

## Revisiting the “Golden Culture” Cantonese-English Code-Switching in *Lost on a Red Minibus to Taipo*

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### Abstract

*The Hong Kong Golden Forum is considered by many to be Hong Kong’s equivalent to Reddit, a controversial online community where many alt-righters aggregate. Its CEO, Joe Lam, published a book in 2011 commenting on components of the “golden culture”—the forum’s participatory culture—including foul language, “clown worship”, and doxing, which intersect with the habits and tactics of the alt-right. However, since then, little scholarly attention has been paid to the development of Golden culture. In view of this, this article examines Golden culture through an investigation of the popular online novel *Lost on a Red Minibus to Taipo*. Through semiotic analysis, this article studies the 1,789 instances of Cantonese-English code-switching in the online novel, which is not a common phenomenon in other novels, to explicate elements of Golden culture and discuss similarities and differences between the Golden Forum and alt-right online communities.*

Keywords: Hong Kong Golden Forum; *Lost on a Red Minibus to Taipo*; Cantonese; code-switching; alt-right

### 1. The Hong Kong Golden Forum

The Hong Kong Golden Forum is one of the most visited online forums in Hong Kong (Alexa, 2021). The forum was founded by Kwok-leung Wong, known on the platform as “Dr.Jim”, in 1999. It originated as an online destination for discussion of topics related to computer hardware and software; its name references a popular shopping centre for computer products in Hong Kong, the Golden Computer Centre (Lam, 2011, p. 197). Wong operated the forum until 2004, when he sold it to Fevaworks Solutions Limited, which later entrusted the forum to its subsidiary, Alive! Media & Communications Limited (Wan, 2012, pp. 30-41). Since then, the forum has evolved to encompass discussion on a broader range of topics. The current Chief Executive Officer of the forum is Joe Lam.

In order to increase public recognition of the Golden Forum, Lam nominated it for the Hong Kong ICT Award, which recognises excellence in information and communications technology, in 2009. The forum won the Best Lifestyle (Social Community) Gold Award. The judging panel recognised the forum as a customer-oriented online community that respected its community culture (Lam, 2011, pp. 96-97). In his book, Lam (2011) describes this community culture—the “Golden culture”—which consists of foul language, re-creations and modifications drawn from popular culture, heated discussions on politics, clown iconography, and doxing. However, since then, little scholarly attention has been paid to the development of Golden culture. In view of this, this article reviews, reveals, and explicates components of Golden culture through studying an online novel serialised on the Golden Forum, and discusses the similarities and differences between these components and the habits and tactics of the alt-right.

### 2. The “Golden Culture”

Before reviewing the existing components of Golden culture and revealing new components, in this section, I will briefly explain Golden culture as described in Lam (2011). In terms of language, the Golden Forum is one of the few online forums operating in Hong Kong that allows its members to use foul language (Xu, 2011, p. 13). It was previously reported that 80% of the messages posted on the forum contained foul language (Shum and Chan, 2012, p. A13). Nevertheless, forum members may choose to enable a language filter that replaces swear words with substitute words so that the posts and comments are less offensive and more presentable (Lam, 2011, pp. 127-129).<sup>1</sup> Likewise, some forum members are keen on modifying song lyrics and changing the subtitles on stills taken from film and television. Most of these works are collaboratively modified (Lai, 2016, pp. 258-259). A notable example is the music video for the song “Go Shopping Every Day” (Actinopterygii, 2014), a user-generated modification of Andy Lau’s “Find Entertainment by Myself” (Miss, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> The foul language filter will be discussed in more detail below.

The forum members started with the phrase “go shopping every day” and modified the entirety of Lau’s lyrics in 26 hours (One Man, 2014), before recording the music video for the re-created song within a month.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to debate and freedom of expression, the forum’s administrators have committed to maintain all posts and comments, so long as their content is legal. This attracts citizens with a variety of political stances to discuss current events and hot button issues on the forum (Lam, 2011, pp. 141-142).

Another rallying point of the culture is the forum’s Clown. Many forum members include icons in their posts and comments, and the Clown is the most popular of these. Because of its comical image, the Clown is called “plastic” in the forum, as the Cantonese pronunciations of “plastic” and “ridiculous” are similar (Lam, 2011, p. 125; Erni, 2017, p. 43). When forum members read something ridiculous, they simply paste the Clown as their comments (Xu, 2011, p. 12). Over time, the Clown has become omnipresent on the forum and operates as the forum’s unofficial emblem. It is thus also called the “Clown God”.

Finally, when a forum member encounters a perceived injustice, other forum members often gather voluntarily to “dox” the perpetrator; in other words, they search out, discover, and publish the perpetrator’s personal information (Koulouris, 2018, p. 759). The forum’s doxing is considered very effective because members usually dox by using both computerised search engines and what has been called a “human flesh search engine”.<sup>3</sup> This creates the misconception amongst the general public that the Golden Forum has a dedicated doxing group (Lam, 2011, p. 158; Xu, 2011, pp. 7-9).

The above-mentioned components of Golden culture mirror several of the habits and tactics of the alt-right—including the use of foul language intended to intensify offensiveness, the re-creation of images and icons, which is the foundation of meme creation, an emphasis on freedom of speech, and doxing (Dafaure, 2020, p. 2; Forscher and Kteily, 2020, p. 90; Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 2020, pp. 567-571). In the next section, I will briefly introduce the alt-right movement.

### 3. *The Alt-Right Movement*

The term “alternative right” first appeared in Paul Gottfried’s speech in November 2008. It referred to a new group of young right-wingers who challenged the conservative movement in the United States and the neoconservative ideology in the Republican Party (Cluverius et al., 2020, p. 1701). In March 2010, Richard B. Spencer founded an online magazine *The Alternative Right*, which featured articles promoting white nationalism (Gallagher, 2021, p. 227). Subsequently, “alternative right” was abbreviated to “alt-right” by Spencer’s supporters.

The only consensus amongst the alt-righters is to oppose the Left and the mainstream establishment. Otherwise, they embrace various beliefs, including anti-globalisation, anti-feminism, anti-immigration, and anti-multiculturalism—the opposites of the mainstream establishment’s ideologies (Gray, 2018, p. 144; Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 5008; Boehme and Scott, 2020, p. 176; Dafaure, 2020, pp. 3-16; Thompson, 2020, pp. 105-110). Some argue that the alt-righters deliberately make their ideology ambiguous to reduce the negative impacts brought by their extreme views (Cluverius et al., 2020, p. 1700; Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 2020, p. 567). Moreover, because of their political incorrectness, they are keen on aggregating in anonymous online communities, such as 4chan, 8chan, and Reddit, and promoting their ideas with the extensive use of memes (Dafaure, 2020; Ganesh, 2020, p. 892; Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 2020, pp. 568-572).

The alt-right has no political parties, and Donald Trump can be regarded as its only “political celebrity”, although he claimed to disavow the alt-right (Hawley, 2017, p. 134). In June 2015, Trump launched his presidential campaign. His political positions, including enforcing immigration laws and renegotiating free trade agreements, won the alt-righters’ favour (Boehme and Scott, 2020, p. 176). In August 2016, Trump appointed Steve Bannon, the then-Executive Chairman of the alt-right news platform Breitbart News,<sup>4</sup> as the Chief Executive of his presidential campaign. After Trump was elected, Bannon served as the Chief Strategist, bringing the alt-right to its peak (Cluverius et al., 2020, p. 1699; Forscher and Kteily, 2020, p. 90). Subsequently, the alt-righters emerged into offline spaces, such as

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<sup>2</sup> In the late stages of the Umbrella Movement, the then-Chief Executive, Chun-ying Leung, asked citizens to shop in the post-occupied areas (*Apple Daily*, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> “Human flesh search engine” is a common method of doxing in Hong Kong and China. When little information about the target can be searched for online, the doxers attempt to gather more fragmentary information from people who know the target or witnessed the incident (Wang et al., 2010, pp. 45-46; Lam, 2011, pp. 161-162).

<sup>4</sup> In July 2016, Steve Bannon stated that Breitbart News was a “platform for the alt-right” (Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 2020, p. 572).

participating in the Unite the Right rally in August 2017,<sup>5</sup> but the backlash of the rally made the alt-right progressively decline (Gallaher, 2021, p. 232).

Hong Kong citizens only came to understand the alt-right after Trump ran for presidency, but anti-establishment sentiment in Hong Kong arose soon after the 1997 handover. Since 2003, thousands of citizens have participated in the demonstration on July 1st—the HKSAR Establishment Day—every year (Purbrick, 2019, p. 474; Lee, 2020, p. 20). With the outbreak of the Umbrella Movement in September 2014,<sup>6</sup> the citizens' anti-establishment sentiment reached a peak. Using memes and re-creations, protesters publicised the movement on the Golden Forum, mobilising other citizens to participate in the movement (Lee and Chan, 2018, pp. 145-147; Agur and Frisch, 2019, p. 8). However, in the wake of the 2019-20 Hong Kong Protests,<sup>7</sup> the Hong Kong government imposed the National Security Law in July 2020 to attempt to end the protests (Hung, 2020, pp. 26-30; Toru, 2020, pp. 100-104). This law not only caused the protests to come to a halt, but also jeopardised Hong Kong's democracy and the city's pro-democracy media, including the Golden Forum. This reiterates the significance of this article—to “preserve” Golden culture before the possible closure of the forum.

#### 4. *Lost on a Red Minibus to Taipo*

Some people, including many forum members, consider the Golden Forum to be Hong Kong's equivalent to Reddit (Beam, 2014; Five Independence Pass, 2014; Agur and Frisch, 2019, p. 8). Whereas for researchers, a striking similarity between the two online communities is the ineffectiveness of their search engines. Most Redditors find Reddit's search engine return unreliable and irrelevant results (Massanari, 2015, p. 80), and the Golden Forum's search engine cannot retrieve posts which have existed for more than three months. Given that, on average, about 5,000 posts and comments published on the forum every hour (Lam, 2011, p. 61), it is more feasible and manageable to study the forum's participatory culture through its online novel.

In 2012, the online novel *Lost on a Red Minibus to Taipo* attracted 40,000 readers on the Golden Forum (Cheung, 2012, p. A20). The novel was written by an anonymous member of the forum known as “Mr.Pizza” and was serialised on the forum between February and July of that year. The online novel became so popular that a publisher, Sun Effort Limited, printed the work in two volumes that July, selling over 30,000 copies (Lau, 2014).

The novel follows a young man named Ar Chi who takes a red minibus from Mongkok to Taipo after a night out. After the minibus passes the Lion Rock Tunnel, everyone in the world—other than the minibus' driver and its sixteen passengers—seemingly disappears. Throughout the afternoon that follows, the passengers gather to discuss the incident. However, most of the passengers die mysteriously before they can arrive at a firm conclusion as to what has happened. After three days, only Ar Chi, Yuki, who becomes Ar Chi's girlfriend after the incident, and a middle-aged man, who is inexplicably disguised by Ar Chi's father, survive. They drive the minibus back to the tunnel, trying to solve the enigma.<sup>8</sup>

The novel found continued success on the big screen when Fruit Chan, a Hong Kong screenwriter, obtained the author's permission to adapt the novel to film. The first film in his proposed duology, *The Midnight After*, was released in April 2014, grossing more than 21 million Hong Kong dollars (IMDb, 2014). Chan had considered filming the second half of his diptych as a sequel (Napolitano, 2014); however, likely due to the relationship between the first film and the Umbrella Movement (Rojas, 2020), his initially proposed sequel has not yet become a reality.

The success of the novel lay in its intense and mysterious plot that attracted the interest of the Golden Forum's members and subsequently the non-members. However, the biggest difference between the novel and other novels published in Hong Kong, be it printed or online, is that it was written in Cantonese—a vernacular language which is the mother tongue of most Hong Kong citizens—and contained many instances of Cantonese-English code-switching.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In response to the local government's decision to remove the Confederate monuments, far-right groups, including the alt-right, the neo-Nazis, and the Ku Klux Klan, organised a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The rally resulted in the death of a counter-protester and injuries of some fifty people (Boehme and Scott, 2020, p. 174).

<sup>6</sup> The Umbrella Movement was a prolonged demonstration for universal suffrage which took place in various business districts of Hong Kong in 2014 (Flowerdew, 2017; Tong, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> The discussions of the Fugitive Offenders Amendment Bill by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong gave rise to protests that were staged throughout Hong Kong beginning in June 2019 (Lee et al., 2019, pp. 2-3; Ho, 2020, pp. 711-712).

<sup>8</sup> The text I refer to here is the serialised version of the novel, see (Mr.Pizza, 2012a). However, after Chapter 31, the novel was no longer serialised on the Golden Forum, but on its Facebook page, see (Mr.Pizza, 2012b).

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I consider both intra-sentential alternation and inter-sentential alternation as code-switching for the purposes of this article.

In the novel, a character referred to as Teenager with Glasses is the only passenger who is a member of the Golden Forum. Before his death in Chapter 18, he is the one who leads the discussion about his and his fellow passengers' predicament. He often embeds English words in his sentences to the extent that, in Chapter 17, Ar Chi, the narrator, wonders if all members of the Golden Forum engage in extensive Cantonese-English code-switching. However, Cantonese-English code-switching is not just an omitted component of Golden culture which Lam (2011) did not recognise,<sup>10</sup> but a common speaking practice amongst Hong Kong citizens.

### 5. *Cantonese-English Code-Switching in Hong Kong*

In the 1970s and the 1980s, Cantonese-English code-switching was generally considered a problematic linguistic practice that hindered children and teenagers from properly mastering both Cantonese and English (Gibbons, 1987, p. 4; Luke, 1998, pp. 155-156). Yet further education proved to be unsuccessful in tackling this "problem". As the phenomenon became common amongst Hong Kong citizens, some linguists began to consider code-switching worthy of specialised study. They came to view code-switching as a unique ability of bilinguals, as it requires a certain level of second language proficiency (Chan, 1993, p. 3). Cantonese-English code-switching, specifically, is a phenomenon unique to Hong Kong—although Cantonese is also the mother tongue of those who inhabit Guangdong Province and Macau (Gibbons, 1987, p. 2), only Hong Kong citizens widely speak English as a second language, as Hong Kong was a British colony before its transfer of sovereignty in 1997 (Tam, 2013, p. 478).

Since its colonisation by the British, English has numbered amongst the official languages of Hong Kong. Children begin learning English in kindergarten, and many secondary schools, as well as most universities, use English as their medium for instruction. As a result, most Hong Kong natives possess at least basic proficiency in English (Yau, 1993, pp. 26-27; Tsang and Wong, 2004, pp. 768-769), though Hong Kong citizens prefer speaking Cantonese in everyday conversation. The reasons for this are twofold. As their mother tongue, Cantonese is a more organic medium for Hong Kong citizens to use to express themselves (Gibbons, 1987, p. 1). Furthermore, by speaking in a common language, Hong Kong citizens maintain an ethnic bond amongst themselves (Tam, 2013, p. 480). Nevertheless, Luke (1998, pp. 153-155) identifies two situations in which Hong Kong citizens frequently embed English words in their sentences, resulting in what are termed expedient mixing and orientational mixing.

The first of these situations arises when knowledge from the West spreads rapidly amongst Hong Kong citizens through the mass media. When standardised Chinese translations of certain technical terms are unavailable, Hong Kong citizens use the English terms to fill those lexical gaps. This is considered expedient mixing (Yau, 1993, pp. 29-31; Tsang and Wong, 2004, p. 769; Tam, 2013, p. 480). The second of these situations arises because, as one of the official languages of Hong Kong, English is used in many official documents, including legal documents. Whenever there are discrepancies between versions of these documents, the English version often prevails. This creates an impression that English has a higher status than Chinese. As a result, some Hong Kong citizens embed English words into their sentences to impress others. This is considered orientational mixing (Gibbons, 1987, pp. 6-8; Yau, 1993, p. 26; Tsang and Wong, 2004, p. 768). This also recalls the practice of some English speakers who incorporate Latin or French words and phrases to make their speech appear more academic or romantic (Porter, 2008, pp. 262-265).

As previously mentioned, when the Golden Forum was founded in 1999, it was a place for users to discuss topics related to computer hardware and software. Although the topics are no longer limited to computers, forum members generally possess greater knowledge of information technology than average, non-member citizens. As a result, forum members are generally more familiar with English technical terms and are more likely than non-members to embed English words in their sentences through expedient mixing. Moreover, for the sake of cordial and effective communication, forum members write their posts and comments in Cantonese instead of standard written Chinese (Lam, 2011, pp. 125-126).<sup>11</sup>

In addition to expedient mixing, forum members also engage in orientational mixing. For example, in Chapter 17, Teenager with Glasses says:

If a person understands *Morse code*, I cannot believe he doesn't know *SOS*, a standard distress signal. It is unbelievable and simply doesn't *make sense*.<sup>12</sup> [my translation]

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<sup>10</sup> I will discuss this later in this article.

<sup>11</sup> Although Cantonese is the mother tongue of most Hong Kong citizens, they are taught to write in standard written Chinese in schools (Snow, 2004, p. 45).

<sup>12</sup> In this sentence, the words in italic were originally written in English in the novel.

In the above dialogue, “SOS” does not have a Chinese translation, but “Morse code” has a Cantonese counterpart, and “make sense” can also be expressed in Cantonese. In this case, Teenager with Glasses embeds the latter two phrases into his sentences for reasons other than those of strict necessity.

## 6. Method

In considering the reasons for code-switching in the text, we should not overlook the fact that the author of the novel, Mr.Pizza, was also a member of the Golden Forum. Although it was his intention to embed more English words into the sentences spoken by Teenager with Glasses to emphasise Cantonese-English code-switching as a common speaking practice amongst forum members, after the character’s death in Chapter 18, instances of code-switching still abound. This yields an opportunity to apply semiotic analysis and to study the cultural meanings behind those instances of code-switching.

Semiotic analysis was described and elaborated in the 1910s as a research method within the field of linguistics. Since the 1970s, the universal adaptability of the method has been widely recognised (Deacon et al., 2010, p. 141). Through semiotic analysis, scholars study the cultural and ideological meanings of signs by understanding the relationships between their denotations [literal meanings] and connotations [latent meanings] (Deacon et al., 2010, pp. 144-145; Suspitsyna, 2013, p. 1354). For example, Park (2016) studied the cultural differences between Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States by comparing the Korean-English and Korean-Japanese translations of photo captions; Leipämaa-Leskinen et al. (2018) studied how depictions of horses in the Finnish media influenced people’s perception of eating horsemeat. In this article, I studied how Golden culture affected Mr.Pizza’s word choice and use of Cantonese-English code-switching in his novel.

Through the course of this investigation, I read the online novel and identified all the English words therein. I copied those English words to a Microsoft Excel document. Additionally, I copied the sentences containing those English words to the same document so that I could understand their context. After gathering all the English words, I listed them in alphabetical order and recorded their frequency of use. Then, I deleted duplicate entries with identical usages, such as characters’ names and brand names. For every remaining entry, I asked a few questions. First, I checked the denotations of the English words. Second, I studied the connotations of the words, if any, in the specific context of the provided sentences. Lastly, if the code-switching was not an example of expedient mixing, I examined the cultural meaning underlying the usage.

## 7. Results

A total of 31 chapters of the novel were published on the Golden Forum (Mr.Pizza, 2012a), while the subsequent and final 11 chapters could only be found on the novel’s Facebook page (Mr.Pizza, 2012b). In sum, the novel contains 270,723 words, amongst which were 1,789 English words. The following table shows the English words that were used at least 10 times in the novel and that I will discuss in the proceeding section:

Table 1: Frequency of English words

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
Adidas	4	Major Tom	45
D	7	mak	6
David Bowie	17	make sense	10
dum	3	MK	36
dup	2	Morse code	13
fuck	31	okay	14
full system reset	21	ON 9	2
Greensleeves	8	pattern	12
help	11	Peter	168
Hi	43	shit	28
Hi Auntie	2	sip	1
Hi Hi	55	Space Oddity	15
Holy shit	6	Stop la	2
Jasmine	20	van	335
K	12	wor	3
lo	1	Yuki	360
LV	55		

The above-listed English words were categorised according to their respective types, as follows:

Abbreviations: K (karaoke), MK (Mongkok);<sup>13</sup>

Brand names: Adidas, LV (Louis Vuitton);

Cantonese homophones: D, dum, dup, lo, mak, ON 9, sip, wor;

Names: David Bowie, Jasmine, Major Tom, Peter, Yuki;

Normal words: full system reset, help, make sense, Morse code, okay, pattern, van;

Songs: Greensleeves, Space Oddity;

Substitute words: Hi, Hi Auntie, Hi Hi, Stop la;<sup>14</sup>

Swear words: fuck, Holy shit, shit.

## 8. Discussions

Amongst the English words found in the novel, some are not regular English words, such as “dup”, “mak”, and “wor”. These are instead Cantonese homophones. Some of them, such as “D (啲)”, “dup (搵)”, “lo (囉)”, and “wor (囑)”, are often used by Hong Kong citizens to replace their Cantonese counterparts for the sake of convenient messaging. For others, such as “dum (井)”, “mak (擊)”, and “sip (駛)”, their Cantonese counterparts are so complicated and rarely used that most readers of the novel would not be able to easily understand them. As a result, the author used homophones to replace those difficult Cantonese words so that, through understanding context, readers could guess what the English words were representing.

I argue these instances of Cantonese-English code-switching can be regarded as an alternative form of orientational mixing—for the sake of readability, the author deliberately used English words to replace complicated Cantonese words. Instead of using English words, the author might have used standard written Chinese words to replace the aforementioned Cantonese words. However, this choice would have affected the forum members’ affinity with the novel, as most of the forum members are Hong Kong citizens, who are deeply influenced by Cantonese culture. It would have been jarring for them to find standard written Chinese words in a vernacular novel (Lam, 2011, pp. 125-126). The choice has political valences. If the forum members were asked to choose whether Chinese or Cantonese culture was more pertinent to their sense of identity, they would undoubtedly choose Cantonese culture. This is similar to how alt-righters would typically defend their own unique identity as a group and subculture as more primary to their sense of self, though most alt-righters fall within the larger identity category of white people (Gray, 2018, p. 142; Dafaure, 2020, p. 2). In other words, these instances of Cantonese-English code-switching are, somehow, manifestations of localism.

There were also regular English words found in the novel that did not predictably conform to the context of their sentences, such as “hi auntie”, “hi hi”, and “stop la”. These were the outputs of the foul language filter on the Golden Forum. As previously outlined in the discussion of Golden culture, foul language is prevalent on the Golden Forum, which mirrors the vituperative language used by alt-righters (Forscher and Kteily, 2020, pp. 90-91). The forum thus introduced a foul language filter to replace some swear words and dysphemisms in posts and comments (Lam, 2011, pp. 126-129). These replacements include “hi auntie” which replaces “屌你老母(fuck your mother)”, “hi hi” which is the substitute for “仆街(fall down)”, and “stop la” which is the output when “收皮(shut up)” is entered (Au Yeung, 2017, pp. 21-22). It is noteworthy that these instances of Cantonese-English code-switching cannot be regarded as expedient mixing nor orientational mixing, as the substituted words are not inputted by the poster or commenter—or, in this case, the author of the novel, Mr.Pizza. Instead, I call them system-generated code-switching. This kind of code-switching is very common in the Golden Forum and also constituted about 10% of the instances of code-switching in the first 31 chapters of the novel. However, it is not observed outside content posted on the forum: in the last 11 chapters of the novel, which were published on Facebook, no instances of system-generated code-switching were found.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the substituted words are unintelligible to non-members. As a result, although many Hong Kong citizens are used to swearing (Lam, 2011, p. 125; Au Yeung, 2017, pp. 26-28), the “foul language culture” is uniquely expressed on the Golden Forum.

<sup>13</sup> Mongkok is the starting location of the minibus in the novel.

<sup>14</sup> These substitute words are the outputs of the foul language filter of the Golden Forum. I will discuss them in more detail in the next section.

<sup>15</sup> An interesting finding is that that instances of “ON 9”—which has a similar pronunciation to “蠢屎 (stupid and ridiculous)” and is replaced by “傻的嗎” on the forum—were found in the last 11 chapters of the novel.

Unlike the forum's substitute words, most Hong Kong citizens understand English swear words such as "fuck" and "shit" (Au Yeung, 2017, p. 42). In the novel, Ar Chi and the university students occasionally swear using these English swear words. Surprisingly, the foul language filter does not replace these popular swear words, so they remain present throughout the novel. Other traces of foreign cultures can also be found in the novel. For example, the passengers are guided to reset a system which is designed by Dr David Law, who is a fan of David Bowie, and so names the system Major Tom—the astronaut in Bowie's "Space Oddity". Similarly, the traditional English folk song "Greensleeves", performed by the Sinfonia of London, was used in the novel to evoke the memories of those who had undergone public examinations about their experiences listening to the radio (Lai, 2017). These cultural references demonstrate that the Golden Forum is not strictly opposed to multiculturalism, unlike most of the alt-right online communities (Nagle, 2017, p. 16; Boehme and Scott, 2020, p. 176; Dafaure, 2020, p. 2). Rather, forum members are keen to make use of foreign cultures to add spice to their posts and comments.

Yet, forum members do resolutely reject any perceived threat to Cantonese culture. Since the transfer of sovereignty in 1997, more than one million people who were previously unfamiliar with Cantonese culture have immigrated from China via the One-way Permit Scheme (Ng and Ng, 2018). On the heels of this, the government has subsidised primary and secondary schools to persuade them to teach Chinese language in Mandarin, instead of Cantonese (Liu, 2017). The younger generations of Hong Kong are thus being alienated from Cantonese culture. As a result, most of the forum members dislike those Chinese who speak Mandarin. The forum members are likewise unwilling to admit that Hong Kong is a part of China. Chinese people are widely regarded as "locusts" in the Forum, implying that they are eating away at Hong Kong's resources and culture (Chiu, 2016, p. 58; Lai, 2016, p. 261). The forum members perceive everything related to China as being "disgusting".<sup>16</sup> When they mention foreign brands, such as Adidas and Louis Vuitton, forum members do not use the "disgusting" Chinese translations of those brand names. Instead, they will use the English brand names. In other words, the Golden Forum is not as politically diverse as it is described as being by its CEO Joe Lam; rather, it is notably anti-China. This is comparable to and compatible with the anti-communist sentiment of the alt-righters (Cluverius et al., 2020, pp. 1708-1709; Dafaure, 2020, p. 16). This also reiterates the relationship between Cantonese-English code-switching and anti-China sentiment of the forum members.

Of course, Chinese culture has its merits, and Chinese language and social contributions are not inherently "disgusting". However, similar to the alt-righters, members of the Golden Forum are keen to label and criticise numerous "bad things", so as to reinforce their sense of superiority (Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 2020, p. 567). For example, forum members frequently stereotype women whom they dislike as "Kong women" (Chiu, 2016, p. 17; Erni, 2017, p. 36). In the novel, the first casualty is called LV Kong woman.<sup>17</sup> Ar Chi has never spoken to her, but he guesses that her hobbies are watching boring television programs, talking nonsense with her friends, and queuing up to the Louis Vuitton flagship store. Moreover, two young passengers assert that she is a prostitute, as they believe that otherwise she would not be able to afford her Louis Vuitton handbag. These prejudices against women reflect the ways the Golden Forum is similar to many alt-right online communities in which misogyny is prevalent (Connell and Pearse, 2015, p. 81; Thompson, 2018, pp. 109-110; Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019, p. 5008).

In qualitative research, the absence of some data can be as important as the presence of other data (Gallaher, 2021, p. 245). I was not surprised that nothing about the Clown, re-creation, nor doxing was found in my research data. There are no plots concerning the Clown nor re-creation in the novel. Conversely, the university students do search the Internet for the minibus driver's mobile number via doxing strategies, but the author depicts this scene without recourse to English. Indeed, though the Clown is still the "emblem" of the Golden Forum, re-creation and doxing are not as prominent as they were a decade ago. Following the Umbrella Movement, the government proposed to amend the Copyright Bill, which aimed to strictly regulate re-creation. Although the reading of the bill was unsuccessful, forum members have worried about being prosecuted for their previously re-created works if the legislation passed in the future (Lau, 2016). Since the outbreak of the protests in 2019, the police have also applied for an injunction to prohibit citizens from doxing police officers (Siu and Pang, 2019), and legislation against all forms of doxing is currently underway (Lau, 2021). These developments have caused re-creation and doxing—the foundations for Golden culture—and hence the Golden Forum, to wane.

This study shows that amongst the components of Golden culture proposed by Lam (2011), foul language is still prevalent in the forum. Whereas, re-creation and doxing are on the wane, and the forum members are mostly right-leaning. Therefore, pro-democracy and localism—or anti-China and anti-establishment—are the mainstream ideologies

<sup>16</sup> In 2012, some forum members collectively re-created a song "Disgusting Chinese Style" from the popular Korean song "Gangnam Style", which was performed by PSY (Lai, 2016, p. 262).

<sup>17</sup> LV is the acronym for Louis Vuitton.

of the forum. This makes the Golden Forum meet the basic condition for becoming an alt-right online community. Also, similar to the alt-righters, forum members possess a strong sense of opposition to external groups (Koulouris, 2018, pp. 754-756; Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 2020, p. 567), such as misogyny and calling Chinese people “locusts”.<sup>18</sup> In addition, apart from the language difference due to geographical and ethnic factors—forum members practise Cantonese-English code-switching, while most of the alt-righters use English—the languages of the Golden Forum and other alt-right online communities are comparable—acrimonious languages and extensive use of icons and memes. All in all, many members of the Golden Forum can be considered alt-righters, and the Golden Forum is hence an online community where alt-righters in Hong Kong aggregate.

## 9. Conclusion

Cantonese-English code-switching is a common feature of the speech of Hong Kong citizens, who embed English words into their sentences to fill lexical gaps as well as to signal status. This article is the first study of Cantonese-English code-switching in a written text. Through an examination of the novel *Lost on a Red Minibus to Taipo*, which was originally published online, I found that members of the Golden Forum, as well as many Hong Kong citizens, replace complex Cantonese words with English words for the sake of convenience. Additionally, as a result of the foul language filter on the Golden Forum, unintentional, system-generated code-switching also features in user posts.

I also examined other of Golden culture’s components, including localism, anti-China sentiment, and misogyny. Many components of Golden culture are compatible with the beliefs and tactics of the alt-right, although forum members seemingly embrace various cultures other than Chinese culture. As the forum is notably anti-China and anti-establishment, I considered it as an online forum where alt-righters aggregate. Consequently, as with other alt-right online communities, the Golden Forum is facing suppression from authorities.

To date, the Golden Forum is one of the very few communities where anti-establishment ideology is prevalent. Following the implementation of the National Security Law in July 2020, Hong Kong’s largest pro-democracy newspaper, *Apple Daily*, was forced to shut down in June 2021 (Davidson, 2021), after which the closure of pro-democracy online news media *Stand News* in December 2021. Pro-democracy citizens were busy backing up news articles over the New Year holidays (Cheung, 2021). We can well imagine that, in the face of this, the Golden Forum has only two options—either to embrace a pro-establishment ethos or to likewise shut down. In either case, it is never healthy for a state to have only a single voice. This is the reason why I revisited Golden culture before the forum’s transformation.

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to calling Chinese people “locusts”, forum members also regard South Asian people, Muslims, and black people as “locust larvae”, “roundworms”, and “caterpillars”, respectively (Chiu, 2016, pp. 57-59).



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