-without-saying rules is a double standard regarding whether it is more beneficial, and indeed more legitimate, to study a culture as an insider (or outsider).

Engaging with reflections on the insider-outsider debate, I do not intend to align this thesis with criticism of a Eurocentric fascination with exotic cultures. Rather, I find it necessary to devote a section to discussing my positionality and the nature of my field site because this research breaks many rules. As a fieldworker from Taiwan (where anthropologists from the developed world used to study Austronesian groups or Chinese communities in the days when foreigners were not allowed to enter the PRC), I left home and worked in Hong Kong, which is neither remote nor under-developed but a highly modernised and commercialised metropolis. In the following sections, I elaborate on two features of my fieldwork: it was conducted away from home, and was carried out in a complex Asian mega-city.

'Outsider fieldwork', 'insider fieldwork', or a little bit of both?
It is not novel to argue that the distinction between 'home' and elsewhere is less straightforward than it appears. The fixed distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider' is also said to be problematic (cf. Kim 1987; Narayan 1993). In a multicultural world, 'home'

does not mean a lack of internal cultural difference (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). Likewise, to work in one's own nation does not necessarily equate with working in one's own culture (Greenhouse 1985). In this regard, studying one's own society could mean studying nearby 'others' who are released from an essentialised and homogenised collectivity of 'us' (Peirano 1998). The situation is further complicated by the fact that collectivities, such as a nation-state, an ethnic group, a geographical region (e.g. Europe, North America, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa), or a cultural sphere (e.g. Mediterranean civilisation, the East Asian cultural sphere, the Muslim world, Greater India) are actually not productive categories with which to group or separate people from various linguistic, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. Appadurai (1991: 191) argues that, in a globalised world, 'groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious, or culturally homogeneous'. Geographical fragmentation of groups that share the same history, language and ethnicity problematises the conventional truism that cultures in different locations must be alien to each other.

Such a truism implies that those who share these characteristics must belong to the same 'imagined community'. For example, the term 'Greater China' encompasses mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and sometimes Singapore and Malaysia which have large Chinese population. Additionally, 'overseas Chinese' groups in Europe, North America, Australia and beyond, very often self-identify or are identified as Chinese, even though plenty of them have no Chinese passport, seldom visit China, and do not speak fluent Chinese. For these people, 'China' is their parents' home or ancestral homeland rather than the place where they were born and bred. 'Chinese' in this sense is a linguistic and ethnic category of people who share traditions and history but now live in fragmented geographical territories under distinctive political orders and social norms and have diverse cultures, traits, and identities. In the light of this complexity, my fieldwork—carried out in Hong Kong by a fieldworker from Taiwan—does not count as either 'outsider' or 'insider' fieldwork. I suggest that the division of insider/outsider field research needs more elaboration if one is to accept it as a label.

My positionality in carrying out fieldwork away from home in an unfamiliar but not completely 'exotic' context was both an obstacle and an advantage. The field site was not totally foreign to me as Hong Kong and Taiwan share a certain degree of 'Chinese culture' and use the same writing system (traditional Chinese, as opposed to the simplified Chinese used in the PRC). During the first Lunar New Year I spent in the field, I was invited to join festival activities on a farm in the New Territories. This was at the early stage of my

fieldwork, when the language barrier still made me feel that I was in an exotic place. I enthusiastically shared a Taiwanese festival ritual with my interlocutors regarding 'lucky money' (a red envelope given to younger family members by their older relatives, containing money that symbolises blessing and good luck), thinking that they would be entertained by learning about different festival customs. However, when I finished my story, they replied calmly: 'Yes, we know. We do the same thing here'. I was suddenly reminded that Hong Kong and Taiwan have much in common, and 'the field' was not as unfamiliar as I thought to be.

Hong Kong might have inherited some 'Chinese' elements; however, the impact of colonial legacy on lifestyle, ranging from food culture, architecture styles, language environment, names of streets and metro stations, to education and economic systems, transportation infrastructure, and entertainment, makes Hong Kong unlike any other Chinese city. According to my interlocutors who live in small apartments in skyscraper residential blocks, the Lunar New Year tradition that family members gather at someone's house, worshipping ancestors and cooking and eating together, is no longer feasible. Some dine out in restaurants, but others simply cancel this tradition and only celebrate with their nuclear family. During the festive period when I was there, there was little festive feeling on the streets. It was unrecognisable as a festival period unless visiting temples or particular spots for traditional celebrations. Around Christmas, however, everywhere was decorated with festive elements and there were various special events. The whole city was bathed in the carnival atmosphere. These pieces of contemporary life interrupt the imagined continuity of culture and tradition, which is contended to be able to encompass everything under the umbrella of, in this case, 'being Chinese'. The fact that my own society and my field site share the same cultural root does not make me a full insider.

British colonisation left Hong Kong a unique place where 'Western' elements cannot be overlooked. Such configurations should have made the city even more 'exotic' to me. Nonetheless, having lived in the UK for several years, very often it was those British elements rather than the Cantonese culture that gave me a sense of familiarity. I was an outsider when I could not speak fluent Cantonese at the earlier stage of fieldwork, while I became an insider when I communicated with local people (not necessarily the primary interlocutors of my fieldwork) in English. In those situations, I was not taken as a Mandarin-speaking 'outsider' but one of those overseas returnees or expatriates who have an Asian face, settle in Hong Kong and probably have family here, but speak English as their everyday language. My sense of familiarity was not only resulted from language but

also affinities between the social systems of Hong Kong and England. It happened several times that when my interlocutors were about to explain to me the differences between the British system adopted in Hong Kong and the system in Taiwan, they stopped halfway and said: 'Oh, you already know that. You lived in the UK'. My experiences of living in the country of Hong Kong's former ruler saved my interlocutors much time teaching me how to live in their city.

In other words, I am between two extremes on the spectrum with 'outsider fieldwork' at one end and 'insider fieldwork' at the other. I took the standpoint of an insider fieldworker not only because I am from a cultural background that is close to my interlocutors', but due to the fact that I have spent much time in another socio-cultural system (the British system) which still underpins daily life in today's Hong Kong. Simultaneously, I am an outsider fieldworker because I did not return to my own society. Moreover, the context of the field site was unfamiliar for me due to regional diversity and contemporary social change, such as Cantonese culture and language and the unique landscape and street culture that fuse Cantonese and British traditions. My positionality was a compound of shifting 'partial identity' (Caputo 2000): I was partially insider and partially outsider, and the proportions of different parts varied constantly depending on the circumstances.

The seemingly conflicting role of neither full insider nor complete outsider, in fact, enabled me to step closer to the emic point of view. It has been observed that people in Hong Kong frequently code-switch between different versions of self by selecting or rejecting characteristics of 'Chineseness' or 'Westerness' (Evans & Tam 1997a). Even though this comment was made two decades ago, it was proved relevant when an interlocutor told me, 'We are good at accommodating different people [from different backgrounds]'. One of them even said: 'This blend of different characters is our character here in Hong Kong.' After some thought, I realised that the flexibility of 'shifting identifications' (Narayan 1993), 'multiplex subjectivity' (Rosaldo 1989) and 'multiple native' (Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987)—when fieldworkers switch between different dialects and styles of clothing so as 'to achieve a high degree of empathy with respect to each social category (p. 183)'—is beneficial for field research. Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987) notes that her role-shift let her get along with informants from different religions, ethnicities, and social classes; she therefore managed to see their 'more "natural" manner' (p. 183). In the same spirit, my mixed background and depolarised positionality made me similar to my interlocutors and thus looked more 'natural' among them, who are no strangers to either

Chinese or British culture and use both Cantonese and English (and Mandarin after 1997) as everyday languages. More doors were open for me to reach a wider range of groups, some of whom were elite, while some were grassroots; some had extensive international experiences, while some spent most of their time in Hong Kong.

Surviving in the field: language-acquisition and house-hunting

1. Acquiring local dialects

Post-1997 Hong Kong is a multilingual society. Daily conversation is a symphony of Cantonese, English, Mandarin, and the mother tongues of people from around the world. Cantonese remains the *lingua franca* of Hong Kong, but since the handover, Mandarin has become *Putonghua*, the 'general dialect'. According to Watson (2010), more and more employees in tourism-related industries such as taxi drivers and shopkeepers now speak fluent Mandarin. English and Mandarin have replaced Cantonese as a requirement for recruitment. School children strive to learn Mandarin to ensure good grades and entry to elite secondary schools and universities. On the street, I saw several times that parents, with a strong Cantonese accent, were trying hard to talk to their children in Mandarin, hoping to encourage their kids to practice Mandarin. Except for a few villagers in the New Territories, everyone I met throughout my fieldwork spoke Mandarin, though not necessarily fluently. In such a social climate, I was constantly asked that, why would I bother to learn Cantonese, given that I speak Mandarin?

To avoid having access limited to information circumscribed by my personal networking or interpretation, I decided not to rely on interpreters or key informants to mediate between interlocutors and myself. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I had only taken a short Cantonese course in London and still hardly spoke or understood any Cantonese. However, believing that language is an essential medium for acquiring first-hand data, I strove to pick up the language. I am phrasing it as if I was holding on to ethnographers' research code. However, there was another vital reason.

It is well documented in anthropological studies of pre-1997 Hong Kong that one could not go far without being able to communicate in Cantonese. This linguistic threshold has persisted; nowadays, despite Mandarin becoming the language used in business, academic, or governmental spheres, fluency in Cantonese is even more important for a person's survival in the city because the 'Mandarin-speaking newcomer' has become a category intertwined with stigma and anxiety. If a person does not appear to be ethnically Western, South or Southeast Asian but does not speak Cantonese fluently, the person will

automatically be sorted into the category of 'mainland Chinese' and treated with discourtesy. The most radical case I learned was that one of my interlocutors never considered visiting Taiwan simply because Mandarin is the official language. Except for this case, people in Hong Kong are generally friendly towards people from Taiwan. I phoned a landlady about renting her property; upon hearing I spoke Mandarin, she said with hesitation: 'Oh, in that case...' I could tell that she was going to turn me down, so I added: 'I am from Taiwan'. Immediately, her tone became more welcoming. This sudden and radical change of attitude happened all the time. Before I set off for fieldwork, a friend from Hong Kong warned that I had to make my identity clear. However, except with key informants and other interlocutors with whom I had opportunities for more extended and more in-depth conversations, it was impossible to emphasise to everyone that 'I am from Taiwan'. Hence, although my position as a Taiwanese benefited my fieldwork, it did not exempt me from acquiring Cantonese. Before managing to communicate in Cantonese, I sometimes had to speak in English and pretend it was my only language in order to protect myself from upsetting experiences. If I had not learned Cantonese, many local people would have refused to talk to me, and I would not be able to carry on my research.

As time went by—finding my English improved because before mastering Cantonese, I often had to speak in English (rather than Mandarin)—I gradually overcame the language barrier. This was a turning point for my fieldwork. I became able to engage in daily conversations and carry out participant observation. Language proficiency empowered me to find a position in the field, assisting farmers to sell vegetables or attending activities only delivered in Cantonese. Most importantly, people became more open to me. Undoubtedly, not everyone had strong 'anti-China' feelings, but even my open-minded interlocutors appreciated not having to communicate with me in Mandarin because using their mother tongue made them feel respected and more comfortable. Thanks to this, they were tolerant of my intrusion into their life and articulate in responding to my questions. On top of this, many people were intrigued by someone from Taiwan speaking Cantonese, so this came to be an icebreaker when striking up conversation with new interlocutors. It granted me opportunities to talk to people who might otherwise be unwilling to interact.

2. (Never) settling in the field

One character of ethnographic fieldwork is that fieldworkers tend to stay in the field for a longer time and immerse themselves in humdrum everyday life:

> Ethnography is a *style* of research that places the analyst in their midst, digging into local archives, eating and drinking locally, interviewing leaders, attending meetings, listening to people complain/ boast/worry, watching football matches, singing at weddings and sitting quietly at wakes.... everything is important and nothing is irrelevant.… the fundamentals of ethnography [are] focusing on what people, irrespective of income or educational level, consider to be important (Watson & Klein 2016: 5, original emphasis).

To facilitate this kind of research, I had to find a place to stay for over a year— something I thought I would do only once. However, like many local people, I had to cope with constant moving and house-hunting. Standing in my interlocutors' shoes and sharing their suffering turned out to be a 'rite of passage' which broadened my horizon from focusing on food and agriculture to taking a more on-the-ground and holistic view.

At first, I naively hoped to settle in a village in the New Territories where a group of young people had launched a sustainable farm. I planned to work as a volunteer to get to know people and participate in various activities. I hoped to live in the village to fulfil my nostalgia for classic fieldwork—living with research participants and joining in their lives seven days a week. However, a pre-field trip revealed this to be a fantasy. On the first day I arrived in the village, I met fewer than fifteen people. Most were members of farm staff, and the rest were hunchbacked elder villagers walking slowly along concrete paths or sitting alone in their houses watching television. The village was largely made up of shabby and rusty iron-sheet farm-houses, many of which were vacant. Abandoned farmland was overgrown with weeds and enclosed by steel wire mesh to prevent unauthorised farming activities. A few years before, villagers were asked to resettle elsewhere if their houses or farmland sit on land which had been sold to estate developers. Most farm workers do not live in the village. Only two young farmers who wish to stay near the farmland and spend less on housing live in old cottages left by elder villagers, who themselves have moved to apartments in high-rise residential complexes. After realising the circumstances, I was convinced that it was neither feasible nor necessary to stay in a village and embarked on my journey of house-hunting across the city.

As a non-local, I had to mobilise all my limited local contacts to find accommodation. Unfortunately, while some of my acquaintances were busy looking for places of their own,

others offered accommodation that I could not afford. I dreamed of renting spare space in someone's house and live with research participants. Nevertheless, due to lack of space, people seldom have gatherings at home, not to mention allowing extra people to stay. Among countless properties which I browsed on the internet or travelled to view in different parts of the city, some were affordable but in poor condition, while others were garages or storage space that cost the same as a conventional room.

After a painstaking process, I rented a spare room in an old apartment in the New Territories near several of the farms where I conducted fieldwork. I shared with a local family who needed extra income. The apartment was smaller than 400 square feet and there was actually no spare room; the family partitioned off part of the sitting room as a bedroom and let the real room to me. The room was very tiny, with only a small double bed, a slim table and a chair. To open the door, I had to put the chair under the table. The view from the window of the apartment was of dense clusters of residential buildings, so tall (more than twenty storeys) and so close to the apartment that I could see only windows instead of the whole building. I could not see the sky. When night fell and lights were on, the windows of the high-rise buildings turned into dazzling ornaments in the dark night. Months later, I learned an expression, 'handshake buildings', which describes residential buildings huddling so close together that residents are able to shake the hand of their neighbours in the opposite building. This heart-warming trope nevertheless shows poor quality of life. Hong Kong is renowned for its night-time cityscape, but it is those packed windows and lights around skyscrapers which brighten up the dark sky.

I was happy to find the place in that apartment, as I saw it an exceptional opportunity to experience local life. However, things did not go my way. My naive anticipation was that I could observe episodes of daily life, such as the whole household sitting around the dining table chatting to each other. However, members of the family who I stayed with seldom had meals together because some had to work, and others would meet up with friends. Even when they did eat together, they would watch television rather than talking to each other. During the period of the Lunar New Year, I expected various family activities, but they went out to eat in restaurants and only a few relatives came for short visits.

To develop a good rapport with the family, I brought gifts, helped out with housekeeping and joined every activity they invited me to participate in. After a month, however, I figured out that they regarded themselves as hotel hosts and me as a guest, rather than someone joining in their family life for an extended period. I was expected to have a pattern similar to other young people in Hong Kong—going out during the day to

do their own things and probably also spending evenings out with friends instead of staying around at home. Although I had always been *aware* that my research was in urban settings, I started to *realise* what it means to conduct fieldwork in the middle of a modern city. I felt it was time to finish my participant observation in the domain of family life. Meanwhile, observations in farms began to reveal to me that the network of food activism stretches beyond villages in the New Territories. Instead of staying near those villages, it was necessary to explore other parts of the city. Hence, I moved to Hongkong Island; and then twice more to other places on Hongkong Island and Kowloon Peninsula respectively. The first time, I had to move because the place was in a noisy and unclean area while still beyond my budget; and the second time, the landlady wished to sell the property.

Due to lack of space, vertical expansion of the use of space is a salient feature of Hong Kong. In industrial buildings, offices, art studios, bookstores, factories, and rooftop farms could be sandwiched into the same building. A typical case of how different groups were accommodated on different floors of the same building is the Municipal Services Building, a multi-functional building found in every administrative district in Hong Kong. In one such building near the Central Business Area, on the ground floor and first floor is a wet market where middle-aged or elder housewives shop for food. The second floor houses a food centre where people from the neighbourhood or foreign tourists hunt for 'authentic' Hong Kong flavours at *daipaidong*, a traditional, local and grassroots type of eatery which has become a symbol of street life (Chan 2018; Klein 2007; Wu 2001). The eateries used to be open-air but are now mostly indoors due to governmental policies based on the rationale of modern public health. Above the food centre is a public library. The fourth floor is a spacious study space where many secondary school students do homework or prepare for exams. Walking up the stairs (which are poorly maintained because visitors always take the lift from the ground floor), the fifth floor is equipped with gym and fitness facilities, a squash court, table tennis and dance room, and an office where visitors can register for membership or make reservations for the basketball, volleyball, and badminton courts on the sixth floor. People on the top two floors are mostly students and young professionals. In larger-scale Municipal Services Building, there are even lecture halls, theatres, and governmental offices. The charm of this kind of building is that, by simply shuffling between different levels, one can swap in and out of different worlds.

The vertical use of space is also noticeable when it comes to domestic design. In kitchens and bathrooms, the walls are usually covered in hooks to expand the space. In some apartments, there is simply no space for a kitchen. In the bedroom, it is more than

normal that the bed has to be placed against three walls. There might not be a wardrobe, but rather a clothes rail fixed to the ceiling or some shelves fitted overhead. Sometimes it is impossible to put a desk and chair in the room because there would be no space to open the wardrobe—if there is one at all. In furniture shops, larger-sized items cost less because mini-sized items are more popular. Some shelves or chests of drawers are slim but very tall in order to fit into small rooms and create more storage space. Some new apartments come with bay windows, but these are seldom used for putting out pots of flowers or reading a book in the sunshine; they will be fully occupied by everyday items since there is no other space to store them. For lower rent, it is becoming common to share a unit with people other than family members. It is not unusual that a third person lives in the sitting room, so that there is one more person to split the bills with and everyone could pay less. These are the situations that ordinary residents are coping with. Things are much better for well-off groups, and life could be even tougher for people of lower economic status.

Not until many months had passed did I understand that housing is the most challenging issue in Hong Kong, even for locals. Owing to escalating housing rates, people move frequently either as a consequence of poor living conditions or annual price increases. When meeting new friends, the first or second question that people ask is 'Where do you live?' I consulted an interlocutor about why this is the case. She replied without a second thought, 'Because it is a problem that always concerns us!' adding, 'We are always worried about evictions unless we pay more'. Although it was just an anecdote, it did reveal that housing is a widely shared concern. After devoting myself to the labour of house-hunting, my interlocutors, who are facing never-ending moves and house-hunting, regarded me as an experienced house hunter and came to me for advice.

The unsettled feeling, persistent worry over the next place to stay, and compromises between budget and housing conditions, however, became invaluable inspirations for me to comprehend the social and economic environment that my interlocutors are confronted with. The experience of viewing properties and settling in different parts of the city began as an extra burden for my fieldwork but ended up enabling me to see the full picture of lives in the present day Hong Kong and empathise with my interlocutors' struggles. Without this process, I would not have discovered how local-food movements are cultivated in the broader social and economic contexts characterised by neoliberalism, consumerism, developmentalism, and a property ownership regime. From this perspective, the movements are distinct from food, environmental, political, student, hippie, or elite

movements elsewhere. The case in Hong Kong is not about postmaterialist values or urban elites' moral statements but concerned with the risk of being left destitute.

Fieldwork in the city: methods and methodology

This thesis contributes to ethnographic methodology through engaging with the discussion of fieldwork in urban settings and the ambivalence of conducting research as a partial 'outsider' and 'insider'. My positionality as a non-local fieldworker from a background that has cultural similarities and historical connections to the field site, and the nature of my fieldwork—multi-sited investigations in and beyond a metropolis—granted me the chance to discover things that would have been ignored if I was in an easier and simpler situation. Data for this thesis was obtained through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and document analysis. In what follows, I demonstrate how I collected and analysed data, and illustrate my reasons for taking those approaches.

Participant observation

Participant observation is the research practice by which anthropology distinguishes itself from sibling disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economics or political science. The capacity to gain insight into people's perceptions and value systems lies in the unique approach to 'being there' in field sites and staying for an extended period of time—long enough to participate in various activities, to attend key events several times, talk to many people, and come across special occasions and unpredictable moments that cannot be planned for. The relationship between knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours may be indirect and context-sensitive. Through 'deep hanging out' with research participants, fieldworkers observe the 'back stage' (Goffman 1956) behaviours, thoughts, relationships, and underlying socio-cultural rules that may not be identified during brief visits or one-off interviews. Ethnographers learn local dialects and take time to cultivate rapport with research participants who can therefore talk freely and reveal things which they may not be willing to tell a stranger or an interpreter.

The whole city of Hong Kong was my field site for participant observation. This decision was not straightforward, nor did I make it early on; rather, it was based on insights gained after numerous misunderstandings and corrections. It took me several months to realise that seemingly fragmented and inconsistent pieces of fieldwork data were actually interrelated and taking place simultaneously. The local-food movements began from multiple starting points: key persons, events, farms or organisations. Groups did not stay

together; farmers and farm workers would switch to different organisations or start new ones. Some farmers spent most of their time on farms in the New Territories, but also participated in food or agricultural events on Hongkong Island and Kowloon Peninsula. Finding this out (with some degree of panic), I knew that I had no choice but to broaden my view to the whole city and wide-ranging groups of people.

Over time, the number of interlocutors grew, as did the scope of my exploration. The more I knew, the more I realised I did not know. There were always more farms and farmers' markets that I must visit; more off-farm events that I must attend; more categories of farmer that I had to talk to (e.g. fulltime farmers, part-time farmers, holiday farmers, 'intern farmers', senior farmers, young farmers, entrepreneur farmers, lifestyle farmers, pensioners, farmers who work for NGOs, etc.); more practitioners other than farmers that I ought to consult; and more issues that are relevant. As a result, except for the days working in libraries and archives or in my own room analysing data and transcribing field notes, I travelled daily on the metro and buses across the city and ran into new interlocutors almost every single day.

I did not rely on my subjective judgement to decide where specifically to carry out participant observation. I followed in the steps of different parties—farmers, farm workers, farm visitors and on-farm farmers' market customers, activists, and other practitioners such as local researchers, journalists, designers, artists, photographers, writers, social workers, secondary school and university teachers and students, and hobby farmers who have fulltime jobs—to visit dozens of farms both on rooftops and farmland, several regular or occasional farmers' markets, and various courses, fora, meetings, reading groups, film screenings, informal gatherings, workshops for farming, preparing food, or making home groceries and tableware, as well as farm activities such as guided tours, harvest festivals, food sharing parties, yoga, and meditation. I volunteered on farms assisting farmers with their routines. I accompanied farmers to collect leftovers or deliver vegetables to customers who placed orders online or via mobile phone apps. I also stood behind stalls at farmers' markets selling vegetables and helped with harvesting and packaging. I spent time in diverse types of restaurants (vegetarian restaurants, free-pricing eateries, high-end Westernised restaurants, low-budget *chachaanteng*, or open-air *daipaidong*), supermarkets, wet markets, wholesale markets, coffee houses, organic shops, and bookstores to observe what products were displayed, how those products were promoted, and what kind of people came in, for what products.

To grasp the general cultural, historical, political and economic contexts, I visited non-agricultural places and participated in various activities. I went to museums, archive rooms, public libraries, art studios, historical buildings and sites, old houses and villages. I learned about street life by going to parks, outdoor markets, fast-food restaurants, herbal tea shops, traditional cafes, dessert shops, metro station food courts, shopping malls, furniture shops, and municipal services buildings. I attended festive events: New Year flower markets, well-wishing, horse-racing, dragon-boat competition, 'Fire Dragon Dances', and religious rituals in temples. I also went to events organised by the government and tourist attractions to see how the city presents itself. I followed my interlocutors to participate in activities in Taiwan in order to gain a trans-local and more comprehensive view. In the following section, I explain how interviews and informal conversations supplement data collected via participant observation.

Interviews and informal conversations

Interviews sometimes cause controversy and are thought of as a secondary strategy for ethnographic research (Forsey 2010). However, although there might be human error, such as interviewers asking leading questions or using poorly-designed questionnaires, interviewees telling lies or simply not realising that they do not do what they say, the interview can be a quite productive tool for research in urban settings. On the one hand, Hockey (2002) argues that in Western contexts, participant observation only provides incomplete understanding because much social life and relations are played out behind closed doors, on phones or the internet. The situation is not exclusive in Western contexts. In Hong Kong, people value their privacy and are concerned about safety, so will not open their doors to someone they do not know well, let alone invite that person into their personal life. Some data, such as opinions, motivations, concerns, or personal stories, are kept backstage, so are not observable and can only be obtained via interviews. On the other hand, although my interlocutors were approachable and willing to help, considering research ethics, I stayed away from some occasions if my presence would be too intrusive. Moreover, many things were taking place simultaneously in different places, and it was impossible for me to be in two places at the same time; I was not allowed to attend some occasions, and some crucial events occurred before I started the fieldwork. Interviews served as a complementary and informative method for finding these missing pieces.

As a non-native fieldworker, I relied on the first few people and organisations to introduce me to the wider network. Aijmer (1980: 7) noted how indispensable personal

relationships were for conducting fieldwork in Hong Kong: 'In order to approach a person without his feeling imposed on, you needed an introduction, or, at least, to be able to refer to a common acquaintance.' I had to count on someone as my 'referee' to get in contact with other potential interlocutors. Such a strategy might be confused with 'snowball sampling'. However, the methodological rationale of snowball sampling is distinct from sampling from real-life relations. Snowball sampling is regarded as a convenient but biased technique for quantitative research because it is circumscribed by personal networks, so the samples might be unrepresentative. In ethnographic research, I argue, finding 'samples' (interlocutors) based on personal networking is a productive approach because it reveals the web of social relations. It is very likely that I would not have noticed many issues, known several organisations and figured out the relations and dynamics if I was not introduced by previous research participants. This is even more important for research in urban environments, where there are no clear boundaries or connections.

The fourteen-month fieldwork generated over 150 hours of semi-structured interviews with individuals and two focus groups. Most interviews were carried out individually in a manner which assured privacy; in this way, interviewees felt more comfortable to talk. Two group interviews were conducted with couples who prefer to be interviewed together. Interviews were conducted in Cantonese, so the interview sheet (see Appendix II) is in Chinese. It consists of a table of demographic characteristics and questions designed for specific themes. Some questions are followed by potential answers which I learned from earlier phases of fieldwork; these options enable me to take notes more quickly. The interview sheet was revised several times by considering interviewees' responses to make the questions more to the point. Having said that there are multiple versions of the interview sheet, core questions and the demographic survey are kept consistent. The quantitative analysis adopted in this thesis bases on the result of the survey and coding interviewees' responses—for example, identifying terms that are frequently mentioned and mentioned by different people.

Seventy-two interlocutors between the age of 19 and 62 were interviewed. They are affiliated with thirty-five farms that spread citywide. Sixty-one interviewees are committed food growers or farm workers (fulltime farm managers, administrators, fulltime farmers and part-time farmers), and the rest are supporters (students, office workers, bankers, teachers, researchers, designers, artists, journalists, cooks, volunteers, frequent farm visitors, customers at farmers' markets, officers at agriculture-related NGOs, and owners of organic shops and bookstores). Every 'supporter' is non-vegetarian, and only 16 per cent of

farmers/farm workers are vegetarian. Among farmers and farm workers, 10 per cent of them have family members working or worked in the agricultural industry; 80 per cent of them were born and raised in Hong Kong, and the rest spent their childhood in mainland China or abroad. Although the 'supporters' tend to be the middle class, 80 per cent of farmers and farm workers live in public, rental or other types of housing in cheaper areas of Hong Kong; 66 per cent of them are the breadwinner of the family. Among farmers and farm workers, 60 per cent of them are female. They took or are still taking various jobs. Some work in bookstores, libraries, television stations or NGOs. Others are salespeople, lawyers, designers, artists, IT workers, office workers, bankers, researchers, teachers, flight attendants, baristas, publishers, journalists, architects, cooks, social workers, nurses, travel agents and students.

Sitting down and chatting to each other is something that my interlocutors did a lot among themselves. Knowing this, I always invited people for interviews by saying 'Let's have a chat.' This sounded less formal and made potential interviewees feel more relaxed. In fact, during interviews, my interviewees and I were literally 'chatting'. The interviews did not follow a fixed set of steps, such as checking through every question on the interview sheet. I had a list of open questions along with a brief survey for demographic data. I would start the interview by stating that the data will be confidential and anonymous. After that, I would ask a few core questions, and then let interviewees freely share their stories and tell me what was important to them. Through not limiting the scope of interviews to my questions and not imposing my perspectives on interviewees, I was told the answer to questions that I was not even aware that I should ask.

Although interviewees were encouraged to say whatever they wanted, interviews were kept on track because I knew what information I was looking for and would add, modify, or delete questions according to interviewees' responses. In the meantime, I took care of my responses and maintained a casual and trustworthy tone. With my interlocutors' consent, I recorded our conversations as well as taking notes to summarise the answers and highlight the information that I found particularly illuminating, contradictory, or showing patterns. The purpose of recording was to help me remember and in case there were some Cantonese words or phrases that eluded me. All in all, I insisted that interviews must be as informal as chats between friends, but meanwhile I had research questions and theories in mind. This is why when a few potential interviewees asked me to send them the questionnaire to fill it in and send back to me, I refused because the type of interview I designed could not be done in my absence.

Several interviews were conducted close to or on farmland when farmers were taking tea breaks, behind a stall at a farmers' market, or at someone's home when they were cooking. This was to accommodate my interlocutors' daily routines. Many of them were too busy to sit down for interviews, so we met when they were working. On-site interviews proved to be fruitful and made our discussion more efficient. Interviewees were able to show me the landscape, tools, plants, photos, books, pamphlets, or various daily groceries they were referring to; they could also demonstrate a farming skill or introduce me to other farm members of staff, frequent visitors, friends, or neighbours. Thanks to these unplanned encounters, I figured out the interpersonal networks, for example, who were friends or ex-colleagues, that I would otherwise be unaware of. Additionally, by carrying out interviews on farms, I could help with farm routines or other work immediately before or after the interview. My interlocutors became more willing to help because they appreciated that travelling to their farms, volunteering for farm work, participating in workshops, and interviewing them in their mother tongue showed sincerity and commitment.

On-site interviews encouraged my interlocutors to articulate their thoughts more precisely and straightforwardly. Bloch (1995) described a scene during his fieldwork: he and a villager were sitting on a rock facing the forest in a village in the evening, 'looking from the village to the forest lit up in the reds of the setting sun' (p. 65). Surrounded by the landscape and ambience, the villager expressed her love for the forest. Likewise, without being in the environment, it was very likely that my interlocutors would not have told me so much about their true feelings. One time in a restaurant, the interviewee talked very little until she saw how much food had been left on tables by other customers. Upon seeing the food waste, she started to express her distaste for the urban lifestyle with its speed, stress, excessive working hours, lack of awareness of environmental and human costs, the pursuit of money, and the unbalanced distribution of wealth and opportunities. Similar things—when contingent events acted as a trigger to encourage people to say more—happened several times.

Contextualised interviews also offer great opportunities for participant observation. Interviewing people at farmers' markets enabled me to hear how farmers introduce their products to customers, what customers were interested in, and the interactions between farmers and volunteers. A young farmer invited me to her home to do the interview over dinner. She had prepared the meal with locally-grown vegetables, rice planted using sustainable farming techniques, food given by friends who work on farms, and ingredients bought from wet markets. She invited other friends, some of whom I knew from other

occasions. At the dining table, they chatted about farming skills, food materials, and exchanged stories of when they were working together or during trips to meet agricultural practitioners in other countries. Sometimes interviewees and I met in chain restaurants, coffee shops, and even fast food restaurants such as McDonald's.[6] These sites have become public spaces for various kinds of meetings and gatherings. It frequently appeared that someone could be a totally different person when in different contexts. During farm activities surrounded by, as several interlocutors put it, a 'relaxed and healing aura' and 'like-minded people', one could be much more approachable, expressive and enthusiastic compared to the same person I met downtown on occasions unrelated to farming. Without conducting interviews, I would not have access to these random but informative life episodes that revealed unobservable thoughts and the network of social relations.

Document analysis

It is a widely adopted strategy that researchers refer to printed documents to grasp the general climate of their field sites (e.g. Choy 2011; Jing 2003; Ortner 1998; Solinger 1999). This method was particularly beneficial for my fieldwork. As my research stretched extensively through time and space, it was impossible for me to attend every occasion or speak directly to everyone. Hence, books, films, documentaries, leaflets, pamphlets, tourist guidebooks, posters, presentation slides, governmental and NGO reports, postcards, hand-drawn maps, blog posts, magazines, editorials, newspapers, and online news are crucial sources of information.

Contemporary social life in the city is largely played out in the digital world. A massive amount of communication and announcement was only available in these spaces. Therefore, the virtual space was one of my 'field sites'. If I did not manage to participate in a specific event or speak to someone, I searched online for Facebook posts, photo albums, videos, taped interviews, or official websites. In some cases I also, with my interlocutors' permission, examined records of conversation on WhatsApp. To further understand people's motivations, I referred to books they read and YouTube clips they watch. By studying the materials they were interested in or frequently mentioned, I gained new understandings and was reminded of broader and deeper dimensions of the local-food movements.

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6   See Watson (1997) for a comparative study of the role that McDonald's has played in the processes of globalisation and localisation in East Asia.

A majority of my interlocutors are college-educated, mostly in social science, humanities and arts. They naturally used concepts like 'sense of belonging', 'cultural heritage', 'globalisation', 'social justice', 'sustainable development', and 'capitalism and neoliberalism'. Some of them have experience with the mass media; some have published books or articles in multiple languages; some are managers or key figures in an organisation; and others are social campaigners who are good at formulating arguments. As a result, I neither had to translate and explain these concepts to them, nor rephrase their wording or ideas with academic and technical terms when analysing fieldwork data. This was beneficial for data collection because we understood each other quickly. However, it also reveals something essential: their thoughts and narratives are largely informed by globally publicised discourses that they received from intellectual circles. After collecting a moderate amount of data, I began to see patterns, and thus became aware that local-food movements—seemingly consisted of fragmented pieces (i.e. diverse activities, non-continuous geographical locations, and random social relations)—actually manifests a causal relationship between people's motivations and the social surroundings. Subsequent chapters will describe and analyse this correlation.

Chapter Three:
Theoretical Framework and Key Themes

Food is a multi-faceted topic that has economic, political, social and cultural dimensions. This chapter begins with reviewing how the category of 'local food' became contentious after a centuries-long exchange and mixture of ingredients and culinary practices across the globe, supported by colonisation, transnational corporation and global governance of food system. Boundary-crossing foodstuffs provoke debates surrounding the loss of tradition and authenticity; the exploitation of local small farmers and food suppliers; the disruption of social relation and impacts on local economy; the implementation of chemical materials and genetic engineering in commercial and industrial food production; the decline of quality and local control over production, consumption and distribution; and environmental implications of long-distance transportation. A wide range of alternative food activism that promote a healthier, more sustainable and socially-embedded system has become popular since the last quarter of the twentieth century. Some of these agendas are criticised as serving urban, well-off customers, whereas others involve protectionist localism that rejects trans-local arrangements. Neither perspective, as this thesis will demonstrate, are sufficient to explain the local-food movements led by young people in Hong Kong.

This thesis engages with anthropological accounts of cosmopolitanism and the politics of community to analyse the localism that has emerged from local-food movements. Through exploring a process in which localness was negotiated through agricultural activities, this thesis reveals a version of localism simultaneously underpinned by the human-land bond and trans-local interactions. This thesis also reconsiders the impression that farming activities in the city are nothing more than a part of the going-green trend among urban elites. This chapter will discuss arguments about the social consequences of neoliberalism and examine the applicability of postmaterialism to the case of Hong Kong. It will also compare cross-cultural perceptions of the human-nature relationship, and investigate the construction of 'sustainable living' and contestation over the quality of food in terms of food safety, food security, and organic food. This chapter will conclude by comparing young farmers and activists to environmentalists—the other group that also incorporates foreign ideas to formulate future living in Hong Kong but does not seek social reforms, nor envision alternative forms of living based on the human-land bond and restoration of social relations.

Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to the knowledge of the above-stated areas by facilitating observation of a particular version of localism, *cosmopolitan food localism*. From this viewpoint, *buntou* ('localness') is grown from the soil, implying the human-land bond and intimate and warm social relations at the grassroots level. At the same time, this version of localism welcomes multicultural and trans-local input. In this regard, the local signifies the land, the place, plus life episodes and social relations that unfold here, instead of geographic territory and a particular group of people defined by pre-determined criteria. On this basis, this thesis contributes to the anthropology of community. The formation of communities of the local-food movements follows the same logic as the conception of *buntou*—attached to the land but simultaneously inclusive and transcending geographical and categorical boundaries. Such localism involves social reform and cultural critique, reflecting on structural constraints on satisfying basic needs for survival such as food and housing. Meanwhile, foodstuffs, ideas, and people from different parts of the world co-create communities shaped by a shared pursuit of sustainable living. The existence of such assemblage shows that community could be both land-based and cosmopolitan. It speaks to a theoretical dilemma about whether a community is a 'spatial' or 'a-spatial' concept. Against the background of globalisation, for academic circles, locality has lost its significance to define a community, whereas, in non-academic narratives such as environmental management or sustainable living, the term 'community' persists a locally bounded notion. Communities and the localism emerged from local-food movements in Hong Kong, on the other hand, entail connection and inclusion as opposed to separation and exclusion.

Local versus non-local?

The globalisation of food systems

With 'the intensification of worldwide social relations' (Giddens 1990: 64), be it 'frictions' (Tsing 2005) or 'assemblages' (Ong & Collier 2005), the local and global 'infiltrate' each other (Grewal & Kaplan 1994), and the boundary between them is often blurred (Murdoch et al. 2000). Local communities are connected to the rest of the world through 'horizontal integration' (Kearney 2004); as a result, investigations confined to place-bounded processes will lead to incomplete understanding (Basch et al. 1994). A 'place' has become not an enclosed 'local' domain, but something constituted by trans-local ties (Castree 2004; DuPuis & Goodman 2005). Places are 'nodes in relational settings' (Amin 2002: 391) and 'articulated moments in networks' (Massey 1994: 5). The concept of place

provokes 'contextual groundings for history, presence and mobility … [and] conscious actors who … spread their life interests in multiple locations' (Campbell 2005: 300).

Although it is argued that the process of globalisation entails 'deterritorialization' such that 'production, consumption, communities, politics, and identities become detached from local places' (Kearney 1995: 552), it is also pointed out that globalisation does not sit comfortably with the framework of an imperialistic world system consisting of centre and periphery (cf. Schiller 2006). This is not quite what Lévi-Strauss described as the Western civilisation 'reborn everywhere as *creole*' (quoted in Peirano 1998: 108, original emphasis). Rather, Pottier (1999) argues that multiple global interconnections have rendered global forces more fragmented and less hegemonic, and the 'local' is no longer vulnerable and homogenised. He proposes 'relocalization' to describe the process in which two assumed separated realms, the local and the global, fuse to create new ideas, products, and landscapes. The process of 'glocalisation' (Swyngedouw 2004), in which the local is built on global connections and cannot be cut off from global flow, also engenders a 'global sense of the local' (Massey 1994) and a notion of the 'glocal' (Prazniak & Dirlik 2001). In other words, there is a growing consensus that the neat global-local dualism is not useful anymore, and the relationship between the local and the global is dialectical.

The local-global hybrid is embodied in the domain of food and shows clearly that globalisation, though it only came to the attention of academia in recent decades, is not a contemporary invention. European colonialism created a world system for exchanging raw materials, industrial food and culinary culture (Goody 1997; Mintz 1986; Wilk 2006a). The commodification and global governance of food supported by transnational corporations and international organisations fosters a global imagination of foodways (Phillips 2006). For example, the contemporary food system is described as a 'moving feast' that travels to distant parts of the world (Miller 2013: 138), involving production and consumption that happen thousands of miles away (Nützenadel & Trentmann 2008). Therefore, food on a given plate is very often 'hybrid food', blending local and imported traditions, as well as mixed scales of production, distribution, and preparation—hence, the 'local' is an ideal type rather than reality (Wilk 2006b; see also Klein & Murcott 2014). The history of food is the history of trans-local interactions, and changes in food very often signify changes in culture, social structure and economic conditions (Mintz 2008). In this regard, the contrast between 'dis-embedded globalised' and 'embedded localised' food systems is a false opposition; locale is not a categorical and geographical entity but a 'relational space' constantly re-defined in the process of constructing localness (Sonnino 2007: para. 28).

Even though a neat local-global dichotomy has been widely challenged, the trans-locality of food still causes anxiety because trans-local foodstuffs are associated with industrial and commercial systems and regarded as low-quality. Such anxiety stimulates a longing for locally grown, socially embedded food with a 'rich texture of daily social interaction' (Mintz 2006: 8), as opposed to food that provokes concern about 'contamination, cultural homogenization, and exploitation' and has lost 'tradition' and 'authenticity' (Wilk 2006b: 15-7). Amidst this prevailing sense of dissatisfaction, concepts of the 'local' and 'localisation' have become catchwords (Hinrichs 2003).

'Locavores'—those preferring to consume locally produced food (Azevedo 2015)—are convinced by 'a set of normative beliefs' (Reich et al. 2018: 3; see also Fitzgerald 2016; Follett 2009; Ladner 2011; Rudy 2012; Shindelar & Pimbert 2015) which asserts that local food has intrinsic qualities in terms of taste, health and environmental protection (i.e. a smaller carbon footprint); moreover, a local food economy is thought to be beneficial for building a self-sustaining community and fostering a sense of community. Diverse locavore discourses across the world are oriented towards ethical eating and the moral economy—an economic exchange system characterised by 'pleasure, friendship, aesthetics, affection, loyalty, justice and reciprocity' (Kloppenburg et al. 1996: 37; see also Jackson et al. 2009)—in which customers are willing to pay a premium for farmers' hard work to repair the production-consumption connections and local economic networks, which have been interrupted by the doctrine of the free market and governmental or retail giant-controlled agribusiness (Dolan 2005; Roos et al. 2007; Wilk 2006b). In accordance with these discourses, various food localisms and practices of localising the food system have arisen to resist the globalisation of the food system. Local-food movements in Hong Kong resonate with these initiatives, while simultaneously remaining distinct from the localism that imagines a fixed territory and clear boundaries.

Local food politics: the global agenda of food localism
Food localism[7] is a direct outgrowth of anti-globalisation activism in which people seek ways of eating as alternatives to corporate, industrialised, monocultural, antibiotic- and pesticide-ridden food (Azevedo 2015; Rudy 2012). Around the same time when globalisation came to prominence in the 1990s, the world witnessed a paradigm shift from conventional to sustainable agriculture (Beus & Dunlap 1990; Nonini 2013). Numerous

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7 Food localism is expressed as 'locavorism' in North American contexts (e.g. Anderson 2014; Azevedo 2015; Barnhill 2016; Fitzgerald 2016; Navin 2014; Reich et al. 2018). The term was coined by an American writer, Jessica Prentice (2006).

forms of food activism—defined as 'efforts by people to change the food system across the globe by modifying the way they produce, distribute, and/or consume food' (Counihan & Siniscalchi 2014: 3)—arose and covered a wide spectrum of political orientations, shaping unlikely alliances between groups usually positioned at opposite extremes (Wilk 2006b: 22). Alongside the change was a 'green wave' of environmental movements (Kalland & Persoon 1998). At the turn of the millennium, having experienced peasant resistance and campaigns for agrarian reform (cf. Borras Jr et al. 2008; Friedmann 2005; Patel 2007; Scott 1985; Wolf 1971), we seem to have entered 'the age of reflexive modernity' (Spaargaren et al. 2012). Financial degradation is attributed to carbon and resource issues (Marsden & Franklin 2013); capitalism has been warned that its old path of appropriating 'Nature' (natural resources and labour) at low cost and passing the costs on to the public and future generations no longer works (Moore 2010, 2016). Alternative food networks are initiated to address those perceived crises as agriculture is seen as a multifunctional antidote.

Alternative agro-food models (AAFMs) or alternative agri-food networks (AAFNs) have burgeoned all over the world, stirring debates on food systems in terms of production, provisioning, locality, quality, gastronomy, tradition and authenticity, social relations, politics, citizenship, democracy, environmental protection, and sustainability (e.g. Cleveland et al. 2015; DeLind 2002; Friedmann 1995; Goodman 2003; Hassanein 2003; Higgins et al. 2008; Ilbery & Kneafsey 2000; Kloppenburg et al. 1996; Lapping 2004; Lien & Nerlich 2004; Murdoch et al. 2000). Food activisms across the world share much in common, such as ideas of 'Farm-to-Plate/Table/Fork', urban-rural integration and reciprocity instead of profit-making (Andrée et al. 2014; Menser 2008). Meanwhile, contextual differences contribute to the formation of a framework which contrasts food campaigns in the Global South with those of the Global North.

In the Global South, food crises have been attributed to transnational capitalism and neoliberal policies, resulting in the break-out of peasant movements in Latin America, Africa and Asia (Lin 2017). Food activism resists globalised and corporate food systems and calls for food justice, security and protection for small farmers (Navin 2014; Pottier 1999). For example, Vandana Shiva's (2006, 2008) Navdanya in India advocates a return to community-based and grassroots participation in decision-making about food systems and environmental governance. Similarly, the campaign for 'food sovereignty', initiated by a Brazil-based global peasant network, La Vía Campesina (Andrée et al. 2014; Desmarais 2007; McMichael 2011; Wittman 2009a), emerged as an ideology and set of practices in reaction to the globalised and commercialised 'food regime' (Friedmann 1993; Plahe et al.

2013), which is perceived as dominated by large corporations that scientifically control seeds, food processing, and distribution (Andrée et al. 2014; Chaifetz & Jagger 2014; Galli 2015; Galt 2014; McMichael 2011). This approach challenges the centralisation of landownership and the deprivation of peasant landholdings (Alkon & Mares 2012) and calls for agrarian citizenship (Wittman 2009b). The campaign considers agrarian crises across the Global South to be the consequence of trade liberalisation and the withdrawal of government support for domestic agricultural sectors (Alkon & Mares 2012; McMichael 2014). Without protectionist tariffs and state subsidies, farmers in the Global South are defeated by subsidised industries from Northern countries and exploited by corporate land grabs (Borras Jr & Franco 2012; Goldin & Reinert 2007; UNDP 2003; Zoomers 2010).[8]

The agenda of food sovereignty underscores the undermining of food self-reliance of nation-states caused by 'commodity dumping and the promotion of export agriculture via the WTO regime' (McMichael 2011: 806). It rejects export-oriented agriculture and peasant integration into global agri-commodity chains (Cid Aguayo & Latta 2015). La Vía Campesina argues that each nation must have 'the right to produce [its] own food in [its] own territory' (Desmarais 2007: 24). The organisation stresses national food autonomy and self-sufficiency: 'We propose local food markets, the right of any country to protect its borders from imported food' (quoted in McMichael 2011: 806). McMichael (2014: 938) points out that food sovereignty implies a territorialism embedded in bioregional stewardship. Attention is paid to support for local communities, indigenous and small-scale producers as well as preservation of food cultures (Galli 2015; MacRae 2016; Perfecto et al. 2009). Rather than catering to the international market and profitable transnational enterprises, domestic and local needs are put at the centre (Lin 2017). In other words, the food sovereignty movement entails a strong sense of territoriality. Although scholars (e.g. Breitbach 2007; Chappell & LaValle 2011) argue that this attention to social justice and equity goes a step further than the local food movements in Europe and North America, localising food systems and decreasing reliance on imports have become a shared agenda for both the Global North and South (Cockrall-King 2012; Smit et al. 2001).

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8   The food sovereignty campaign therefore promotes democratisation and regionalisation of food systems to combat poverty and hunger by reclaiming peasants' agency to determine their own food and agricultural system in terms of trade and production, and to claim their rights as citizens who have access to land, healthy, locally produced and culturally appropriate food, and the guarantee of self-sufficiency, food security, and sustainable development (see Andrée et al. 2014; Block et al. 2012; Cid Aguayo & Latta 2015; Edelman 2014; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck 2011; Patel 2007, 2009; Schiavoni 2009; Trauger 2015; Wittman 2009a).

Since Hong Kong is a wealthy modern city, this thesis will discuss the food activism there in the context of the Global North and more affluent societies, in which local food movements are seen as 'social and political vehicles for embedding and creating the means of transitions to the post-neoliberal eco-economy' (Marsden & Franklin 2013: 640). This activism takes the form of community gardens and urban gardening, food cooperatives, anti-GMO activism[9], farmers' markets, farm shops, pick-your-own farms, farm-to-table restaurants, farm-to-school or hospital programmes, and seed-saving and exchange (Fitzgerald 2016; Pratt 2007; Rudy 2012; Werkheiser & Noll 2014). In what follows, I review several local food campaigns that mentioned by my interlocutors.

The initiative of **Fair Trade** was launched as a critique of the consequences of globalisation, but, paradoxically, advocates global solidarity and responsibility to create markets of justice, autonomy and sustainability by avoiding intermediaries that exploit local small food producers (Jaffee et al. 2004; Linton et al. 2004; Lyon 2006; Nicholls & Opal 2005; Raynolds 2002; Renard 2003; Rice 2001; Zerbe 2014). The **Slow Food** movement is another case that has arisen globe-wide response. The movement originating in Italy in the 1980s regards tradition and the origin of the food as a guarantee of quality and authentic tastes. It calls for traditional artisan practices and preservation of regional culinary, local trattoria, and brasseries. It resists the harmful pace of urban life and industrialised, commercialised, and standardised fast food led by large corporations. For instance, it involves in protests against the building of a McDonald's at the Spanish Steps in Rome (Brunori 2007; Leitch 2000; Miele & Murdoch 2002; Petrini 2003, 2007). **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** (Cone & Kakaliouras 1995; Fieldhouse 1996; Galt et al. 2012; Hinrichs 2000; Jarosz 2008; Lapping 2004; Wells et al. 1999) started in Japan and Germany, but gained popularity in North America. CSA stands in contrast to industrial and chemical monocultures, emphasising social and environmental embeddedness and inviting consumers to collaborate with farmers in producing healthy, fresh, safe, seasonal, and usually organic food by paying in advance to share the risk in the process of producing food. It brings consumers closer to agricultural production and transforms consumers into informed citizens. Related initiatives, such as **farmers' markets** or on-farm retail activities, 'serve the local community with local produce' (Lapping 2004: 146; see also Brown 2002; Galt 2013). Products in such a scenario carry

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9 Industrialised, capitalised and globalised agriculture have provoked debates on agricultural biotechnology such as GM (genetically modified) crops and how it results in social conflict and cultural change (see Bolton & Degnen 2010; Campbell 2009; Klein & Watson 2016; Kloppenburg 1988; Murcott 2001; Purdue 2000).

symbolic value, such as customers' trust in farmers (Fine & Leopold 1993; Guthman 2004a), diverging from the hypermarket system of food consumption, involving the 'commodification of the intimate relationship between producer and consumer' and championing the value of community over the value of 'organic' (Galt 2013: 346). Although alternative food movements began in accordance with organic food movements starting in the 1960s (Reed 2010), the fact that organic has been reduced to a branding strategy and involves debates over the certificate system resulted in the substitution of 'local food' for 'organic' food (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli 2007).[10]

Local food is widely seen as better than imported food (Chambers et al. 2007) and greener than organic food (Moore 2006). People who prefer local food regards local food as value-laden (Berry 2009; Fitzgerald 2016; Halweil 2004; Kingsolver et al. 2007; McKibben 2007; Pollan 2006; Rudy 2012; Thompson et al. 2008): it carries implications of quality, flavour, health, freshness, safety, nutritional value, biological diversity, morality, authenticity, and tradition. 'Locavores' believe that consuming local food supports small farmers and tightens relationships between consumers and farmers as well as between urban and rural areas; it also reunites humans with the non-human world, improves animal welfare, appreciates homemade food, and travels fewer 'food miles' (Caputo et al. 2013; Pratt et al. 2017; Shindelar & Pimbert 2015). Moreover, local food initiatives highlight democracy and social justice, promote vegetarian eating habits, and foster local economies and community revitalisation. Local food promises a sustainable future no longer dominated by transnational corporations, global capitalism and neoliberal norms: 'it points to a hope and shared dream that we can regain a balanced relationship with nature through our food choices' (Rudy 2012: 28); further, food localism has 'successfully challenging the industrial foods system, big energy, and Wall Street' (Fitzgerald 2016: 5). Local food activism empowers human agency to regain control in the face of structural obstacles: 'we can change the world through changing our own behaviours' (Fitzgerald 2016: 7; Rudy 2012); it is an all-in-one project to seek change (Lyson 2005; Rudy 2012).

Notwithstanding all the moral values attached to local food, food localism risks endorsing parochial localism and a problematic local-global opposition. The trope of the 'local' has an emotional dimension, and the domain of the local has become a site of resistance to the global (Dirlik 1996). McWilliams (2009; see also Hinrichs 2003) argues that, rather than realistic solutions to food crises, locavore movements are underpinned by

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10 See later sections of this chapter and Chapter Four for further discussions on organic food.

identity politics and an imagined dualism of moral local communities versus evil global forces. Formed against the 'incursion' of global capital and agricultural enterprise, the Euro-American back-to-the-land movement embraces 'native' and 'traditional' lifestyles that are considered healthier and safer (Klein et al. 2014: 16). Narratives of 'taste of place', 'reembedding food into local ecologies', or 'coming home to eat' (McWilliams 2009: 18) are largely driven by the agenda of anti-globalisation, anti-capitalism, and perceived pitfalls of modernisation such as the disappearance of the countryside and decline in community cohesion.

Owing to its entanglement and alliance with parochial sectionalism, 'defensive localism' casts a shadow over support for local farming in England and Wales (Winter 2003). Through her study on gardeners in the North of England, Degnen (2009) found that plants are personified and carry symbolic meanings; some plants are desirable while others are unwelcome. She argues that the evaluation is linked to nationalist arguments surrounding Englishness and Britishness: some plants are seen as 'bad' because non-native seeds are incompatible with British soil. As those plants are labelled as 'foreign invaders' that bring 'genetic contamination', anti-immigration, nationalist and segregationist sentiments are provoked (Degnen 2009: 159). In Iowa, the regional identity that local food carries is represented as elitist, reactionary, and full of nativist sentiments (Hinrichs 2003). Here, a local food movement seems to be about localness, rather than about food.

In spite of its emphasis on challenging global capitalism, food localism is under attack for elitism and relevance only to economically and politically privileged middle- to upper-class consumers (cf. Alkon & Agyeman 2011; Alkon & Mares 2012; Andrée et al. 2014; Clendenning et al. 2016; DuPuis & Goodman 2005; Ellis & Sumberg 1998; Guthman 2004b; Klein et al. 2014; Paarlberg 2009; Pilgeram 2011; Tregear 2007). Some busy urban dwellers are described as 'lazy locavores' who are not interested in taking care of their gardens and lacking time to pick up their CSA orders or meet the farmers (DeLind 2011: 276). Local food acts as a counter-ideology to industrialisation and commodification, but ironically, money is often the 'the guarantor of quality or authenticity' (Pratt 2007: 297). McWilliams (2009: 32) notes that the non-elite mass usually 'roll their eyes at such antiestablishment prescription'.

The popularity of local food has made it so marketable that an increasingly number of restaurants prepare local food to cater to locavores (Nie & Zepeda 2011; Sadler et al. 2014). Even large corporations such as McDonald's or supermarket chains like Walmart have started 'local-washing' (Fitzgerald 2016: 15; see also DeLind 2011; McWilliams

2009; Reich et al. 2018)—identifying themselves as active supporters of local food and appropriating local food to build their images in a similar manner to 'green-washing'.

The merit of local food is largely elaborated from the perspective of ethics and morality (Engler 2012; Klein et al. 2014; Peterson 2013). Meanwhile, existing studies on urban food systems pay 'a disproportionate amount of attention' to consumers who are assumed to merely change their ways of consumption while not attending to food growers and suppliers (Nonini 2014: 403). To fill in the gap left by the single-voice arguments focusing on moral consumers—many of them wealthy urbanites—this research studies food producers. Since the 1997 handover, there has been social conflict in Hong Kong stemming from issues of national identity, social change, and immigration. While there are people who take a parochial attitude to the arrival of newcomers and new social circumstances, local-food movement practitioners have a different view. This thesis will discuss a version of localism that is characterised by cosmopolitanism and acceptance of border-crossing goods, ideas, and peoples.

Cosmopolitanism vis-à-vis nationalism

Globalisation forged a cosmopolitan culture among the younger generation who are interested in multiculturalism and concerned about social and political reforms beyond their own society (Mason 2012). Cosmopolitanism is a term that dates back to Ancient Greece (Calhoun 2002) but has new relevance to the contemporary world characterised by 'penetrability of boundaries' (Massey 1994: 165). With the arrival of the internet, the development of communication technologies (Delanty 2012b), and the dominance of English as a global language (Held 2002), the 'local' has become 'a specific site of the materialisation of transnational processes' (Schiller 2006: 9). Cosmopolitanism has regained momentum since the concept of globalisation came to prominence in the 1990s. Beck (2006) argues that cosmopolitanism is an ethical reaction to globalisation. Werbner (2008c) specifies that globalisation describes the free movement of capital and the spread of goods and ideas, while cosmopolitanism implies empathy and respect for differences in culture and value. Cosmopolitanism is distinguished from 'banal globalism', which imposes tropes of 'global community' or 'global responsibility' on everything and everyone (Szerszynski & Urry 2002).

Cosmopolitanism provokes 'relational thinking' (Campbell 2008: 9) as opposed to the homogenisation implied in globalisation. It manifests a process in which multiple issues affect and bind people together regardless of the place they were born or settle in (Held

2002). Therefore, it entails world citizenship that transcends kinship or national bonds (Cheah 2006). Citizenship in this way is rendered not to a single government or ruling power but to a moral community committed to respect for humanity (Nussbaum 1996). In this regard, cosmopolitanism envisions a world in which everyone has moral obligations to each other, and thereby everyone lives in harmony with others who possesses different value systems (Appiah 2007; Nussbaum 1996). Hence, Delanty (2012) argues that similar concepts such as internationalism or transnationalism are an inadequate framework for understanding social change compared with cosmopolitanism, which is more than a description of boundary-crossing mobility or hybridisation.

Cosmopolitanism, however, is sometimes seen as a Western ideology invented to legitimise Western authority over other places or peoples (Kirtsoglou 2010). A perennial critique of cosmopolitanism is that it is the privilege of globe-trotting elites who possess the resources to travel, learn languages, and understand other cultures (Delanty 2012b; Vertovec & Cohen 2002b). Here, cosmopolitanism is taken as 'the class consciousness of frequent travellers' (Calhoun 2002) for whom cosmopolitanism is a 'taste' (Szerszynski & Urry 2002). This 'transnational capitalist class' (Sklair 2001), predominantly Westerners (Tomlinson 1999), are stereotyped as privileged bourgeoisie for whom cosmopolitanism signifies the fetishisation of foreign commodities: keeping up with international fashion trends, going to coffee shops, consuming exotic and luxury products, or performing global mobility as tourists, transnational employees, or expatriates (van Hooft 2009; Micklethwait & Wooldridge 2000; Vertovec & Cohen 2002b). In this regard, cosmopolitanism becomes a rather homogeneous 'white/First World take on things' (Massey 1994: 165). Such 'lifestyle cosmopolitanism' (Hannerz 1990) is separated from the mentality of 'critical cosmopolitanism' that 'engage[s] with other cultures on a self-critical level, reflecting the limitations or shortcomings of their own cultures and nation-states' (He & Brown 2012: 428). 'Lifestyle cosmopolitanism' is distinguished from 'genuine cosmopolitanism', which Hannerz (1990: 239) portrays as 'an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other … a search for contrasts rather than uniformity'. I argue that the former group takes cosmopolitanism as a performance or status symbol, whereas the latter group who maintains openness and is well-informed about things happening in other places does not necessarily claim to be cosmopolitan.

Although these introspective arguments over the global dominance of Western 'cultural imperialism' (Held 2002) and economic-political privileges of Westerners are well-intentioned, gaps between the so-called 'West' and the rest of the world might be

over-emphasised as a result of apprehension about Eurocentrism. '"Western" objects are the products of endless entanglements [across continents] … Our habit of framing everything in terms of "Western" ideologies, or "Western" discourse … tend to blind us … to the actual historical dynamics at play' (Graeber 2008: 282, 295). Reflections on Eurocentrism or Western dominance are meant to point out arrogance and ignorance towards other cultures and populations. Nevertheless, these benevolent gestures inevitably carry connotations of Western superiority and neglect the agency of the non-Western world where people are no longer disadvantaged, backward, or oppressed by Western hegemony. Instead, they employ cosmopolitanism and globalisation for their use.

The recent quest for meanings of cosmopolitanism has sought to discard the elitist and Eurocentric image of cosmopolitanism. There is no single form of cosmopolitanism; it is observable in many societies but may appear in different shapes and idioms as a result of being 'historically and spatially positioned' within a field of power (Werbner 2008c: 13; see also Szerszynski & Urry 2002; Vertovec & Cohen 2002b). 'Vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Werbner 2008c), or non-elite and non-Western forms of cosmopolitanism demonstrate that one does not have to be rich enough to travel or reside beyond their cultural or national roots in order to embrace different cultures and maintain close contacts with other ethnic groups (Werbner 2008c). Assuming mobility to be the precondition of cosmopolitanism and regarding the cosmopolitan as distinguishable from the local is problematic, as it implies that only wealthy travellers from the Global North are able to be cosmopolitan while disadvantaged groups or even wealthy groups from places other than the Western world cannot (Szerszynski & Urry 2002).

It is also pointed out that jet-setting individuals such as business elites with multiple passports and have multiple homes in different countries do not necessarily display cultural openness and sensitivity (Ong 1998)—cosmopolites are recognised by attitudes rather than 'bank accounts' (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 2000: 230). This updated version of cosmopolitanism entails 'tolerance, inclusiveness, hospitality, personal autonomy, emancipation' (Werbner 2008: 17). In other words, cosmopolitanism is concerned not with mobility and consumption but acceptance of others (Notar 2008). Cosmopolitanism—as illustrated using concepts of 'glocalized cosmopolitanism' or 'ethical globalism' (Tomlinson 1999: 198)—requires flexibility and a mindset open to the globalising world while simultaneously grounding in one's original context. In line with this, although a pervasive attack on cosmopolitanism argues that cosmopolites are politically uncommitted (Vertovec & Cohen 2002b), particularly those who reside in cities (thought to be prone to

regard the city only as a space for economic activities rather than getting involved as citizens (Sennett 2002)), 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Cohen 1992) and 'cosmopolitan patriotism' (Appiah 1998) are proposed to argue that people do not have to compromise local political commitments to identify with multiple cultural origins or plural loyalties.

With diverse interpretations and practices in different places, cosmopolitanism is no longer confined to its Western genealogy and are frequently found in postcolonial societies (Werbner 2008c). In several Asian cities that share a history of colonisation (such as Hong Kong and Singapore), inhabitants are increasingly cosmopolitan and able to think beyond the local (He & Brown 2012). As influential as globalisation, colonialism created connections and relations across groups and places (Go 2013). The meanings of 'local' are complicated in postcolonial settings where contact with non-homogeneous foreign communities and trans-local ideas and materials happens regularly (Delanty 2012b). 'Banal cosmopolitanism' (Beck 2002) describes a process in which individuals experience integration into global processes on a daily basis; 'everyday cosmopolitanism' (Hiebert 2002) epitomises circumstances in which people of disparate ethnicity, nationality, culture, or language fabricate a social space where diversity is accepted and considered ordinary. In such contexts, 'postcolonial cosmopolitanism' (Go 2013) entails an inclusive humanity that envisions a worldwide community consisting of colonisers and colonies who have become part of the history of each other. In this regard, the local is the platform for a global vision, rather than something left behind by or a replacement for the global. Thus, cosmopolitanism embodies a transformed relationship between the global and the local and reaffirms that they are not opposing ideas (Tomlinson 1999).

The fragmented world is even more unified as many parts of the world becoming 'risk societies' (Beck 1992), in which loss of security invokes a cosmopolitan imperative for collective action to tackle global risks, ranging from the economic and technological to ecological, environmental, and humanitarian. This is based on an awareness that the future can no longer be managed by a single political, cultural or ethnic entity. The concept of 'cosmopolitan community of climate risk' or 'world risk society' (Beck 1996, 2011; Beck et al. 2013; Beck & Levy 2013) is proposed to describe this new situation, in which the whole world has a shared sense of planetary-scale food and environmental crises and therefore works together to face the challenge. The concern for survival generates trans-local interconnectedness (Beck 2011) and creates unprecedented 'affinity' between national governments (Broad & Orlove 2007: 325). Being constructed and communicated through global media, dystopian perceptions of common encounters with risks cast doubts

on the sense of security once promised by nation-states (Beck 1996; Beck & Levy 2013). This leads to the 'cosmopolitanisation' of nationhood, which is redefined in the context of globalised markets and norms, migrations, 'global generations', and their involvement in civil society (Beck & Levy 2013: 15).

Taking inspiration from the argument of cosmopolitan risk society, this thesis examines how young farmers and food activists in Hong Kong address personal encounters with food crises in relation to the global community and engage with discussions on good-quality food and sustainable living. The global agenda is taken in reflexively and pragmatically to cope with local issues. With the mentality of cosmopolitanism, their thoughts and actions shaped new forms of community when conventional forms of community such as the nation-state were no longer recognised as given.

The politics of 'community': localism without parochialism

Due to its colonial history and role as an international business hub, Hong Kong's version of the 'local' provides a unique starting point from which to look into the construction and contestation of localness. People in Hong Kong grow up surrounded by miscellaneous ways of obtaining information, immersed in an environment where cross-cultural encounters are ordinary. Routine exposure to cultural differences and constant reminders of the wider world facilitates a sense of 'globality' (Robertson 1992: 132) and enables Hongkongese to become cosmopolitan without leaving home. The sense of commonality and mutual identification of thoughts and lifestyles among populations across different localities created a trans-local 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983).

A statement, 'Hong Kong is a community', frequently appeared during my fieldwork. 'Community' was a buzzword throughout all sorts of discourses on alternative food systems and sustainable living. This ubiquitous while discursive concept was everywhere in magazines, posters, government reports, and newspapers. Coffee chains, organic shops, restaurants, bookstores, and city farms all advertised themselves as working towards improving community welfare. Urban renewal and land development schemes were also touted as community-based. However, far from being a neatly defined concept, 'community' carries highly context-sensitive connotations. It has been in the English language since the fourteenth century and has a range of different meanings (Williams 1983): the common people, a state or organised society, the people of a district, or a particular relationship of holding something in common and sharing a sense of common identity and characteristics. Williams (1983: 75-6) makes an intriguing note: 'Community

was the word normally chosen for experiments in an alternative kind of group-living … [It could be] a word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships.'

Notwithstanding the feature of disjunction of this 'taken-for-granted and unexamined form … of analysis' (Amit 2002: 42), the lexeme 'community' has been regarded as a promising idea to achieving sustainable living. The rhetoric of 'community development', 'community engagement', 'grassroots innovation', or 'Community Supported Agriculture' are widely accepted and have been put into practice (White & Stirling 2013). Paralleling the global discourse of empowering the poor and respecting local knowledge (Gold 2005; Milton 1993), the political affordance of this term has been employed in environmental movements or development projects since the 1990s to promote inclusive management, which invites local participation and 'work directly with people' (Williams 1983: 76) as opposed to offer top-down advice to the community. 'Community' is considered to be the focal point of grassroots participation and engagement with local knowledge; the language of 'community' is adopted to legitimise economic or environmental entitlements (Campbell et al. 2016).

In other words, 'community' is taken as the representation of the local and the legislative management regime for sustainable development (Brosius et al. 1998). This rationale assumes a long-standing dualism: 'community' is associated with stable and homogeneous culture and intimate social relations in the countryside, as opposed to alienated relations in modern urban society (Clarke 2014). With a similar logic, the domain of community is distinguished from the domain of the market (Gudeman 2008). Formed by imagination (Anderson 1983; Appadurai 1996; Bloch 2008; Cohen 1985), 'community' calls forth sentiments of shared identity, a sense of belonging, social solidarity and emotional bonds (Brow 1990; Cohen 2002; Gold 2005; Olwig 2002; Rosaldo & Flores 1997). Here, 'community' is defined by locality and evokes 'warm [and] "fuzzy" feelings of belonging and serve[s] as reminders of a pre-modern period' (Lu 2002: 100).

As locality gradually become less critical for defining communities in a world characterised by human mobility, constant interactions and mutual influences between places, social scientists have shifted attention to 'a-spatial communities' (Wonneberger 2011: 129), based on interpersonal networks, social systems, and power relations. They argue that 'communities' are no longer spatially confined or entail isolated groups of people who share cohesive cultural norms (e.g. Amit 2002; Campbell et al. 2016; Cohen 2002; Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Olwig 2002; Olwig & Hastrop 1997; Swyngedouw 1997).

Much earlier than the conceptualisation of globalisation, Barth (1969) had already found that boundaries between groups are constantly negotiated rather than static. He argues, as later reaffirmed by Alvarez (1995: 453), that an enclosed place inhabited by a group of people in cultural isolation is more illusion than reality. Along the same lines, the concept 'communities of interest' (Hoggett 1997; Waylen et al. 2013; Ziller 2004) signifies that people's concerns and expectations are more relevant than geographical and physical circumstances to the formation of communities; 'communities of practice' are built through continuous interaction and participation (Lave & Wenger 1991). Relationships are developed and transformed through practices in which newcomers can be incorporated into the group (Wenger 1998).

Despite that the concept of community is seen as constructed by relationships and practices rather than locality, this thesis suggests that the relationship between place, landscape, and human society deserves re-evaluation. The modern view that sees nature as 'purified' (Latour 1993) from social networks and regards 'nature' and 'culture' as two separate domains has been extensively challenged when it comes to global environmental governance (Beck 1992; Campbell 2005; Ingold 2000; Strathern 1980). Non-human surroundings such as landscapes and seascapes are not only influenced by human activities but also influence our ways of seeing the world (Bender 2001; Groth & Bressi 1997). In postcolonial societies, environmentalism clashes with history and collective memory. A study of Monterey pine trees planted by the British during the colonial period in Australia finds that environmentalists supported removing the exotic tree because it would help to purify unique botanical features of the native Australian landscape, while the opposite faction argues that the trees must be kept as a testimony of the colonial history (Lien & Davison 2010). In Japan, the concept of *kyodotai*, which originally indicated wet-rice-cultivating villages, has become a symbol of the authentic Japanese rural community (Robertson 1991). In the sense of *kyodotai*, a community is formed by the intimate relationship between humans and the land.

The concept of 'sense of place' is taken as the manifestation of people's attachment to place and landscape, upon which a sense of self and sense of belonging is established (Ashworth & Graham 2005; Bender 2001; Gow 1995; Ingold 2000; Relph 1976; Soini et al. 2012; Tilley 2004; Tuan 1977). Drawing from the abundant legacy of scholarly exploration of an intangible yet entangled relationship between the land and human society (e.g. Allerton 2009; Ingold 2000; Latour 1993; Lien & Davison 2010; Norberg-Schulz 1980; Olwig & Gulløv 2003; Tilley 2004; Tsing 2005), this thesis illustrates how this

entanglement is reinvented and highlighted for the purpose of constructing and promoting a new version of localness—through local-food movements—in Hong Kong.

Postcolonial transition and uneasy urban living

Downward social mobility: the low-income middle class

Food localism in wealthier societies is often associated with middle- and upper-class people. However, this view oversimplifies the reality and overlooks the fact that even in affluent societies, there are more privileged and more marginalised groups. Nonini (2013) made a useful contrast between *food-security activists* and *sustainable agriculture activists* in the US. Most *food-security activists* are from multi-ethnic and lower socio-economic backgrounds. They are concerned about social injustice, the allocation of national wealth and food accessibility for underprivileged groups and racial minorities. Compared to food-security activists, *sustainable agriculture activists* are usually white middle class who tend to be the 'cosmopolitan globalizing elites committed to hybridity and consumer-oriented multiculturalism' (Nonini 2013: 270). They distrust the global food system and believe in local community and farmers. The latter group is prone to be sceptical about the state, while the former welcomes governmental funding or aid from charities. This comparison manifests the heterogeneity of food activism, but the polarisation underpinned by social stratification between well-educated, wealthy and cosmopolitan elites versus low-income and marginalised groups might not be an apt perspective of analysis for the situations in some societies where 'grassroots' or 'middle-class' are contentious labels.

The criteria for identifying social classes vary from context to context, and in different disciplines, but one thing has seldom been challenged: the causal relation between education and wealth. The idea of taking education as the premise for recognising middle-class people is embodied in Habermas's (1989, 1996) account of the 'public sphere' and 'civil society'. He defines the 'public sphere' that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century as a buffer and a bridge between state and society. The literate 'educated classes' among the bourgeoisie, such as judges, doctors, pastors and scholars, were influenced by liberal thought acquired in the 'private sphere' (households). From critiques of art and literature, to reflections on the feudal state controlled by a small number of individuals, a public sphere was created in which the educated classes debated public issues and state policies, in salons, coffee houses, dining rooms, or in newspapers.

The correlation between education and social class might be true for eighteenth-century Europe and is still widely accepted as reflecting reality in some contexts. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily the case for twenty-first-century Hong Kong and East Asia in general. With the accessibility of educational resources, it is no longer a class privilege to receive higher education. Joining reading groups and holding intellectual discussions in coffee houses, restaurants, or on social media is no longer unattainable for people from lower-class backgrounds or working in low-paid jobs. Meanwhile, a good education does not guarantee economic achievement or social mobility.

Such traits of contemporary urban life are also visible in postcolonial Kerala in South India. 'Developmentalists' promise that schooling is the path leading to social mobility, and thus a better life (Chua 2014: 16). However, Chua reveals that educated young adults still experience feelings of stagnation and powerlessness: when opportunities for education increase, nevertheless, the rate of unemployment has risen among the educated, and waged work has 'deteriorated across social groups and classes' (p. 16). As a consequence, social mobility as the reward of education becomes an empty promise, and Kerala witnesses high suicide rates due to the overwhelming disappointment of dead-end futures.

The causal relation between wealth and education has been considerably weakened in Japan, China, and the US, where the occurrence of a low-income middle class, or the disappearance of the middle class, has been identified and conceptualised as 'downward social mobility' (Atsushi 2005; Chan et al. 2009; Fujita 2016; Newman 1988; Ohmae 2006). As an affluent society, Hong Kong has many social problems shared by other modern metropolises. Notably, the phenomenon of downward social mobility is closely linked to an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, which began when the city was still a colony. A description of pre-handover Hong Kong could easily apply today: 'modern, high-tech, high-rise buildings juxtaposed to shanty towns, intensely developed areas adjacent to unused and desolate land and well-maintained estates surrounded by dilapidated neighbourhoods' (Kwok 1993: 111). The scenario highlights significant contrasts between the two worlds in one city. Tensions between the two worlds has been ascribed to the monopoly of land and estate markets by real estate tycoons (Poon 2011). Poon argues that the 'ruling class' forms partnerships with the government, and the grassroots majority is subordinated to the elite minority who have control over land and thus over every aspect of daily life.

The worsening inflation of real estate values and the rising unemployment rate have caused much dissatisfaction (Choy 2011). Those lucky enough to find a job spend on

average 50.11 hours a week in the workplace, and only have 17 days of annual leave (Cooper & Lam 2018). Work does not lead to a higher wage level compared to other major cities, while the housing costs in Hong Kong are ranked second-highest in the world, behind New York (Cooper & Lam 2018). Cooper and Lam (2018) conceptualise well-educated and well-networked young people who are nonetheless suffering the effects of urban life dictated by neoliberal capitalism, such as wage stagnation and increasingly unaffordable housing rates, as 'graduates with no future'. Working culture and living expenses underpin a broader anxiety afflicting a whole generation. According to sociologist Lui Tai-lok's (2007) widely cited theory of generational difference in Hong Kong, the generation born after 1980—those now younger than forty—are struggling with skyrocketing housing costs and fewer positions on the job market. Higher education no longer ensures better quality of life.

Mannheim (1952 [1927]) argues that peers of the same cohort stand on a common 'generation location'—they have similar experiences and behaviour modes. These generational 'dispositions' (Jing 1996: 60) are formulated by shared senses of life possibilities, knowledge and reflections (see also Rosaldo 1980). The emergence of 'graduates with no future' in Hong Kong highlights the fact that education does not imply higher economic status. It fundamentally challenges the assumption that urban farming is exclusively for the middle class. Against this background, agriculture that integrates issues of land, food, working culture and the notion of *buntou*, came to be the starting point from which young people formulate plans of more desirable ways of living.

Human-nature relationship and urban sentiments towards nature
Perceptions of 'nature'—one of the most complex terms in English (Williams 1983)—profoundly influence food systems and environmental governance; food and environmental activism, on the other hand, stimulate new approaches to being in or with nature. The term 'anthropocene', coined at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Campbell 2018), has recently became a high-profile concept. With its roots in geology, it signifies human influence in the composition of the more-than-human world, marking an epoch when, on the one hand, 'nature' defines and is defined by human life (Hastrup 2014), and on the other, the 'art of living' (Tsing 2017) becomes the battleground of ontological, epistemological and practical debates of how people create their realities in relation to 'nature'. It is believed that growing food enables people to get closer to nature; farms are sites where urban dwellers retreat from downtown hustle for healing and relaxation (Bhatti

& Church 2001; Macfarlane 1987; Pryor 2016). Such statements imply a nature-culture dualism that takes 'nature' as the physical world separated from human society. This section will place 'nature' under scrutiny in order to analyse social and political episodes that have unfolded based on particular interpretations of the term. The divide between the Western worldview and non-Western cosmology will also be examined.

It has been pointed out that 'nature' is a socio-cultural construction and has many cross-cultural and historical variations (Descola 2013; MacCormack & Strathern 1980; Weller & Hsiao 1998). In nineteenth-century England, nature was appreciated 'for its own sake' (Weller 2006: 53), championing the 'heroic, emotional and intuitive self' in adventures exemplified by Grand Tours into the wilderness of the Alps or Mount Everest, which became a 'rite of passage for English gentlemen' (p. 54). Around the same moment in the US, imagining and sanctifying untouched nature became popular and later fostered the creation of a national park system (Weller 2006). This worldview sees nature as human- and industry-free and pursues the goal of people becoming *one* with nature (Lohmann 1993). In this logic, 'oriental' traditions such as Taoism or Hinduism have been adapted since the 1990s into a Western construction of sustainability as the solution to environmental degradation (Kalland & Persoon 1998; Lohmann 1993).

People from cultures influenced by the Confucian worldview, especially China, Japan, or Korea, are portrayed as 'living in harmony with nature' (Callicott & Ames 1989, noted in Kalland & Persoon 1998: 3). Echoing Sahlins's (1972) accounts of the 'original affluent society', Kalland & Persoon (1998: 3) point out that people living under the framework of Buddhism, Daoism or Hinduism are thought to be 'content with little, epitomised by the ascetic recluse who subsists on the bare minimum to uphold life functions'. Famous writers regard this lifestyle as ideal, for instance, Thoreau criticises urban lifestyle and envisions alternatives 'based on simplicity and purity of the individual self without need for the artificiality of city life and social convention' (quoted in Weller 2006: 54).

Underneath the romanticisation of 'non-Western' ways of being with 'nature' is a dichotomy between non-Western cosmology and Western civilisation, which is considered to have lost the sense of wholeness and relatedness to capitalist modes of production and living, as a result taking the human body as a machine rather than integrated with nature (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987, reviewed in Degnen 2009). However, it has been revealed that 'Asians' do not always possess an ecocentric perspective of nature in contrast to the Western anthropocentric view, and there is no such thing as a homogeneous or coherent perception of nature across Asia (Bruun & Kalland 1995; Kalland & Persoon 1998; Nash

1989). The culture/nature split is also observable in 'Eastern' cultures in which 'nature' could be seen as harmful or appropriated for human use (Asquith & Kalland 1997; Kalland & Persoon 1998). Meanwhile, in 'Western' societies, nature is not always taken as impersonal. Degnen (2009: 160) finds that gardeners in the north of England believe that plants 'eat food', 'express food preferences', and 'will bleed if cut'.

The culture-nature dualism tends to go hand in hand with urban-rural opposition (Cunningham & Scraper 2014). The entanglement of nature-loving with anti-urban and anti-industrial tendencies is evident in newly developed economies. Urban professionals 'fleeing the physical, emotional, and moral stresses of the "rat race" by embracing a rustic "simplicity" that can only exist in an idealized, bucolic, postpastoral countryside' (Klein et al. 2014: 16; see also Gould 2005; Paxson 2012). As one of the Four Asian Tigers (four economies that experienced rapid economic take-off in the latter half of the twentieth century; the others are Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea), Taiwan had not 'discovered' nature until the mid-1980s after witnessing a 'modernist war against nature' (Weller 2006: 50; also Weller & Hsiao 1998)—rapid modernisation of infrastructure and the industrialisation of agriculture followed by chemical pollution and environmental degradation. These experiences evoked an unprecedented appreciation of nature, responding to a prevailing feeling of 'alienation from both nature and tradition' (Weller & Hsiao 1998: 84). Likewise, when urban areas in today's China are seen as the base for modernisation, industrialisation, and the advancement of civilisation, rural areas are regarded as the space for authentic tradition and cultural heritage (Klein et al. 2014). The urban middle class are attracted to rural villages by their fascination for the simplicity, purity and cleanness of rural life (Klein 2014). Alternative food agendas such as CSAs, community gardens, or shops and restaurants that serve local or organic foods 'bring the countryside' to city dwellers (Klein et al. 2014: 16). Now in both 'West' and 'East', people are concerned about 'the "death" of the countryside' (Klein et al. 2014: 13). Young farmers and activists in Hong Kong share this concern because they worry that the disappearance of the countryside means the demise of local food production.

Sustainable living: constructing 'quality food' and 'quality life'
1. Food safety, food security, and organic food

As the primary supplier of over 90 per cent of agricultural products consumed in Hong Kong (Chan & Chan 2008, 2009; Yuk Wah Chan 2016; Klein 2013; Siu 1993; Wu et al. 2014), mainland China is troubled by successive food safety hazards ranging from

pesticide poisoning, heavy metal pollution and chemical additive abuse to fake foods, melamine-tainted milk powder, cadmium-tainted rice, and other contamination and animal illnesses (Bian 2004; Gong & Jackson 2012; Hamburger 2002; Klein 2013; Lam et al. 2013; Liu 2014; Smil 2004; Tam & Yang 2005; Thiers 2005; Tracy 2016, 2010; Wang et al. 2008; Wu & Chen 2013; Xiu & Klein 2010; Yan 2012). Amid the prevailing sense of crisis, numerous studies found an emerging market of quality food (Shi et al. 2011; Sirieix et al. 2011; Zhang 2018) and growing interest in initiatives for reliable food systems to establish new social relations and community resilience in reaction to profit-driven food production (Zhang 2018). The alternative food advocacies mainly address the issue of health and invoke 'nature' as the guarantee of healthy food (Klein 2009). The perceived healing power of 'nature' is epitomised in the increasing popularity of organic food. Despite a long list of technical definitions, for ordinary consumers, 'organic' means the food is more 'natural', using less chemical ingredients, and safer. This quality is often judged by the appearance of food: the more beautiful it is, the less natural (Klein 2009).

The very concept of 'organic' is a twentieth-century invention, created to oppose industrialised food grown with chemical substances. The term 'organic farming' was coined by the English agriculturist Lord Northbourne (1940), who describes the farming system as a dynamic and balanced living whole (Paull 2006). Before the notion was coined, methods and principles that fit into today's organic standards, such as non-chemical fertilisation, turning waste into compost, renewable energy recycling, or tillage and irrigation arrangements adapt to land scarcity, had long been implemented in China, Japan, Korea (e.g. Bray 1986; King 1926; Netting 1993; Santos 2011) and elsewhere.

After two World Wars, scientific research as part of the international 'Green Revolution' campaign advanced agricultural technology by repurposing warfare chemicals for agricultural use in order to tackle global population growth and the consequent issue of food insecurity (Pratt 2007; Ross 2003; Shiva 1991; Soby 2013)—the social predicament predicted by Malthus (1973) who foresaw unbalanced population growth and food provisioning (Galli 2015). An outbreak of food crises in the 1970s marked the beginning of global food security governance that sees insufficient production, rather than unequal access to food, as the primary threat to food security (Lin 2017). The modern agriculture which evolved from such reasoning is characterised by technological advancement, mechanisation, the spread of hybrid plants, the use of synthesised fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides, capital-intensive systems, and global free trade from which transnational

corporations pursue capital accumulation (Alkon & Mares 2012; Galli 2015; MacRae 2016; Paarlberg 2009; Scofield 1986).

The Green Revolution-style agriculture spawned all kinds of organic movement (Paarlberg 2009; Scofield 1986), seeking to grow food in more natural and environmentally friendly ways. During the 1960s and 1970s, organic agriculture was popularised by the back-to-the-land movement, primarily initiated in Europe and the US (Guthman 2004a; Kuepper 2010). From the 1990s, a worldwide retail market for organic food began to emerge. As agricultural philosophies develop, organic farming began to be considered a transitional stage from conventional farming to sustainable agriculture (Rigby & Cáceres 2001), which focuses on reducing damage to the environment and attends to the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole (Jackson 1985).

Young farmers and activists in Hong Kong share the fear of unnatural foodstuffs and a vision of environmentally and socially sound approaches. They articulate what are 'natural' and 'unnatural' food based on influences of the concept of nature in a set of philosophies of sustainable agriculture (see Chapter Four), according to which 'natural' food is beneficial for both humans and the environment. Having said this, rather than taking sustainable agriculture as an environmental agenda, 'quality of life' is a key term in their imaginations of sustainable living. Given that 'quality of life' is a multidimensional and elusive idea, this thesis adopts the definition used by Ng et al. (2018: 36), defining quality of life as a person's 'subjective satisfaction towards life', encompassing physical and mental health, family, work, social life, economic status, and living conditions. Through the eyes of young farmers and food activists, sustainable living relates to physical and mental health, a close and balanced relationship with the physical world, and a sense of living a 'meaningful' life.

2. A postmaterialist approach to sustainable living?

Compared to the high cost of living, wages are low in Hong Kong, and the income from farming lower still. Therefore, young farmers are often asked whether they can sustain themselves and their families. Since their career choice is seen as 'unusual', they are often labelled as idealists, and thus 'postmaterialism' is a label often imposed on them. Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997) describes a culture shift in the US towards new social values since the late 1970s. He notes that the unprecedented appreciation of nature and new initiatives of environmental governance are results of the satisfaction of material needs—when those needs have been addressed, people start to concern themselves with less practical

problems. Along the same lines, local-food movements practitioners in Hong Kong are said to be motivated much more by ethical and emotional incentives than economic considerations. However, this thesis suggests that such interpretation fail to consider everyday struggles that young farmers and activists are facing. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the younger generation is portrayed as 'graduates with no future' who are coping with social and economic challenges with a sense of despair and turmoil. Therefore, it is hardly convincing to say that they shift their attention to non-material considerations because their material needs have been satisfied. Taking food activism as a moral statement or spiritual pursuit neglects the broader social-economic context which the campaigners must grapple with, and as a result, misunderstands what concerns or inspires them.

It is something of a 'misnomer' to refer to environmentalism as a postmaterialist value (Martinez-Alier 2004: 4). Martinez-Alier argues that economic prosperity in the US, Japan, and the European Union relies heavily on the consumption of energy and other materials. Initiatives for environmental protection in these places have been proposed to address material concerns over pollution and shortage of resources specifically. Similarly, food activism that appears postmaterialist actually derives from concerns over the satisfaction of material needs. Gardening in one's free time is totally different from becoming a farmer who grows food for the public. When farming infrastructures such as farmland, water, and fertiliser are made profitable commodities (Flynn 2005; Nonini 2014b), farming is rendered a high-threshold choice of occupation. Further limited by other structural constraints such as agricultural policies, the system of organic certification (Galt 2013; Guthman 2004a; Mutersbaugh 2005), and the retail sector dominated by well-financed chain supermarkets (Paxson 2006), farmers often have to labour for undervalued returns, endure under-consumption, and give up basic needs in order to strike a balance (Galt 2013; Petrini 2003; Pratt 2009).

Off-farm income plays a vital role in the sustainability of a farm. The variability of farm income (cf. Mishra & Goodwin 1997) is noticeable in the case of young farmers in Hong Kong. To cope with the aforementioned multi-layered destitution, a 'half farming, half x' lifestyle has gradually gained popularity. The model was proposed by a Japanese writer and farmer Naoki Shiomi (2006), encouraging people to live a self-contained and balanced life by incorporating food-growing in everyday life and simultaneously doing something else that the person is good at and interested in to make ends meet. The 'x' could be any part-time or freelance job, but things that are beneficial to the natural environment and human communities are preferable. The popularity of this aesthetic,

bucolic and ethical model, nevertheless, manifests the reality that farming offers such low rewards that farmers must take on other sources of income in order to survive. With this in mind, this thesis foregrounds the material dimension of local-food movements, demonstrating how the movements are motivated by concerns about surviving in an expensive city.

Hong Kong as a case study

For urban young farmers in Hong Kong, farming is similar to an 'earthly vocation' (Choy 2011: 114)—living, travelling and acting not only for an environmental and political agenda but also 'the practical matters of living a life'. This relates to 'practices of cosmopolitan and comparative self-care', the concept proposed by Tim Choy (2011: 136) through his fieldwork with two environmental campaigners in Hong Kong, one of whom took part in an international environmental organisation, while the other was a Greenpeace campaigner. According to Choy, a cosmopolitan tendency underpinned the two frequent travellers' environmentalist commitments, which were connected with negotiation and presentation of self, desires and attachment to place.

Due to personal experience of living in North America, one of Choy's interlocutors strongly identified with Canadian hippy environmentalism, becoming vegan and refusing to use plastic bags or shampoo, buying no new clothes and ceasing to shave; he believed that this should be adopted as a normative mode of life, and regretted that people in Hong Kong regard environmentalism as something only for academics. Choy notes that this interlocutor's environmental activist ideology epitomises the North American appreciation of wilderness and environmental aesthetics and ethics; simultaneously, it is distinct from that of North American environmentalists due to the interlocutor's reflection on domestic structural issues, including social and economic norms, parochialism, problematic urban lifestyle, and the dominance of business tycoons.

Another of Choy's interlocutors viewed environmentalism as a transcendence of the local that associates people with other places, thereby forming a 'global solidarity' (p. 134). Through everyday environmental practices, each of them distance themselves from a 'Hong Kong mind-set' (p. 134) but also cultivate their attachment to the place. This kind of environmentalism, Choy argues, is both locating and translocating. At the heart of their environmental action is a commitment to an alternative view of politics and lifestyle, shaped by living abroad or identifying with the world outside Hong Kong—a view that has

taught them how life could be different and how they might become 'a different kind of Hong Konger' (Choy 2011: 136).

Choy's work presents a comprehensive set of creeds and practices of environmentalists who formulate their ideas of what everyday life should be through political reflections and environmental commitments formed by experiences outside their own society. Their cosmopolitanism is manifested in their mindset that sources ideas beyond the local and identifies with what they think are globally recognised modes of living. Cosmopolitanism is also embodied in their ongoing comparisons between the local and non-local, as well as their attempts to distinguish themselves from other members of the Hong Kong society based on the reasoning that they are more connected with the 'global' (i.e. North American) community.

This thesis, however, works with a different set of interlocutors and will present a different face of cosmopolitanism, which is more intertwined with, but also distanced from, localism. Most distinctively, my interlocutors seldom identified with environmentalism, and associated sustainable living with good quality of life. Rather than speaking about environmentalism, my interlocutors discussed economic and political issues that, in their opinion, undermine physically and mentally healthy forms of living. They became farmers and activists to seek structural change.

Although local-food movements in Hong Kong share many straits of global food activism, this thesis will point out that it is more than a local manifestation of a global trend. The centre-periphery model of world history and social advancement (cf. Hannerz 1987; Rostow 1960; Wallerstein 1974) has been extensively challenged; a wide range of social science studies have pointed out that people are not passive recipients of imported messages (e.g. Macleod 2004; Miller 1992; Mintz 1977; Morley & Robinson 1995; Sahlins 1999b). Rather than being brainwashed, people actively compare new messages with life experiences before incorporating them (Boellstorff 2003). This thesis conceptualises a particular kind of localism, *cosmopolitan food localism*, to enhance our knowledge of the complexity of localness and the dialectical relationship between the local and the global. Following chapters will demonstrate that *cosmopolitan food localism* is neither a parochial or nationalist discourse nor an argument that unreflexively embraces 'Western' ideas or globalisation. Furthermore, it is a pragmatic rather than a postmaterialist approach.

Chapter Four:
Imported Localism and the Transformative Revival of Agriculture

Over the last decade, *fukhing* ('reviving') agriculture, a novel appeal that contradicts Hong Kong's dominant social value of developing the city by erasing agriculture, has been widely circulated via flyers, pamphlets, posters, Facebook posts and the broadcast media. The message is usually followed by a justification of the flourishing of agriculture in this city on the grounds of solid historical evidence, arguing against the assumption that it is impractical to grow food locally in the overcrowded Hong Kong. Although some people wish agriculture to bounce back, others want to get rid of this 'thing of the past' and see reviving agriculture an unreasonable attempt to drag the city back to backward poverty in which people had to earn their livelihood from farming. Agriculture is regarded as something that this city finally left behind after decades of urbanisation, modernisation, and economic growth.

Aligned with global sustainable movements and alternative food initiatives, local-food movements in Hong Kong involve environmental discourses. However, the discourses entail different meanings from the environmental ethos in other advocacies. This chapter will unpack those narratives and illustrate why local-food movements are more about social reform and cultural critique than environmental protection. This is not to deny that the agenda of 'environmental protection' *per se* already includes 'social reform' and 'cultural critique', but rather to compare the 'urban-centric' attitude of local-food movements in Hong Kong to the 'ecocentric' tendencies of other sustainable campaigns across the world. Through discussing the nuances, this chapter does not intend to reinforce the anthropocentrism-ecocentrism dualism. Instead, this chapter analyses a process in which perceptions of the human-environment relationship across different cultures mutually influence each other.

Local-food movements in Hong Kong is a phenomenon that urban dwellers seek to find localness and negotiate the relationship between humans and the land. Most young people in Hong Kong grew up in a metropolitan, internationalised, and commercialised milieu, characterised by a mosaic of uprooted and cross-cultural life experiences. A large number of secondary school students, university students and young professionals only discovered agriculture in the past few years during intensive social movements protesting

against the demolition of cultural heritage, land development, and new education and electoral systems. Compared to 'foreign' or 'Western' elements, it is agricultural landscape, peasant culture, and rural lifestyle that are novel for young people in this city. However, inspired by trans-local interactions and multicultural influences, the younger generation now re-defines localness through bringing agriculture into everyday life.

The process of adopting foreign ideas to forge localness might be reminiscent of the mechanism by which the local is assimilated into the global. As a result, mainstream food localism prioritises and legitimises the local and sees the global as a playground of capitalism and the local as a site where people seek empowerment to resist the global regime (Herod & Wright 2002). However, this chapter will demonstrate that agriculture from the perspective of urban young farmers is a transformative project which takes on board new ideas from the outside world in a selective manner. It not only incorporates food localism and models of sustainable living from Australia, Europe, North America, and other East Asian regions but also references farming techniques that have been practised in Hong Kong and South China for generations. The agriculture that the new generation formulates is a transformation, rather than a continuation of either 'Eastern' or 'Western' way of farming and imagining the human-environment relationship.

'Sustainable living' as a trope for alternative forms of life

The city-wide zest for writing about waanbou *and* daitaan *lifestyles*

In printed documents regarding food published in Hong Kong in recent years, narratives of climate change and reducing carbon emissions appear frequently. In particular, two terms, *daitaan* (low-carbon) and *waanbou* (environmental protection), have gained popularity, promoting awareness of the environmental costs of human activities, and encouraging environmentally friendly choices such as reducing the use of plastic bags and disposable cutlery, travelling on public transport, and supporting local farmers. Based on the idea that local food travels fewer 'food miles' and therefore produces lower carbon emissions, pursuing a *daitaan* lifestyle has become an important reason to consume local food.

A manual for growing potatoes at home justifies the necessity of hands-on food growing by suggesting that escalating fuel prices will affect food supply chains and prices. Another active ecological conservation NGO, the Conservancy Association, mentions in their annual report that local agriculture decreases the carbon emissions created by

importing food.[11] The report argues that local agriculture is crucial for stabilising food prices in facing political conflicts, climate change, energy shortages, population growth, and water pollution. They call attention to the fact that Hong Kong is highly reliant on food imports and therefore vulnerable to soaring food prices when food shortages occur in places of production as a consequence of adverse weather conditions. Concerned groups that promote a vegetarian diet also assert that eating less meat contributes to the reduction of carbon emissions. At a government-supported event for technology innovation, there was a whole session responding to climate change, focused on 'how governmental sectors, civil organisations, and residents together build a low-carbon sustainable society' (I quote from the pamphlet of the event). In recent years, the Hong Kong SAR Government encourages hydroponic planting of vegetables as an approach to solving the problem of farmland shortage. However, sceptics blast this approach as more wasteful of natural resources and releasing more carbon emissions than soil farming (e.g. Liber Research Community 2016).

A local journalist who holds a degree from the UK mentions in her book that the government's ban on keeping poultry in farms contributes to climate change (Chan 2012). According to her research, without chickens, spreading weeds and fallen tree fruits that attract fruit flies will force farmers to use herbicides and pesticides; moreover, without chicken droppings that could be used as compost, farmers have to dose plants with chemical fertilisers. As a result, these pesticides and fertilisers (which are produced from fossil fuels) generate carbon dioxide. Another book published by local researchers notes that global fluctuations in food and fuel prices profoundly influence Hong Kong because the city does not produce its own food (Chow & Yiu 2015). The book indicates that Hong Kong stands alongside African countries that frequently suffer food insecurity caused by natural disasters and suggests that increasing the production of local food will not only ensure food supply and reasonable prices, but also reconnect consumers to producers and establish intimate social relationships. Chow also argues that the agricultural ecosystem has been destroyed by environmental degradation, climate change, urban development, and corporate monopoly, suggesting that appropriate farming methods are essential for the stability and resilience of food supply in facing environmental crises (So & Chow 2015).

A high-profile organisation that promotes environmental education and healthy lifestyle defines the *daitaan* lifestyle as an austere form of life, devoted to reducing carbon

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11 *The Conservancy Association Annual Report*. Pamphlet distributed during Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley Harvest Festival 2017, Hong Kong.

emissions by decreasing daily consumption and waste through recycling and saving electricity and gas. Similarly, a book published by an NGO working on agriculture and youth development calls attention to the consequences of damage to the ecosystem, such as global warming, climate change, and Arctic ice melting (HKFYG Organic Farm 2011). The book explicitly identifies human beings as the origin of these issues and appeals for individual practices of *waanbou* and *daitaan* to save the planet. Simultaneously, they underscore that the *daitaan* lifestyle is beneficial for physical and mental health because 'low-carbon living enables people to resist the desire for material possessions and indulgence, fulfils higher level of spiritual life; such simple and plain living will baptize one's mind and create minds of contentment' (p. 99). Likewise, in the newsletter of a local residents' association, 'permaculture' is translated as 'sustainable community' in which 'nature' and human beings take care of each other. The community promotes concepts of green living, simplicity, discipline, and the value of equality and sharing. In the same newsletter, the disappearance or abandonment of farmland and climate anomalies, including changes in temperature and rainfall, are blamed for the increase in midges which exacerbate the harsh working conditions of farmers in Hong Kong. In the mass media, a Hong Kong-based online news institution published articles arguing that global warming results in the early arrival of spring, the breeding of pests and mosquitoes, and changes to agricultural production.[12]

These materials show that *waanbou* and *daitaan* frequently appear in discourses surrounding food ethics and environmental protection and have become common sense notions. However, the following section will demonstrate that when the two terms are used in popular vernaculars, they do not seem to imply an awareness of global environmental crises and the need for action. The agendas are understood more as individualised, or at most institutional introspection, on urban capitalist forms of life. Moreover, the scope of discussion is generally confined to everyday rather than planetary-scale problems. People get involved in those campaigns for practical reasons instead of ideological considerations, such as protesting against environmental degradation in distant places.

Waanbou *and* daitaan *in intellectual discussion but not everyday conversation*
Research has shown that Hong Kong has historically lacked an official curriculum for environmental education (Jackson et al. 2016). Its inhabitants demonstrate a lower level of

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12 The Stand News 2017. Retrieved from: https://thestandnews.com/nature/春天早到-暖化影響農業收成-增蚊蟲滋生/. Accessed: May 2018.

environmental awareness than in other places (Lee 2000). To explore this further, I brought up issues of climate change and other environmental hazards in discussion with my interlocutors. Issues like global warming, rising sea levels, or energy crises received much less attention than concerns around food safety or the disappearance of green landscapes. Although *waanbou* is a familiar concept for them, many of them felt that it is not in use in everyday conversation because they have little chance to experience the consequences of climate change. On the one hand, the weather in Hong Kong is mild and there are few severe natural disasters or crises. On the other hand, Hong Kong is wealthy enough to create comfortable living spaces through, for instance, sophisticated air conditioning systems and footbridges that allow people to move between skyscrapers without getting wet during heavy rain; some footbridges are even air-conditioned. Located away from the front-line of environmental events, residents in Hong Kong believe that food imported from overseas will never run out as long as they can afford it. Hence, they are not worried about the consequences of extreme weather on the food supply.

Local-food movements practitioners pay more attention than other residents in Hong Kong to global environmental crises and social justice for small food producers worldwide. Many farming-related organisations (other than the environmental NGOs discussed above) launched in the last few years put *waanbou* on their agenda. Having said this, it would be over-stating it to argue that concern about climate change is a motivating factor in people becoming urban farmers. They understand the term, but their reactions suggested that they did not treat climate change as a key issue in their agenda of the localisation of food systems. When I asked young farmers whether they felt that climate change causes difficulties in farmers' daily routines, they usually answered: 'maybe, I am not sure', and changed to another subject they found more relevant. There were many times I spoke about unusual weather conditions, attempting to learn their opinions on global environment disasters, but they talked very little about it and seemed uninterested. For example, although vegetarianism is seen as an effective approach to reducing carbon emissions, several young farmers said that they ate vegetables more than meat because they wish to consume food grown themselves; they were unable to grow beef, pork, poultry or fish, so they ate vegetables. The choice is not linked to environmental protection. Some said that they took vegetables only because they have no desire to eat meat.

Of seventy-two interlocutors interviewed, only twenty-six cited environmental protection as a motivation to become an agricultural practitioner. Although it is the third most mentioned reason (the first and second being 'quality of life' and 'food safety'), they

perceive environmental protection in a particular way. On information-sharing occasions such as reading-groups, seminars or film fora, they echoed popular concepts that circulate in global food, agricultural and environmental movements, including reducing waste, consumption and carbon footprint; enhancing ecological cycling, recycling; and following a vegetarian diet. Nonetheless, these topics rarely arose in everyday conversation.

Even farmers who were most sensitive to challenges posed by extreme weather tended not to blame climate change for the poor condition of their crops. Farmers and activists spoke of *climate* because it plays an essential role in food production, but they seldom talked of *climate change*. Farmers coped with weather conditions in their own ways and few ever complained to me about feeling troubled by climate change. During my fieldwork, farmers encountered the coldest winter in Hong Kong in the last half-century. Many plants were damaged by low temperatures and even snow, which is very unusual in Hong Kong. That autumn, a typhoon attacked the city. Compared to disasters caused by typhoons or hurricanes in other places in the world, the one which swept through Hong Kong was not devastating, but it did result in the suspension of farmers' markets for a few weeks. Vegetables which survived but were not saleable were made into pickles and sold. In addition, farmers and farm workers designed workshops to tutor interested urbanites in making pickles so as not to waste the vegetables. When I spoke to farmers about the loss and inconvenience caused by typhoons and the cold weather, they never mentioned climate change; the same was true in the increasingly unendurable heat in summer, which worsened pest damage to vegetables and increased the number of insect bites.

Farmers attribute the growing number of pests not to global warming, but to farmland being uncultivated and overgrown with weeds as a consequence of land development. A magazine launched by several activists and farmers criticised the current 'high-carbon' lifestyle in Hong Kong, arguing that the breeding of midges is the consequence of the disappearance of agriculture after the New Territories started to be transformed into a concrete jungle. The magazine noted that before the 1990s, farmers did not have to grapple with 'bloodsucking insects', which, as stated in the magazine, have been bred by unlimited expansion of *jungwaan gajik* ('Central Values'). 'Central' refers to Hong Kong's central business district, invoking the city's modern image as Asia's international financial hub. The term 'Central Values' was used by the former chief of the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan, Lung Ying-tai, to portray a value system dominated by capitalism that seeks 'money and power, profit-making and commercial competitiveness, efficiency, development, and globalization' (quoted in Lee 2008: 51). The term 'bloodsucking insects'

not only indicates midges in the field but also farmland developers and estate hegemony in Hong Kong. Except for a group of young farmers who organised film screenings and selected a film about climate change, overwhelming attention was focused on bread-and-butter issues such as the accessibility of healthy food or available and affordable farmland.

Notwithstanding the fact that local-food movements are aligned with global alternative food campaigns on sustainable living, environmental discourses were not uncritically adopted by residents in Hong Kong. The next section will discuss local perceptions of climate change from an urban-centric viewpoint and provide historical, social, economic and geopolitical context to analyse why agriculture bounced back and came to be the cornerstone upon which young urbanites imagine alternative forms of living. The 'indigenization' of global (predominantly Western) environmental narratives could be seen as part of 'the indigenization of modernity' (Sahlins 1999b: x), which has re-diversified global homogeneity. The 'indigenous adaptations to the global juggernaut' (p. ix) differentiate local-food movements in Hong Kong from other movements across the world.

Why agriculture?

The shift from environmentalism to food activism

Rather than a random personal choice, young urbanites' choice to become food growers embodies a nexus of historical, social, economic and political specificities. It has been found out that disillusionment with modernity and urban lifestyle, and thus an interest in 'nature' has been a tide which 'swept the entire world' (Weller 2006: 5; Bellah 1996; Berger & Kellner 1974). Hong Kong is no exception; the appreciation of 'nature' has been noticeable for at least four decades. Environmental and landscape protection was firstly proposed by the Conservancy Association in the 1970s. Influenced by the Green Revolution (see Santos 2011 for a similar process in South China), Hong Kong adopted low-cost and chemical farming practices—now identified as *seungkwai* ('conventional') farming. The mechanisation of agriculture saved farmers time and labour; however, simultaneously, agriculture came to be regarded as a polluting industry that contaminated water and the soil. Since the late 1980s, resonating with the global paradigm of environmentalism, the British-Hong Kong government embarked on regulating agriculture with rules on using fertiliser and a new system of certifying government-approved farms.

In the late 1980s, Produce Green Foundation established Hong Kong's first organic farm, aiming to promote environmental education and green living in response to global concerns about environmental degradation. Since the 1990s, the conservation of nature has

been intertwined with the recreational value of the natural landscape (Cheung 2004), and in 2003, eco-tourism gained in popularity due to the SARS crisis: people needed green spaces to get away from the downtown environment that made them ill. In the same year, a new immigration policy encouraging mainland Chinese tourists to visit Hong Kong was launched to combat the economic recession caused by the disease (Cheung 2004). Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden has been a renowned organisation that combines eco-tourism with nature conservation, sustainable living, and education. The outlying areas such as country parks and hiking trails also serve as refuges for urban dwellers.

Around the same period, people became alarmed about food safety following numerous incidents in which hundreds of consumers in Hong Kong were sent to hospital due to poisonous vegetables from Shenzhen (Siu 1993). After that, periodical news of toxic or fake food created a prevailing sense of risk. As a result, organisations on ecological and environmental conservation established during the 1990s all raised concerns around food safety. In 2000, due to urbanisation and transformation in economics, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department of the Hong Kong SAR government encouraged *seungkwai* farmers to convert to organic farming in the face of the decline of agriculture. In 2002, Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre Certification LTD was co-launched by the Baptist University, Produce Green Foundation, and Sustainable Ecological Ethical Development Foundation. The organisation is currently the primary official organic certificate company in Hong Kong. Notwithstanding the fact that the reliability of the food system had been put on the agenda, until the 2000s, green movements in the city had not detached from environmental protection, and only paid partial attention to food safety.

Things began to change towards the end of the 2000s. Food movements reached a peak after controversy over the construction of the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, a new high-speed rail connecting Hong Kong to Shenzhen. This project was considered an embodiment of the city's pro-development principle. It resulted in the displacement of Choi Yuen village, where inhabitants depended heavily for their livelihood on vegetable gardening. This made the younger generation aware of local agriculture. The Anti-Express Rail Movement broke out in late 2009, mobilising students, activists and artists to join the villagers in protesting against the project. The scope of the campaign grew from the demolition of a single village to political-economic configuration of Hong Kong. Many new farmers explicitly attribute their dedication to agriculture to this event. A young farmer who teaches in the university once said the following:

Do you know the story of Choi Yuen Village? We fought with the villagers against displacement due to the construction of the Express Rail. Before that, we knew little about agriculture. We stayed with them, and after they were eventually forced to resettle, we tried to 'help' them to build a new village. But later we realised, we were the ones who knew nothing. We didn't know how to construct a house; we didn't know how to install and fix water hoses; we didn't know how to grow food. We city people were incapable of living independently.

This campaign was a watershed, after which agriculture caught the attention of the media, and more people came to realise that agriculture is relevant to Hong Kong. The first rooftop farm was launched in 2009, and since then, new farms have been proliferating in the New Territories. The first government-edited manual for farms, *A Guide to Hong Kong Leisure Farms*, was published in 2010. The Conservancy Association, an influential organisation that used to concentrate on ecological conservation, now focuses on the protection of farmland along the border between Hong Kong and mainland China. Over 90 per cent of my interlocutors were introduced to farming after 2010, many becoming enthusiastic food growers or even taking up farming as an occupation. Although not every young farmer explicitly associated their career choice with this event, none of them began farming until 2010.

Farming was not an obvious career choice for young farmers or indeed most people in Hong Kong. 'Growing food was not my intention in the first place', a young farmer whose parents are academics and himself is an English teacher once said, 'but rather than sitting desperately and complaining about the current situation, we needed to figure out a clear vision of alternatives'. Many young farmers became aware of land development issues after a series of protests since 2004 against the demolition of historic landmarks and mundane sites that embodied the street culture and bore collective memory (for research on these campaigns see Ku 2012; Kwong 2016; Veg 2017). The the social settings evoked the younger generation's interest in farming. Agricultural activism converged with other campaigns, including the Umbrella Revolution and protests against farmland development or urban renewal schemes that replaced cultural heritage and old neighbourhoods with commercial areas or flashy residential blocks. These campaigns reified a counter-discourse that reconsiders the interfaces of 'culture versus economism, life space versus developmentalism, and citizen participation versus state/corporate power' (Ku 2012: 20).

Many young farmers who used to be activists now devote their time to growing food, even those who once stood on the frontlines during rallies. The young farmer who is an English teacher also said, 'to grow one's own food might be the ultimate answer [to various social problems]'. Nevertheless, they were criticised by peer activists who thought young farmers became too settled. They think that young farmers 'retreat' into villages to work quietly on the farmland meaning they had 'given up'. However, from young farmers' point of view, this is their way of making the campaigns more long-lasting and influential. The farmer who teaches in the university said, 'Learning to be a proper farmer and growing food is my approach to deepen and perpetuate the impacts of those campaigns.'

On a sweltering day, a young farmer who is also a part-time secondary school teacher, was levelling the land to prepare for the next crop rotation. I stood by watching instead of joining his work for fear that I would mess things up. I was amazed by his skill, and remarked, 'You look so professional!' He replied: 'I used to preach loudly the value of agriculture and lectured people on how to do sustainable farming'. He explained: 'I only paid lip service (*dak ba hau*); I couldn't even convince myself'. He continued: 'Now polishing my farming ability is my first priority … I want to physically practice (*lok sau lok geuk*) this alternative mode of living and demonstrate to other people that one can rely on farming to make a living in Hong Kong'. Young farmers believe that producing something substantial is more important than making discourse, and the quality and amount of harvest as well as the ability to sustain themselves from farming would make their ideas more convincing. Although not every local-food movements practitioner is involved in other campaigns, reflecting on the existing neoliberal economic-political power relation that determines future dwelling in Hong Kong has become a shared agenda of the younger generation.

Changing perceptions of the farmer: elder farmers' memories of the fields, and young farmers' childhoods in the city

As reviewed in Chapter One, in the process of the historical devaluation of agriculture, farming became an occupation perceived as undesirable for being associated with backwardness, poverty, and poor education. Even in the days before the 1970s when rice cultivation and market gardening of vegetables and flowers prospered, farmers invested in their children's education in the hope that their children would get 'more "modern" jobs' (Aijmer 1980: 135). Aijmer argues that young people also dreamed of moving to the city. Hayes (2006: 80) suggests that descendants of agricultural families 'do not value their own

heritage [of farming skills and countryside knowledge], and nor does anyone else value it'. People resigned themselves to this antiquated job only if they were incapable of doing anything else. There are two popular Cantonese expressions that summarise this attitude: 'If you don't study hard, you can only be a farmer!', and 'You know nothing at all; go back to the countryside and farming!' Young people with college degrees are expected to pursue 'decent'—stable, well-paying, and white-collar—jobs in the city instead of staying in rural areas and labouring on the land.

Although parents may refuse to accept their children's decision of choosing farming as their career—because of increasing costs of living and limited agricultural infrastructure in terms of government support, subsidy, and curriculum—many young and highly-educated members of society now have a different view. One day, I was having lunch with several young farmers, farm staff, and their friends, sharing food they had grown. In the middle of the meal, someone said: 'It's so nice that we could eat food grown by ourselves'. A member of farm staff whose parents are also farmers replied immediately, without realising how unusual her words were: 'What's so nice? Every day is like this'. Because most people in Hong Kong do not have the opportunity of consuming food grown by one's own household, one of us responded: 'It is not the case for us. You are lucky that your parents are farmers.' Another one added in a jocular tone: 'You can show off by asking people: "Oh, this is not the case for you? I thought everyone is like this [eating home-grown food]. How come you are not? So miserable!"' Everyone at the dining table immediately burst into laughter at this sarcasm, or agreed with a knowing smile. While consuming home-grown vegetables might not be taken as a luxury in the past, the different opinion flew naturally among the younger generation.

Once a despised role, farming has become an honourable pursuit in the eyes of young farmers and activists, who admire farmers for being the masters of 'the art of farming' and feeding the world. This attitude is manifested in the fact that not every young farmer feel comfortable to be identified as such, but not because they are ashamed of being labelled a farmer; rather, they do not yet feel qualified to accept this title. Several of them self-identified as 'food growers', 'food workers', or 'farming lovers' instead. On the one hand, they thought that they had not acquired sophisticated farming techniques and food knowledge; they only produced a small harvest, so were still not significant contributors; and on the other hand, they did not spend enough time on farming because it was not their primary source of income. In later chapters, I will demonstrate how they sustain

themselves through organising events and taking on various off-farm jobs to cope with low economic rewards from farming.

Through consulting older farmers and considering young farmers' accounts, I learned that the urban context that young farmers are facing today is fundamentally different from that of traditional agricultural villages in the past. Some elderly farmers spent their childhood in Hong Kong, while others lived with their families in mainland China. Rice cultivation was a typical livelihood. To manage irrigated rice cultivation, lineage became the most significant social structure in South China (Freedman 1958, 1966). In a smallholder farming society, the household was the most salient social unit (Netting 1993), and children grew up working and playing on the farmland. They witnessed how parents, other family members, or village elders did farm work, and sometimes they were asked to help. By watching, listening, and practising, from managing the farmland to growing crops, elder farmers naturally acquired countryside lore, food knowledge, and farming expertise handed down through the generations.

Today's young farmers did not grow up in such a social milieu. Even though a small number of them were born into agricultural families, their parents or grandparents had quit farming and found jobs in the city, so they had no chance to actually be in the fields. Moreover, they were hardly taught any agricultural techniques because their senior family members did not expect them to be farmers. Before agriculture re-entered the awareness of young people over the past ten years, more than half of my interlocutors had never visited a farm, let alone grown food. Young farmers cannot rely on childhood memories or advice from family members, so must find their own path.

At the beginning, I assumed that consulting elder farmers was an obvious way to learn. However, it turned out that very few young farmers had done so. On the one hand, young farmers have few opportunities to get in touch with elder farmers, who are always very busy and engaged with endless work in the fields and tend not to be in the social networks of young farmers unless they are relatives. Only in rare cases did young farmers have the chance to seek advice, such as when they had colleagues or customers who were elder farmers, or sometimes when elder farmers living in the neighbourhood would visit young farmers' farms out of curiosity. On the other hand, young farmers felt that although elder farmers are excellent food growers, usually they are bad teachers. They are skilful and knowledgeable about farming, but seldom bother to enquire about the philosophy or scientific basis behind the technique, something that young farmers need to learn. They need to know *why*, seeing if things make sense for them, in order to master *how*. Elder

farmers just repeat what senior family members did, acquiring skills without step-by-step tutorials or oral explanations. Therefore, they are unable to explain why to do certain things and not others. They do not know how to teach people to farm because farming is a tacit knowledge for them. For elder farmers, leaning to farm is just like acquiring their mother tongue, whereas young farmers are learning a second language.

Agriculture by young urbanites

Transformation instead of continuation

Food knowledge and farming techniques were introduced to young urbanites in different contexts and through different channels from how the skills were acquired by elder farmers. These discrepancies resulted in distinctive and sometimes incompatible perceptions of the 'correct' ways to grow food and the relationship between humans and the environment. In cases when young farmers managed to work with elder farmers, generational differences became clear. The variances illustrate that young farmers are formulating a new type of agriculture rather than yearning for the traditional peasant life and attempting to abandon urban forms of living.

In the past, the neatness of farmland was one of the criteria to judge if a farmer was hard-working; clean and neat farmland earned a good reputation. Hence, elder farmers often insist on clearing all the weeds. However, young farmers have a different view. One time, a young woman participated in a farm volunteering event because she considered applying for a job in the farm. At the end of the day, I asked her how she felt. She said that she might not stay at this farm, as she explained: 'I feel here is not right for me when the staff asked us to clean up all the weeds in the field'. In line with many other young farmers, she argued that weeds create a more well-rounded ecology and enhance biodiversity, so unless they seriously affect the harvest, she would allow them to flourish in the field. Moreover, some are actually herbs or ingredients for making plant ashes and compost. Young farmers believe that the so-called 'weeds' are useful. Another young farmer once asked, 'What are weeds? Weeds are the plants which we humans don't want'. She said that 'weed' is a human-centric label; that is, anything planted by humans is food, while everything else is redundant.

These young farmers' view seem to reproduce the generalisation of 'Asian cultures', which, as reviewed in Chapter Three, is said to be ecocentric and staying in harmony with nature. However, in fact, the young farmer who volunteered on the farm but decided not to

join has extensive experience of volunteering on farms abroad, and is well-read in Euro-American environmentalism and alternative food discourses. With a complete absence of agricultural infrastructure, farming and food knowledge is not something she could acquire from life experiences, so she referred to foreign books and overseas working experiences. Therefore, her opinions are not a representation for 'Asian culture' but a result of incorporating Euro-American ideas.

In addition to a distinctive attitude towards weeds, when preparing land for the next rotation of planting, some elder farmers used flamethrowers to burn away grass and old crops. It was a common practice in the 1960s; insecticides and herbicides were also constantly sprayed on crops (Aijmer 1980). Young farmers, however, would rather clean weeds by hand or grass cutter. They believed that fire would kill bugs, worms, helpful microbes, and many other organisms in the soil, and pesticides would pollute the land. In some tiny-scale farms, young farmers only use homemade garlic and chilli spray to keep pests off the plants. Even under the pressure of making ends meet through selling products to sustain an income, young farmers do not mind pests coming to eat their vegetables. They said that food grown from the soil is a gift from *tin* (literally 'sky', referring to 'God' or 'heaven', or the domain of 'nature'). Young farmers believe that all lives on earth have the right to share the gifts of nature.

Throughout my fieldwork, I had numerous chances to observe their determination to minimise human impacts on the land because a dominant proportion of my time working in the field with young farmers was spent weeding by hand. To make their life easier, young farmers planted pest-repelling plants beside vegetables. Sometimes they did not have to do that because among various kinds of 'weeds', there were already pest-repelling plants; in this case, they had to learned to tell weeds from pest-repelling plants, herbs for cooking, making tea, medicine, or dyes. Before becoming a farmer, when given a shopping list, many of them could not successfully purchase vegetables from wet markets because they did not know the name or the original form of the ingredients on their own dining table.

Unlike earlier environmental or organic movements led by the government, NGOs, and middle-aged social elites in Hong Kong, the local-food movements initiated by the younger generation embody a philosophy not of embracing ruralism, but of transcending the dualistic imagination of an idyllic rural life distinguished from modernised and metropolitan lifestyle. A majority of young farmers and farm members of staff do not live close to farmland but commute every day. Unlike elder farmers for whom there was no such thing as a 'holiday', young farmers usually take at least one day off during a week.

On the day off, they go downtown for social gatherings between friends and relatives or go to bookstores and cinemas, attend exhibitions or other events. Even on workdays, they seldom spend all day on the farm. They may need to work a freelance or part-time job, go shopping, or meet people to discuss farm activities.

Cheunwaan*: drawing on global ideas to formulate localness through perceptions of human-land relations*

Young farmers learn farming, which in their words encompasses 'reconnection with nature' and 'knowing the land that nurtures us', through alternative approaches. They believe that the most important step in their learning process is 'learning by doing'—acquiring farming techniques by spending time in the field to observe 'nature', exchange experiences with peer workers, and practise farming skills. In addition to this, they widened and deepened their knowledge through unconventional channels, such as attending workshops or short-term courses organised by local farms or NGOs.

Because governmental support or official curricula for agriculture are limited, young farmers visited farms and social enterprises, or attended agricultural fora in Taiwan, Japan, China, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Canada, the US, and Australia. Some took courses in Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, and Australia on sustainable farming, the scientific rationales behind making compost and nurturing the soil, and farm design and management. Some farmers went to Europe or Japan for culinary courses at Le Cordon Bleu or other institutions; not only learning to cook, but staying with local families to acquire knowledge about the original flavours of food and how to choose ingredients wisely.

Most young farmers do not have the budget to travel; as an alternative, they read books, watch YouTube videos, gather information from online fora, blogs, news media, NGO websites, Facebook posts, or conversations on social media apps. They obtain information in multiple languages (Chinese, English, Japanese and more). At one rooftop farming workshop, the organiser cited not only Chinese books but also books from Japan on the farming lifestyle and Natural Farming; from Australia and Taiwan about permaculture; from the UK about sustainable economic development; from the US about the history of food and cuisine; and from India about natural farming. In what follows, I spell out these systems of agricultural philosophy that young farmers take on to formulate their own system for understanding the relationship between humans and the environment and the bridging role that farmers play.

The most frequently cited approach is **permaculture** (Holmgren 2002; Mollison & Holmgren 1978), a concept initiated in Australia in the 1970s, and now has expanded worldwide. The term 'permaculture' is a portmanteau of 'permanent agriculture'—'a design system for the creation of sustainable human settlements' (Hopkins 2008: 136)—coined to summarise a set of principles for planning an agricultural production system that maintains the resilience of ecosystems (Holmgren 2002; Mollison 1988). It considers both human and non-human dimensions and discusses wide-ranging topics such as human rights, global management of water and energy, and the quality of food and housing. It emphasises cooperation at community level to conduct low-carbon-footprint and labour-intensive farming that will create an edible landscape. It suggests that the design of a farm must consider both the nature of plants and the surroundings. For example, some plants need a lot of sun while others prefer shade and cool temperatures. Moreover, to build a well-rounded ecosystem, it is thought beneficial to allow weeds to grow beside crops.

The second mostly mentioned approach is **Natural Farming**, or 'do-nothing farming' (Fukuoka 1978). Fukuoka believes that living and farming in a 'primitive' way instead of imposing human intervention, such as tilling the land, using fertilisers, weeding or using pesticides, allow farmers to get closer to 'nature' and learn 'the laws of nature'. Although many young farmers wish to adopt Natural Farming in Hong Kong, they often hold back because the success of this approach lies in the quality of soil, and according to several of them, farmland in Hong Kong is largely polluted by pesticides and chemical fertilisers, or turned into 'brownfield' (barren land), which is repurposed for commercial or industrial usage that damages the soil with heavy metals, rubbish, or construction waste. Such soil is infertile, so implementing Natural Farming would be unfeasible unless farmers put in much effort to repair the soil for growing food.

Some young farmers were interested in a spiritual approach to farming. They took courses in **Bio-Dynamic (BD) Farming** (Steiner 1993) in Taiwan or invited experts to Hong Kong. Initiated by an Austrian philosopher in 1924 to help farmers in Germany, BD Farming sees food growing as part of a holistic and organic system consisting of the natural environment, humans, and the dynamics of the universe, e.g. the movements of Earth and other planets. Proponents of BD Farming argue that the production of healthy food relies on the coordination of the three parties. The movement of the sun, the moon, and other planets affect the timing of harvesting and have impacts on the absorption of water and nutrients by plants. Moreover, soil is influenced by food producers' thoughts, so farmers and food processors must hold positive thoughts in the process of production. BD

Farming adopts ideas from Anthroposophy, a philosophy emphasising the balance between the human mind and the ecosystem so as to produce healthy food and improve the health of the earth. In addition to BD Farming, Hong Kong farmers also refer to an approach from Taiwan: *youshan gengzuo* ('**Friendly Farming**')—a food-producing system that works against the Green Revolution legacy (Tsai 2016) and highlights the consciousness of taking care of the Earth and international food producers.

After incorporating various paradigms, young farmers framed their own version of a sustainable approach to farming. Through implementing sustainable farming, as introduced in Chapter Three, they sought to improve the quality of life. The reasons they appreciated local food were also articulated within this framework (see Chapter Five for further discussion). The set of ideas for sustainable farming was continuously revised, but the core of the narrative remains centring around an idea that young farmers called *cheunwaan* ('circulation'), which indicates the circulation of substance and energy. Young farmers use the term to signify and reify 'natural cycles'. *Cheunwaan* describes a process in which natural resources are turned into food or materials for human use, and once consumed, they go back to 'nature' and prepare for another cycle. To retain the balance of the system, one must pay back to 'nature' once one takes something from the environment. In this spirit, young farmers underline that soil nourished with compost and inhabited by earthworms and microbes is more likely to grow quality food because in this way, a healthy and a lively micro-ecosystem is created.

At the same time, to improve the quality of soil, young farmers brew compost from recycling leftovers in their farms, coffee grounds from coffee shops, herb dregs from herbal tea shops, soybean dregs from tofu factories, mushroom compost from mushroom planting factories, fruit peel, rotten vegetables and fruits, eggshells, and fish viscera from restaurants and wet markets.[13] In addition to this 'green matter', they also need 'brown matters' such as fallen leaves and tree branches to make compost. They collect these materials in their own farms or by cleaning streets and recycling residential waste.

Young farmers promote to retain *cheunwaan* by organising flea markets, second-hand exchange, or 'freecycle' (free markets), at which people donate unwanted items which may be useful for another person. Once the item is taken away, its life cycle restarts. Young farmers also 'up-cycle' unwanted furniture or household items and turn them into farm equipment. These activities reduce waste created in the city, reintegrate the resources that

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13 Young farmers emphasised that 'compost' is different from 'fertiliser'. Fertiliser is fed to vegetables, while compost is spread on the soil to increase and preserve the productivity of the land.

humans take from the environment back to nature, and produce desired items with less input and minimal consumption. *Cheunwaan* embodies a dialectical relationship between 'waste' and 'the valuable'. Through activating the circulation, 'waste' is transformed into 'the valuable'; and once 'the valuable' becomes 'waste', it goes into another cycle.

With the concept of *cheunwaan* in mind, many young farmers do not eat a vegetarian diet. This is not to say that they are meat-centric. They eat vegetables much more than meat. However, a young farmer took herself as an example and explained to me that she wanted to take on a vegetarian diet, but her doctor advised her not to do it because according to the philosophy of Chinese medicine, consuming meat helps to boost energy circulation so she would not be as weak as before. In addition to medical considerations, vegetarianism is sometimes in conflict with maintaining social relations. Several interlocutors told me that they favour a vegetarian diet when they eat alone, but when dining with others, they are happy to eat meat in order to avoid trouble to others who otherwise have to cook or order vegetarian dishes. In addition to medical and practical reasons, they argue that vegetarianism is not necessarily 'natural' because humans are omnivorous: it is in our nature to eat a mixed diet consisted of both plants and animals. In their opinion, the point is whether we are 'respectful' of the food we consume and of those who are involved in the process of production and distribution. For them, human beings are amongst other animals that play a part in the *cheunwaan* of the food chain.

To put it in a nutshell, *cheunwaan* is a multi-faceted concept, involving a process of growing food, activating the ecosystem, reducing urban waste, and building social relations. Based on the human-land bond and close interpersonal relationship implied in the idea of *cheunwaan*, as will be further discussed in Chapter Seven, this ecological idiom was used as a metaphor for connections between people, as well as between humans and the physical world. Young farmers acknowledge the meanings of 'organic' when this concept was firstly coined (see Chapter Three) and argue that 'organic is not merely about toxic-free'; it entails 'complying to the law of nature', 'healing scars that humans left on the earth', and 'mutualism between humans and nature' as opposed to human exploitation of natural resources. However, they believe that the present-day organic certification system no longer guarantees these qualities, but rather is intertwined with economic-political controversies. Hence, they have shifted their support to sustainable farming.

Wingjuk ('sustainable') farming as a substitute for organic farming

Avoiding pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilisers and large-scale machines is a principle adopted by all kinds of urban farming activities in Hong Kong. Virtually all rooftop farms, leisure farms or community farms claim that they conduct organic farming. An organic certificate is always useful for making farm products more saleable. Organic food is conceived as tasting better and being fresher, healthier and safer as well as more environmentally friendly (Yip & Janssen 2015).

Having said this, organic food is not regarded positive all the time. From the 1990s to early 2000s, organic food was seen as the antidote to the ills caused by industrial food systems (Guthman 2004a). Organic farming was once considered a rediscovery of traditional or indigenous wisdom to 'work with natural cycles', and achieve 'mutual benefit with rather than dominance over nature' (Ye 2007: 158, my translation); it is also seen as a chemical-free approach to food growing and an alternative mode of consumption that challenges corporate industrial production and monoculture that exploit farm workers (Pollan 2006). However, from the mid-2000s, 'local food' has stolen the crown of organic food (Galt 2013; Pollan 2006). It is argued that the organic movement has lost the revolutionary impulses that it carried when it was developed in earlier decades (Engler 2012). The concept of organic has been 'hijacked' (Engler 2012: 22) by the organic industry: corporations make profits by encouraging shoppers to 'pay extra for an eco-friendly label'. The organic market serves middle- and upper-class consumers (Cheung et al. 2015; Hinrichs 2000; Shi et al. 2011). In mainland China, organic food is only available in a limited range of variety and brands and can only be purchased in supermarkets or specialised shops in urban areas (Wang et al. 2009). In Hong Kong, by browsing supermarket shelves, standing for hours at farmers' markets, and visiting organic shops in gentrified areas, I also found that organic food had become the preference of wealthier groups. Given it is more expensive, imported organic foodstuffs are more favoured by the market than locally grown food (HKBU & HKORC 2009; Yip & Janssen 2015). Young farmers, conscious of the criticisms outlined above, do not share this preference. Meanwhile, although they conduct organic farming, an organic certificate is not very crucial for them, for several reasons.

Firstly, there were financial thresholds to obtain and maintain an organic certificate. Application fees plus administration fees cost a farm around HKD 15,000 per year, which is equal to many young farmers' two months' income. The fees increased by the scale of farm, and the certificate must be renewed annually. Meanwhile, whether a food is certified

as organic relies on whether its procedures of production—pesticide and herbicide management, quality of soil, and irrigation arrangements—are monitored and approved by the relevant institutions (Vegetable Marketing Organization 2008). Currently, the organic certificate in Hong Kong is provided by two non-governmental and university-supported organisations, Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre Certification Limited and Hong Kong Organic Certification Centre, since 2004 and 2003 respectively.[14] Following standards defined by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), by 2017 there were over 200 farms in Hong Kong certified as organic, most smaller than seven *dau* (decalitre, a unit of volume but used as a unit of area), approximately 4800 square metres.[15]

Secondly, young farmers do not think it is necessary to champion their products with an organic label because they think that the quality of their products and the value of their practices are not defined by the certificate. They believe that trust between producers and consumers is established through face-to-face interactions. As long as customers are well-informed about the food grower and the process of production, they do not need certificates. Some young farmers even told me that they never advertised their products as organic when customers visit their farms to buy vegetables because it goes without saying. Likewise, customers never questioned whether the product was genuinely organic. Only when they were at other markets facing new customers would they promote their product as organic because for some shoppers who are not familiar with alternative food movements, 'organic' is the most accessible term to explain the merit of their product.

Thirdly, many young farmers are not convinced by the criteria of the certification system. Farms that wish to be certified must only use organic fertilisers and plant organic seeds verified by the certification organisations. Compost made from sewage, animal manure or food leftovers is prohibited because they may contain uncontrollable materials (Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre certification LTD 2015). However, as an essential part of *cheunwaan*, turning waste into fertile soil is an important element of young farmers' sustainable farming. This practice has historical roots. In Hong Kong from the 1950s to 1970s, the government supported a system of collecting night-soil from households in

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14 Prior to the organic certification system, in 1994 the government launched an Accredited Farm Scheme to encourage farmers to adopt more environmentally friendly techniques and produce safer vegetables. By 2017, the scheme had certified 276 farms in the New Territories and 35 farms which supply the Hong Kong market from Guangdong and Ningxia Provinces. 'Accredited vegetables' fall between organic and conventional vegetables; they are sold for more than regular vegetables but less than organic produce.

15 Data compiled from the official site of Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre Certification Limited: http://www.hkorc-cert.org/en/service.php. Accessed: January 2018.

Hongkong Island and Kowloon, mixed with ashes, livestock droppings and water, and then processed into night-soil sludge, which would then be sold cheaply to farmers in the New Territories and used as fertiliser (Aijmer 1980; Blackie 1955; Chan-Yeung 2016; Edie & Ho 1969; Newcombe 1976). This completed an urban-rural metabolism: urban consumers provided means of production to rural farmers who then produced food for the urban populace. At the same time, farmers kept poultry: the birds played an important role in the circulation of resource as they ate pests and their manure could be made into compost for fertilising crops. After the 1970s, nonetheless, chemical pesticides and fertilisers were promoted by the government to increase yields, and practices with night-soil gradually ceased. Now the use of household, farm, or restaurant waste is not allowed by the organic certification system unless under strict conditions. Aware of this historical background, young farmers were concerned about the absence of natural fertilisers.

With such concerns in mind, young farmers distance themselves from organic farming and embrace sustainable farming. Chapter Three reviewed how organic agriculture gained popularity in Euro-America from the 1960s when it was seen as a departure from the Green-Revolution-style agriculture. After that, due to increasing debates on social and environmental implications of organic farming, initiatives for sustainable agriculture began to gain popularity in the 1980s. According to young farmers' understanding of sustainable farming, although organic and sustainable approaches share common values, including avoiding pesticides, planting seasonal food, and keeping the original taste of food, sustainable farming reflects upon the profit-driven and industrial production of food, and implies a higher degree of awareness of its environmental and human costs.

Young farmers argue that sustainable farming does not just 'protect the environment for its own sake', but represents 'a commitment to make everyone healthier'. It aims to 'protect humans' and help them to 'live a life with happiness and peace of mind'. Ultimately, sustainable farming entails 'doing what is good for human health, animals and the earth', complying with 'the laws of nature' and enhancing the cycle of an ecosystem which is composed of soil, plants, water, sun, air, wildlife, and humans. The success of sustainable farming relies on 'quality of soil' and 'farmers' state of mind'. To conduct sustainable farming, a young farmer told me that 'soil, wind, trees, plants, bugs, and stars are our teachers'. When I asked her who in their farm was more senior and able to teach others, she answered that everyone is equal, and they all 'learn from nature'.

Revisiting the nature-culture division

Making sense of 'nature' in the urban setting

As reviewed in Chapter Three, it has been suggested that 'culture' and 'nature' are not separate domains (e.g. Beck 1992; Campbell 2005; Descola 2013; Ingold 2000; Latour 1993; Strathern 1980). This view is echoed by young farmers and activists, several of whom expressed that they were reluctant to use the narrative of 'environmental protection' because they felt that this is another hypocritical discourse like the 'organic' labelling—overused for the purpose of green-washing. It was not that they did not use environmentalist language to articulate their agendas; rather, they constantly stressed that 'humans are a part of nature and the universe', 'humans derive from nature', and 'humanity and nature are one and inseparable'. They emphasised that they do not regard nature as a resource for exploitation that serves human comfort, but 'respect' and 'live in harmony and foster mutual-benefit' with nature.

Such perception is exemplified in a young farmer's reflection on her experience of staying in the Amazon rainforest when she was an undergraduate student. She participated in a programme which offered students a one-month field trip living with local communities in Ecuador. She told me she enjoyed 'living close to nature' in a 'simple lifestyle'. After returning to Hong Kong, she decided to do something 'meaningful', in contrast to what she was doing at that time (pursuing a business degree). In comparison to seeing nature as a wild and pristine world separated from human society, this urban perception of nature is testimony to the likelihood that the concept of the Anthropocene, which describes the entanglement of humans and the physical environment, is an apt observation on today's world.

However, this section will point out that affection for nature among residents in Hong Kong, including local-food movements practitioners, is urban-centric—articulated from urbanites' perspective and reifies their discontent with urban lifestyle. According to this view, nature is defined by 'what is not urban'. Throughout my fieldwork, both young farmers and other Hong Kong residents regularly mentioned a term *jiyin,* the Cantonese equivalent of the Mandarin term *ziran*, translated as 'nature'. A similar term, *daai jiyin*, literally 'great nature', has connotations paralleling 'Nature' with a capital letter. Although *jiyin* and *daai jiyin* are largely interchangeable in everyday conversation, there are nuances: *jiyin* indicates the more-than-human world, while *daai jiyin* is used as a personification of *jiyin*, symbolising the existence of a higher, divine, and transcendental power. Although nature (*jiyin*) is thought to be something that intertwines with human society and is

therefore ordinary, Nature (*daai jiyin*) is linked to morality, aesthetics and affection, and must be protected and respected. The frequent use of these two terms seems to suggest a broad acceptance of the inseparability of humans and nature. However, the awareness of the existence of 'nature' and an impulse to reconnect with 'nature', I argue, demonstrate that Hong Kong residents perceive nature as a domain apart from the human sphere. People only seek connections with things that we feel are separate from us. A young farmer implied this when he said: 'If one really believes in the inseparability of humans and nature, one won't even bother to ask what is the relationship between humans and the environment.' Humans have to be 'out of' nature to 'stay close to', 'respect', or 'live in harmony with' nature.

The fact that *jiyin* or *daai jiyin* are catchwords but adopted in fuzzy and arbitrary ways suggests that people were not conscious and self-reflexive when they used the terms. Although the terms appeared familiar to everyone, the meanings of the terms remained ambiguous and are constantly negotiated and re-created. I had to give definitions of the terms at the beginning of this section so as to discuss them, but there is no clear and agreed sense of what they signify.

Despite the ambiguity, 'nature' generally represents a realm that is not yet 'developed' by 'urban civilisation'. It indicates things that are not artificial or industrial and unfamiliar for urbanites (though they are familiar with the term). The idea of 'nature' is a mental projection through which people see a picture of the desirable life. In this regard, the nature/culture split parallels the nature/city divide: *culture*, in their view, is not a neat antithesis to nature, but *city* is. 'Nature' is understood from an urban-centric point of view. In spite of extensive recognition of the inseparability of culture and nature, people in Hong Kong tend to compartmentalise the two.

Young farmers bring 'nature' to the attention of others and elaborate on the connection between humans and nature because they are convinced that the urban planning of Hong Kong, such as urban renewal and land development projects, has not considered the entanglement of nature and daily life. They believed that this connection is the key to carve out new possibilities. Their priority is to take care of people rather than the physical environment, but they do believe that to take care of people, 'nature' must be protected as humans rely on the land and the environment that surrounds us to survive and flourish. To make their ideas accessible and persuasive to others and relate Hong Kong to the wider world, young farmers and activists integrated various initiatives of localising food systems and articulated ideal urban dwelling in environmental terms.

Dialectics between 'Eastern' and 'Western' imaginations of sustainable living

Although the development of the concept of 'nature' has gone through different trajectories in different cultural traditions, there are increasing similarities across geographical and cultural boundaries as a result of globalisation and a shared sense of planetary environmental crises. This challenges an assumption reviewed in Chapter Three about the essential contrast between Western views of human-nature relationship and Eastern cosmology. Weller (2006) argues that Euro-American views of nature are in fact a product of ideas imported from other parts of the world through colonial and postcolonial processes. Eastern philosophy originating from Chinese, Indian, Japanese or Southeast Asian traditions is considered as staying in harmony with nature and thus taken as the role model for Western societies to imagine sustainable forms of living. Globally spreading farming models and settlement arrangements—organic farming, permaculture, Natural Farming, BD farming—or alternative food movements—Community Supported Agriculture, Fair Trade, farmers' markets, Slow Food, farm-to-table, food sovereignty, and other grassroots food activism reviewed in Chapter Three—are more or less established by consulting a romanticised and exoticised 'traditional Asian wisdom' of living stoically in equilibrium with nature.

However, as the narrative of 'sustainable living' becomes globally trendy, now people in the 'East' refer back to the 'West' for inspirations. Foreign ideas are instilled into local society through various media such as books, mass media, the internet, and cross-cultural and trans-national interactions. Hong Kong young farmers walk out of their cultural enclave, foraging for foreign ideas, adjusting these ideas—Western ideas which have taken inspirations from Eastern culture—to fit local circumstances and creating their own projects of sustainable living. Hence, it is oversimplified to understand local-food and sustainable movements in Hong Kong as a local manifestation of global food activism and environmental ethics. Although young farmers and activists in Hong Kong refer directly to global agendas, they also show interest in farming techniques developed locally to think about the human-environment relationship.

When globally circulating thoughts are 'indigenised', they evolve into new projects that are relatable to, but distinct from, earlier models. Young farmers and activists accepted foreign ideas, not because of an ideology that ideas coming from the Western world are more progressive. It has been found that in mainland China, food imported from Euro-American countries symbolises a modern lifestyle that make shoppers more willing to purchase food of non-local origin (Zhou & Hui 2003). Similarly, in Hong Kong, 'Western'

elements are seen as 'modern', 'classy', and 'good taste', signifying 'a Hong Kong sense of metropolitanism' (Tam 2001: 63). This hierarchy between the Western and the Eastern worlds is not mirrored in the process by which young farmers and activists tailor foreign ideas to local needs. From their point of view, whether an idea is rooted in Eastern cultures or imported from Western societies is not a criterion by which to judge its value or make it any less or more persuasive. They never self-identified as cosmopolites, but their thinking pattern exemplifies cosmopolitanism. Young farmers take Western ideas on board not for the purpose of showing that they are modernised and civilised people. Instead, as long as an idea makes sense and can be properly contextualised in local settings, young farmers are willing to adopt it. The following section compares local-food movements in Hong Kong to a Europe-based but globally renowned initiative of sustainable living, to elaborate on how the activism in Hong Kong resonates with as well as distinguishes from globally circulating ideas due to contextual differences.

Imagining 'transition'

It is often said that Hong Kong is currently in 'transition' from a British colony to a part of the Chinese state. During this time of political transition, young people are also seeking transitions away from their current lifestyle. The revival of local agriculture is seen as the key to transit to a more self-sufficient, resilient, and sustainable way of living. My interlocutors did not mention the Transition movement—a sustainable movement that emerged from a permaculture course taught in a Northern Ireland village in 2005 (Brunetta & Baglione 2013)—but there are noticeable similarities between the movements in Hong Kong and that in the UK. This relatedness, I argue, results from the fact that both campaigns are informed by 'permaculture'. The resemblances between the two cases show that, when it comes to 'sustainable living', the 'East' and the 'West' are highly relatable rather than essentially different from each other.

The Transition model advocates bottom-up and community-centred actions to increase the resilience of human society against the threat of 'peak oil'—a critical point from which the depletion of fossil fuels will result in energy insecurity, soaring fuel costs, food shortages, or other disturbance in the era of energy crises and climate change (Barry & Quilley 2009; Connors & McDonald 2011; Hopkins 2008, 2011). 'Resilience' in this context refers to the ability to adapt to environmental changes (Graugaard 2012). The term 'transition' means 'a shift away' from current high energy-consuming and vulnerable forms of living (Felicetti 2013) to an 'abundant future' (Hopkins 2008: 94) in a

sustainable, post-carbon, and post-capitalist order, in which people live 'handmade' lives —more familial, authentic, and artisanal (Quilley 2009: 265). The movement is at odds with neoliberal norms (Stevenson 2012) and in line with other 'new social movements' (Habermas 1981), which no longer centre the agenda around wealth distribution but rather on the quality of life. The Transition movement embodies 'a search for meaning in one's world and life' (Biddau et al. 2016: 158). Various activities are taking place in Transition Towns ranging from time banks, local currencies, free markets, community gardens, to handcraft workshops, eco-construction of houses, courses for the future of the community and renewable energy systems, health care, and arts—all serving to strengthen social relations and building a resilient, self-reliant, low-carbon and low-impact human settlement (Barnes 2015; Brunetta & Baglione 2013).

Localisation has been the guiding concept of the movement (Hopkins 2008, 2011; Wilson 2012). Framed within the 'new environmentalism', which believes that empowering the local is a key to sustainability (Biddau et al. 2016; Connors & McDonald 2011; Speth 2008; Staggenborg & Ogrodnik 2015), transition discourses heavily rely on the localisation of food production and consumption (Barry & Quilley 2009; Hopkins 2008). The initiative is identified as a localist endeavour that stems from frustration with consumer societies and seeks to develop local politics of de-growth (Quilley 2013). The movement shares ground with localism, such as local control and ownership (Cretney et al. 2016), but the primary advocate, Hopkins (2010), insists on adopting the notion of *localisation*, which for him implies many characteristics lacking in the discourse of *localism*, including ethics of sustainability, the principle of proximity, community control over resources, and reconfiguring consumer-producer relationship. The Transition model champions 'inclusive' (Mason & Whitehead 2012: 511) or 'reflexive' localism (Sage 2014), foregrounding principles of openness, diversity, and inclusivity, welcoming participants from different backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, age, class, nationality, and religion (Barnes 2015; Hopkins 2011).

The narrative of localisation renders the model attractive to a broad audience such as anti-globalisation sympathisers, environmentally conscious individuals, or food sovereignty campaigners (Felicetti 2013; Mason & Whitehead 2012; Sage 2014). Currently, it has expanded to more than 1,000 groups worldwide (Feola & Him 2016), mostly in the English-speaking world (Felicetti 2013), but also in Oceania and South America (Hopkins & Lipman 2009; Smith 2011).

Local-food movements in Hong Kong and the Transition movement have much in common in terms of emphasis on the localisation of the food system, environmental awareness (though from an urban-centric standpoint), the pursuit of a 'meaningful life', and various community activities. Having said that, the Hong Kong case is distinct from the Transition model for two reasons. On the one hand, Transition Towns are based on 'rural radicalism' that encompasses longings for rural communities and visions of a society based on values of sharing, collectivity, anti-consumerism, and anti-industrialism (Neal 2013). The concept of rural radicalism derives from critique of the invention of radical rural space that seeks to be alternative, countercultural, and anti-capitalist, rejecting materialism, urbanism, modernity, and embracing self-efficiency, frugality, and back-to-land low-impact living (Halfacree 2007). Local-food movements in Hong Kong are in line with the Transition model in terms of supporting ideas of sharing, low impact, self-sufficiency, anti-consumerism, anti-industrialism, and anti-capitalism. Nonetheless, movements in Hong Kong do not prioritise rural areas over modern cities. Young farmers and activists do not reject modernisation or intend to withdraw from urban life. They have no intention to retreat to the countryside, nor do they romanticise the frugal peasant lifestyle. Many of them mentioned that they need to use phones and the internet to reach out to the wider world. They criticise the urban lifestyle because they wish to revamp the system and bring positive changes to their city.

On the other hand, the Transition movement sets out to draw on members of civil society who self-identify as citizens rather than activists (Hopkins 2008; Mason & Whitehead 2012). Therefore, the model suffers from critiques of keeping a distance from reflecting on the larger social structure, power relations, and the exploitative economic system which underlie social problems; as a result, no substantial change to the rules of the game can be obtained (Aiken 2017; Chatterton & Cutler 2008; Connors & McDonald 2011). It is also pointed out that the Movement confines itself to small-scale, consensual and local discourses and actions (Aiken 2017). It takes an apolitical or post-political attitude (Rancière 1999, noted in Aiken 2017) that deliberately overlooks disagreements and uneven power relations in order to address problems efficiently (Chatterton & Cutler 2008; Connors & McDonald 2011; Haxeltine & Seyfang 2009; Neal 2013; North 2010; Scott-Cato & Hillier 2010).

Hence, the Movement is described as more exclusive than inclusive (Speth 2008) and only for middle-class people (Connors & McDonald 2011; North 2011; Smith 2011; Stevenson 2012) who are literate and skilled at using new media such as blogs and

YouTube (Stevenson 2012). As an alternative, a notion initiated in Northern England, 'Incredible Edible' (Campbell forthcoming), has been proposed to question the productivist agricultural system that seeks commercial profitability. It manifests grassroots innovation in tackling issues of food insecurity and climate change and attracts a wider demographic range of the population including the working class and economically marginal classes, rather than just the middle-class, to campaign for the right to better food (Campbell forthcoming). Local-food movements in Hong Kong share similar concerns over social inequality. Young agricultural practitioners do not avoid political confrontation. Amidst all kinds of political and social conflicts after the 1997 handover, they pursue social reform and engage with debates over structural change, power relations, and socio-cultural norms.

Transformative revival of agriculture

Resonating with environmental narratives that are circulating worldwide, a citywide interest in Hong Kong in discussing climate change, low-carbon lifestyles, ecological conservation, and environmental protection seems to indicate the existence of a 'cosmopolitan risk society'. However, although environmentalism attracted much attention, it remained a theme for intellectual or policy discussion. Environmental consideration did not play a role in local-food movements as significant as that of other social, political and economic concerns. In this regard, the use of the idiom 'sustainable living' did not always have environmental implications but was adopted as a handy phrase to describe a more desirable way of living. The Hong Kong case highlights the fact that environmental discourses are not uniform across the globe. Residents in Hong Kong indigenise globally prevailing ideas to local context and create an urban-centric view of environmental protection and sustainable living.

Both in environmental discourses and academic literature, domains of nature and culture are seen as integral. Both local-food movements practitioners and other residents in Hong Kong speak of this inseparability and express a strong appreciation for nature. This urban perception of nature, however, does not undermine the culture-nature division because it still implies that 'nature' is separated from everyday life in the city where 'nature' has been lost in the process of urbanisation, modernisation, and industrialisation. From my interlocutors' point of view, the importance and value of 'nature' lie in the fact that urban dwellers no longer have access into 'it'. Because everything in the city is 'unnatural'—artificial, industrial, and not complying to the laws of nature—urbanites invite 'nature' into urban life to seek a better quality of life. A lifestyle that reconnects with

nature restores a good-quality life and social relations that have been lost due to neoliberal governmentality of this city. The random but ubiquitous use of the term 'nature' and the imagination of a 'man-made artificial world' (as opposed to 'God-made nature') suggest that the nature-culture divide retains widely accepted in Hong Kong.

Amidst food hazards in mainland-imported food since the 1990s, local agriculture, once seen as a polluting industry, become something that should be protected. The anxiety had not evolved into social movements until an agricultural village was to be relocated to make way for a high-speed railway. Young people who joined the campaign are concerned about being unable to produce food and other daily necessities because this inability forces them to comply with the current social and economic structure, otherwise they cannot survive in their costly city. They no longer viewed agriculture as backward, but rather value the contribution of farmers and regard farming a compelling occupation. However, with neither an official curriculum for agricultural knowledge nor the privilege that elder farmers enjoyed of acquiring farming techniques from family members, young urbanites learnt via books, online information, exchanging experiences with people from different backgrounds, and volunteering on farms abroad, thus developing skills and philosophies distinct from those of elder farmers.

Young farmers consulted various sets of farming techniques worldwide. This chapter has discussed four approaches that were frequently referred to, including permaculture, Natural Farming, Bio-Dynamic Farming and Friendly Farming. These models seek to promote sustainable farming and living that considers a complex system consisted of both humans and the more-than-human world. The cross-reference of different philosophies from different cultural traditions results in a new version of sustainable farming that is distinct from either conventional agriculture, organic farming, or other farming approaches. According to its principles, young farmers share their harvest with insects, leave weeds to grow, turn urban waste into compost, and comply with the circulation of resource and energy. The agriculture that young farmers support is not a continuation of traditional peasant life, but a means to transform the current urban lifestyle.

Hong Kong young farmers' version of sustainable farming is created by incorporating imported ideas which are not classified or ranked by their origin. They do not enforce the East-West opposition and are explicit that as long as an idea is suitable for the context of Hong Kong, where an idea comes from is not an important question for them. This hybrid of different approaches to sustainable living and farming highlights a situation in which ideas originating in different places could have been inspired by other traditions and

therefore are mutually influential rather than unrelated to each other. The resemblance between the Europe-based Transition movement and local-food movements in Hong Kong epitomises this dialectical relationship. Both campaigns are significantly influenced by permaculture, seeking to localise the food system and establish sustainable forms of living to increase the resilience of human settlements. Apart from the similarities, the Transition model has as its primary goal tackling the consequences of climate change, while local-food movements are devoted to social reform and structural change. Next chapter will examine the social and economic configurations surrounding the local-food movements.

Chapter Five:

'Grow our own Food': Localness Cultivated on the Ground

As the 1997 handover approached, 'psychological depression brought about by uncertainty over the future' (Cheung 2003: 2) evoked a nostalgia among Hong Kong residents for roots. Given that the connotation of 'localness' is highly subjective, there were multiple voices of dissent. some people associated localness with national identity and aligned themselves with claims of separatism or 'Hong Kong nationalism' stirred up by political tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China. As the confrontation became noticeable (e.g. Lee & Chan 2008; Tse 2014), it is easy to fall into the trap of reducing local-food movements to a political gesture endorsing such an attitude, and as a consequence, fail to see the abundant meanings of *buntou* that are cultivated in the movements.

Young farmers sought to establish a way of living that makes them feel more assured and at ease. They believed that it requires them to return to the land, grow food and produce daily necessities with their own hands. This 'returning to nature' is not just a sentiment of escaping urban decay; rather, it resembles a 'deep' ecology that contains 'ecosophy' (Naess 1973: 99)—a philosophy that attends to the ecological harmony and equilibrium of the universe and the norms, rules, and values of the society. Chapter Four noted that local-food movements in Hong Kong are distinguished from other sustainable campaigns in terms of placing social reforms before environmental agendas. Young farmers do not picture the ideal life as living isolated in the countryside in resistance to the environmentally damaging system of the modernised and industrialised city. They seek to minimise human impacts on the physical environment, but simultaneously believe that environmental issues are inseparable from social and political issues.

'Grow our own food' is a statement that emphasises taking back the control of one's own life by growing food. This view is reminiscent of the 'food sovereignty' movement, which calls for peasants and smallholder farmers in the Global South to take back their rights to grow and access food from the corporate food regime of Global North nations (Andrée et al. 2014; Block et al. 2012; Cid Aguayo & Latta 2015; Friedmann 1995; Lin 2017; McMichael 2005; Wittman et al. 2010). However, this chapter will note that the movements in Hong Kong do not express a sense of territoriality and are a less parochial version of localism than that entailed in food sovereignty campaigns.

Compared to small farmers in the Global South, well-educated young farmers in Hong Kong might be taken as economically and socially privileged metropolitan elites who are amongst the middle-class instead of the low-income citizenry (Ellis & Sumberg 1998). Mintz (2006) explicitly points out that attempts to make healthy, diverse, and delicious food available locally reach out only to selected groups of people who are mostly in the West and educated. The Slow Food movement has been widely criticised as elitist (Wilk 2006b); the Transition movement has attracted similar criticism, and even participants in food sovereignty campaigns in Euro-American contexts are predominantly white (Alkon & Mares 2012), while under-served communities might not even hear about these agendas (Clendenning et al. 2016). It is argued that neoliberalism ingrained in these campaigns passes well-being on from a state responsibility to individuals, leaving marginalised communities to address health and social problems under pressure from market mechanisms (Alkon & Mares 2012; Guthman 2008; Pudup 2008).

Fundamentally, local-food movements were initiated precisely to react to the neoliberal set-up of Hong Kong society. Although the movements are taking place in a social and economic context similar to other campaigns that are said to be elitist, a vast majority of young farmers and activists are among the 'graduates with no future'. They are facing 'downward social mobility' which makes educated young urbanites struggle to make ends meet due to low salaries and high living expenses (see Chapter Three). From an emic point of view, my interlocutors did not place themselves among the middle class. It is to survive financial uneasiness that they decided to become food growers. This chapter will discuss why this is the case.

Multiple interpretations of localness

'Local' has never been a neutral term but rather ideology-laden. 'Local food' has been positioned as the fulcrum of wide-ranging discourses on sovereignty, identity, social equality, and citizenship. In this regard, the interface of local and imported food has become a battleground for debates not straightforwardly related to food. From a global perspective, discussions on food crises tend to tackle issues of poverty, hunger, and food insecurity (Lin 2017). However, in the current contexts of Hong Kong, and more broadly urban China, food safety has outcompeted those typical agendas. Food safety is foregrounded when arguing for the merit of local food. It invokes worries about ineffective regulation, chemical and pesticide residues, excessive use of additives, unhygienic processes of preparing, distributing and selling food, and 'fake food' made from harmful

chemical substances. On the surface, these issues concern health and moral hazards. However, by exploring the implications of distrust of imported food and examines different reasons for supporting local food, this section will argue that while localism is sometimes intertwined with nativism, it could also be cosmopolitan.

Distrust of imported food

Although considerations of price and support for small farmers impact the consumption orientation of Hong Kong consumers, food safety is often prioritised (Yip & Janssen 2015). Chapter Four illustrated that anxiety over unsafe food has grown increasingly pervasive since food safety scandals broke out in mainland China (Hong Kong's largest food supplier). In parallel to a global distrust of Chinese food (cf. Bongiorni 2007), this sense of risk is reinforced by the Hong Kong media (Yip & Janssen 2015), notwithstanding a study published in 2014 pointed out that the city had enjoyed an 'overall food safety rate' of 99.7 per cent in the previous few years (Wu et al. 2014: 141). The disjuncture between public conception and the scientific accounts shows that there are more contributing factors to the widespread distrust of imported food than whether the food is safe or not.

An unusual situation adequately explained what lies behind the distrust: not only the panic over food safety but also the hardship of small farmers in Hong Kong is attributed to agri-products dumped from mainland China. Beneath this are post-handover social conflicts—only a disproportionately small amount of blame is put on the transnational and industrial corporate food regime, which is nevertheless according to the scholarship on global food protests (e.g. McMichael 2005; McMichael & Schneider 2011) responsible for the difficulties of small farmers. Some academically-minded young farmers, activists, and researchers mentioned the situation of smallholder farmers in the world food system, but this is not a prioritised incentive in the minds of most 'locavores' in Hong Kong.

Another equally unusual phenomenon makes the tension between Hong Kong and its new motherland a significant factor that brews the distrust of mainland-imported food. From the official perspective, Hong Kong customers are attracted by food that is certified organic because it is considered to be healthy, natural, safe, nutritional, and free from genetically modified organisms (HKORC & AFCD 2005). However, what has escaped the government's notice is that, in vernacular discourses, the reliability of organic products not only depends on the certificate but the place of origin. Food imported from prestigious sources worldwide could be sold at good prices, while food from mainland China will be the choice of price-conscious consumers. A preference for local organic food vis-à-vis

mainland-imported food has been radicalised: even local conventional food (without organic certificates) is perceived as acceptable, whereas consumers show a negative attitude towards mainland-imported food even if it is labelled organic (Yip & Janssen 2015). Organic food from mainland China is still viewed as low quality and chemically contaminated. Sometimes, even if a product is labelled in simplified Chinese characters— the writing system used in mainland China—customers refuse to buy it.

In such a climate, local food is privileged and 'local' has become a powerful label increasing the perceived value of the product. It should be underlined that the 'local' in these periodic episodes of competition between local and non-local food is not a purely geographical concept. In search of cheaper land, some farms formerly in Hong Kong have relocated to mainland China. These farms use a new label indicating that their products were grown in 'Hongkongese-managed farms' to win back consumers' trust. Once mainland-imported food has this badge, it enjoys a higher price regardless of the location of the farm. It reveals that distrust of particular food is stimulated not only by where the food is produced, but also who produced it.

The perception of mainland-imported food as risky while local food is trustworthy is interpreted as part of the resistance to mainland China's influence since the handover (Yuk Wah Chan 2016). A widely accepted theory is that because an overwhelming majority of the current food supply in Hong Kong is imported from mainland China, food safety concerns in mainland China will expand to Hong Kong. Similar to food, other waves of adverse impacts will flood Hong Kong. Therefore, as described in Chapter Two, there have been radical groups calling for rejecting not only food from mainland China, but also Chinese people and political, cultural, and economic influences from the PRC.

This tendency to build political sovereignty through food evokes a sense of déjà vu about the policy orientation of the British-Hong Kong government during the Cold War. The 'Bamboo Curtain' between Communist PRC and British-ruled capitalist Hong Kong paralleled the 'Iron Curtain' in Europe during the Cold War period (Mizuoka 2017). As reviewed in Chapter Two, local agriculture was taken by the colonial government as the means to strengthen its rule of Hong Kong because sufficient food supply and stable livelihoods for farmers would limit the influence of communism and ensure the city's independence from the PRC (Bai et al. 2015; Potter 1968). Water supply also caught the colonial administration's attention, and from the 1920s to 1970s, the government launched one reservoir construction scheme after another to increase the water self-sufficiency of the city (Hayes 2006). Although the Bamboo Curtain was removed after 1984 with the signing

of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, nowadays local food production in Hong Kong is still bound up with the political sovereignty of the city. Against this background, the agenda of 'food self-sufficiency' promoted in local-food movements is immediately associated with anti-China sentiments. Promoting 'local food' is also seen as a political gesture to appeal for Hong Kong as a political entity.

However, although young farmers and local-food movements activists share the concern about unsafe food imported from mainland China, they do not discriminate against any food before knowing more about how the food was produced. Acknowledging the burgeoning demand for the transparency of food systems and various practices of 'green' and 'ecological' foods in mainland China (cf. Jin et al. 2017; Klein 2015; Sanders 2006; Shi et al. 2011; Wang et al. 2009; Zhang 2018), young farmers and activists in Hong Kong endeavour to convince customers that as long as the foodstuff is produced with environment- and human-friendly methods, its quality should not be arbitrarily judged by its place of origin. This is evident in how mainland-imported products are promoted. One time at an on-farm farmers' market, on the shelf there was rice from Jiangxi (a province in Southeast China) grown by a young 'eco-farmer' who quit his well-paid job in the city and returned to his hometown to grow rice. A member of staff at the farmers' market was trying to persuade customers that the product was produced by reliable suppliers whom the farm knows in person, so the quality is trustworthy. In the following sections, I elaborate on why young farmers prefer local food, and why this preference is not based on undifferentiated distrust of mainland-imported food.

Constructing 'healthy', 'tasty', 'fresh' and 'suitable' food
<u>1. 'Local food is more natural, tasty and fresh.'</u>
Young farmers place the seasonality at the heart of their choice of local food and practice of sustainable farming. They frequently use an expression *bat si bat jik; bat si bat sik*: literally 'wrong season, no planting; wrong season, no eating'. They buy and sell food only when it is in season. On the calendar in their farms, events are designed according to the maturation and rotation of plants. From their point of view, seasonal food is fresher, safer, and leaves a smaller carbon footprint, while unseasonal food has several implications. Firstly, if a vegetable is a winter crop but sold on the market during summer, it means that it was refrigerated, so it will not be fresh. Secondly, if the vegetable was planted just recently, it must have been transported from another climate. For example, *choy sum* is a cool-season vegetable, but it can be purchased in Hong Kong throughout the year. The

vegetable only flourishes in lower temperatures and therefore cannot be grown in Hong Kong during summer. However, because *choy sum* is the most popular vegetable, farmers and distributors are willing to transport it from distant places located at a higher latitude, such as the Ningxia region in northern China. Thirdly, if the unseasonal vegetable is neither planted in another season nor transported from another place, this suggests that the production process involves a higher degree of human intervention: farmers might have to 'trick' the plants by adjusting the temperature of the green-house and using artificial light, and unseasonal vegetables are more likely to be attacked by pests, so they have to be dosed with more pesticides and (usually chemical) fertilisers.

In the view of young farmers, human intervention makes food 'unnatural'. I stated in Chapter Four that the culture-nature division has not been challenged but rather mirrored in the 'indigenised' concept of 'nature' (*jiyin* or *daai jiyin*), which is defined as the antithesis of the city—a domain that urbanites are unfamiliar with. According to local perceptions, 'unnatural' means artificial, industrial, and violating the laws of nature. Young farmers believe that unnatural food is not only unhealthy but also less tasty. For example, a farmer told me that the unique scent of 'crown daisy' is generated to repel pests. If dosed with pesticides, the plant will not have to protect itself and no longer creates the scent, thereby becoming tasteless. On top of this, the flavour of the crop is thinned because chemical fertilisers shorten the maturation time. Agro-food that young farmers perceive as 'tasty' must have its original flavour. This seemingly straightforward quality has become more difficult to achieve, as several farmers sighed, '[it is now rare that] food tastes like it should'. To retain this quality, they argued that the crops need to be well-tended by caring farmers who are willing to invest more time and necessary costs. A food that has its original flavour embodies farmers' commitment.

Several young farmers mentioned that food grown by themselves tasted better because it was the fruit of their own labour. Customers also appreciate their efforts. A young farmer once told me in an emotional tone that at a farmers' market, an old lady came to say to him that a flavour in her memory had been lost for decades since vegetables were no longer grown in Hong Kong, but the young farmer's products brought back the taste; she was grateful for that. He was heartened and, along with many other young farmers, felt that the devoted farmers whom they regard as their role models deserve more respect. For young farmers and local-food movements activists, local food is favoured not because the label of 'local' *per se* symbolises goodness, but due to its many qualities, including freshness, seasonality, safety, taste, and respect for farmers.

2. 'Local food is more "suitable" for the human body.'

In addition to the traits mentioned above, the most important reason why local food was premium, from the perspective of young farmers, was its close relationship with the land, or more precisely, soil. It is worth noting that this argument regarding the connection between soil and quality is distinct from the concept of *terroir* (see Chapter Three). Young farmers never asserted that food grown in Hong Kong's soil is better: their wish was to strive for 'a taste of our own'.

They believe that soil in different places fosters crops with different characteristics. A farmer once said: 'We eat Italian food in Italy, French food in France, and still eat world food in Hong Kong because we do not have local food to display the taste of Hong Kong'. He sees this as an essential reason to revive an agricultural system of the city's own. Older farmers agreed with young farmers on the link between soil and taste. A senior farmer, whom I came across in a farmers' market, explained to me that vegetables grown in different farms and soil have distinctive flavours and textures. This is why shoppers usually go to the same stall because they prefer the unique taste of vegetables that are cultivated at a particular farm. Taste is undoubtedly a primary concern of customers, whereas for young food growers, to produce food of their own is not only a matter of taste.

As discussed in Chapter Four, young farmers believe that human beings are inseparable from the environment. From their point of view, an expression that keeps appearing throughout this thesis—'desirable' or 'alternative' ways of living—is a 'holistic life' built upon *gungsang* ('interdependence') between human and nature: maintaining an intimate, balanced, and mutually beneficial relationship with the earth. They believe that 'food, human life, and civilisation all rely on soil'. A Buddhist idea, *san-tou-bat-yi* ('the human body is the product of the land'), was widely cited by young farmers, not only Buddhist practitioners but also Christians or those who did not declare any particular religion. This is a Japanese concept translated into Chinese, indicating the 'non-duality of body and earth' (Yo 2012). This perceived entanglement of the human and the physical world became more evident to me when a young farmer stressed it regarding traditional Chinese medicine. She said that Chinese medicine is essentially a system of understanding nature, according to which the two most essential elements of the human body, *qi* (energy) and *xie* (blood), both come from nature: *qi* is constituted from the food we consume, and *xie* is influenced by wind, soil, and climate. In this regard, local food is believed to be the most 'suitable' food for the human body because it is cultivated in the soil of the same land that nourishes its inhabitants.

This appreciation for local food should not be confused with a defensive localism that prioritises the local while rejecting the non-local. I asked young farmers who spent time abroad how they stuck to the principle of only consuming local food when they were not in Hong Kong. When they are abroad, they consume food grown in that place. Once in Taiwan, a young farmer and I went to a greengrocer's shop to buy some fruits. The young farmer was not sure what to buy, so she asked the shop keeper: 'What is grown locally?' In Hong Kong, she would have expected only limited items to have been grown locally, but the grocer answered: 'You want fruits grown in Taiwan? Almost all our products are grown in Taiwan!' The young farmer replied with surprise: 'So many! In Hong Kong we can hardly find any fruit grown locally.' She ended up asking me to recommend anything I liked because as long as the food was locally grown, she was happy to take it. For the young farmer and her peers, 'local food' indicates food produced where they currently live, not where they are from. Even if this means that they have to eat cuisines that they are not accustomed to, they are willing to adjust eating habits. In other words, the trope of 'local food' resurges as a *place-based* experience based on the nexus of soil, social relation, and cultural heritage, not a *place-bounded* state of mind.

Negotiating *buntou* over food and farming

So far, I have illustrated that local food has a supreme status in the minds of young farmers and activists, not because of a superficial, idealistic, or emotional affection for the local, but rather a preference grounded on rigorous contemplation and in-depth examination of food systems and the broader society. Local-food movements practitioners are worried that although people in Hong Kong enjoy the accessibility of international cuisines, the city is starved of local food since the right and responsibility of growing food has shifted to other places. From their point of view, underneath the lack of food self-sufficiency is the undercurrent of developmentalism and neoliberal capitalism that runs through multiple aspects of everyday life in Hong Kong.

Re-evaluating the existing local: the structure behind the uneasiness of everyday life

Neoliberal governmentality is not a post-handover arrangement. During the colonial time when the Bamboo Curtain still blocked interactions between Hong Kong and mainland China, Hong Kong was transformed into a capitalist metropolis. Research published before the handover already found that Hong Kong society had been bound up with several phrases: 'concrete jungle', 'real estate', 'horse-races [gambling]', and 'all you need is

money' (Chow 1992: 164-6). During the colonial period, it was observed that, 'the more frustrated or blocked the aspirations to "democracy" are, the more the market booms' (Abbas 1997: 5). Because there was no room in the governmental administration structure, people instead devoted themselves to economics, which became the root of the 'Hong Kong identity' (Carroll 2007). People grew proud of their economic achievement, celebrating the 'Lion Rock Spirit'—the Hong Kong version of the American Dream—and establishing confidence based on their economic advancement compared with other parts of the Chinese society (Evans & Tam 1997; Hsing & Lee 2010; Ren 2010; Turner 1995).

This view was shared by a British economist, Goodstadt (2005, 2013), who was Head of the Central Policy Unit of Hong Kong before 1997. He pointed out that, from colonial times, partnership between the colonial government and local elites have created an unequal distribution of wealth and power, and ruled every aspect of social life. Pre-1997, the colonial government's coalition with the privileged business and professional classes— property tycoons, senior executives or principals, wealthy families, gold-collar professionals, and other wealthier and more Westernised groups—was crafted to overcome obstacles to the colonial administration (Goodstadt 2005). The unusual colonialism-capitalism alliance between Hong Kong Chinese and the British colonial government was underpinned by the role of 'comprador' who, rather than being oppressed colonial subjects, acted as middlemen assisting the colonial regime and benefiting from the partnership in terms of wealth, lucrative monopolies, and residential privileges, hence becoming a business elite (Carroll 1999; Choi 1999; Hayes 1983; Hui 1999). Extensive monopolistic practices sustained a friendly environment for private profit at the expense of public interests and social equality (Goodstadt 2005). The 'barren-rock-turned-capitalist-paradise legend' (Ngo 1999a: 120)—the rapid economic take-off around the last quarter of the twentieth century—has long been attributed to the colonial government's economic and political non-intervention, which attracted capital, technology and entrepreneurs from the wider world, including mainland China.

After 1997, the post-colonial administration adhered to the state-business collaboration based on the principle of *laissez-faire*—free market, free trade, minimal government and low taxation, ensuring the flourishing of business, and consolidating the political influence of business elites (Goodstadt 2005). Fostered by reproducing the colonial system, which considers welfare spending to be 'unaffordable', the economic boom has not trickled down to average households (Goodstadt 2013: 12). The gap between the rich and the poor has not narrowed; income has stagnated, hours of work are longer, and there are fewer certain

job prospects, whereas expenses on housing, medical services, and education are soaring (Goodstadt 2013; Ngan & Li 2007). Alongside rapidly increasing housing prices, aggravated poverty, and widening wealth disparities are escalating costs of dining out, the privatisation of public spaces, crowding in public transport, the closure of small shops, and mushrooming of the number of shopping malls offering boutiques catering to the appetites of the *nouveau riche* (Che-Po Chan 2016; Kwong 2016; Ma 2015; So 2016). As the doctrine of *laissez-faire* is highly respected in Hong Kong (Ngo 1999b), the city is not only facing severe social challenges such as one of the world's highest levels of income inequality, powerful influence of business interests, and a high-consumption lifestyle, but also environmental crises caused by large amounts of household rubbish, low levels of recycling, air and water pollution, and intensive development of farmland and country parks (Harris 2012).

Young farmers and activists, amongst the 'graduates with no future', believe that neoliberal capitalism and developmentalism created a multi-layered vicious loop in which a whole generation is trapped: to survive, one must find a position in the system; however, financial security is often gained at costs of physical and mental damage caused by long working hours, little fulfilment, stress, and low salaries compared to living expenses. At the same time, the more one works towards the goal of ensuring financial security, the less secure one becomes, because vested interest holders will make more profits and the system will grow more powerful; it will then provide products (e.g. food, housing units) of poorer quality and higher price, and those who depend for their livelihood on the system will be forced to accept the situation. When stuck in the loop, one young farmer said: 'I never knew we have a choice other than studying for degrees that secure a well-paying job and then working overtime for enough salary to sustain our lives in this costly city'. Another young farmer attributed the situation in which 'people are unconscious and careless about how their behaviours are causing damage to the environment and to others' to the fact that 'they are too pressured and too busy'.

Briefly speaking, dissatisfactions with land development and the food system are reactions to 'social sufferings' (Kleinman et al. 1997), mainly regarding two concerns. One is the worry over a future in which they have to devote themselves to lucrative yet undesirable and unhealthy jobs, as a sacrifice for surviving in a costly city. The other is that, even when they make such a compromise, there is still no way out of running short of disposable money because costs of living escalate faster than income, let alone the fact that the price increase does not mean improvement but very often a decline in quality. As

reviewed in the first section of this chapter, neoliberalism underlies alternative food movements in affluent societies. Likewise, neoliberal governmentality is a salient feature of the social configuration against which local-food movements broke out. When the responsibility of improving the quality of life is transferred to individuals, people have to work around the system to seek a way out. Young farmers and activists in Hong Kong not only attempt to accentuate social sufferings implied in the neoliberal structure, but also to address the issues through carving out alternative forms of life with farming as an essential. As I will show later on, addressing social sufferings is a key motivating force for urban young farmers.

Building a new buntou *from reviving agriculture*

The social hazards are manifested in land disputes between those who possess land and those who do not. There has been an assumption that land in Hong Kong is too scarce to grow food, so farmland should be converted for real estate development. This widely accepted faith is condensed in a frequently quoted idiom *Heung gong dei siu yan do*, literally 'Hong Kong has small land but huge population'. Research on Hong Kong residents' environmental attitudes finds that even environmentally conscious groups are prone to prioritise development over environmental protection when the two conflict (Cheung & Fok 2014). Counterarguments against local agriculture believe that local-food movements activists neglect the need for housing and only care about the 'nonsensical' appeal for local food which can be substituted by imports. Some claim that protesting against landowners and occupying farmland for planting vegetables is a violation of private property rights; what is worse, it breaks the trust between landowners and tenants. As a consequence, landowners will become worried that they will be unable to repossess the land, and thus become less willing to rent out their properties.

However, several activists and local researchers argued that the amount of land in Hong Kong is not as little as assumed and implied in agricultural policies and land development schemes. They believed that much land is left fallow or abused for purposes that will make profits, rather than growing food or building affordable homes. In order to appeal for space for agriculture in the city, they added a comma to the idiom quoted above, amending it to *Heung gong dei, siu yan do*, changing the meaning to 'this city is suffering from villains, rather than land shortage'.

An incident happened in the middle of my fieldwork embodied the tension between two opposing rationales. A group of young people stood at the entrance to a village in the

New Territories, stopping police and staff of an estate developer from entering the village, as they sought to claim back some farmland on which crops were still growing. During the confrontation, a young man was arrested, though he was released soon after the incident. When he was being taken away by the police, he shouted: 'I am a farmer!' He meant to express that he was not a rebellious troublemaker but a food-grower.

This dissent about the usage of farmland has a long history. As early as the 1930s, land sales were not unusual. Urban dwellers and wealthy overseas returnees bought land in the New Territories to build houses or farms and commenced the transformative change of traditional rice-farming to market gardening (Potter 1968). In the immediate post-war period, market forces—increasing return offered by the government or private developers to landowners who converted farmland to industrial, commercial, or residential uses—encouraged landowners to rearrange land tenancies with market gardening tenant farmers, resulting in farmers being evicted from the land and struggling to make a living from agriculture. Consequently, much land was abandoned (Strauch 1984). The village where Strauch studied, Fung Yuen, had not yet been affected by developments, but her description of the climate in the village in the 1970s is reminiscent of many villages in today's Hong Kong: 'Fung Yuen is in a state of limbo, a collective holding of breath, but in some small ways the quality of daily life may be deteriorating under the threat implicit in the suspended sword of development' (p. 205). It mirrors the concern of young farmers and other Hong Kong residents who are persistently worried about eviction from the land they are growing food on, the shop where they do business, or the house they live in.

Strauch notes that farmland was not only a means of production but 'a symbol of rights and obligations', and a tenure agreement was 'a moral contract' (p. 193) that implies mutual trust, '*kom-tsing*' (warm personal relations) (p. 204), and moral codes such that '[the landlord] would be guilty of gross impropriety if he attempted to dispossess one tenant in order to receive a higher rent from a second' (p. 203). Tenants were also obligated to maintain the fertility of the land and return the land when the landlord requested it. Owing to disputes between landowners, tenant farmers, and the government that was implementing large-scale development plans, some farmers joined a trade union farmers' branch, becoming activists protesting for the revival of traditional land tenure, warm social relations, and solidarity (Strauch 1984). Rather than complying with the neoliberalism that leaves the distribution of land resource to market mechanisms, farmers resisted the system.

Today, history is repeating itself. The undercurrent of neoliberalism flows all the way through competition over land resources and living space and shapes the social setting of

the formation of local-food movements. Young urbanites speak up for farmers and even become farmers themselves because, this thesis suggests, they can relate to the difficulties that elder farmers are facing. Activists and farmers organise protests to express their disapproval of the commodification of farmland, which they believe undermines the ground on which their lives flourish and on which they can build and claim localness. The action of young farmers manifests discontent with the way the city is run (as sketched in the preceding section). From their point of view, the crux of the problem lies in the long-existing—from the colonial period to postcolonial times—conformity to developmentalism and a *laissez-faire* system in which economic-politically powerful groups, such the government and business elites, are in charge. Therefore, they are not convinced that post-handover cross-border populations are responsible for the upheaval. While the most vocal localist advocates claim that mainland Chinese tourists and immigrants have 'invaded' Hong Kong, causing fierce competition over resources and lowering the quality of life, young farmers and activists argue that newcomers should not be made the scapegoat for the aftermath of a complicated social and historical process, which is structural and beyond the control of individuals.

These differences in reasoning over social predicaments engender incompatible interpretations of *buntou*. The ambition of young farmers and food activists to address structural issues and their refusal to discriminate against individual mainlanders are attacked by people who espouse a nativist view of localism as 'castles in the air' while they themselves are labelled as 'disloyal to Hong Kong' or 'communist sympathisers'. In fact, however, a considerable number of young farmers and activists agree with other localist campaigners in terms of civil disobedience to the authoritarian Chinese state and policies that they feel are casting a shadow on the future of Hong Kong. What they find difficult to approve of is the undertone of taking the people of the streets (individual mainland Chinese) as representative of their governing body (the Chinese state of the PRC) and, as a consequence, the undifferentiated prejudice against the border-crossing population, not because of what they do but what they are (mainland Chinese)—a mentality that is also applied to food imported from the mainland, which suffers not necessarily due to how it was actually produced, but consumers' perception that is largely based on stereotypes.

For young farmers and activists, the 'local' is not necessarily good or ethical because it could entail social hazards caused by the neoliberal set-up of society. They believe that being honest about the downside of one's own society, rather than pinning the blame on external forces, does not violate patriotism. At the same time, a sense of belonging to the

hometown and openness towards newcomers and outsiders can sit side-by-side. Although many of them are active campaigners for street culture and cultural heritage, their appreciation of local elements does not stop them from making introspective cultural critique. While local agriculture has not been included in the localist agenda by most, local-food movements practitioners begin their search for *buntou* with farming. When localists speak of the unique culture and history of the city to distinguish Hong Kong from mainland China, the non-monetary value of land, the heritage of traditional village life, and local food are not on their agenda. This inattentiveness puzzles young farmers and activists, who wonder how the camp that upholds nativist localism plans to achieve political independence without the ability to sustain the food supply. One farmer questioned the preaching of Hong Kong nationalism by university students: 'They have no idea of where food comes from, they cannot cook or take good care of themselves; are they really able to become independent?' From the point of view of local-food movements practitioners, food self-sufficiency remains the fundamental bargaining chip of a city's subjectivity. Therefore, they argue that it is impossible to talk about *buntou* without growing food locally.

Becoming independent: counteracting the structure

Self-sufficiency in terms of food and more

The phrase 'self-sufficiency' might recall the British-Hong Kong government's Cold War policy of boosting local agriculture so as to prevent dependence on China. However, as this section will illustrate, self-sufficiency is a prescription for independent living rather than rhetoric for political independence. It appeals for just distribution of land resources, access to good-quality food, and the freedom of choosing one's desired way of living.

The pursuit of 'self-sufficiency' is driven by a sense of risk in relying on the current system and becoming unable to escape dependence: those who do not grow food or produce daily essentials must pay for everything. To earn money, they have to work and are too busy to shop for fresh food ingredients or cook for themselves, so have to eat out. Cooking at home is much cheaper, but it is expensive to buy or rent an apartment with a proper kitchen, while the costs of either dining in restaurants or ordering take-away food are skyrocketing due to rent rates. Moreover, my interlocutors feel that the food is often neither healthy nor tasty. To restore their health and recover from work pressures, people buy dietary supplements and medical care, pay for gym memberships, go shopping, or take trips—as a young farmer who used to work in a bank said: 'We need to leave to heal

ourselves.' Consequently, the financial return for hard work is spent entirely on surviving, and because these activities are expensive, people are left no choice but to work even harder to sustain themselves and their families. Still, they have insufficient living space and have to endure food of low quality, unless they are very successful in money-making. As a young farmer said in an ironic tone, 'If one is super rich, one can have a wonderful life here.' Disillusioned, young farmers determined not to play the game any longer and to write their own rules in pursuit of independent living.

Although it appears counter-intuitive to pick up farming, a job with meager returns, as an exit from bread-and-butter concerns, young farmers argue that farming lies beyond the rules of the neoliberal structure. Hence, it is taken as, I quote a young farmer, 'an experiment to see if I can survive by farming'. Becoming a farmer is an experiment to figure out and demonstrate alternative ways of living in Hong Kong. The social structure affects the younger generation's choices of job and lifestyle: numerous young people I met during the fieldwork expressed a willingness to take up farming as an occupation but had not done so. On the one hand, their parents wish them to pick better-paid, more stable, and 'decent' jobs; and on the other, they were not confident that they could survive in Hong Kong by farming. Similar stories were told by many of my interlocutors who had thought of becoming artists, writers, or film-makers, but ended up surrendering and joining the business world. Due to the fear of financial difficulties, they obeyed rather than challenged the rules of neoliberal capitalism. As a result, choices that they made, often unwillingly, consolidate the structure.

Farming, according to young farmers, is the antidote to their innocence, confusion, and having no control over their own lives. By learning 'the art of growing food', they get to know 'the basis of everyday life'. Some of them who delved into the business world after graduating from university but then changed their mind, describing the situation thus:

> Sitting in air-conditioned offices doing work which was bad for my health and making me feel unbalanced; doing things which had no meaning for me just for the sake of money—I would rather be labouring in the fields.

> It took a long process but now I realise that farming gives me an opportunity to live authentically, independently, and stay humble... The life of being a farmer is more meaningful... as a farmer, I have more freedom and autonomy.

This thesis is not suggesting that local-food movements are invented by upset young people; rather, the visions that young farmers and activists propose are shared by wide-ranging members of Hong Kong society from different age groups, occupations, and family backgrounds. There have been several organisations devoted to promoting the revival of agriculture. There are organisations that offer young farmers a piece of land to grow food and learn farming skills for free as long as they contribute to activities hosted by the organisation. There are also a growing number of agriculture-friendly landowners willing to rent farmland to young farmers at very low prices. Some even waive the rents in exchange for young farmers taking care of their property.

Many such local food supporters have a particular view of big corporations such as supermarket chains, which are often owned by real estate tycoons that also invest in other businesses such as restaurants, banks, transportation, and media and communication. Although local-food movements practitioners sometimes compromise by shopping in supermarkets because supermarkets are more widespread and open longer and more frequently, they are willing to purchase local food at farmers' markets that only open on weekends and might require shoppers to travel to less accessible areas. They explained this as resistance to big companies that monopolise food and estate markets and take control of ordinary people's everyday life: skyrocketing land rates extinguish small businesses; old or independent stores are replaced by supermarket and restaurant chains owned by powerful companies that can afford high rents. As long as there is no competition, overpriced, low-quality commodities are the only choice.

In recent years, there has been extensive backing for a movement called 'Go Beyond the Mall' (*ngh bong chan deih chaan seung*), meaning 'do not patronise the business of real estate companies'. The movement aims to appeal against 'developer hegemony' and promote locally-grown and homemade food or handicrafts. A *heui* ('street market') festival was advertised with a slogan, 'Constructing life through *heui*: economic and spatial autonomy'. The widely supported festival was held at Causeway Bay, Hong Kong's best-known shopping area, which has the world's highest retail unit rent. Dozens of stalls sold local food, homemade pickles, second-hand groceries, and handicrafts made by local artists. There were also stalls displaying fliers and pamphlets concerning the city's pro-development principle that, according to those documents, results in lack of choice in everyday life and loss of community solidarity. Participants called for more just urban planning whereby everyone has more living space. They also appealed for restoring the spirit of mutual help in contrast to competing for resources.

Supporters and practitioners of local-food movements gather on various occasions like the *heui* festival, farmers' markets and handicraft markets, farm tours, agriculture courses and fora, food-processing and handicraft workshops, film screenings, food-sharing parties, and local-food home cuisine restaurants. Some strangers who met during these events became close friends and even co-established farms and organised more activities. These emerging networks are working to revamp the old idea of *buntou* to a new, more sustainable version. In this regard, local-food movements are more inclusive than campaigns of the middle class and take a reflective attitude in defining localness, rather than holding onto a sense of territoriality or even nationalism.

Self-sustainability

Several farmers and activists summarised their view of the 'alternative form of living' with a term *ji-jyu-sang-wut*, literally 'independent living'. The Cantonese term was translated into English as 'self-sustainability' by an activist whose family is from Hong Kong, but he himself was born and raised in England before moving to Hong Kong a few years ago. He is currently an active figure promoting local agriculture, street culture, and sustainable forms of living. 'Self-sustainability' does not indicate a political statement of independence; instead, it speaks of breaking loose from the predetermined social, cultural, political, and economic structures analysed in the preceding section. This concept elaborates on having control over one's own life through hands-on producing everyday necessities as much as possible, for example, young farmers grow leafy greens, bake bread, make pickles, recycle and upcycle abandoned goods and furniture; some even grow rice.

In contrast to defensive localism, 'self-sustainability' involves a transformative and inclusive localism that appreciates grassroots culture, considers other people's well-being, and stays environmentally conscious. For instance, from the point of view of nativist localism, farms managed by Hongkongese are 'local' even if the farms are located in mainland China. However, in young farmers' opinion, food grown in these farms is not local because 'who the farmer (or farm manager) is' should not a decisive criterion. Food planted in distant places, even it is grown by Hongkongese, is not categorised by them as local because it leaves carbon footprint created by long-distance transportation. More importantly, according to young farmers and activists, such farming activities involve low-cost labour and chemical pollution of other people's land. They argue that one of the essential qualities of local food is that it does not exploit smallholder farmers or damage the environment of those living in the neighbourhood where the food is produced.

By promoting local food, young farmers and activists explicitly protest against a lifestyle that seeks one's own interests at the cost of others' and call for social equality and justice. They envision a world in which they and other members of the 'global village' can live a better life—a life no longer depends on an exploitative system and becomes more 'sustainable', i.e. healthier, happier, more resilient, and assured, and less troubled by social or environmental hazards. A majority of my interlocutors are university graduates. However, they do not self-identity as middle-class; some even described themselves as 'extremely poor' owing to the fact that they struggle to strike a balance between earnings and expenses. Facing similar everyday struggles, educated young farmers and activists can relate to the difficulties that the disadvantaged or marginalised are enduring. The feeling of suffering together motivates them to initiate campaigns discussed in this chapter. If they were among the wealthier classes, they might not have noticed these predicaments. Financial unease enables them to relate to the less educated and advantaged citizenry.

Local-food movements are not for urban elites only. It is evident in the frequent use of a term in plain Cantonese: *kaifong*, literally 'street, lane'. It is an idea that has been adopted amongst urban communities on Kowloon Peninsula since the late nineteenth century (Hayes 1983). At that time, the *kaifong* was known as a charitable and self-help neighbourhood association that dealt with commercial and manufacturing matters, local religious ceremonies, and public construction such as building and repairing bridges and footpaths. It provided a wide range of welfare services including education, medical treatment, and funeral expenses for poorer residents. Today, *kaifong* retains its meaning of mobilising civil society from the grassroots level. The term is now used as a substitute for 'neighbour' and 'neighbourhood' to express the warmth between people, while also excluding social elites. Many young farmers and charities working for 'community development' declare their mission to provide affordable and healthy food to those *kaifong* who are underprivileged or marginalised. Some organisations embed *kaifong* in their names, aiming to empower elder residents, housewives, low-income individuals and households, or people suffering from mental or physical ill-health.

For example: to tackle the problem that local food grown with sustainable farming methods tends to be out of the financial reach of low-income communities, an organisation promotes a currency they call *sifangyun* ('time vouchers'). Within the communities that the organisation works with, members help with food growing and processing, making daily groceries, or assisting with other community matters. The *kaifong* who invested their time and labour are rewarded with *sifangyun*, which they can exchange for healthier, safer, but

more expensive vegetables. A member of staff from the organisation once gave a talk in a farm in the New Territories. The speaker was a social worker who had been working with lower-class communities for more than ten years. At the time she gave the presentation, more than £10,000 worth of farm products had been exchanged via the time voucher system. In the talk, she invited the audience to reflect on a set of questions: 'Do you think your life is fulfilled?', 'Have you participated in a "happy economy", or "community oriented mutual economy"?', and 'Have you eaten any local food in the past week?' Most in the audience shook their heads.

Several young farmers said they became farmers in order to address the situation. One of them was inspired by the street life of underprivileged groups and along with a few friends, launched a small market stall in Yau Ma Tei—one of the most grassroots areas in Hong Kong. This stall is like a 'community centre' at the corner of a small plaza with a mini-garden, film screening, food preparation and sharing, book selling, free hair-cuts, free or pay-as-you-wish markets, open fora, festival parties, or free hand-written 'Lunar New Year couplets' (poems or phrases that symbolise blessing and happiness written on red paper to be hung on the wall or by the door during the Lunar New Year). Much of the equipment and decoration are second-hand donations or upcycled furniture that otherwise would go to landfill sites. The stall attracts students, young professionals, middle-aged workers, elderly people from the neighbourhood, and children and their parents from South Asian backgrounds. Regardless of political ideology, it brings together the voiceless and powerless with more well-off members of the society.

Just a few blocks away, another group of young people opened a free-pricing eatery in the form of *daipaidong*, a type of open-air food stall to be found on side streets serving homestyle dishes at modest prices. A wide diversity of people come to the place to eat and chat in an open-air, informal setting rather than in air-conditioned restaurants. By the reception are posters for various community activities and a bookshelf displaying books, magazines, and pamphlets concerning food, local agriculture, and land issues. Although the eatery is a *daipaidong*, an icon of grassroots and local street life, it serves international cuisine, not prepared by senior chefs but young people, using vegetables, European herbs, handmade pasta, and other unconventional ingredients. To promote reducing food waste, they openly use foodstuffs that are not expired but have passed their shelf life. They believe that the products which have just passed the 'best before' dates are still safe, edible, and fresh. Regardless of financial status, anyone is welcome to dine and decide how much to pay; some paid less, while others contributed generously to show support. In the middle

of my fieldwork, the eatery had to close temporarily due to rising rents. It had to raise funds from the public and luckily managed to reopen. Both the eatery and the market stall are manifestations of the commitment of the younger generation to build a post-capitalist city where life is based on mutual help, cooperation, and the spirit of 'community' (see Chapter Seven for further discussion), rather than rivalry and profit-seeking.

The younger generation strives for, in their own words, 'self-sufficient', 'healthy', and 'happy' forms of life, which bring about new types of social relation. Sometimes they exchange labour or farm produce for meals at friends' houses or yoga and handicraft courses organised by other farmers. They recycle used materials and upcycle them into household goods. Some even learn to make daily necessities such as furniture and farm equipment. They argue that those were everyday skills for elder farmers, but as city people, they are unable to satisfy basic needs without depending on the cash market for daily essentials. With this in mind, many agricultural practitioners are enthusiastic advocates of *siknung gaaujuk* ('education for food and agriculture'). They believe that spreading agricultural and food knowledge to city people is a pivot for a more ambitious purpose, *sangming gaaujuk* ('life education'). They argue that, after becoming informed about the complex agricultural, environmental, and social system, city people will be able to make better decisions.

Young farmers and activists argue that, the farming lifestyle illuminates the fact that some *needs* are actually *desires* and they had those desires simply because they were haunted by frustration and emptiness springing from the trap in which they work to be paid but then exhaust salaries on healing physical and mental illness created by working so hard. This suffering is accepted as something everyone who wishes to make a living in Hong Kong must endure. Producing food with their own hands, on the other hand, makes them feel, in their own words, 'assured and standing on solid ground'. Weaving farming into their everyday life considerably cuts down expenses on food and daily necessities. This makes them feel no longer 'disciplined by capitalism and consumerism' which reinforces an urban illusion: life in the city is convenient but relies on the market, so everyone has to devote themselves to money-making, and eventually, everything is valued in monetary terms. They believe that, the less they rely for their survival on the neoliberal capitalist system—the more self-sufficient they are—the freer they become because they will have more control over their own lives. Although it is impossible to escape the cash economy entirely, becoming a farmer relieves the financial pressure because they are capable of producing food and everyday groceries and no longer have to pay for those.

Also, spending more time on the farmland significantly cuts down on their expenses; for example, they no longer need to rent expensive apartments in the downtown because they do not have to rush to the office. When others work for high wages in order to afford safe and tasty vegetables, they avoid that and work directly for high-quality food. Farming empowers young farmers to materialise self-sustainability and sustain themselves in the ways they choose.

A down-to-earth imagination of the local

This chapter analyses the social and economic milieu of local-food movements. A whole generation is trapped in a treadmill of accepting better-paid but physically and mentally damaging jobs to meet the high cost of living. Income is spent on costly food, poor-quality housing, and restoring health. After earnings are exhausted, they need to work even harder in order to sustain themselves. Using one's own hands to grow food and produce daily necessities is considered a means of escaping the loop and bringing alternative forms of living into reality. It frees young farmers from anxieties caused by lacking a work-life balance, opportunities for career development, and access to reliable and affordable food and housing. Cultivated in this process, *buntou*, from the point of view of young farmers and activists, is down-to-earth—closer to the land and grassroots groups—as opposed to a nativist or nationalist statement that regards the local as necessarily moral and progressive, and believes that the life in their city was happy and carefree before newcomers ruined it.

Social constraints that might have caused the disappearance of farmers nevertheless evoked the younger generation's enthusiasm for agriculture. The narratives of 'self-sufficiency' and 'self-sustainability' articulate a vision of claiming back people's control of their own life in terms of having the freedom to judge of what works for them. In this vein, 'self-sustainability' embodies a sense of security and confidence in being an independent person who has the agency to determine what food to eat, what job to take, where to live, and what life goals to pursue. After weaving farming into everyday life, young farmers finally manage to take on the forms of living that they identify with. They are no longer victims of the structure created by norms of neoliberal capitalism, consumerism, and developmentalism. Unlike many other food campaigns that protest against globalisation and the global food regime, the movements in Hong Kong seek to tell urbanites that they have the option of refusing a local regime that dominates multiple aspects of everyday life. In the light of this, 'local food' serves as a rhetorical expression involving cultural critique

and systemic transformation. Localness negotiated in this process implies humanitarian and cosmopolitan considerations rather than xenophobic sentiments.

It is widely criticised that urban agriculture is a class privilege. However, local-food movements practitioners in Hong Kong are not only from diverse social strata, but also experiencing downward social mobility across levels of education. As analysed in Chapter Three, educated young people in Hong Kong do not fit comfortably in the category of the middle class due to downward social mobility. Sharing the suffering, they empathise with less privileged members of the society and call for change of the current system.

In this regard, this thesis disagrees with the view of generalising all urban food movements as moral agendas that will potentially be labelled as 'postmaterialist' values. Such a theory assumes that, since survival issues are no longer a problem for middle- to upper- class people, they begin to concern themselves with less 'practical' issues. For instance, social elites came to be interested in green lifestyles because they now have the privilege of not only satisfying material needs but pursuing a spiritually abundant life. They become those who are 'higher up' offering 'aid' to people in lower social and economic positions, such as wealthy urbanites patronise small farmers, or residents in affluent societies claim to protect the environment to show their care for those who are fighting for their lives on the frontline of environmental catastrophe. In the next chapter, I discuss in details to what extent the Hong Kong case challenges such assumptions and enhances our understanding of urban food activism.

Chapter Six:

Reconsidering the Postmaterialist Shift

This chapter suggests that local-food movements are an experiment that attempts to address practical concerns in everyday life, rather than an epitome of the pursuit of 'postmaterialist' (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997) values. Upon hearing stories of well-educated young urbanites embracing the austere life of a farmer, my fieldwork interlocutors in Hong Kong outside the food activism circle tend to have two reactions. On the one hand, because young farmers' and activists' views and actions are not in line with mainstream values, they are considered idealistic, anti-social, anti-development, anti-government troublemakers, or 'losers' who fail to accept the reality and cope with it properly. On the other hand, terms mentioned frequently in local-food movements, including human-land relationship, freedoms, social justice, cultural heritage, subjectivity, or identity are recognised as 'postmaterialist' thoughts.

Such a comment is reinforced by numerous academic accounts of the younger generation in Hong Kong (e.g. Cheng 2014; Chiu 2010; Chiu et al. 1999; Chiu & Leung 2015; Harris 2012; Ho & Leung 1995, 1997; Kuan & Lau 2002; Lee 2018; Ma 2011; Shan 2018; Sing 2005; Ting & Chiu 2000; Wong & Wan 2009; Wong et al. 2011). Because they grew up during the city's rapid economic take-off, the younger generation is portrayed as brought up in material abundance, unlike their parents and grandparents who had to worry about the satisfaction of basic needs. As a result, it is assumed that the younger generation objects to material satisfaction and has little interest in economic rewards because their material needs have been satisfied; they now have the luxury of shifting their attention to postmaterialist discourses, which are often associated with moral statements emerging from countercultural movements.

Originating in Europe and North America in the 1960s and later attracting worldwide followers, counterculture is often credited as a driving force behind alternative food movements (e.g. Kuepper 2010). The surge of interest in natural and organic food is linked to the 'neo-bohemian youth movement' and identified as 'countercultural foodways' or 'countercuisine' (Belasco 1989, 2005: 217) characterised by hippie communes, anti-war, anti-consumerism, anti-globalisation, anti-authoritarian sentiments, attachment to rural life, and a preference for natural over industrial products (Ayres & Bosia 2014; Lebovics 2004). Allied with postmodernism, traditionalism, indigenisation, and regionalism, campaigns

protesting against industrial and transnational capitalism, neoliberal policies, the modern nation-state, unemployment, downward social mobility, commercial civilisations, and ideologies of growth and development signify a 'hegemonic decline' of the Euro-American regions (Friedman & Friedman 2008) and result in the thriving of local food movements in the US (Nonini 2013). Advocating for a '[return] to the local' is seen as involving an 'ethical renaissance' (Ayres & Bosia 2014: 338) that reacts to post-industrial consequences, such as global agribusiness, global warming, peak oil, and economic collapse; the agenda prioritises organic production and consumption, small-scale community farming, and the culture of 'freegans' (p. 340)—promoting re-use and appealing against consumerism.

Young farmers and activists in Hong Kong are familiar with and share these ethics. However, with the soaring price of housing, transportation, groceries, and other costs in education or medical services, people in their twenties, thirties, and forties are confronted with severe challenges. The vast majority of my interlocutors told me that, compared to their parents or grandparents, they had a carefree childhood in good economic conditions. However, by the time we met, they not only had to make their own living but also acted as the breadwinners of their households in an even more competitive world with shrinking resources and opportunities. Because young people are still troubled by financial pressure, this chapter argues that considering local-food movements to be echoing countercultural or postmaterialist discourses implies a denial of the social predicaments (described in Chapter Five), which cast a shadow on the optimistic view of the younger generation as a careless group, exempt from financial insecurity.

It is equally problematic to think of local-food movements as urban sentiments towards 'a lost Eden'. The idealisation of wilderness and nostalgia for an imagined rural world that attracted Romantics (Schama 1995; Thomas 1983) and urban-based professionals was not appealing to farmers' children (Weller 2006). In line with pastoralism's anti-urban attitude that sees peasant life as idyllic, 'the "new" middle class' who belong to the knowledge sector, i.e. lawyers, teachers, doctors, are particularly active environmentalists (Weller 2006: 6). They see the countryside as an alternative to cities polluted by 'corruptions and affectations' (p. 57). These movements protest against industrial farming (Engler 2012), entail modern nostalgia for a return to nature Featherstone 1996), 'urban "Rousseauian" dreams of a harmonious rural idyll' (Roos et al. 2007: para. 7), and the imagination of a scene in which farmers work happily on the land (Dolan 2005). People would 'drop out' of the 'mainstream' and 'return to the land'

wishing to escape from life in the 'big city' to pursue communal, frugal lives in rural and agricultural settings in order to stay 'in tune with nature' (Barry 1999: 25). They feel that the pre-industrial, traditional, and things of the past can guide them towards a better future. For young farmers and activists in Hong Kong, however, revival agriculture is a forward-looking tactic to find out new ways of surviving in a costly city, rather than a nostalgia for the good old days in the countryside. Through discussing how young farmers work around obstacles, this chapter points out that the theory of postmaterialism is insufficient to explain the emergence and flourishing of local-food movements.

What is neglected by the postmaterialist theory?

Farming: a job and business model

Young farmers take farming not only as a campaign to call for structural adjustment, but also an occupation through which to earn a living and develop a career. Through growing food, they can *wansik*. The literal meaning of this Cantonese phrase is 'seeking food', but it has been used to mean 'working to make a living'. Once on a farm, I expressed my admiration to a member of farm staff on finishing a physically demanding mission, by saying: 'Good job! That was tough work'. This was at an earlier phase of fieldwork, when I did not have much knowledge of the context. Like other researchers, I was convinced by the postmaterialist approach and expected the worker to say something about how her altruism and commitment to benefit the environment and the community. However, she replied: 'I don't have a choice. I have to earn money.' Another time, I asked a farmer when he was weeding: 'Do you have to work on the land every day?' He replied: 'Yes, we have to make sure that the vegetables are in ideal condition so that customers will buy them.' Similarly, when I visited a farm manager and a farmer at their farm, they both admitted how badly they wanted to retire, but they had to carry on, to *wansik*.

In facing declining opportunities in the job market, establishing a farm becomes an alternative. Running a farm could be a start-up business. A farmer in his thirties, who used to work in the governmental sector, told me that several peer farmers felt that there was no ideal job on the market. After some thoughts, they came up with the idea of launching their own business and becoming their own boss in a new field (agriculture), rather than just *daagung* (being employed), a phrase implies working for someone else's goals rather than one's own and usually involves accepting unreasonable working conditions just for the sake of money. Refusing to take such a job but still having to make a living, young urbanites chose to start a farm, in which every member is a 'business partner' who shares

similar visions and has equal power and responsibility. Another farm manager explicitly said that his farm is the fruit of a 'business model'. He is not an unscrupulously profit-seeking businessman, and his farm attends to many social issues, including community development, traditional culture preservation, and the revival of agricultural villages, but his primary goal remains to make economic returns out of organising farm activities and growing and selling food. Farms sometimes identify their farm as 'social enterprises', companies with the principal goal of addressing social problems.

Devoting oneself to running a farm like a business does not necessarily contradict the purpose of appealing for social reform. A young farmer once said: 'If you can't grow good quality food, you have no right to have a say in other issues.' She has learned that the influence of her actions lies in whether she has become a professional farmer who can sustain herself by growing food. Many other young farmers also learned this after receiving criticism that they make little substantial contribution to the agricultural sector in Hong Kong. From the point of view of some senior farmers, young farmers are just idealists who are 'having fun', 'stirring up trouble' between landowners and tenants, and incapable of producing decent food.

By the time I conducted fieldwork, young farmers have begun to prioritise farming knowledge and skills as opposed to discourses for social reform. To make themselves more credible, they underline the importance of *sangchaan*, growing saleable food and feeding the public rather than gardening for oneself or only sharing harvests with friends and relatives. They make a distinction between farmers and gardeners, arguing that *farmers* are food providers who deserve respect and are needed by society, while *gardeners* are green lifestyle pursuers for whom farming is a pastime and personal interest. In order to make farming a reliable livelihood, young farmers strive to produce crops of premium quality to attract more shoppers and ensure their products are sold at good prices.

A conversation in a farm showed me just how these young urbanites have shifted their identity from urban elitist campaigners to food growers and take food-producing very seriously, wishing to become not just amateur but professional farmers. A young farmer told me: 'We actually don't want to hear people say that they support our ideas.' 'Why?' I asked in surprise. She explained: 'I want them to buy my vegetables, not because they want to "support" young farmers, but truly appreciate my products.' When training themselves to become proper farmers, they developed their own opinions about public wisdom: when it comes to unconventional (organic and beyond) food, the uglier it is, the healthier it is considered to be; insect bites are even looked on with approval, because they

are evidence that the crop is pesticide-free. The young farmer who I just quoted argues that only immature skill and insufficient knowledge will produce ugly vegetables. According to her, when non-chemical farming has just been brought back after decades of Green Revolution-style agriculture, farmers were unfamiliar with the technique so unable to grow attractive, unblemished vegetables, but this is no longer the case.

Besides, customers are not as tolerant of the appearance of food as once thought. Even at farmers' markets where shoppers come for unconventional agricultural products, farm products must be good-looking (*leng*), otherwise customers will not accept them. Imperfect-looking products are much less popular. When helping farmers at their stalls or working with them on farms to prepare and pack vegetables for delivery, I saw numerous times that vegetables were thrown into compost due to a small insect bite or not-green-enough leaves. Sometimes, a small mark on the peel will make a pea-pod end up in farmers' own kitchen. Sometimes, shoppers asked for a lower price, complaining that the food 'is not *leng*'. To promote the less good-looking products, young farmers had to make signs to explain that imperfect vegetables, such as a carrot with two legs, a tomato which is not round, or curved courgettes, were as nutritious and tasty as 'normal' vegetables.

If someone wishes to support young farmers, the most widely-accepted contributions are either financial (e.g. purchasing their products, or signing up for farm activities) or material (e.g. offering new or second-hand goods, books, seeds, or homemade food). I frequently came across a young woman at one of the farms where I carried out participant observation. Every time she visited the farm, she would always buy something, even if she only came to have a chat or meet someone. She would greet the staff at the till, saying, "*Bong chan ha*!", meaning 'to patronise the farm's business'. Upon hearing this, the farm staff thanked her happily. Some farms recruit volunteers, but I was told that volunteering is not always welcome because unskilled volunteers cause more trouble than they are worth. Other members of staff will need to spend time teaching them or fixing their mistakes. If young farmers did not have to worry about how to make ends meet, they would not have these considerations.

Adopting the model of 'half farming, half x'

Chapter Four demonstrated the city-wide popularity of environmental discourses and the link between food and health. Prosperity, nevertheless, does not reflect farmers' income and the priority of land use for agriculture in this land-starved city. On occasions like food festivals, despite the crowds of people and lively mood, not many shoppers actually bought

vegetables grown with sustainable farming methods because they are 'too expensive'. However, from the point of view of young farmers, although the food grown with sustainable farming enjoys prices two to three times higher than *seungkwai choi* (ordinary vegetables grown with conventional farming techniques not regulated on the use of pesticides, herbicides, or chemical fertilisers), customers are paying for the premium value of sustainable food which takes much more time and effort to cultivate.

A young farmer argued that the difference in price between sustainable food and *seungkwai choi* is in fact not enough to compensate her investment. We were squatting on the farmland on a drizzly day, 'thinning out' carrot seedlings to make more space for them to grow. Feeling the pain of extended squatting, we started a conversation about the price of sustainable food. The young farmer said to me that considering the time and effort she devoted, a reasonable price would be HKD 100 per carrot. However, at farmers' markets, carrots are sold for HKD 20–40 per pound (five to ten carrots). In other words, a carrot can be sold for HKD 8 at most, whereas imported organic carrots are sold at HKD 60 per pound in supermarkets. The price of young farmers' products is much lower than the price of imported organic food in high-end supermarkets.

On top of this, there is no reliable channel through which to sell and purchase sustainable foods. There are governmental wholesale markets to distribute locally grown vegetables, but many farmers do not feel much supported by the system and do not sell their products this way. It is unaffordable for young farmers to have their products displayed in supermarkets. It is also not always possible to rent a stall at wet markets or farmers' markets. Moreover, except for well-informed shoppers (i.e. those within the circle of local-food movements or who know someone in the circle), residents in Hong Kong tend to be unaware that there are still people growing food locally, let alone buying their products. There have been initiatives similar to Community Supported Agriculture, but rather than regarding the system as a risk-sharing mechanism to assist farmers, customers in Hong Kong expect to receive the amount and variety of crops which they paid for. If sometimes farmers are unable to provide the required products, farmers feel obliged to make it up in the following rounds. Also, customers' demand is highly unstable. Sometimes farmers receive more orders than they could meet, while at other times farmers have to eat the same varieties of vegetables for days or weeks because customers did not buy them in time. As a consequence, in the worst situation, a farm could earn zero income (minus expenditures) for a whole month.

Above all, the most pressing concern is stable access to good-quality, well-located, affordable farmland. Most young farmers are not descendants of those in the New Territories who own the farmland (cf. Faure 1986; Watson & Watson 2004), and none of them could afford to buy farmland. Very often, farmland is only available for tenants who have *guanxi*—strong interpersonal relationships with friends and relatives—to mobilise. Because continuous land development renders land a highly profitable commodity and influences landowners' willingness to lease their land for food growing, trust between tenants and landowners must be negotiated by mutual acquaintances. Farmland that can be rented at an affordable price and for a reasonable length of contract is usually in very inaccessible places. Neither landowners nor middle class, young farmers' status as tenant farmers is worsened by rents that increase yearly. Moreover, the length of contract is usually three to five years, but more and more are shortened to one or two years. Although the contract is short, many farms never needed to extend it because they close within five years, or the land is claimed by the government, landowners, or estate developers.

Insecure land tenure makes farmers hesitant to invest in infrastructure. At the same time, farmers do not have time to improve the quality of soil because this takes years and considerable effort. In the best cases when all these difficulties have been overcome, farmers have to grow food in limited space. In the farms I investigated, the average space for growing food is about 0.1 hectare. Some farms manage to expand to as large as 0.3 hectares, but most farms are tiny.

Through spelling out the difficulties that young farmers are dealing with when they attempt to open up new forms of living alternative to the mainstream, I suggest that they do not just want to 'experience' the life of farmers and will quit once they are bored of 'playing at' farming. Rather, they treat farming as serious work and commit to learn agricultural knowledge and to work around all kinds of constraints in the hope of making a living through growing food.

In addition to food growing and selling, young farmers had to develop various strategies to make their business and campaign sustainable. Firstly, they pragmatically select the crops they plant. They specialise in growing vegetables. Although several farms have started to grow rice, it remained a supplementary rather than primary source of income. No one grows fruit trees because investing farm income while waiting for the trees to mature, as a senior farmer put it, will make farmers 'starve to death'. At the largest fruit wholesale market in Hong Kong, there are many signs touting foreign fruits from different parts of the world, but hardly any fruits is grown locally. Major sources of fresh fruit are

the US, mainland China and then Thailand (Food and Health Bureau (HKSAR) 2017). Only farmers' markets or street vendors sell wild bananas, papaya, dragonfruit, jackfruit, *longan*, and Chinese *wampi*.[16] Hence, when I visited the wholesale market and asked the vendors for locally grown fruits, they thought my question very odd.

Secondly, young farmers broaden their source of income by reaching out to diverse organisations. Some farms collaborate with small-scale eateries, private kitchens, or greengrocers. The owners of those shops or restaurants are usually also local-food movements practitioners. Sometimes, farmers act as instructors in gardening activities or farming workshops in schools, charities, or on rooftop farms. Thirdly, they organise on-farm and agriculture-related events, ranging from Farm-to-Table dining events, food-processing workshops, cooking classes, agricultural products festivals, to farm and village tours, documentary fora, and concerts.

Lastly, to improve their financial situation, young farmers have to take off-farm and non-agricultural jobs. The 'half farming, half x' model (Shiomi 2006)—a lifestyle that weaves farming into personal daily routines while also doing other things in order to make ends meet—is widely accepted among young farmers. In addition to farming, they take on more economically rewarding jobs, including cooking, teaching, doing research, administration, designing, or other freelance jobs. Some farmers are hired by NGOs, but most are self-employed. Although a few of them managed to entirely sustain themselves by growing food, a young farmer once told me his calculation that earnings derived from food-growing only constituted around 30 per cent of his income, even though over 70 per cent of his time and energy was devoted to farming. Other young farmers did not mention these numbers but were also upset over the disproportionate rewards for their hard work. Some of them even had to spend money saved from previous jobs to prevent their farms from closing.

'Anti-development young people who are whining about trifles and don't pay tax'?

Young farmers' stories have attracted quite some attention. For those who appreciate such life choices, young farmers are portrayed as brave dreamers and moral campaigners who fight for street culture, the spirit of community, social equality, justice, environmental protection, and Hong Kong's self-sufficiency and 'subjectivity'. However, for others who do not consider growing food and other freelance work to be 'proper' jobs, young farmers

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16 *Longan* is related, and looks similar, to the lychee, while *wampi* grows on an evergreen tree and resembles a grape in appearance, although the taste is not as sweet.

are *faiching* (literally 'useless youth'), criticised for not being in employment, education, or training but wasting time doing non-economically productive things that make no substantial contribution to their households or society. Stigmatised as unable or unwilling to find a decent job due to personal failure and maladjustment to contemporary urban life, they are labelled aggressive socialists and idealists who are complaining out of personal frustration and making revolutionary discourses that are useless and redundant. Even their elder family members disapprove of such a career pathway because it is 'unstable' and 'has no foreseeable prosperity'. For both supporters and opponents, young farmers embrace postmaterialist values and are detached from reality.

Since young farmers are familiar with social science jargon, I invited them to speak for themselves whether they are postmaterialist. One of them replied: 'Postmaterialism is such a strong and serious statement. If we claimed to be postmaterialist, we wouldn't even use electricity, mobile phones, and the internet. We shouldn't wear clean clothes, live in decent houses, or use public transportation.' Therefore, he concluded: 'We are not pursuing a way of life as extreme as a postmaterialist one.' Other young farmers expressed that they have no intention to return to the low living standards of decades ago when people lived in traditional agricultural villages in ways that they now view as 'primitive': villagers could not find a way out; if they ever had a choice, they would go to the city. Cities, on the other hand, provide gateways to sources of information and well-connected transportation. Young farmers believe that society needs to move forward but it is unnecessary to strive for progress through postmaterialism, as one of them said: 'There's no need to be as radically anti-social or become a hermit.'

It is true that they do not take income and bank savings as the preconditions for a better quality of life, but they do not object to the cash economy and moderate consumption, nor promote radical restraint of material desire. They do not spend a fortune on dining in high-end restaurants serving exotic food freshly imported by air, because they feel home-cooked and locally grown food is tastier, fresher, and healthier. While living in luxury apartments with all sorts of amenities is the dream for many, they think a spacious farm-house with a piece of garden is more appealing. Rather than sitting comfortably in air-conditioned offices, they prefer to work in the fields in the sun. They do not spend much on new clothes and other daily necessities because they think that free market, recycling, and DIY (e.g. hand-made home decorations, tableware, furniture, toiletries such as soap, lotion, and many other groceries) are more meaningful ways to express personal style. Instead of paying for gym membership, they prefer burning calories by working in

the field. When I first met young farmers, I brought them black tea as a gift, but then was told that they do not drink tea for health reasons. They were not ill but seeking a balanced condition of body, a view from the Chinese medicine: some food has 'medical values' (Anderson 1997) whereas others might be harmful, and black tea belongs to the latter category. When they feel unwell, they tend to cure themselves by 'eating better food', 'basking in the sun', or 'labouring in the field'. It is not that they do not appreciate material satisfaction; they just have different perceptions of what brings satisfaction.

In a way, these young farmers care too much about material contents to accept low-quality food, poor living conditions, and an exhausting working culture that deprives them of their time and energy. They take farming as an essential element of the desirable *sangwut* ('life'/'living'/'lifestyle') because it could balance the state between extremes of urban concrete jungles and rural peasant societies. In the next section, I discuss the case of a group of local-food movements practitioners who believe that they used to be ignorant about how to have a satisfactory life but now have been striving to reflect on it and put their vision of sustainable living into practice.

Imagining sustainable living

Practising 'the art of living'

On the outskirts of the town centre in the northern New Territories, a group of young people have been experimenting with alternative forms of living. They rent a 'village house' and make it, as they put it, 'a space for practising the art of living' and 'sharing life together'. Coming from diverse educational and family backgrounds, they share a zest for discovering 'the art of living' and *linjaap* ('practising') how to 'live properly'. The size of the group may be five, six, or more members; people may come and go as their plans dictate. I was introduced by accident, but later realised that this randomness and flexibility is normal and vital for people in this 'community of sustainable living' (see Chapter Seven) to connect with other members of this village house. That day, I was roaming around a farm not far from the house. Members of the house are both friends and customers of the farm. A young farmer happened to plan to have lunch with them. As a curious fieldworker interested in all sorts of things, I asked the farmer if he could put me in touch with people at the village house someday. As open-minded and generous as the farmer had always been, he immediately invited me to join the lunch, and we later cycled over to the house. Twenty minutes later, we reached the place.

Figure 4. Village houses in the New Territories. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, this is a photo I took during fieldwork but not for the specific house described here.

I refer to this group of people as 'members of the village house' because the house represents the lifestyle and those who created and live in it. It had been made not only a rented place but a field where its inhabitants built their ideal life. Members of the house personalised it by hand-crafting their daily necessities. Most furniture, decoration, appliances, and tableware were made, designed, or recycled by themselves. They are families, friends, and community members. Except for one or two days a week going back to their original homes to see their families, they live, cook, eat, and organise various events together. To become a member of the house, one must be accepted by other members and have fundamental skills for living independently from the market mechanism, such as farming, cooking, photography, drawing, pottery, or carpentry. Members are encouraged to develop their own talents and interests, but everyone must make a substantial contribution to maintain the house.

On weekends or special holidays, life in the house is enlivened with workshops on baking, carpentry, or pottery for the public, to promote their ideas as well as bring in some income. In the bakery workshop, bread will be made with organic flour, local ingredients, home-fermented yeast, and baked on firewood stoves. In carpentry workshops, waste wood is given a second life, transformed into tableware, kitchen utensils, decorations, and even furniture. Clay for pottery workshops is sourced from friends' farmland rather than purchased. Natural materials such as wood, banana leaves, or bamboo are made into ash glazes. In the process of turning clay into handicrafts, workshop participants will learn not only about clay for pottery, but also local soil for farming. They will be told where the clay is from, who helped to collect it, and what is grown on the land. Sometimes participants might dig the clay from the land by themselves and read the stories the soil tells, such as what plants were planted, what buildings once stood here, and what human activities happened on this land. The instructor of the workshop argued that, by touching and observing the soil and how clay works with water and heat, people get to know the place better and thus establish an attachment to the place.

I did not fully understand what this space was until I had visited the village house several times. One time I came to do an interview, taking the metro from downtown and then walking to the house. After less than thirty minutes, all the hustle of the metro station was left behind when I turned into a pathway leading to the house, deep in the greenery. Observing the house from a distance, it was surreal, like a castle surrounded by forests. On that particular day, there was instrumental music emanating from it, which was the background music played when members of the house were cooking in an open-air kitchen they had built in the front garden. They are rigorous about food ingredients and culinary methods: they take turns to be the chef, and the person who is in charge not only has to figure out what to cook, how, and in what combinations, but also to consider special dietary needs such as allergies or other issues that may make certain food unsuitable. Several of them said that before joining the house, they thought themselves expert in the art of food, but now feel that they knew very little.

These members of the village house have a disciplined daily schedule. After waking early in the morning, they prepare breakfast, usually plain rice, and everyone sits at the dining table discussing arrangements for coming events. After the breakfast, some start to work in the field; some prepare materials for carpentry and pottery workshops; some contact young farmers to order food delivered to the house, or shop in wet markets if young farmers are unable to provide some ingredients; some reply to emails and Facebook

or WhatsApp messages; some write Facebook posts and work on photos and films to document or advertise their activities; some read or meditate; and others do housekeeping. At noon, they begin to work in the kitchen for one to two hours to prepare lunch. After the meal is ready, they will spend another one to two hours eating, chatting, and cleaning up the dining table and kitchen. In their free time, they might play music together with a piano, a guitar, or other instruments. In the evening, they will again take several hours to cook dinner, eat slowly and mindfully, and clear up. On average, they spend a quarter of each day on cooking and eating, and members working in the field spend extra hours growing food. This is not the typical timetable for contemporary life in Hong Kong, where people usually only have an hour for lunch. When asked why they spend so much time on food, they replied: 'Isn't it the most essential thing for living?' In what follows, I demonstrate their ideas of sustainable living centred around food.

'Food-experiencing' and 'mindfulness'

'Food-experiencing' is their signature activity. It is held once or twice a month; dining tables will be set out inside the house, on the rooftop, or at the front yard. Seats are limited and usually sold out immediately after an event is announced on their Facebook page a few weeks prior to the event. They collaborate with local farmers and design the menu according to farmers' planting and harvesting cycle. The food-experiencing activity aims not only to provide opportunities for customers to learn about and taste good-quality food, but also to support the development of local agriculture. These events happen on holidays throughout the year, but during the Christmas period, there will be special arrangements. The food-experiencing part remains unchanged, but might be packaged with other activities. I take the event from Christmas 2016 as an example.

On Christmas Day, members of the house were busy answering telephone calls from people who had got lost on their way to the house. It was particularly difficult for those who relied on Google Maps, because although it only takes twenty minutes to walk from downtown to the house, it is hidden in a rural village where many alleys and locations are not on the map. After all the visitors managed to arrive, they were shown to the site of the banquet on the rooftop of the house. The village house sits on greenbelt land sandwiched between two highly developed areas. To the south is a downtown of northern Hong Kong; to the north is Shenzhen. There are no tall buildings to block the view, so visitors could take photos of the greenery stretching to the horizon—a rare scene in today's Hong Kong, where high-rise buildings stretch as far as the eye can see.

While visitors were enjoying themselves, the chef and other helpers were working in the kitchen. Food is not always prepared on gas stoves; sometimes on a firewood stove. In those cases, they will demonstrate to visitors the traditional cooking methods and invite visitors to attend to the unique taste, distinct from food cooked on gas stoves. Sometimes there will be a guest chef, who will be a friend from another farm, restaurant, or other food-related organisations. While waiting for the food, participants were treated to various hot drinks, ranging from locally-grown and hand-dried perilla and ginger tea, to brown rice tea, purple rice tea, and Fair Trade coffee from Taiwan. Drinks were served in jugs, placed in recycled wine boxes; coasters were handmade from wood chips; mugs were made of clay. After the drinks, the banquet began. The meal consisted of mushrooms, bananas, papayas, roselle flowers, potatoes, tofu, courgettes, tomatoes, and eggs, either from the village house's own garden or other young farmers' farms. Dishes were beautifully presented on ceramic or wooden tableware, handmade by members of the house. When a dish was added to the table, the chef would explain about the ingredients, which farm they were from, and how they were cooked to inform participants what they consumed.

I arrived on Christmas Eve, a day before the food-experiencing event, for a whole-day activity including another food-experiencing lunch. This time, participants entered a dimly-lit room and sat at a simple wooden candlelit dining table. We were instructed to keep in a calm, relaxed, and happy mood, and not chat to each other too much so as to prepare ourselves for tasting food consciously and respectfully; otherwise, according to members of the house, everything we consumed would eventually be transformed from beneficial to harmful for the body. The atmosphere was cool, cosy, but solemn, entirely unlike the pace and efficiency of everyday life in Hong Kong. The feast began with plain brown and white rice cooked on firewood. We were instructed to savour it slowly, observe the appearance of the rice, and note the smell and taste. The brown rice was locally grown, and the white rice was brought back from Taiwan, cultivated by their friends with 'Friendly Farming' (see Chapter Four). At the dining table, participants held small bowls of rice, whispering to each other about the taste of the rice they had discovered through this mindful, slow manner of eating. Rice was followed by soup and dishes made of tomato sauce, mashed sweet potatoes, sliced lotus root, bananas, tofu, steamed courgettes and carrot, potatoes, and various kinds of beans.

Earlier that day, there was a yoga workshop taught by a young farmer who is an experienced yogi. The original plan was to hold the workshop outdoors, but it rained and we had to retreat into a room in the house. The room was filled with books on land and

agriculture. In a room with such an aura, the workshop was not only about practising yoga poses, but also the 'yoga diet'—the influence of food on spirit and mind. The instructor mentioned that, according to the theory of the yoga diet, foodstuffs are classified by their impact on physical and mental health. Food that is natural, less processed and flavoured, and ethically and locally grown or processed is the healthiest and most beneficial for meditation. To the contrary, the food category, *Rajastic*, including irritating food such as black tea, spices, or food added with chemical ingredients, should be avoided because it will cause pressure, anxiety, illness, or impair the circulation. After the workshop, many participants who are office workers said that they felt relaxed and healed from the mentally and physically exhausting everyday life in Hong Kong.

After the yoga workshop and lunch, we moved to a moderate-sized garden (around 0.06 hectares) where some herbs on our lunch table had been grown. In the field, there were potatoes, lettuce, papayas, roselle flowers, and tomatoes waiting to be harvested. Most ingredients for the food-experiencing activity need to be purchased from other farms or wet markets due to the tiny scale of this farm. The entrance to the farm was framed by a short gate with a wooden lintel marked *tin*, literally 'farmland'; here it means 'farm'. The gate is deliberately designed to be low, so that people have to dip their heads and show respect for the land when entering the field. The farmland, as a member of the house said, is a laboratory where they learn from nature. They experiment in techniques of Natural Farming, including letting the weeds grow and creating compost from leftovers to improve the quality of the soil. They also designed the farm along principals of permaculture such as creating a 'keyhole' bed—a planting area built in the shape of a keyhole for the purpose of maximising the planting area and reducing the space for a pathway. We were instructed to do a practice of mindfulness: a 'walking meditation' in which everyone held a small bowl of water and walked slowly, attending to plants and other lives, listening to the wind and voices of birds. To prevent water from spilling out from the shallow bowl, we had to focus our attention on the here and now.

Recycling countercultural movement and urban affection for a lost Eden?
Agendas of sustainable living proposed by the younger generation in Hong Kong might recall urban sentiments towards rural and pre-industrial lifestyles or countercultural narratives that are said to give organic agriculture a left-leaning political and social flavour (Kuepper 2010). However, in the light of ethnographic data provided in this and preceding chapters, this section illustrates why this is not the case. We might begin by discussing the

concept of the 'hipster'. In Chapter Two, I used the term *nungching*, to refer to urban young farmers. *Nungching* is a contraction of two Chinese words: *nungfu* ('farmer') and *manching* ('hipster'). This term indicates that these people are well-educated, socially-minded, and choose to become farmers rather than inheriting farms from their families or being forced to stay in rural areas due to lack of professional skill and qualification. However, there is a risk in adopting the term *nungching* as it is linked to countercultural movements and has specific connotations which another term *manching*, implies.

Originally, *manching* was used to refer to young people who are academically inclined, fond of literature, art, photography, independent films and music, and concerned with social issues. The term has been translated into English as 'hipster', reflecting the spirit of countercultural activists in the 1960s. However, as the term hipster has developed over time, its meanings have become connected to several impressions: hipsters are posh and anti-mainstream in consumption, values, and ideologies; their clothing is simple but usually from expensive brands; they often have highbrow, bookish, abstruse, and idealistic talks about social issues such as environmental protection, cultural heritage, or social justice; they complain, are detached from reality, and make little substantial contribution to society. Hipsters are associated with gentrified modes of consumption. In a recently published book on young people working in creative industries in London, hipsters tend to drink a certain kind of coffee: the flat white (McWilliams 2015).

These connotations have provoked debates about 'real' and 'fake' hipsters. For example, a free magazine sponsored by a real estate developer in Hong Kong, was displayed in an upstairs bookstore at the Causeway Bay.[17] According to the magazine, 'fake hipsters' take hipster as a chic and desirable label and wish to be recognised as hipsters. While 'real hipsters' seldom self-identify as hipster, 'fake hipsters' who do not necessarily read books or have deep thoughts pursue the 'hipster outfit'—wearing thick rimmed glasses, canvas or leather shoes, skinny jeans, and simple, earth-toned clothing; using Apple laptops, single-lens reflex cameras, or 'lomo cameras' to take photographs and upload to social media sites; carrying canvas tote bags with books and notebooks inside as well as vintage goods and handmade instruments such as ukuleles. The magazine traces the notion of hipster back to the 1960s, stating that hipsters at that time were rebellious young people who subverted traditional values, campaigned to address social issues, and had a

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17 All independent bookstores in Hong Kong are on the first or higher floors due to high rents for ground-floor commercial properties: for this reason they are known as upstairs bookstores. Ironically, the bookstore where I collected the magazine closed in 2016. At the same time, the estate company which sponsors the magazine had launched several new development projects.

strong sense of taking responsibility for others' well-being. The magazine emphasises that 'hipster' indicated a state of mind rather than a style, in contrast to today's hipsters.

Neither the heroic image of the 1960s hipster nor the consumerist one in today's world is an adequate portrait of young farmers in Hong Kong. The fundamental reason for this is that, as suggested in Chapter Five, they self-identity as food growers or food workers rather than middle-class young urbanites because they are facing financial difficulties. It is apparent that they are distinct from well-off urbanites, who can afford and are willing to pay for the 'hipster look'. At the same time, they also are different from countercultural activists because they are campaigning to address issues they themselves are coping with, not just being altruistic and social-minded. Along the same lines, it is not convincing to view local-food movements as reflecting an urban fascination with the rural peasant lifestyle. Young farmers told me that there are many sorts of city people, and they are different from those who take farming as a personal choice of pastime and an element of green lifestyle. Young farmers distinguish their farms from 'city farms' where *singsiyan* ('city person/people') conduct 'urban farming' in order to, in the words of my interlocutors, 'relieve stress', 'share healthy food with family members', 'feel the joy of watching things grow and the sense of fulfilment of growing food with their own hands', and 'appreciate the beauty of nature'. This kind of farmer has become a chic identity for urban office workers and retired people. However, young farmers think that *singsiyan* 'are always so bothered by soil; they think soil is dirty'; they also said: '*Singsiyan* are unable to tell vegetables apart from weeds.'

Young farmers' opinions on *singsiyan* are seconded by people who self-identity as *singsiyan*. On a sunny weekend afternoon, I just finished some farm work and stood by the meadow watching a goat grazing. A woman in a hiking outfit joined me. She was visiting the farm for a bread-baking workshop and farm-work experiencing activity. She pointed at the goat and asked me: 'Why is its tail so short? Did they [farm staff] cut it?' I was confused by her question but tried to answer: 'No, goat tails are short, aren't they?' After a few seconds of silence (she may had been digesting my answer), she exclaimed: 'This is a goat? I thought it was a cow!' She then teased herself: 'We *singsiyan* are really ignorant.' It was also said by many of my interlocutors other than farmers that *singsiyan* seemed to be unable to keep the plants they are growing alive and seldom cook for themselves because it is too time-consuming.

This distinction between different kinds of *singsiyan* became more evident in a conversation I had with young farmers. One day on a farm, staff members were sitting

together by a big dining table, sharing rice and vegetable-based dishes for lunch. I mentioned to them something I had seen the other day in a village near the farm. I ran into a piece of farmland fenced by steel wire. The site did not look like a normal farm because the land had been divided into little plots. Seeing a curious stranger, a middle-aged man who was working in the field walked towards me and asked in Cantonese if he could help. Upon hearing that I am a student from a British university, the man switched to English, and he explained that a real estate company had purchased this area, but since the company had not yet launched a construction plan, it allowed a charity to run a project of renting allotments to people interested in farming during their free time. The 'hobby farmers' were beginners and did not do farm work routinely, so a fulltime farm staff was required to provide farming tutorials and take care of the plants.

Because the project is close to the young farmers' farm and seems to share their vision of introducing farming to more Hong Kong residents, I asked young farmers whether they have any sort of partnership with the project. An administrative staff member answered immediately: 'not at all'. A young farmer added: 'we are different'. They felt that the hobby farmers are 'gardening, not farming' because they do not produce food for the public. In contrast to creating more space for middle-class urbanites to enjoy the greenery and the pleasure of growing food, young farmers seek to empower their city with its own food system, providing good-quality food that is accessible to people of every social and economic status.

Conclusion

It is reasonable to argue that young people in Hong Kong no longer see economic achievement as the primary purpose of life because they also pursue other goals which they view as meaningful. However, this thesis suggests that it is inadequate to pigeonhole their food activism and understand their actions as making moral statements, because such an interpretation sacrifices the insight that the younger generation is coping with bread-and-butter concerns. I have elaborated in this chapter that describing local-food movements as postmaterialist is a misinterpretation. On the one hand, young farmers and activists are not among the social elites who have had their basic needs met, and therefore have the extra resource, time, and energy for non-material concerns. Instead, they are, in a sense, 'urban enterpriser[s] in rustic disguise' (Aijmer 1980: 138) who take farming and food-related activities as a business opportunity because, no matter how carefree their childhood may have been in the midst of economic take-off, they now see themselves as trapped by

structural constraints. On the other hand, it is not that they are uninterested in prosperity and material abundance; they are just not convinced by the conventional approach to achieving these goals, chasing after financial success while turning a blind eye to the real reasons behind the low quality of life. Compared to devoting themselves to money-making in the hope of being rewarded by a higher level of material satisfaction, they would rather work directly towards improving their living conditions. They adopt a 'half farming, half x' form of living, which allows them to grow food as well as ensure financial security.

The fact that young farmers do not embrace postmaterialist values manifests the nuanced differences between them, countercultural campaigners, and middle-class city people who take green lifestyle as a moral statement. Regarding young farmers and activists as making moral statements is, in fact, the same as regarding them as upholding postmaterialism, believing that they no longer face survival issues. This view implies that there is no real issue; whoever preaches social reforms is creating rather than resolving problems. However, as pointed out in Chapter Five, young farmers feel that residents in their city are enduring predicaments resulting from norms of neoliberalism and developmentalism. From their point of view, local-food movements are experiments to address the issues and to find out how to live a better life in their city. The succeeding chapter will discuss a trans-local yet rooted community, which emerged as a space for carrying out such experiments.

Chapter Seven:
A Community of Sustainable Living:
Growing Localism from the Soil

'Community' has served as a rhetorical tool and an all-encompassing idiom to stand for entities such as 'village', 'town', 'city', 'nation'; or a company, an ethnic group, a tribe, a social class, or a group of people who have the same interest or share the same concern. Any group that is difficult to describe is arbitrarily referred to as a 'community' due to its capability of evoking 'emotional resonance' (Amit 2002: 13) and a sense of collectivity, such as that 'we are all together' and 'what we say and do is for the best', while other terms might have negative connotations and sound less moral, inclusive, or legitimate. Without clarifying to whom a 'local community' refers, this concept is adopted to *community-wash* —in a similar manner 'green-wash'—the image of a corporation or to legitimise development management, environmental governance, or agricultural reform by claiming that their projects are inclusive. In such circumstances, 'community' becomes a ubiquitous expression, referring to a group that is constructed rather than given, random rather than clearly-defined. This term has become too general to signify anything. By pointing this out, I am not opposing the use of this term. Instead, this chapter aims to clarify what this buzzy term means in the context of local-food movements in Hong Kong and examines the relationship between a 'community' and locality.

As reviewed in Chapter Three, due to globalisation, the ambiguity of boundaries and the mobility of people, ideas, and goods have detached the concept of community from geographical territories. A community is no longer assumed to be a homogeneous group, and 'the problematization of locality assumed its most pressing form in the study of the city' (Amit 2002: 42). This comment is particularly relevant to Hong Kong. As a postcolonial society, a migrants' destination, an international hub for business, and a place where various transnational interactions are taking place, 'the community of Hong Kong' is depicted as 'based on cultural work and social responsibility rather than on the Realpolitik coercions of blood, race, and soil' (Chow 1992: 167), suggesting that this community is relational and not place-based. This view, however, entails a distinction between conventional, place-based communities and liberal, relational ones such as those forms of community that are conceptualised based on 'what "we" have shared, not the boundary dividing "us" from "them" ' (Amit 2002: 60).

This chapter reconsiders this polarisation by scrutinising the presence of the concept of community in local-food movements. Chapter Six has demonstrated an alternative living arrangement, in which a group of young people believes that they are reflecting on how to increase the quality of life and putting 'the art of living' into practice. On this basis, this chapter takes a broader view from which to examine the dualism between boundary-crossing communities and locally-bounded ones. This chapter argues that the key to transcending the dichotomy lies in recognition of the inseparability of humans and the land. Due to a shared belief in the importance of this recognition to the goal of sustainable living, people from different parts of the world gather together and exchange ideas, forming trans-local communities. In this regard, localness is grown from the soil, which signifies the 'mother earth' that gives birth to the living world. In a magazine launched since 2016 by several key actors of local-food movements in Hong Kong, the language of *buntou* entailed the place in which people settle; at the same time, 'community' consisted of human society and the landscape. In this sense, local-food movements did not protest against the non-local (e.g. the border-crossing population, global influences) but rather reflect on domestic issues perceived as lowering the quality of life.

Enhancing quality of life is the most frequently mentioned motivation through which my interlocutors came to be concerned with food activism. From their viewpoints, quality of life is a multi-faceted portrait of the state of living: it entails 'physical and mental health', 'an enjoyable job that gives people a sense of meaning and purpose', 'warm social relations', 'close and balanced relationship between human society and the environment', 'self-sufficiency that brings a sense of freedom and fulfilment', and 'feeling good about one's own life and feeling that life is meaningful'. Three assemblages that are signified with concepts similar to community—*sekeui* ('community'), the *hyunji* ('circle') of local-food movements and *sangtaaichyun* ('ecovillage')—are manifestations of the imagination of a good-quality life.

Sekeui has become a popular term commonly used in local-food movements by young farmers, activists, farming lovers, farm administrative staffs, farmers' markets shoppers, farm visitors, and other practitioners and supporters. These people met and formed a *hyunji* through various events and occasions such as workshops, farming courses, fora, film screenings, farm tours, food-sharing parties, farmers' markets, or personal networking. A primary goal in their minds is to build an alternative form of living that heals physical and mental health and 'scars on the earth'. *Sangtaaichyun* is a reification of their vision. The concept of 'ecovillage' has received globe-wide attention and put into practice in different

countries alongside sustainable movements. Notwithstanding its popularity, there has not been a consensus of what it should be. This chapter provides an ethnographic account on a particular form of ecovillage established upon food and agricultural movements.

'Commensality', or the sharing of food, is an activity observable in all three forms of assemblages. Similar to the term community, commensality in social science literature has long been understood as means of building solidarity and closeness (Bloch 1999). Although Watson (2016) reminds us that this is not always the case through his study on China during the Maoist era—when commensality was imposed through a public canteen system as part of the socialist state's collectivism which led to low standards of cooking, unsanitary conditions, and even famine, from a bottom-up point of view, eating together fosters communities, identity, and social movements devoted not only to challenging the current food systems, but also creating alternative practices and social configurations (Sutton et al. 2013). Chapter Six has demonstrated practices of cooking and eating together among a group of local-food movements practitioners in the New Territories. This chapter will further elaborate on how *buntou* was constructed and articulated in the processes of producing and consuming food. The human-land bond and the sociality cultivated in these interactions are two main factors that created a cosmopolitan version of localness.

Sekeui: a both rooted and inclusive community

One day in the New Territories, I was volunteering in a farm with *sekeui* in its name. During the tea break, a young farmer who just finished his work sat down and said that should I have any question, I may ask. So I asked him, 'what do you guys mean by *sekeui*? Who are included and who are excluded?' The farmer hesitated and then replied: 'I don't know. I never thought about this. No one ever asked.' I later realised that the definition of *sekeui* is self-evident for him and his colleagues so they never attempted to clarify it. They include *sekeui* in the name of their farm not only because it articulates what they are doing, but that this concept is easy for anyone to take on. Throughout my fieldwork, I heard people said *sekeui* countless times, but no one ever bothered to question what they were referring to. Having said that, although people might not be able to draw the boundaries of *sekeui*, they seem to know which *sekeui* they belong to.

Sekeui is used under two kinds of circumstances. On the one hand, the term is a shorthand to indicate the neighbourhood where one lives. 'Where do you live?' is a typical ice-breaking question when meeting new friends or catching up with old ones. Answering this question, people usually pinpoint the location by referring to a metro station or the

name of a larger area if they do not want to be too specific. Those who shop for food and groceries in the same wet markets, supermarkets, or shopping malls are also seen as belonging to the same *sekeui*. In this sense, *sekeui* is a tangible notion anchored on the landscape and encompasses people who live close to each other. Once, a hobby farmer said that she appreciated a rooftop farm near the place she lives because it is beneficial for, in her words: 'my community'. She used the English word 'community' instead of the Cantonese term '*sekeui*' (it is normal in Hong Kong for people to use English terms or phrases). This feeling was shared by another rooftop farm manager, who explained that she chose to do rooftop farming near her apartment rather than on real farmland in the New Territories because she wanted her community to have space to grow food.

On the other hand, *sekeui* embodies a transcendental idea that signifies 'Hong Kong', being employed as a trope to create a sense of intimacy between residents. Although the young farmer I consulted during the tea break was not sure how to answer my question, later in the conversation he said that, 'Hong Kong as a whole is a *sekeui*.' A middle-aged farm manager agrees with this view. The first time I visited his farm, I explained that I am not from Hong Kong, but he could talk to me in Cantonese. Upon hearing this, his instantly asked me: 'Can you sing *A Brighter Future*? If you speak Cantonese, you have to be able to sing this song!' He was joking, but people around us all nodded in agreement. The song is created by a Hong Kong rock band who has an international reputation, reaching its peak in the 1980s and 1990s. This was a time when Hong Kong enjoyed rapid economic growth and was a golden era of the city's popular music and film industry (Hsing & Lee 2010). The most recent appearance of this song was during the Umbrella Revolution. Lyrics of the song stirred campaigners' nostalgia for the bygone days, making people believe that they were standing together for Hong Kong's brighter future.

The statement 'Hong Kong as a whole is a community' might recall the concept of 'imagined community', which, in Anderson's theory, indicates a nation-state. However, taking this usage of *sekeui* as evidence of nationalism would be a misreading. The point of seeing Hong Kong as a collectivity is to underscore that *sekeui* consists of people who reside in the same place and have shared life experiences. However, culture, language, nationality, and ethnicity in Hong Kong are heterogeneous, and 'local community' is a notion that encompasses all sorts of people from a diverse range of backgrounds. From this point of view, the boundary of *sekeui* is fluid, and its members do not form a fixed group— this is why the young farmer was unable to tell me exactly who is eligible for the membership of their community. They named their farm using the term *sekeui* because it

signifies the place where they and other *kaifong* ('neighbour') were born and/or have settled, rather than that they predetermined who their interlocutors are.

More precisely, *sekeui* is imagined as an assemblage of people, land, and 'nature', which, as illustrated in Chapter Four, indicates an imagined domain separated from urban life. Agriculture is seen as an essential element of this assemblage because agriculture establishes and consolidates an intimate relationship between humans and the land—the land nurtures both the people and food they consume. *Sekeui* as such an assemblage was epitomised in an outdoor exhibition in an agricultural village, where local artists who acted as agricultural campaigners made artwork with which to decorate the landscape. In collaboration with young farmers, the artists made clay men with soil collected around the village. The clay men were personifications of villagers and an embodiment of the link between humans and the land. Through the exhibition, messages of 'loving nature' and 'loving home' were expressed by symbols of roofs, hearts, and Chinese characters inscribed or painted on the bodies of the clay men. In the context of this exhibition, 'home' refers to a redefined *buntou* that signifies not a geographical territory inhabited by people with categorical traits, but the land, landscape, and episodes of life evolve here.

At the same time, artists decorated the wall of an old grocery store in the village with a colourful painting, hoping to bring the village new energy. They visualised their idea of *sekeui* by drawing images of traditional snacks and drinks. Through these symbols of the old days, they commemorate tastes and *kom-tsing* (Strauch 1984: 204) or *kam ching* (Hayes 2006: 133)—warm and close interpersonal relations—in old farming communities. Hayes argues that the spirit of *kam ching* has been lost in the process of modernisation in the New Territories. He notes that, in agricultural villages in the past, 'others would help a farmer if he got sick or his wife had a baby … Those who finished their planting or harvesting first would help out … people would do things for you even though they really couldn't be bothered' (p. 133). Local-food movements campaigners believe that agriculture creates a sphere in which *kam ching* could be restored, and *sekeui* could be built.

Such *sekeui* is not exclusive for a pre-determined group called 'Hong Kong people', i.e. those who are Chinese, fluent in Cantonese, holding a Hong Kong passport, etc. One day at a young farmers' farm, a group of Russian singers came to perform. They had travelled to different countries and now became close friends of farmers and farm workers. Their songs told about the human-nature relationship and stories of land movements in Russia. When they were singing, behind them was a banner reading, *Ngo oi ngo ga* ('I love my home'). Hong Kong audiences were reminded of the idea of 'home' when listening to

the Russian singers' songs. Likewise, at a local food festival in the New Territories, 'local food' was defined in a flexible sense. There were various stalls for vegetables, homemade food, handicrafts, and handmade home accessories designed by local artists who took inspiration from traditional elements such as *dim sum* and objects used on folk religious occasions. Close to the reception was a stall providing traditional tea cakes from Guangdong made by a young farmer, who was born and spent her childhood in Guangdong before she and her family settled in Hong Kong. Although the event focused on local food, the tea cake was not excluded, but rather much appreciated and taken as an embodiment of the Cantonese tradition. The fact that it was made with local ingredients grown by the young farmer and her peers using sustainable farming techniques also added value to it. Similar flexibility are also observable at on-farm farmers' markets where locally grown vegetables, rice, and homemade pickles are displayed together with foodstuffs imported from worldwide, such as 'eco-rice' and Fair Trade coffee from Taiwan, Fair Trade rice from Cambodia, rice cultivated in the Philippines with Bio-Dynamic Farming, and organic items from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Peru.

Imported foodstuffs, ideas, and the border-crossing population who bring or come for those goods, events, and ideas co-created a *sekeui*, which is formed by a shared vision of sustainable living and the localisation of agriculture. This inclusive but rooted form of community justifies an argument that runs through this thesis: despite a hint of localism in local-food movements, localness in young farmers' eyes is a concept negotiated in a dialectical process in which the global and the local mutually influence each other. These dynamics are summarised by a slogan, 'thinking globally, acting locally'. An organisation which aims to give a voice to small farmers and grassroots workers calls attention to 'the art of living' and the goal of revamping the food system and working culture in Hong Kong. Echoing young farmers' and activists' discourses, the organisation also appeals for carving out lifestyles alternative to the current one. Resonating with international food and environmental activism, this organisation argues that economic growth and developmentalism contribute to global environmental degradation, food hazards, the decline of traditional manufacture, and unjust distribution of wealth. The organisation takes an active role in food and agricultural fora and food-sharing activities to promote its vision of taking care of farmers and workers worldwide. An interconnected *hyunji* of local-food movements has emerged from similar activities. The *hyunji* consists not only of people in Hong Kong but also those who travel to other corners of the world.

A trans-local *hyunji* of farm workers: farm work exchange in Taiwan and Japan

Due to the lack of governmental and social support, young farmers and food activists had to travel the world to enhance agricultural knowledge and experience. After finishing their training and exploration, they came home to work on farms in Hong Kong. Every now and then, they had foreign friends visiting them and bringing gifts that symbolised friendship, ranging from magazines, T-shirts, bags, and banners, to rice, pickled food, artefacts, coffee, and tea. These items embody frequent transnational and transcultural cooperation and exchange of information. Moreover, young farmers meet their global counterparts on various occasions around the world. They have visited mainland China, Southeast Asia, and Europe to attend events for exchanging farming experience and ideas for agricultural reform. Some farmers used to work for international NGOs, carrying out agriculture or food related projects in rural China, refugee camps in Southeast Asia, or local communities in Oceania. Having said that young farmers and activists are global travellers, they are not amongst the globe-trotting elites who have economic capital to pursue cosmopolitanism as a taste; rather, they have to take different approaches.

Wungung ('work-exchange') has gained popularity as an accessible way for young people to work on farms abroad, explore foreign places, and gain experience of different lifestyles. A third of my interlocutors had travelled to Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Britain, New Zealand, or Australia to work on farms through a platform called World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF), an organisation that links organic farms around the world to volunteer workers. Volunteers offer their time and energy to help with farms that suffer from labour shortages. In exchange, they get free catering, accommodation, and opportunities to learn farming skills.

Similar to the work-exchange arranged via the WWOOF, a young farmer mentioned to me when she was selling vegetables at a farmers' market that she was going to conduct *wungung* in Taiwan. A few days later, at the dining table with young farmers and their friends, I learned that several of them had the same plan. I decided to join them and embark on my multi-sited fieldwork. The trip broadened my understanding of local-food movements by revealing that underneath young urbanites' concern for food and enthusiasm for growing food is an existential quest: how to live a healthy, more meaningful, and sustainable life? The following paragraphs will elaborate on this by describing the trip which introduced me to a trans-local *hyunji* of urban young farmers.

The farms in Taiwan where young farmers from Hong Kong went were those where they previously took agricultural courses or had done work-exchange. During their

previous meetings, Hong Kong young farmers established a long-term friendship with the hosting farms and frequently come back to visit. I followed three of them to volunteer in their friend's place in Yilan County. We arrived at a bungalow one rainy night. After knocking at the door but hearing no answer, we phoned the host. He instructed us to push the door and go inside because the door was unlocked, even though no one was at home. The time we spent here epitomises several elements of Hong Kong young farmers' ideal life. Hence, in what follows, I provide a thick description of the episodes.

The bungalow had been renovated from an old unused accommodation block for members of staff of a railway company. From window screens to the refurbishment of bathroom and kitchen, the renovation was done by the host and his friends with the 'natural building' techniques—using recycled goods or materials coming directly from the environment. Walls were painted with yellow-coloured paint made from a mixture of straw, rice hulls, clay, and sand. One of the walls was intentionally left unpainted so that the red bricks inside remained visible, bringing a different colour and pattern to the lounge. In front of the wall, there was a handmade bookshelf made of driftwood.

In the middle of the lounge, there was a platform made of wood pallets—a design also adopted in Hong Kong at young farmers' homes and several farms. A tea table on the platform was upcycled from an old wood table, where the host and visitors placed books, laptops, food ingredients, and homemade dishes. Hot water was generated from a boiler fuelled by firewood or bamboo, and thus usually took more than half an hour to heat the water. There was no washing machine or tumble dryer; laundry was done by hand with the help of a spin dryer. Cleaning in the kitchen and laundry were done with a kind of traditional soap, which is very cheap and made of natural ingredients. It was widely used in Taiwan decades ago, but as a result of modernisation and industrialisation, this sort of 'old-school' household product now only survives in museums or grandparents' houses in the countryside. Young urbanites probably never heard of this product. However, in this bungalow, the host decided to bring it back into everyday life.

A board against a wall of the lounge in the bungalow was painted with blackboard paint; people could draw or leave messages. On the wall, the host wrote his goal of the year: 'growing rice and living a settled life'. Next to it was a daily timetable to discipline himself: 'Wake up at 5.30 am and do a Buddhist meditation till 6.30 am. After the meditation, take a walk around the area for one hour and then prepare and eat a simple breakfast from 7.30 am to 8 am. From 8 am to 10.30 am, labour in the field. After that, read for two hours. Lunch to be prepared and finished within one hour before 1.30 pm. In

the afternoon, take a nap for two hours and get up at 3.30 pm to do housework till 5.30 pm. In the evening, from 5.30 pm to 8 pm, cooking and having dinner. After that, take a break for an hour, do another Buddhist meditation at 9 pm and go to bed at 10 pm'. During our time there, although we did not follow this strict schedule, we did similar things.

The bungalow was more than a site for work-exchange; it was a space for *gongtong shenghuo* ('practising the art of living together'). Different from the quick tempo in the city, time in this bungalow was generously spent on cooking and eating together, reading, chatting, doing housework, and taking breaks. During the time we stayed in the bungalow, we woke early in the morning. Several hours were spent preparing food, cooking, and eating fresh, seasonal, and non-artificial food bought in the nearby wet market. The host used to be a chef and is very good at cooking Taiwanese home cuisine, which he learned from his grandmother. One of our breakfasts was plain pancakes, spread with salt, fried oil, and flour. We prepared for the meal starting from kneading the dough and then fried the spread sauce and the dough. Another time, young farmers from Hong Kong demonstrated their skill at making steamed bread. They did not flavour it but chewed it slowly in order to taste the pure aroma of flour.

Between meals, we carried out farm works both in the morning and afternoon. At noon, the lunch break would last for at least three hours. Many farmers in Hong Kong had a similar routine. They get up early in the morning and work for four to five hours. When the sun becomes too strong for work, they would take a break for two to three hours, and then go to the farmland again after 3 pm. During the long break in the middle of the day, sometimes I would feel guilty for not doing anything 'productive' and worried about the efficiency of farm work, but it was explained to me that it was equally productive to spend time on breaks so that our minds and bodies could recover from the hard work.

During the time we stayed in the bungalow, much tea-break time was spent reading our host's books, on subjects such as urban farming, community building, environmental protection, self-help, natural building, and even an introduction to anthropology—similar to the subjects that young farmers from Hong Kong read about after finishing farm work. In particular, *The Alchemist*—a book first published in 1988 by a Brazilian writer about a shepherd boy's journey that began as a treasure-hunt, but ended with him finding the wisdom of the universe and his true self—was regarded by one of the Hong Kong young farmers as the most life-changing book she had read.

Our host was a young but experienced farmer, though he was not from an agricultural family. He studied finance in college but fell in love with farming and the lifestyle. He now

drives a minibus, on which some seats have been removed to make more space for farming tools, bags of peanut fertiliser, or customers' orders of rice. He rents farmland to grow rice and vegetables and adopts the approach of Natural Farming. As part of our work-exchange duty, we worked with the host to weed his paddy field. We were instructed to do it by hand and not to clear out all the weeds. We also cleaned the rubbish on ridges between rice fields with hoes and rakes and then rebuilt the ridges.

When we were working in the field, the host was also cleaning weeds with a weed cutter machine. He had to take care of a much larger area. Young farmers from Hong Kong did not wear gumboots because they did not mind touching the soil with bare feet. Two of them were relatively experienced, so taught the other less experienced farmer and me to use the hoe with the correct posture and angle to do the job effectively and without fatigue, even after a long time. The new farmer practised hard using the tools because she was planning to quit her job in the bank and become a fulltime farmer. When we finished the work of cleaning weeds and building the ridges after a few hours, the host said to us with a genuine smile: 'If it were just me, it would take many days to finish the work. But with the help of you guys, we finished it all so quickly!'

The bungalow was not an isolated organisation but had been transformed into a common area that embodied a *hyunji* of alternative ways of life. Occasionally, several young people, who had moved to the countryside in the last few years and worked and lived in nearby farms, visited the bungalow to chat with our host, or came to sit in the lounge, reading, resting, meeting friends, or sharing food. Members of the community not only share similar interests but support each other during difficult times. One night, someone came to tell us that a friend's house had been broken into and a laptop and some other valuables were stolen. This mobilised everyone to contact the police, make sure their friends were fine, and locate the laptop by connecting to its GPS tracking programme. Late into the night, people came and went to see if they could be of any help. One of them said: 'How could anyone dare to be a thief? People who live around the area know each other.' Anyone who has lived in an urban environment will know that, very often, people do not even know who lives next door. This incident created a sense of déjà vu of a rural agricultural village in a bygone past. The 'villagers', however, were young urbanites who mastered modern technologies such as GPS, laptops, and single-lens reflex cameras.

On our last night at the bungalow, the host organised for one of the Hong Kong young farmers to share her experience of work-exchange on farms in Japan. She was not the only one who had done so. Several months of tropical heat in Hong Kong makes the day-to-day

running of a farm even more physically demanding. The harvest reduces, and farmers often have to grapple with pests and typhoons. A few months before I embarked on my fieldwork, some young farmers travelled to Japan during the hottest days to take part in a festival which combines art, farming, and countryside development in a rural village. Since it was too late for me to conduct participant observation, I interviewed the participants and learned that several young and senior farmers, artists, NGO workers, and dozens of middle school and university students who wished to learn about the lives of farmers had stayed with local villagers and farmers, some for a few weeks and others for up to six months. The participation of young people from Hong Kong fostered interaction between local and foreign farmers, encouraging urban youth to obtain knowledge of food, and become mindful of everyday needs that are, in Hong Kong farmers' words, 'gifts from the land'. By taking part in collective activities of growing, harvesting, and eating food, young urbanites gained farming skills and experience of collaborating with villagers and local farmers. After returning to Hong Kong, young farmers grow food using the experience and skills acquired in Japan, devoting themselves to improving soil quality and bringing positive change to local *sekeui*. A year later, when the festival restarted in 2016, some Hong Kong farmers decided to work for their hometown, so temporarily withdrew from the project, while maintaining the contacts. Occasionally, their foreign friends still visit them in Hong Kong and attend agricultural activities.

Such trans-local *hyunji* of volunteering farmers was manifested in the bungalow in Taiwan. Through farm work exchange, the bungalow attracted people interested in 'practising the art of sustainable living' with a down-to-earth approach. Notwithstanding structural constraints such as land scarcity and high living expenses, a similar *hyunji* was taking shape in Hong Kong. One day during our stay at the bungalow, we went to the other side of the mountain to visit a middle-aged returning farmer. Before the end of our visit, the farmer invited us to sign a massive piece of paper on the wall. Among countless names left by visitors before us, I recognised several names of members of a farm in the New Territories in Hong Kong.

Sangtaaichyun: reification of a trans-local community of sustainable living

I talked to one of those who had signed her name, a young farm worker, about her ideal life. She described this as living in an environment 'surrounded by nature and a group of like-minded people'. In this settlement, not everyone had to be a farmer; instead, people can do whatever they are good at and feel passionate about. She compared her ideal life to

'mainstream society', emphasising that she was fond of the alternative lifestyle because 'there will be more options other than money-making jobs'. A leaflet I later found regarding the history of the farm where she was working depicted a *sangtaaichyun* ('ecovillage'). The young farmer later confirmed that the ecovillage is precisely the ideal form of living that she meant to describe to me.

The farm is located in an outlying corner of Hong Kong, but staff and visitors can take shuttle buses between the closest metro station and a grocery store, where people get off the bus and walk for ten minutes to reach the farm. Half a century ago, the construction of a reservoir changed the hydrographic conditions here. As a result, rice farmers turned paddy fields into ponds. As modernisation and urbanisation continued to move forward, both farmland and fish ponds have been abandoned. From 2009, despite sky-high land rates making the ecovillage a quite unattainable idea, a group of people initiated a project to revive agriculture and conserve the land. On the leaflet I came across, the farm's manifesto read: 'Gathering people who are dedicated to developing a new life in this place; bringing farming activities back to this land and building a sustainable *sangtaaichyun*.' The farm wishes to establish, in their original phrase, a 'holistic life', built upon an interdependent, balanced, and intimate relationship between humans and the earth. They declared a mission to 'nourish the land so as to nourish people and make all lives flourish forever'. A ritual during a rice harvest festival reified the farm's faith in the bond between humans and the land.

The ritual was organised by an overseas returnee who spent her early years in Europe before graduation. By the time I conducted my fieldwork, she had become an enthusiastic practitioner in local-food movements. This young farmer joined the farm, in her words, to 'practice how to live', acquire the agronomy, and learn about 'the mutualism between humans and the land'. She is among several peers who leave urban lives behind and joined the farm to experience farmers' lives. They were identified as 'intern farmers' by other staff at the farm. During the summer, a senior farmer led these intern farmers to grow rice. After five months, the ritual, which was named 'Becoming Soil', was held to celebrate the harvest of the hand-grown rice.

When the ritual began, practitioners stood on the rice paddy barefoot. Shoes must be taken off and left outside the field to show respect to the land. The young farmer who designed the ritual walked slowly and quietly between practitioners and said prayers. In the lines of the prayer, she symbolised the human body as rice, and described a process of the

human body absorbing energies from nature and growing from the soil. Part of the prayer was as follows (initially written in English, and read out in Cantonese in the ritual):

> You are absorbing the sun, your skin is breathing, just as your heart is beating.
>
> Your chest feels the warmth, from the ground and from the sun, and brings this energy up through your shoulders, through your neck and to your head.
>
> The energy is strong, and you are growing taller and taller.
>
> You have grown from the soil. Take a deep breath.
>
> Slowly feel the rice in between your fingers, with your eyes still closed, place the rice into your mouth, on your tongue. [Pause]
>
> The rice on your tongue was once just soil.
>
> The energy of the soil is now within you.
>
> Just like you, it grew from the soil and was nourished by the soil.
>
> The soil creates us, and it creates what is inside of us.
>
> The soil creates life. Take a deep breath.
>
> Slowly swallow the rice.
>
> Embrace the rice inside you. Embrace the life inside you. Take a deep breath.
>
> You are the soil. Take a deep breath.
>
> (The ritual of 'Becoming Soil', Rice Harvest Festival 2016)

As the prayer guided practitioners' thoughts, they were instructed to observe their mind and body and attend to the plants and animals around them. Subsequently, practitioners were instructed to slowly swallow a grain of rice and imagine that after consuming the rice, the body, rice, and nature were becoming 'one'. At the last stage of the ritual, all festival participants were invited to join ritual practitioners to dance on the rice paddy. Participants moved their body freely with low postures close to the soil or simply lying on the land. They danced to the music of instruments including a drum, a flute, a bell, a bamboo, an *asalato* from West Africa, a Jew's harp from indigenous groups in Asia, and someone who used his voice to produce the sound of wind. After everyone's body was covered in soil, 'humans became the soil'. By the paddy field, there were artists drawing watercolours to document the ritual. Gradually the night fell, and all participants received a sheaf of straw to symbolise 'sharing'. People took turns putting the straw in the middle of the field to pile up a campfire as they chanted together. At the end of the ritual, everyone held each other's hands and stayed quiet for a short while. The ritual was wrapped up with a gesture:

participants brought their hands together in front of their chest, as people do in temples, and bowed to the campfire.

Such a ritual, full of symbols and metaphors, did not happen frequently, but the narrative that it delivered, the human-land bond, is frequently mentioned in local-food movements. More than half of my interlocutors both in Hong Kong and Taiwan have read a series of books published since 1996, *Anastasia* (Megre 2008). The book elaborates on how humans work with nature to create a harmonious and abundant life. A whole chapter of this book focuses on how a Russian woman conveys messages to food seeds and then 'customises' the seeds to suit the need of her body. After receiving the messages, the seeds not only grow better but also transform into healthier and more suitable food for the woman. The principle of the 'non-duality of human and earth' (*san-tou-bat-yi*), illustrated in Chapter Five, is an epitome of a similar narrative. In this view, a slogan 'supporting local agriculture' is connected to 'supporting Hong Kong'. Young farmers and activists envision Hong Kong as a *sekeui* in the form of *sangtaaichyun*, built with the premise of human-land attachment rather than confined within predetermined boundaries. They believe that, in this way, urban dwellers may finally manage to live a happier, healthier, and more sustainable life.

Various activities that took place in this ecovillage project clustered people both inside and outside Hong Kong: the rice harvest ritual was merely a small piece of the full picture. There were also farmers' markets for handicrafts, home-processed food, cooked food, baked goods, and vegetables grown at the farm or by other local farmers. Other than farmers' markets, wide-ranging hands-on workshops were organised to highlight the importance of using one's own hands to produce everyday necessities. They believe that only after mastering the skills to sustain daily life could people be self-sufficient in terms of satisfying basic needs and healing themselves, thereby becoming captains of their own lives. The workshops included all sorts of activities for processing food and making home groceries and equipment. Specifically, participants could learn to bake bread, make rice dumplings and pickled plums, make reed pens, hand-woven buckets and coasters, create plant print arts, brew compost fertilisers, grow tomatoes, learn the uses of herbs, and recognise edible wild plants.

Apart from these themes, young farmers sometimes organised 'mind-body-spirit' workshops that they believed would boost mental and physical health. Through outdoor yoga and meditation, participants were encouraged to slow down, observe their mind and body, and attend to the physical world around them. Participants could harvest and cook

food directly from the farmland and have meals together before returning to the farmland to grow food. These events aimed, as shown on the farm's Facebook page advertising this kind of workshop, to provide city people with a chance to practise 'living a good and truthful life'. Some workshops were facilitated by those who acquired their knowledge and skills outside of Hong Kong. For instance, a workshop for making reed pens was led by a woman who quit her job and learned the weaving techniques in Taiwan. The farm also invites people to come to Hong Kong to give presentations or instruct workshops. For example, a series of workshops for 'earth oven'—a cooking pit made of soil and clay for baking, steaming, or smoking food—were led by the farm's Taiwanese friends. Also, a farmer from Taiwan was invited to give a talk during a forum. The Taiwanese farmer shared her opinion on laws and policies concerning Friendly Farming and the concept of organic. She argued that farmers and consumers formed a community and used the metaphor of kinship to describe the relationship between members of the community: 'Consumers support farmers like supporting their own family members; farmers produce food like producing food for their own family members.' She stressed that family-like relatedness is cultivated in consumers' face-to-face communication with producers at local food markets. In this regard, local food entails warm and intimate social relations.

At one of the events organised as part of the ecovillage project, I met a couple who came to the farm for a harvest festival. The woman is from Hong Kong, but settled in Taiwan with her Taiwanese husband. They both received higher education in the UK. They use their own place, a B&B, to host various activities that they regard as essentials of sustainable living, such as concerts, handicraft exhibitions, workshops for natural building, food parties in which participants cook and eat seasonal food together, and fora on global ecovillages and sustainable movements. Like young farmers in Hong Kong, they emphasise on using one's own hands to create the life one wants, because, in their view, as stated on the Facebook page of their B&B: 'The less dependence, the larger freedom.' This statement aptly summarises the primary statement of local-food movements in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

This chapter examined different forms of 'community', *sekeui*, *hyunji*, and *sangtaaichyun*, which are grounded in the human-land bond mediated by local food. The concept of 'community' emerged from the three types of assemblages is taken as the reification of *kam ching* and attachment between humans and the land. In this context, food localism does not involve 'food neophobia' or local superiority because the locality of local food

does not lie in where it is grown or who grew it, but the social relations and the non-duality of humans and the land. This version of localism is shaped by trans-local mobilities and interactions, epitomising inclusive imaginaries of localness. In this regard, food localism is about connection instead of separation, inclusion rather than exclusion.

The trans-local dynamics create an assemblage of people, goods, and ideas from diverse backgrounds. Through reading the same books, sharing concern about the same issues, and envisaging a similar future (in which people have the freedom to make different choices and are happier and healthier), farmers and activists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and many other places formed this assemblage. Terms like *sekeui*, *hyunji*, or *sangtaaichyun* are among numerous attempts to verbalise the assemblage. Geographical and cultural boundaries are no longer obstacles to interactions between strangers. Discrepancies and disconnections might exist within a culture, a nation, a geographical region, an ethnic group, or other criteria thought valid for classifying people; and simultaneously, there are resonances across these categories.

Young farmers' and activists' high mobility and willingness to accept foreign ideas and people from diverse backgrounds are the cornerstones of the trans-boundary partnership. Such alliance is observable at farms and other sites where various activities take place, such as experience-sharing presentations, for a, or work-exchange arrangement. These day-to-day and down-to-earth processes cultivated a *community of sustainable living*. In this community, the bond between humans and the land and ideas concerning sustainable living have been reproduced, refined, reaffirmed, and put into practice. At the same time, the practices continue to engender and enhance a trans-local community, and vice versa, the emergence of the community makes more people aware of the idea and thus attracts more members. In the process, people came to realise that their concerns could be fixed or transformed because there are many people who share their worries and are working together to find solutions. This community does not consist of people who live in the same neighbourhood, of similar social status, nationality, mother tongue, skin colour, or religion, but those who have concerns and visions that are relatable to each other.

The community of sustainable living transcends the dilemma of whether the notion of community could be place-based because it shows that a community could be simultaneously place-based and trans-local. This kind of community is distinct from communities defined by geographical boundaries because it incorporates ideas, goods, and people from diverse backgrounds; this community is different from a-spatial communities (e.g. communities of interest) because it is based upon a belief in the appreciation for local

solidarity and the close relationship between humans and the land. Additionally, this *community of sustainable living* adds to the discussion about compromising between freedom and loyalty—as reviewed in Chapter Three, a dualism that sees cosmopolitanism and patriotic attitude as in conflict. Following this logic, those who appreciate the value of the local must not show too much interest in the non-local. However, the community of sustainable living embraces localness by claiming the freedom of integrating foreign ideas as well as retaining the loyalty to tradition, local culture, and 'home'.

During the transition from a British colony to a Chinese SAR, there have been multiple waves of outmigration since the second half of the 1980s after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration (Skeldon 1994). Those who left claimed that they were concerned that postcolonial political upheaval and cross-border population would threaten *buntou* culture, spirit, or values. According to an opinion poll conducted in 2016 (Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies 2016), 38.9 per cent of respondents who declared a strong 'sense of belonging' to Hong Kong thought of emigrating abroad in search of a better quality of life. Distinguished from this approach, young farmers and activists come back home after their agricultural training abroad. Several young farmers mentioned that they did not feel a sense of belonging to their city nor particularly appreciate local culture and history until they took part in the intrinsically trans-local local-food movements.

The partnership with non-local groups and the influence of imported ideas do not lead to alienation from their own society. On the contrary, the trans-local community has fostered connections to one's hometown through persistently reminding people about the human-land bond. Young farmers choose to stay 'home' and strive to make a change. However, this is not the end of the journey. If they continue the attempt to promote local food and other cultural critique and social reform evolving from it, they will continue to reach out to *the other* because trans-local connections are the keys by which they came up with ideas of sustainable living and managed to put the ideas into action in the first place.

Chapter Eight:
Conclusion

Overview of the thesis

Primary arguments

This research began with curiosity about future ways of living in the city. It examines how urban living is changing and changed by residents' expectations of a desirable tomorrow. In contemporary cities, due to the high mobility of border-crossing population, goods, and ideas, trans-local interactions have complicated the neat boundary between the local and the non-local. 'Localness' is very often a composite of both local and foreign elements, and circumscribed by encounters with 'outsiders'. How might localness be negotiated in such context? This thesis focuses on a postcolonial Chinese metropolis and studies the phenomenon of local-food movements, which are illuminating for unpacking and grasping the meanings of localness, known in Hong Kong as *buntou*. This thesis has discussed the specificities that distinguish the local-food movements in Hong Kong from food activism in other places, aiming to increase our understanding of local food politics.

Since the 1997 handover, *buntou* has become a ubiquitous, contentious, and value-laden term. Amongst diverse interpretations, there has been a prevailing argument that expresses concerns over the 'invasion' of mainland Chinese goods, immigrants, tourists, capitals, and the loss of Hong Kong's political autonomy and cultural and economic superiority. Localism in this sense is not opposed to globalism, but rather against 'mainlandisation' and entails a 'Hong Kong nationalism'. However, postcolonial encounters with newcomers and the new motherland also opened up spaces for the re-evaluation of social norms. The younger generation began to consider whether they want to cling to the existing pattern or seek new possibilities.

Amongst various cultural shifts, an increasing number of young urbanites joined the vanguard of agricultural and social reform. Farming, a down-to-earth activity that bridges local and international society, was employed by young people in Hong Kong to negotiate localness. Agriculture is seen as a comprehensive practice that is capable of restoring warm interpersonal relationships and reconnecting urban dwellers to the land. This new enthusiasm for agriculture resonated with globally circulating ideas of alternative food networks and 'sustainable living'. Young farmers' and activists' version of *buntou* was constructed and expressed through the imagination of a healthier, happier, and more

meaningful form of living. Rather than seeing the 'global' as an enemy, they do not view globalisation as a hegemonic force or multicultural hybridity as a crisis. Instead, trans-local dynamics implied in globalisation are regarded as 'useful', inspiring them to come up with transformative ideas and enabling them to establish international partnerships, through exchanging goods, ideas, skills, and voluntary work with their counterparts in China, Taiwan, Japan, Europe, North America, Australia, and many other places.

From young farmers' and activists' point of view, locality is not a geographical concept that refers to a pre-determined citizenry. They do not see the exclusion of the postcolonial border-crossing population as necessary for protecting localness, which, in their opinion, involves *connection* rather than *separation*. It is a quality fostered by actions of getting close to the land, appreciating grassroots culture, and nurturing social relations by claiming for social justice. It does not determine which people and which land fall within the scope of localness. Social relations that it entail are not confined to particular groups such as the middle class or 'Hong Kong people'. Likewise, the human-land bond exists between humanity and the 'mother earth', upon which humans settle and grow food, rather than a specific geographical or political territory. It was in this rationale that the appreciation of local food was rooted. This version of localism is an epitome of trans-local relations cultivated from the soil.

Young farmers and activists accentuated the notion of *buntou* not to resist external forces (i.e. the Chinese state, individual mainland Chinese tourists and immigrants, the global food regime). Instead, they, who received a good education but hardly enjoy any financial privilege as middle-class groups may expect, speak to the local neoliberal regime, which they believe has created social inequality, marginalised the public, demolished vernacular values, and prioritised the interests of the politically and economically privileged groups. In their opinion, the sweeping control of neoliberalism, developmentalism, and consumerism caused social hazards in terms of soaring costs of living vis-à-vis low quality of life, such as poor-quality food, unaffordable housing, and physically and mentally damaging work culture.

When young farmers and activists consider who is responsible for the social predicaments that made them 'graduates with no future', they propose to address the long-standing structural constraints in their own society rather than holding external forces accountable and regarding the 'local' as unquestionably good, progressive, and ethical. Motivated by day-to-day unease, young urbanites changed their role from food consumers to producers. By becoming a farmer, the younger generation envisions a future in which

they are more self-sufficient and therefore freer. Farming takes young farmers a step away from the fear of financial insecurity. It is an alternative approach to coping with poor quality of life and challenging a sense of not having, in a young farmer's words, the 'freedom of choice' to select desirable jobs and balanced, reassuring, and healthy ways of living. As one young farmer once emphasised, becoming a farmer is not about keeping up with a globally trendy lifestyle; she said, 'farming is not a lifestyle; it is life itself.'

Unlike holiday or hobby farmers, young farmers do not take farming as a pastime but set out to become food suppliers for the public. Although intellectual discussions and aesthetic representations of agriculture permeate local-food movements, the movements are not exclusive for the middle class, nor does it embody ruralism or postmaterialism. Young farmers do not romanticise the peasant lifestyle. Having become farmers themselves, they fully understand that life as a farmer is challenging. To make ends meet, they have to adopt the 'half farming, half x' model—not only relying their livelihood on selling farm produce but also taking off-farm jobs and organising various activities. Young farmers accept their status as city people. They do not seek to bring back traditional peasant society but to create a new type of urban living simultaneously attaches to the land and has access to trans-local interactions. This thesis conceptualises their view as *cosmopolitan food localism*. The agriculture formulated with this mentality facing outwards and forwards rather than turning backward. They refer to agriculture—which is thought to be a thing of the past—in order to step forward. They listened to people from around the world because the input helps them to find their roots.

This research examined food movements in order to enhance our knowledge of how the younger generation positions themselves in a fast-changing time and space. In early 2016, when I followed a young farmer along a street collecting leftovers, some people showed disgust at what he was doing. A year later, I retook this short trip with the same farmer. A little girl looked curiously at the buckets, as her mother softly explained to her: 'The farmers are collecting leftovers to grow vegetables for us,' and then smiled at the farmer and me. The change in people's attitude indicated a gradual social change whereby more and more Hong Kong residents have come to realise that agricultural practices are happening in their city. Some people who used to express disbelief at the necessity of a local food system also begin to develop an interest in sustainable farming.

Key points of each chapter

Chapter One described how the colonial legacy created a cultural hybrid space in Hong Kong, where the 'local' is a notion open for interpretation. It is widely argued that this peculiar context equipped residents in Hong Kong with the traits of cosmopolitanism, diversity, and inclusiveness. However, after 1997, people and goods crossed the Chinese border and packed into this overpopulated city: this has made the two sides of the border more integrated but also estranged. While Hong Kong is still 'learning to belong to a nation', the concept of *buntou* became a controversial trope. While 'anti-China' discourses and disputes over national identity are widespread, campaigns for local agriculture and sustainable living—the local-food movements—have become the younger generation's way of seeking the localness that they identify with. *Buntou* has never been a notion opposed to the global. Young farmers and activists take inspirations from global food activism, welcome trans-local interactions, and propose to cultivate localness from the soil.

Local-food movements in Hong Kong is more than a local manifestation of the global locavorism. Most significantly, anti-globalisation or counter-cosmopolitan agendas are not implied in the Hong Kong version of food localism. This thesis associates this uniqueness with the social, historical, and cultural fabric of the city where boundary-crossing is taken as natural rather than disturbing. Young farmers and activists speak to the undercurrent of neoliberalism and developmentalism rather than trans-border dynamics. Given such a setting, this thesis agrees that the division between the local and the non-local is detached from reality. It also invites a reconsideration of the dualism between localism and cosmopolitanism.

This chapter sketched the geographical context of Hong Kong and introduced how the multi-sited fieldwork in a metropolitan setting was designed, including the rationale of selecting fieldwork interlocutors, the writing strategies of the ethnography, the methods of analysing the materials, and how the field sites were gradually defined throughout fieldwork. I demonstrated the decision-making process of turning from focusing on a single site to multiple sites spread across the city as well as a place I had to travel to by air. I also elaborated on how boundaries that fragmented the city into three parts and divided it into urban versus rural areas are fluid and thus I needed to explore different parts of the city in order to grasp a comprehensive picture of local-food movements.

Chapter Two provided a description of the historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical contexts of the field site and discussed my ontological, epistemological, and methodological reflections on fieldwork. This chapter started by leading readers through

the history of agriculture in Hong Kong, including its flourishing decades ago, and the replacement of farming villages by an urban landscape that brought the assumption of urban-rural divide into question. This chapter then went on to analyse how trans-locality and hybridity came to be intrinsic characteristics of Hong Kong society, and how the slippery concept of *Heunggongyahn* justifies the idea that localness has never been a clearly defined notion. As part of the introduction to the context of the field site, this chapter then depicted the density of the city and described a new landscape of going green despite the widely-held assumption that Hong Kong has no green space and thus nothing to do with agriculture. After setting the context of the emerging green lifestyle, the scope of this introduction focused on young farmers and activists and provided a clearer portrait of them by disambiguating between *nungching*, young farmers, and urban farmers.

In the second half of this chapter, I reflected on my positionality in the field. Through discussing the ambivalence of my position as both outsider and insider, I further demonstrated the multicultural complexity of the field site. Additionally, the tension between Hong Kong and mainland China was presented in this chapter by explaining why, as a Mandarin speaker, I had to learn Cantonese and avoid using Mandarin. My experiences of house-hunting and observations of living conditions in Hong Kong laid the foundation for the discussion of the social background of everyday unease. In the last part, this chapter demonstrated how data was collected via participant observation, interviews, informal conversations, and document analysis.

Chapter Three reviewed the theories and topics that underpin this thesis, including the dialectical relationship between the local and the non-local, various discourses of local food politics across the world, cosmopolitanism versus nationalism, the politics of community, downward social mobility, the human-nature relationship and urban sentiments towards nature, postmaterialism, initiatives of sustainable living, and tension over the quality of food. This chapter also compared local-food movements practitioners to environmentalists, pointing out the nuanced differences and similarities between them.

This chapter has several functions. Firstly, it points out the social and political-economic challenges that young people in Hong Kong are facing. It is this context that motivates people who are qualified for middle-class jobs to join the ranks of farmers. Secondly, this chapter demonstrates the burgeoning popularity of localism occurring contemporaneously across cultural, geographical, and linguistic barriers. Through engaging with this phenomenon, this thesis reconsiders the local-global division and suggests that localism, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism are dialectical rather than contradictory ideas.

Thirdly, this chapter reviewed the proliferation of planet-wide alternative food movements and sustainable living projects. An urban fascination with the rural lifestyle, postmaterialist values, or moral statements about environmental or food ethics are topics that are frequently associated with these food and lifestyle campaigns. However, the reductionism of imposing these perspectives onto local-food movements in Hong Kong is a misreading of the motivations of young farmers and activists, springing from failing to attend to the downward social mobility and simultaneous costly, low-quality food and housing that young people are coping with.

Chapter Four began by analysing a city-wide interest in writing about environmental protection and low-carbon lifestyles. This chapter pointed out that although these ideas are promoted by NGOs, put on government agendas, and mentioned in books written by local journalists or researchers, this widespread interest remains a subject for epistemic discussion. These topics have yet to become an everyday concern of people on the street, let alone be put into action. Even among farmers who are more attentive to the weather because it affects harvests and the day-to-day running of their farms, ideas like climate change or global warming have not been regarded as reasons for the difficulties that they encounter. It would be biased to argue that environmental awareness plays no role in the formation of local-food movements, but it is much less relevant than other political-economic issues that young farmers and activists found to have more direct impacts on everyday life in Hong Kong. The weakening of the environmental dimension of food activism is due to that two historical contingencies motivated the campaign: food safety controversies entangled with imported food, and land development disputes over whether farmland should be converted into construction land or reserved for food growing.

Since local production of food was brought to the attention of the younger generation, they began to see farming as a desirable way of living and farming as a skilled and respectable occupation. Because young farmers who grew up in the city do not have the same access to agricultural skills and food knowledge as elder farmers, they learn farming techniques through various pathways, including reading books in languages other than Chinese, watching YouTube videos, and participate in agricultural events both in and outside Hong Kong. As a result, they formulated their own version of farming, which foregrounds sustainability and the cycle of resources and waste. Farming activities, in this sense, signify a transformation rather than a continuation of traditional agriculture. Meanwhile, *buntou* constructed in this process is grounded in foreign elements and embodies a hybrid of the local and the non-local.

The concept of 'sustainable living' has been adopted in Hong Kong because this phrase verbalises an imagined form of living that is more connected with 'nature' and different from the urban lifestyle. The frequent mention of 'nature' in local-food movement narratives shows that the 'indigenised' perception of 'nature', from an urban-centric point of view, has not challenged but rather consolidated the culture-nature division. Local food is considered the best because it is 'natural'. Even though the dualism of 'nature' versus 'culture' has been extensively challenged, the appreciation for 'nature' still justifies that my interlocutors regard nature as a separate domain beyond the urban dystopia. The culture-nature divide is implied in another dichotomy between 'anthropocentrism' and 'ecocentrism'. The former view is often assigned to 'Western societies' whereas the latter is connected to the 'Eastern world'. Such argument reproduces an imagination of undifferentiated 'Eastern tradition' and monolithic 'Western philosophy'.

However, this chapter pointed out a process in which people from different parts of the world reference each other's ideas. World cultures are becoming more related to each other, and are fused to create new ideas. In the case of local-food movements in Hong Kong, elements from diverse cultural backgrounds blended naturally without pre-determined or perceived rankings between ideas of different origins. Young farmers' and activists' attitude towards *buntou* reflects this mentality. This chapter compared local-food movements in Hong Kong to the Europe-based Transition movement to elaborate on this observation. Both campaigns have a goal of achieving sustainable living. They took inspiration from permaculture and share the agenda of localising food systems. Despite the similarities, the Transition model focuses on addressing climate change and the risk of peak oil, whereas local-food movements foreground the improvement of quality of life by calling for structural change.

Chapter Five suggested that, under the umbrella of the widely articulated (although elusive) concept *buntou*, people are waving the flags of different values and ideologies. Young farmers and activists spoke about land and soil, arguing that only from the soil might local culture, history, and identity be cultivated. In their view, local agriculture is the cornerstone of localism because it ensures a city's self-sufficiency. The quest to take back control of one's own life was proposed as the purpose of improving the quality of life, which was believed to be achievable through maintaining an intimate relationship with the land. Based on this, the preference for local food is grounded in a belief that local food is healthier, tastier, fresher, and more suitable for the human body.

From young farmers' point of view, localness is negotiated through reflecting on the existing system rather than clinging to it. In their opinion, the basis of localness—the human-land bond and warm interpersonal relationships—are undermined by the system. They feel that the neoliberal set-up of Hong Kong results in the monopoly of land resources and soaring land rates. The political and economically advantaged groups are the primary beneficiaries, while ordinary people face difficulties with housing and the physically and mentally harmful working culture. In this sense, local-food movements are not a class privilege; rather, the campaign fosters a grassroots version of localness.

Young farmers and activists argued that growing and consuming local food entails not only a more sustainable, accessible, and healthy food system, but also the pursuit of a city of variety, diversity, and freedom of choice. The farming life was compelling to them because it is self-sufficient and thus empowers them to have control over their own lives. Promoting local food is part of the project of carving out alternative approaches to living in a high-pressure and extortionate city and achieve self-sustainability—living a healthier, happier, more resilient, and assured life.

Given that young farmers and activists are concerned with bread-and-butter issues, **Chapter Six** argued that postmaterialism is not a satisfactory theory to analyse the movements. This chapter documented a group of young people who put their vision of sustainable living into practice. I describe how the vision was designed holistically, encompassing food, cooking, farming, producing daily necessities, and healing physical and mental illness. They believed that high-quality food is not only about physical health but also spiritual fulfilment. They see agriculture as a craft and an essential part of 'the art of living'. They practised this art by slowing down on the path and staying mindful when performing everyday routines.

This chapter pointed out the challenges of being a farmer in Hong Kong. Firstly, since land resources are largely reserved for real estate development and landowners are likely to claim the land back within a short period, finding a piece of farmland that is affordable, available, and stable is extremely difficult. Similarly, buying a house is impossible for most young people, while renting is only slightly easier. Secondly, farming has never been well-paid. Other jobs are more financially rewarding, but still rarely sufficient to cover high living expenses. Thirdly, some farmers hope to improve their knowledge and equipment to increase income, but there is little governmental financial aid, technical support, or official curriculum for people to acquire agricultural knowledge. Due to these concerns, most parents were strongly opposed to their children becoming farmers. Only two of about

seventy young farmers who participated in this research did not have to argue with their parents about their career choice. This lack of support also happens in other sectors which are typically perceived as the idealistic choices of dreamers, such as artists or writers. It is said that these 'dreamers' will one day have to face reality and shift to a better-paying job in order to survive. Such a statement is a testimony of what young farmers mean by having no freedom of choice.

Many young farmers do not manage to rely on the income from farming entirely, so they have to adopt a 'half-farming, half-x' lifestyle in order to make ends meet. The impossibility of entirely depending on small incomes from selling farm products forces farmers to come up with various strategies, such as taking off-farm freelance jobs or organising agricultural-related activities ranging from Farm-to-Table dining, processed food workshops, farm tours, to documentary screenings, for a, or concerts.

In light of the struggles, this chapter distinguished local-food movements in Hong Kong from the urban fascination for nature, countercultural discourses of the 1960s, and the present-day hipster consumption trend. Rather than being moral and altruistic, young farmers and activists protest against social norms because they are facing economic difficulties at a personal level. They are also not well-off urbanites who pursue hipster style, or city people who regard farming as a personal choice of greener lifestyles. They seek to build a vibrant and sustainable local food system based on which, they believed, could the goal of a more ideal and sustainable life be achieved.

Chapter Seven illustrated that the concept of community is taken as an all-encompassing term that evokes a sense of warmth and compassion. Because of this, the 'local community' is seen as a legitimate unit for development projects, environmental management, and even commercial activities. Global alternative food networks or sustainable living projects tend to underline that local small-scale agriculture enhances community solidarity. These uses of the term 'community' assume given boundaries that define a geographical enclave where a group of people with certain traits settle. However, at the same time, the concept of community in these narratives refers to a collectivity circumscribed with indicators such as language, ethnicity, residency, and nationality. Scholarly accounts, on the other hand, define 'community' as something that transcends pre-determined criteria. This view is validated and adopted to justify that if Hong Kong is to be seen as a community, it consists of socio-cultural particularities instead of 'blood, race, and soil'. The academic versus street interpretations of the meaning of a community

shows a polarisation: a community is either place-bounded or relational (based on shared interests or social and cultural characteristics). It cannot be both.

This chapter described a trans-local community built upon people's bond with the land. Through examining the case of three different forms of community that emerged from local-food movements in Hong Kong—*sekeui*, the *hyunji* of local-food movements, and *sangtaaichyun*—this chapter revealed a community that was simultaneously boundary-crossing and place-based. Based on a shared goal of living a good life, this community integrates ideas from diverse cultural traditions and assembles people from different places on occasions such as farm activities, agricultural courses, and relevant events organised by the informal sector or NGOs. Members of this community believed in the inseparability of humans, land, and nature. For them, the value of local food is grounded in the intimate relationship between humans and the land. In this sense, localness is grown in the soil in which food is cultivated. *Buntou* is a metaphor for an essentialised group of people, a political entity, or an enclosed geographical territory.

Such a community is distinct from the bounded and monolithic image of a 'local community' that is employed for *community-washing*. It is also different from a 'community of interest' or other forms of community that take shape based on social relations or shared interests, as opposed to elements regarding the place and the land. The forming of the *community of sustainable living* reifies a more intimate relationship between humans and the land, mirroring a version of localism that transcends geographical, national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Simultaneously, it is characterised by human attachment to the land and the place. Moreover, this trans-local community is made possible by the younger generation's global mobility and exposure to imported ideas.

Research implications

A study 'in' rather than 'of' the city; 'farming in the city' rather than 'urban farming'

This thesis speaks to a broader scholarship of contemporary reflections on everyday life in the city. It focuses on bottom-up agricultural movements as a cultural critique of the lack of freedom of choice. Acknowledging Henri Lefebvre's widely-discussed notion of the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996), his critique of the ideology of urbanism (Lefebvre 2003), and several scholarly works that follow the Lefebvrian theory to study urban social movements (e.g. Attoh 2011; Harvey 2008; Jiménez 2014; Mitchell 2003; Purcell 2013), this research started by examining the construction and contestation of localness embodied in disputes over land development, the planning of urban space, and ownership of the city. My

interlocutors take farming as both the starting point and the ultimate solution to their everyday concerns. From their point of view, farming is a subject that combines many issues such as low-quality food, land grab, heritage protection, social justice, human health, self-sustainability, sovereignty, and identity. Therefore, I centred my urban living in postcolonial Hong Kong on agriculture and food movements.

Since the language of 'right to the city', 'democratic participation in the decision-making processes of urban planning', and discussions of 'who owns the city?' were consistently raised by my interlocutors, at an earlier stage of my fieldwork, I was convinced that my study would be about 'how people plan their cities'. From this perspective, as I think is implied in Lefebvre's work and other urban studies, the city is an entity and a container that is outside and larger than people's daily life. However, after fourteen months of intensive fieldwork, closer examination revealed that the phenomenon studied in this research is about 'how people plan their lives' instead. At first glance, young farmers and activists in Hong Kong campaign for changes in the food system and against the privatisation of urban space. However, a better food system and planning of urban space is not their ultimate goal. The fundamental quest was for spaces in which they would be allowed to choose the way of living that they desire. The city is just the background against which their lives unfold. In other words, this research is not a study *of* a city—how a city is planned and developed—but of lives *in* the city—how people strive to live a healthy, meaningful, and satisfying life.

This thesis suggests avoiding downplaying the difficulties that people face on a daily basis. Although the phenomenon of urban dwellers returning to the land and young people devoting themselves to food movements has been found around the world, its manifestation in Hong Kong has many specificities. Against the background of neoliberal governmentality and high cost of living, local-food movements involve *farming in the city* rather than *urban farming*. This thesis has furnished observations on relevant literature and pointed out that urban farming is either regarded as a reaction to the globalised and industrialised food system, an urban sentiment towards a green lifestyle, or a set of postmaterialist values. Urban farming in this scope is associated with middle- and upper-class people who no longer worry about survival issues. However, unlike well-off groups, young people in Hong Kong conduct farming to find an exit from the current social system in which they feel they have no control over their lives because they have to make compromises to ensure financial security.

Sustainable living is more about 'living' than about 'sustainability'

The intellectual roots of sustainable living primarily respond to the idea of climate change. This idea is linked by Dove (2014) to a millennia-long exploration of the relationship between nature and culture, environment and society. According to Dove, this exploration has been a central academic concern to anthropologists, and more broadly, to the development of human civilisation. It is argued that climate crises manifest human society's deranged relationship with the physical environment and has become an inescapable variable for the imagination of life in the future as it is entangled with reordering of power and redistribution of wealth (Ghosh 2016).

The case of Hong Kong also revealed the more political-economic dimensions of sustainable living, but those issues had not been linked to environmental catastrophe. Although environmental discourses were quite prominent, narratives of climate change, environmental protection, ecological conservation, waste reduction, or low-carbon were adopted to justify and legitimise the necessity of the localisation of the food system, rather than being tackled for their own sake. Compared to environmental hazards, local-food movements practitioners are more worried about the cultural, social, economic, and geopolitical dimensions of the current system. These anxieties are neither a form of urban nostalgia that attempts to preserve the pristine condition of 'nature' from human intervention nor postmaterialist sentiment that questions modernisation and industrialisation and shifts attention away from material satisfaction.

The use of environmental terms in Hong Kong farmers' and food activists' narratives is similar to the prominence of the term 'glacier' that Cruikshank (2005) mentioned in oral histories provided by her fieldwork interlocutors along the north Pacific coast. According to Cruikshank, changes in glaciers took place simultaneously with social changes brought about by the European fur trade. This coincidence rendered the changing landscape an 'imaginative grist for comprehending and interpreting *shifting* social circumstances' (p. 12, original emphasis). Food activism campaigners in Hong Kong do not focus their agendas on natural disasters bound up with climate change, but global discussion of environmental issues does provide a background against which they imagine and articulate alternative forms of living. Hence, rather than viewing social changes as the result of environmental change and the actions to manage it, it is more apt to say that 'society typically is changing at the same time that climate is changing' (Dove 2014: 25). Similarly, it is rather that cultural shifts in Hong Kong and the global perception of climate change are epiphenomena than those initiatives of sustainable living in Hong Kong are responding to

international environmental governance. Young farmers and activists search for a new model of living. The idea of sustainable living that they find appealing is brought to them through diverse channels of information exchange. They adopt some elements, such as those regarding local food and social relations, but dropped others such as environmental concerns which they acknowledge but do not strongly relate to.

Are localism and cosmopolitanism necessarily in conflict?

'Culture', the central idea of anthropology, has been subject to contestation (e.g. Clifford 1988). Jack Goody (1996, 1998) has pointed out that deep structural differences between societies depicted with binary categories, such as simple versus complex, West versus East, First World versus Third World, modern versus traditional, and advanced-capitalist versus pre-industrial-precapitalist, are exaggerated. Two decades after Goody's observation, different parts of the world retain their own particularities while also sharing much in common. This is resulted from boundary-crossing encounters with diverse peoples, goods, and information, and a sense of commonness springing from planetary-scale issues including food and environmental crises. Resonating with global agendas of alternative food systems and sustainable living, local-food movements in Hong Kong take Goody's argument further. Food activism in Hong Kong shows how distinctive 'cultures' are not only not so different, but have close interactions and influence each other.

Postcolonial Hong Kong provides a unique context for the emergence of different versions of localism. Through examining the multi-vocality of *buntou*, this thesis sheds light on the conception, expression, and contestation of globally-smart senses of localness. A Chinese office worker may read about vegetarianism in a popular American book, while the person's New York counterpart may seek advice on a vegetarian diet from an Indian guru's writings. Thus, urban dwellers in Los Angeles might feel closer to their counterparts in Japan, Singapore, and Korea than to their countrymen (Lasch 1995). People freely, rather than confined by 'local culture', choose commodities on the 'global cultural supermarket' (Mathews 2000)—a metaphorical space in which people pick and choose cultural elements, including information and identities on scales broader than the local.

Young farmers and activists in Hong Kong take items off the shelf in the global cultural supermarket. Moreover, they incorporate imported products into their formulation of localness and display at farmers' markets, where they sell both local food and a cosmopolitan version of localism. In accordance with other anthropological studies that take a comparative perspective, this study is positioned not as research about Hong Kong,

but an attempt to find a missing piece in the puzzle of how big-city living changes when people seek meaning and purpose of life and consider how to build a more satisfying life.

Final words

There are two things worthy of discussion but have not been covered in this thesis so far. One concerns how widespread the food localism is; the other is about further explorations of a life which is conceived as good and desirable. This latter topic has been implied in this thesis. In this final section, I will discuss it more explicitly.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, local food is widely accepted, and there are various forms of food movements happening city-wide in Hong Kong. Simultaneously, however, incompatible criteria for judging the quality of food and quality of life are also noticeable. Although young farmers saw locally grown food as the best choice, Yip & Janssen's (2015) research finds that imported food is thought to be of better quality. In supermarkets, agro-food whether labelled organic or not was stratified into different price levels: overseas-imported food, which was perceived to be the best in terms of quality and taste, was the most expensive, followed by organic food imported from around the globe. Organic food imported from mainland China came next, while mainland-imported ordinary food was the cheapest and most popular choice, constituting over 90 per cent of the agro-food market in Hong Kong (HKSAR 2017).

Organic foodstuffs mostly attracted wealthier customers who often shop in high-end chain supermarkets. These people were the most likely to eat salads as their everyday cuisine. Although Hong Kong's colonial history has influenced the dietary culture of Hong Kong, salad remains alien to the grassroots and traditional dining habits. An interlocutor, who used to work in the banking and insurance sector in Central, told me that her colleagues were happy not to eat vegetables, but required meat. The only time she saw someone eating from a lunchbox filled with vegetables was when some female colleagues were dieting. Her observation was justified by a sign I came across in the Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden, which has a long history of assisting post-war migrant farmers, and today is a famous educational and recreational farm. The sign read: 'The average daily per capita calories from animal products in Hong Kong is 250 per cent of the world average.' There was hardly any vegetarian restaurants downtown until recently. Sometimes vegetables were more expensive than meat, and dishes in restaurants usually came with few or no vegetables at all. Despite the massive variety of international cuisines available in this metropolitan city, Canton-style dishes, which are meat-based (Watson 2014) and

always cooked and served hot, remain the most popular cuisine (Chan & Chan 2009). The meat-based tendency is so apparent that a British student who was studying at the University of Hong Kong once told me that his most vivid impression of Hong Kong was that 'they don't eat vegetables'.

Salads continue to be a menu choice limited to particular classes, those with higher education and income, more international experience, and usually better English. Salads could only be seen on the menu of fancy or relatively 'Westernised' restaurants and coffee houses, usually located in more expensive areas. Unlike the wealthier groups or customers who are concerned about their health and willing to pay extra, most people were price-conscious. These people shop in supermarkets or wet markets and tended to choose cheap foods imported from mainland China. At wet markets, there might also be a small amount of food grown locally using conventional farming techniques and one or two booths selling organic food, which might be grown locally. Except for this, locally grown food is only provided at farmers' markets, specialised greengrocers, or on order from individual farms. In other words, despite the popularity of local food among particular groups, this consumption tendency has yet to become mainstream in Hong Kong.

As for the consideration of living well, the shifting meanings of 'well-being' and 'happiness' have been extensively explored in anthropology (e.g. Ahmed 2010; Chua 2014; Fischer 2014; Jimeńez 2008; Johnston et al. 2012; Kavedžija & Walker 2016; Mathews 2012; Mathews & Izquierdo 2009; Miles-Watson 2010; Moore 1990; Ortner 2016; Robbins 2013; Stafford 2015; Thin 2012; Throop 2015; Walker 2015). These studies unpack well-being and happiness by examining their political, economic, and philosophical dimensions. Anthropological approaches are concerned less with gauging how happy people are as the answers to this are highly context-sensitive, than with how happiness is conceived as an idea or motive in everyday life. Meanwhile, these scholarly explorations discuss how well-being is perceived cross-culturally, rather than taking well-being as a given concept and measuring the level of well-being in a society.

Research mentioned above examines how people understand, experience, and take various approaches to create a 'good life'. An author cited in this thesis, David Graeber (2013), tackles this question from the viewpoint of contemporary working culture under the framework of neoliberal capitalism. He does not directly refer to the concept of the 'good life', but discusses how life 'goes bad'. The notion of the 'good life' has become the grounds for contestation over different value systems and ideologies. The 'good life' cannot be imagined without considering the establishment, the power of the state, and

other politically and economically privileged classes or groups. This thesis is a part of this exploration. From the angle of food and farming, I have examined how people's lives unfold by coping with the structure and materialising aspirations by working around it. The local-food movement is one dimension of a fundamental pursuit of a good life, increasingly defined not only by physical health or material abundance but also by spiritual satisfaction. This thesis has addressed how people strive for physical health and material abundance. When mentioning yoga, meditation, and practices of mindfulness, I implied the significance of dimensions of mental health and spiritual satisfaction in my interlocutors' perceptions of a more balanced and freely-chosen way of life. More in-depth and comprehensive understandings of 'happiness', 'well-being', or the 'good life' require further substantial research.

Appendix I: Glossary

Term	Chinese character
Bat si bat jik, bat si bat sik.	不時不植，不時不食。
benxing (M)*	本性
Bong chan ha	幫襯吓
Boundary Street	界限街
buntou	本土
buntou yingtung	本土認同
chachaanteng	茶餐廳
cheunwaan	循環
choy sum	菜心
Choi Yuen Village	菜園村
daagung	打工
daai jiyin / ziran (M) / jiyin	大自然 / 自然
daailuk	大陸
daipaidong	大排檔
daitaan	低碳
dak ba hau	得把口
dau (decalitre)	斗
Deng Xiaoping	鄧小平
dim sum	點心
faiching	廢青
fukhing	復興
gaaisi	街市
Gongsik yumcha	港式飲茶
guanxi (M)	關係
Guangdong Province (M)	廣東省
gongtong shenghuo (M)	共同生活
gungsang	共生
heui	墟
heunggongyahn	香港人
Hongkong Island	香港島
Heung gong dei siu yan do	香港地小人多
hyunji	圈子
linjaap	練習
Jiangxi Province (M)	江西省
ji-jyu-sang-wut	自主生活
jungwaan gajik	中環價值
kaifong	街坊
kom-tsing / kam ching	感情
Kowloon Peninsula	九龍半島
longan	龍眼
Lung Ying-tai	龍應台
Ma zhao pao, wu zhao tiao	馬照跑，舞照跳
manching	文青
New Territories	新界

Ngh bong chan deih chaan seung	唔幫襯地產商
Ngo oi ngo ga	我愛我家
Ningxia (Hui Autonomous Region)	寧夏（回族自治區）
nungching	農青
nungfu	農夫
leng	靚
lok-sau-lok-geuk	落手落腳
pen-ti jen (M) / bendi ren (M) / punti / poon-tei-yan	本地人
Putonghua	普通話
qi (M)	氣
Qing Dynasty	清朝
san-tou-bat-yi	身土不二
sangchaan	生產
sangming gaaujuk	生命教育
sangtaaichyun	生態村
sangwut	生活
sekeui	社區
seungkwai	常規
seungkwai choi	常規菜
shanshui (M)	山水
Shenzhen	深圳
sifangyun	時分卷
singsiyan	城市人
siknung gaaujuk	食農教育
tin (sky / farmland)**	天 / 田
waanbou	環保
wai jen / ngoi-loih yahn / ngoi-loi-tik	外人 / 外來人
wanwu (M)	萬物
wampi	黃皮
wansik	搵食
wingjuk	永續
wungung	換工
Yau Ma Tei	油麻地
Yau Tsim Mong District	油尖旺區
Yilan County	宜蘭縣
youshan gengzuo (M)	友善耕種
yumcha	飲茶
yungeuiman	原居民
xie (M)	血

* In Mandarin.

** The pronunciation of the two vocabularies is the same but in different tones.

Appendix II: Interview Sheet

Interview

Who:

When:

Where:

Demographics:

1	年齡	
2	下田時間/頻率	
3	全/半職農夫/行政/自己定義	
4	到達農場路程時間	
5	家庭背景是否農業相關？	
6	香港土生土長？	
7	居住區域/形式	
8	教育背景	
9	（之前）職業	
10	耕種區域、面積	
11	耕田佔總收入之比例	
12	宗教	
13	有機認證？	

A. Motivations

1. 開始耕種的時間/契機？（1. 耕種班; 2. 社會運動; 3. 朋友介紹; 4. 其他）為什麼想耕田？（1. 休閒; 2. 不用花錢買菜; 3. 食安; 4. 其他）有什麼非開始不可的理由？（1. 想擺脫資本主義生活; 2. 想有其他食物的選擇; 3. 需要紓壓; 4. 其他）期待下田（工作）嗎？耕田最吸引你、最開心的事是什麼？（1. 耕作過程; 2. 收成; 3. 其他）有什麼期待/vision？（1. 自給自足; 2. 香港農業復興; 3. 與他人分享食物; 4. 其他）

2. 當時決定耕田時有沒有過掙扎？（1. 經濟; 2. 土地; 3. 其他）為什麼不像大家一樣想找「可以賺到錢、穩定」的工作？家人、朋友怎麼看待你現在做的事？是否需給家用？能否維持生活？會不會擔心錢不夠用？對「理想工作」的想像？會怎麼和其他朋友、家人聊/解釋現在的工作/生活狀態？

3. 是否考慮做其他工作？（1. 是; 2. 不是）會不會一輩子耕田？（1. 會; 2. 不會; 3. 以後再說）在香港可以靠耕田維生嗎？（1. 能; 2. 不能）最大的困難？（1. 土地; 2. 政策; 3. 收入; 4. 其他）怎麼應對？就算不能，你還是堅持嗎？（1. 堅持; 2. 放棄）有想過放棄嗎？（1. 有; 2. 沒有）如果有一天必須放棄，會是因為什麼原因？

4. 你認為自己算「城市人」嗎？（1. 算; 2. 不算）你喜歡城市裡的生活嗎？（1. 喜歡; 2. 不喜歡; 3. 沒感覺）你覺得城市的生活有沒有問題？（1. 收入; 2. 生活空間; 3. 飲食; 4. 文化歷史; 5. 身份認同; 6. 實踐理想; 7. 其他）你現在過的是你理想的生活嗎？（1. 是; 2. 有改善空間; 3. 如果有其他選擇想選其他的）

5. 有沒有受過政府政策方面的協助？有沒有得到過其他人的幫忙（地主、顧客、其他家人朋友）？你是否同意在香港耕田只能「靠晒自己」？

B. Practices & social structure

6. 你覺得農業最重要的功能為何？（1. 教育; 2. 環保; 3. 食安; 4. 其他）香港為什麼需要自己的農業？（1.教育; 2. 環保; 3. 食安; 4. 其他）

7. 你怎麼決定要種什麼（例如種過什麼）？

8. 怎麼學習農業知識、技能的？（1. 耕種班; 2. 租田; 3. 請教老農夫; 4. 其他）

9. 收成是自己吃還是拿去賣？（1. 自己吃; 2. 拿去賣; 3. 其他交易/交換方式）農場怎麼維持運作、怎麼維持自己的生活？（1. 前一份工作的積蓄; 2. 半農半 X; 3. 農場賣菜、辦活動; 4. 其他）

C. Human-environment relationship

10. 你吃素嗎？（1. Vegan; 2. 鍋邊素; 3. 不吃素）為什麼？

11. 城市遠離自然的生活困擾你嗎？（1. 困擾; 2. 不會）會想重建這個連結嗎？為什麼？（1. 在大自然中身心舒暢; 2. 想知道食物怎麼種出來的; 3. 其他）

12. 你傾向選擇哪一種食物？（1. 有機; 2. 本地; 3. 便宜; 4. 時令）你較常自己煮還是出街買？（1. 自己煮/家人煮; 2. 出街買）你都怎麼獲得食材？（1. 超市; 2. 街市; 3. 農墟; 4. 自己種; 5. 其他）

D. Interpersonal relationship

13. 是否認識農田附近街坊？（1. 認識; 2. 不認識）到什麼程度？（1. 打招呼; 2. 農務交流; 3. 參加社區活動）

14. 你怎麼加入農場/找到農地的？

E. Daily life struggles

15. 對香港農業前景有什麼看法？會為了種田而離開香港，去其他地方生活嗎？（1. 願意; 2. 不願意）耕種和你對香港的認同有關嗎？（1. 有關; 2. 無關）耕種後有沒有讓你對香港更有歸屬感？（1. 有; 2. 沒有）

16. 你會形容自己「想回到農業社會的生活方式」嗎？（1. 會; 2. 不會）

17. 你懷念「老香港（社區、人情味、殖民情懷）」的生活方式嗎？（1. 會; 2. 不會）

18. 你覺得自己的想法有受到 New Age 相關概念的影響嗎？（1. 有; 2. 沒有）

19. 你會形容自己「反資本主義、反物質」嗎？（1. 會; 2. 不會）

20. 你嚮往自給自足的生活嗎？（1. 嚮往; 2. 還好）

21. 自己種食物與希望有更多自主、自治的權利有關嗎？（1. 有關; 2. 無關）

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