

C & G interviewing Ming about Hong Kong's Harcourt Road

Interview Date: 5th August, 2024

The interview was conducted in Hong Kong Cantonese.

The following is the English translation of the transcript.

C: Clara Cheung, G: Gum Cheng, M: Ming

G: All right, we're starting the interview now. It's Monday, August 5, 2024, around 2:17 p.m. We're here to talk with M: about their personal memories and stories connected to Harcourt Road. M:, did you get to know about Harcourt Road in the 2014 Occupy Movement, or were you familiar with it before?

M:[01:09] I actually wasn't really aware of Harcourt Road before 2014. I didn't even know how to pronounce that Chinese character for "Kok" (鰐), so I looked it up. That's when I learned it was pronounced "Hah-kok" in Cantonese.

C:[01:21] Any idea when that was?

M:[01:23] Definitely sometime before 2014. I don't remember exactly. I just recall seeing the unfamiliar character, looking it up.

G:[01:31] Fair enough. In Hong Kong, if it's not a commonly traveled road, you might never learn the name. So did you ever visit that area before 2014? What was your first and most memorable encounter with Harcourt Road?

M:[02:01] I lived in Peng Chau for a while and often took the ferry to Central. My usual walks in the Central district led me past Harcourt Road, though I didn't pay it much attention. I grew up in Kowloon and didn't spend much time in Central until later. Eventually, I started hanging around the Landmark area or near the Universal Trade Centre. I suspect I first noticed "Harcourt Road" just from walking by and seeing a sign with that odd character.

C:[02:44] What was your sense of that neighborhood back then? Did anything in particular stand out about Harcourt Road or the surrounding streets?

M:[03:09] Not really. It was just another road to pass on my way between the ferry pier and places like Landmark or the Universal Trade Centre. I'd see the sign or pass over via the pedestrian footbridge.

G:[04:13] In late 2011, the Hong Kong government headquarters moved next to Harcourt Road. Did that shift your impression of it at all, having the government there?

M:[04:40] Not especially, except maybe I passed by a bit more. Back in the day, protest marches ended closer to Government Hill. But once the government offices were relocated, we had to walk farther to get there (laughs).

C:[05:24] You mentioned living in Peng Chau in the 1990s. From 2011 onward, did you start passing by more often? How about Harcourt Road in 2014, did it hold any special memories for you?

M:[06:39] For sure. It was kind of a nice place to sleep overnight (laughs). Though to be honest, I rarely slept directly on Harcourt Road. More often, I camped on that little "island" between the government headquarters and the demonstration area on the ground floor of the Legislative Council Complex('LegCo demonstration area'). But of course, to get in and out, you had to cross Harcourt Road. I remember in 2014 some people mentioned there was

a place to shower near The Hong Kong Academy of PerformM: Arts ('HKAPA'), though I never used it. The more vivid memory is that so many fascinating things sprang up around: for instance, the makeshift study room with tents and tables. Some friends helped set it up: arranging drainage, securing tarps, turning it into something like a proper library or study area—complete with bicycle-powered generators. It was incredible. There were also supply stations. I even went around doing some informal interviews to find out why people joined. A few just said they'd shown up "to see tear gas." (laughs)

C:[07:51] So you actually interviewed people there?

M:[07:52] Yes. A few friends and I talked to folks, wrote some articles. After that, I realised that only some of them were strictly there for "genuine universal suffrage." I remember one supply station had a brand-new water dispenser they'd rescued from a convention expo in the nearby Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre because it was going to be thrown away. It was such a quirky scene: random bits of furniture or equipment, with people improvising new uses for them.

Then we started thinking more deeply: what are people actually doing out here? Right, so yeah, I interviewed a few young people at that supply station. They were all mad about the situation so they came out. So I have a lot of memories from [around Harcourt Road], some interesting stories. I mostly hang out at that "island" though—the one I slept on. That island was pretty awesome. It even had hammocks for people to sleep on. Some folks came by for a nap. We'd jam on a not-very-good ukulele, singing "Umbrellas In the Night" [a protest song]. People would walk by and ask, "Can I film you?" Apparently they wanted to make some short videos. I asked, "What do I do?" , they said they didn't want everything to look too sad, with only scenes of clashes, negativity... I found that interesting. We even kept in touch, though after 2019 I lost track of them.

G: [09:59] That little "island" is on Tim Mei Avenue.

M: [10:03] Yes, next to Harcourt Road. We were neighbors (laughs).

C: [10:09] Could you talk more about how the study area you mentioned was built up? For example, the materials used, like a process of constructing it. It's almost like building a new space. Do you remember how it started, who helped out with building or with setting things up?

M: [10:31] Actually, I wasn't there watching it from the beginning. I only knew what people told me. I do know that originally they sheltered themselves just with umbrellas, which was so crude (laughs). Later, the study room I remember was under a proper canopy. I recall that being quite well-constructed...

G: [10:52] Yes, it got bigger and more elaborate as time went on—it was quite impressive.

M: [10:59] I remember that many students refused to go home after school. They'd stay and effectively live out there. Maybe they couldn't get along with their families, so they ended up camping on Harcourt Road, or around there. I'm not sure exactly how it got started. From what I know, students really did do their homework out there, and people taught them. It was beautiful. I knew some friends who worked in stage production, backstage, props, that sort of thing. They built things—like I recall at home I once had a small wooden stool, about knee-height. They were building stools or chairs like that on site. So yeah, it was a group of people who realised "It's raining; that's no good, we need drainage!" so they rushed to fix it. Some of them were professional stagehands or lighting technicians—backstage folks I know. Others might have been actual scaffolders. Because they were so good at building barricades from bamboo scaffolding (laughs).

G: [12:51] I remember seeing a whole truckload of bamboo (laughs) carted over there.

M: [12:58] “The Three-Minute Upgraded to ‘city’ level,” right? That’s a video gamer’s phrase, apparently. I didn’t know it either until someone told me, “They’re all gamers. They call it “the three-minute Upgraded to ‘city’ level”, and it’s just built that fast!” (laughs)

G: [13:20] You mentioned gaM:. How would you describe the relationship between young people’s protest activities and the gaM: world they come from?

M: [13:34] I think people bring their own life experience into real life. If you only ever gamed alone, you might not necessarily make that connection. But online gaM: is often team-based—people share experiences. And that’s powerful, turning something that’s often scolded as “useless” into something concrete and useful, even turning fantasy scenarios into reality.

G: [14:28] They were creating something, right? At least they managed to set up real structures.

M: [14:32] It wasn’t easy. I tried building stuff too. I remember needing wooden pallets...

G: [14:39] Yes, so many pallets.

M: [14:40] I wasn’t there 24/7 in Admiralty, but whenever I was out and saw some pallets, someone would shout “Pallet! Pallet!” wanting to take it. Obviously, we usually wouldn’t. But we’d get excited whenever we saw pallets around (laughs).

G: [14:54] Like seeing a truck with a load of pallets, they’re unloading, unloading...

M: [15:08] Hongkongers are amazing, truly. Back when everything first started—on September 27, 2014. Right after 9/26, when the storM: of Civic Square happened, the next day we were all out there. People asked, “What supplies are needed?” I remember they yelled from the stage, “We need goggles!” and soon loads of goggles were brought in. Then we had no way to charge our phones, and someone shouted, “We’re out of battery!” People asked what model phone you have, then at once they brought in chargers. That all happened within hours, which I found crazy. Hongkongers were just ready for that. Or were they? I sometimes wonder where that readiness came from.

C: [16:02] When our Mobile Museum van goes out, we often get asked, “How exactly did [the 2014 protests] start?” Everyone has a slightly different story because it’s a large area and people stood at different spots, each with their own view of “the beginning.” Do you recall anything about how that Occupy action actually kicked off, on the night of September 27 or 28, from your perspective?

M: [16:31] On the night of the 26th, I was in Sham Shui Po doing a “street performance,” encouraging people to pay attention... because Occupy Central with Love and Peace[OCLP, Hong Kong civil disobedience campaign launched on 24 September 2014, partially leading to the 2014 Occupation Movement in Hong Kong] was brewing for October 1 call for occupation action. Then, on my way home from Sham Shui Po to Tai Po—kind of far—I heard that the storM: of Civic Square had happened. Before that, there’d been a student strike. As the strike was winding down, Scholarism [a student group] had hinted that something else would happen, if I recall correctly. Suddenly, people rushed into Civic Square. I saw video footage afterward. A crowd stormed the square, and I thought, “Oh dear, they’ve gotten in; this is scary and dangerous; they’re surrounded.” But I’d just gotten home—it didn’t make sense to go back out. So I stayed, watching a livestream, I can’t recall which channel. It was agonizing: should I go out or not? Ultimately, I went out early the next morning. I already had in mind what gear I might need, but it turned out my backpack wasn’t up to it (laughs). I arrived to find everyone standing around, seeing how things would develop. At that point on the 27th, roads weren’t yet blocked. People started calling for goggles, phone chargers, and so on.

M: [18:37] Yes—because some people had entered Civic Square on the 26th or 27th, so you might go over there near Tim Mei Avenue. Folks surrounded Civic Square...?

M: [18:47] The first move was telling people, “We don’t have anything, so let’s at least secure the toilets!” Because, on June 13 that year—during the Northeast New Territories LegCo funding fiasco—people surrounded the LegCo building, but eventually had to leave to find a restroom. Once you left, you couldn’t get back to that line around LegCo. So I said, “Our first move is to secure the toilets.” We carried barricades around them (laughs). I think, back then, some of us who’d participated in protests and activism since perhaps 1989 recognised a pattern.

Also, the Occupy Central folks did plenty of preparations in early 2014—trainings, etc. We’d been involved in social movements or student movements. We had actually prepared—starting back in 2013 into early 2014. Through the Occupy Central With Love and Peace initiative, we made plans for what to do and how to handle things when the time came, including what kind of training we needed.

G: [20:13] They did some rehearsals?

M: [20:15] Yes, some rather funny practice sessions (laughs). Looking back, they’re still quite amusing. So I suggested to people in the street, “Let’s block off the washrooms!” People seemed to listen.

G: [20:35] Who exactly were you talking to at that moment?

M: [20:36] Anyone out there on the street.

G: [20:38] Did everyone, both older and younger, pay attention to what you said?

M: [20:45] Yes. They felt it made sense. They fenced off the area with barricades, including the footbridge that leads up from “Civic Square.” My friends and I stood guard there for a long while. Another funny incident: The police were said to be hiding in a low planter near the parking garage of CITIC Tower, ready to pop out. So I told people, “Why don’t we sit around the planter and keep watch?” So dozens of us literally sat there watching a planter (laughs). In the end, nothing happened. I suspect it was just that people felt they should do something, but didn’t know what. When someone suggested a feasible task, they gladly did it. It was that sense of cooperation—also seen in 2019, even more so. Back in 2014, we already had a hunch that tear gas might be used. On the 27th I’d packed vinegar-soaked towels to hand out to friends. Actually, a friend of mine who’s a police officer told me tear gas was likely, so we were prepared. Then later that day, another friend said the roads would probably get shut down. If they did, I’d have to jump a bridge (laughs). I said, “That’s really serious, will die” and was about to discuss it, but got sidetracked by someone else. Also, my gear was inadequate, so I went home early on the 28th to change and came back out. Meanwhile, that friend said, “I might climb the bridge now,” and I asked him to wait for me (laughs). Then... (hesitates) well, not sure I can say certain things if you’re going to broadcast this... but anyway, that is an important point. A friend of mine was up on the bridge, took a photo, which circulated. That was how people below realised something and managed to break the police cordon. The judge brought that up in the trial.

C: [24:40] So your friend was standing on the bridge, and because of that, you mean people on the ground realised how to break the cordon?

M: [24:58] There was definitely some reason. Maybe they saw with their own eyes or heard something. In any case, once they saw, or heard something, they realised they could open a path to bring in air mattresses [for a potential jump]. The judge mentioned in the trial that’s why the cordon was opened. That was basically how I remember the blockade breaking.

C: [25:34] So from September 28 onward, many people stayed put, starting that whole occupation? They didn't leave; they decided to remain, right?

M: [25:53] Yes.

C: [25:54] Earlier you said you did interviews with some participants during the occupation. Can you say more about who you decided to interview, or who was willing to talk? What was that like?

M: [26:11] We mostly interviewed people who ran supply stations. We figured these people were committed to staying, wanting to do something. We asked them, "Why did you come out here? Are you here for genuine universal suffrage?" They said yes, but it wasn't their first reason.

G: [27:03] What does Harcourt Road mean to you? Would you say it symbolises the fight for democracy, for genuine double universal suffrage [Chief Executive and Legislative Council], or was it a starting point that awakened some people?

M: [27:45] We called it "Harcourt Village."

G: [27:47] Harcourt Village? Could you talk about that?

M: [27:50] "Harcourt Village" was the community of people who slept right on Harcourt Road. They were called "villagers." I only heard the term "Harcourt Village." I'm not sure about "Tim Mei Village."

G: [28:07] I've never heard of a Tim Mei Village either.

M: [28:09] But it's not just Harcourt Road, is it? There's Harcourt Road, Tim Mei Avenue, LegCo demonstration area. So if you're only talking about the Admiralty cluster, it's not just Harcourt Road—it extends to Queensway, though that portion was later cleared. Also near the HKAPA footbridge—maybe that's not part of Harcourt Road?

G: [28:37] Yes, the overhead road near HKAPA that goes back down to Harcourt is still Harcourt Road.

M: [28:44] That reminds me of something I left out. You asked how the occupation started—I was at that footbridge near the Academy for PerformM: Arts. The police shoved me into a big pillar. It could've caused serious injury. Nevertheless, we anticipated possible violence. We ended up below the HKAPA building on that road. People were like, "Let's occupy this area!" Others said, "But we need to help those over there!" And I said, "Why not occupy both places?" Then I sat down on the road (laughs). Eventually a vehicle came along, so we got up, but then more people flowed out, and that's how that area got occupied. Different spots spontaneously sprang up. Otherwise, we would've just stayed around the government headquarters.

G: [29:58] Yes, the occupied area had to expand; you couldn't just stay in that one spot.

M: [30:00] That's why it spread to Causeway Bay and Mong Kok. I guess at first the police had no idea how to handle it. Right before that moment, I did something quite funny on the 28th. We had a small group of police officers in front of the APA entrance, about ten in total. So I stood up and shouted, "Officers in front, don't be afraid! You are now surrounded by citizens, but we won't hurt you!" (laughs). It was so random, but I felt it was a funny statement of fact. I sensed they really didn't know what was going on. Right after that, we walked out onto the road and occupied it.

C: [30:59] This was near the HKAPA?

M: [31:03] Yes, near the main entrance facing the big road, which connects with Harcourt Road. That's why I'm describing it in such detail—Harcourt Road wasn't the only spot. For me, personally, I wasn't based in Harcourt Village; I was on that "island," at Tim Mei Avenue. Besides, so many events occurred in different locations. Harcourt Road is important, especially that driving ramp, that flyover. I recall being exhausted from the occupation—still having to work. I couldn't sleep out there every day because I lived so far away, in Sha Tau Kok. One day, I was too tired and decided to chill at a Thai restaurant nearby. It had large glass windows overlooking that flyover. The view was strangely beautiful. I felt so relaxed, which was ironic given that we were in the midst of a serious struggle for something we knew we might not achieve (laughs). In that moment though, seeing the scene out there gave me this carnival-like vibe—like maybe there were balloons or dancing, though obviously not. And after that, we left. Then came the night right before the clearance. That day, I couldn't stay because I had to go to work. Then I watched them take down that banner, which I believe was in or around Harcourt Road.

C: [34:07] Back in 2014 at Harcourt Village (or nearby Tim Mei Avenue, Queensway, etc.), people set up study areas and bicycle-powered generators, among other things. Were there any other community-organised activities you recall? Any public discussions or things that were collectively done there that stand out?

M: [34:46] Yes, they also tried wind-powered electricity (laughs). Over by the Far East Finance Centre, which gets strong gusts. I asked them how effective it was. Probably not super effective, but they wanted to try. That's fun. As for discussions, there were lots. Someone would have a mic, and we'd gather round. That was fantastic, people were trying to talk things out—though in hindsight, I realised not everyone really knew how to have a constructive conversation. Some folks would just say their piece without real back-and-forth, so there was no progress. At the time, I didn't notice it, but afterwards, in the civic groups that formed post-2014, I realised everyone just spoke their mind without truly engaging. But that's normal, I guess. We'd never had that experience before.

G: [36:25] So basically everyone gave their own monologue without deeper interaction?

M: [36:28] Yes, a lot of that. I joined some civic groups that did post-screening discussion, some were great and did reflect on the film's themes, but others just talked about random personal stuff.

C: [36:52] That was after the 2014 Occupy Movement ended?

M: [36:56] Yes, out in local neighborhoods every week. I think 2014 prompted a surge of these small gatherings—especially in Mong Kok, but also in Admiralty. Some small-scale, some just circles of people chatting. I had served as a facilitator. Sometimes we'd go talk to the occupiers about whether to open certain areas so regular traffic wouldn't be disrupted too much. Or [Occupy Central leaders] would send facilitators like me to talk with them. I never got cussed out; people were pretty receptive. Also, I remember a friend who held ukulele lessons at the protest, bringing extra ukuleles for the crowd, or they'd stage "playback theatre" near LegCo demonstration area. I participated in that. Then there was free food, people brought donated food, such as expensive brand sushi. Occupiers who didn't know each other were like, "Wow, such great food!" That's part of it: supplies just poured in. The Convention Centre expo folks gave us all kinds of leftover items...

C: [39:03] Water dispensers?

M: [39:04] That was just one example. There was a lot of stuff sent to the LegCo demonstration area. The area started to look like a luxury apartment—full of furniture. It became a living space, a public space that felt private. We also did recycling. All these things carried an important message.

G: [39:30] Before 2014—before the Occupy movement—many people described

Hongkongers as a bit selfish, not that keen to share. They questioned how people could quickly mobilize to bring supplies. How do you see it? What was the turning point?

M: [40:12] Not sure about a precise turning point, but I feel Hong Kong was never that bad. We talk about the “Lion Rock spirit.” Old RTHK shows about Lion Rock reflect similar mutual aid. Actually, I want to give some credit to OCLP—they spent an entire year doing “deliberation days,” where random strangers got together in facilitated sessions. As a facilitator in a few sessions, I saw how many participants said they never had the chance to express their ideals (not just political, but also community-related) to the people around them. After these sessions, a network formed. People would create WhatsApp groups, etc. I experienced that in 2014: a bunch of strangers joined the movement and ended up forming lasting bonds. You might trust them more than many others. I’ve been in the UK for three years. One of those folks has visited me here three times—he is still based in Hong Kong. Actually, this might have always existed—we just didn’t have an outlet for it before. Historically, Hongkongers have channeled this impulse into charitable efforts, like donating for flood relief in mainland China, or the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, etc. Hong Kong is quite an educated society. Even working-class folks often have the knowledge and sense to push for something bigger. By 2014 it all converged, though there had been precursors like the HKTV movement [about awarding broadcasting licenses], or the Anti-National Education Movement (2012).

C: [43:48] Would you say it involved some shared civic demands or a spirit of mutual support?

M: [43:54] Yes, for sure—partly it’s about those common aims. But also, previous movements let people practice mobilizing, collecting supplies, and so on. So the capacity was there. Then in 2014, there was this ‘awakening.’ From 2014 up to 2019, it just exploded; People quickly fell into place. There’s also the yearly June 4th vigil [Annual Hong Kong gatherings commemorating the victims of 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, calling for vindication of the protests and for democracy and freedom in China]. People don’t just go to the assembly; they also look for ways to support the organisations—buying things, donating money, including supporting the Hong Kong Alliance, the main organiser. It’s not that these things just popped out of nowhere; I believe they’ve always been around, just waiting for the right moment. Suddenly everything converged.”

I recall watching a documentary called *Umbrella Diaries: The First Umbrella*, seeing footage of the first tear gas canisters. Everyone started chanting “Hongkongers!” I found that very moving. Also, I remember on the night tear gas was fired, the government threatened to use live rounds. Some young people brought supplies, but they were scared and unsure what to do. I told them, “You can decide for yourselves how best to use your supplies. There’s no single group telling you what to do anymore.” They thought about it, agreed, then went off to figure it out on their own.

C: [47:18] When the 2014 Occupy protest “ended,” people left the site. After that, did you return to Harcourt Road at some later point? Or was the next major memory from 2019?

M: [47:43] The next memory was tears (laughs), because when I revisit the occupy site. And feeling it was so inconvenient—before, we could take a straight path from the bus terminal at Admiralty Centre to the bathrooms. Suddenly we couldn’t. So that was my immediate memory. After the clearance, I saw leftover marks and scribbled notes on the ground...

C: [48:24] So if you compare that with 2019’s protest movement—again, many events took place, some around Harcourt Road near Government HQ. Did you have particular experiences of Harcourt Road in 2019?

M: [48:44] I do. For me, July 1 stands out. The night of June 30 I stayed out so late, and the next morning I woke up somewhere on Hong Kong Island, discovered things were chaotic,

so I rushed over. We heard there'd be a clearance by noon or something. I recall a group of protestors broke into the Legislative Council building, brought out photos from inside, and were carrying them around. I have a friend who was part of a first-aid team. I'm a social worker, so we thought we should head to another area. That day felt tense, but it wasn't violently so. People had entered LegCo, but in the afternoon, there was some friction with the pan-democratic legislators who tried to get them to leave. Emotions were running high—like we'd hit boiling point. We worried about serious police violence in the LegCo demonstration area, so the FA(first-aid volunteers) had to do their job.

So we parted ways. I said goodbye to a FA, or more like we parted with a kiss (laughs). At that moment, none of us knew what would happen next. But nothing major occurred—thankfully. Back in 2014, there was a main stage on Harcourt Road, but I wasn't around it that much. I do remember once they tried to dismantle the "main stage," and I stayed nearby, worried about clashes. Another memory is that footbridge near the Legislative Council. It might have been June 17, 2019. I spent the night in the LegCo demonstration area . Next morning, the police seemed to want us out of Harcourt Road and Tim Mei Avenue. Why were we in the protest zone the night before? Because I was chatting with some protesters who stayed overnight. The conversation was quite interesting. Then the next day, we spotted a line of 30-40 police heading our way with a big speaker system. They might have been a negotiation team. I was filming them while they set up. We also had a mic, with a crowd of protesters behind us—likely because we'd gotten to know them the night before. We started speaking a bit, and then the police said something along the lines of, 'We're not really doing anything; we just want you to leave, that's all. After all, everyone has to work'. (laughs) So I responded with a few words of my own. We said to the police, "We're not official representatives of anyone. Different people want to speak." So we shared the mic. People lined up and made statements. I don't recall exactly, but eventually the police left.

G: [54:43] How long did that conversation last—about an hour?

M: [54:47] It was a decent stretch, but not an hour. Maybe 10-20 minutes, or half an hour. Then the police left, and everyone felt excited that we could just talk them down. My lawyer told me later, "Wow, apparently you can talk the police into leaving!" So that was uplifting. And it was June 17, just after June 12. Everyone expected nasty clashes, but we had a civil discussion. People felt really good. After that, we left the road, so we didn't continue blocking it. Then a few younger protestors came over and asked for my advice. I found that moment important because it showed that young people did have ideas but didn't know what to do. When they saw we were sensible, they approached us for a chat. That theme also cropped up a day or two earlier (or later)—some student union folks came by, and we wondered if they'd find us old folks annoying. But before we decided whether to approach them, they came up to us themselves saying, "Can we talk?" That made me really happy. Naturally, we weren't telling them, "Don't do it!" but rather asking, "Have you thought it through? If you do it, what's next?" That sort of conversation. At that point, the LegCo demonstration area was still crowded, and every day people wondered what to do next—these were fruitful discussions, not one-sided. Also, I recall that I wasn't wearing a mask, and some young people kept insisting I wear one (laughs).

C: [58:08] You mentioned that in 2014, a common cause was fighting for "genuine universal suffrage." In 2019, what do you think the major demands were among the people you spoke with?

M: [58:29] Initially, I was especially worried for folks in the pro-establishment camp, because that's who'd be at greatest risk under the Extradition Bill, ironically.

There was a young guy I stayed with for a few days in the LegCo demonstration area. He told me his dad actually allowed him to come out even though his dad has connections with the mainland. So yes, it was really about the Anti-Extradition Bill. That was very clear to me

and some people. Earlier I mentioned I worked in Sha Tau Kok, so I really saw this kind of situation. Actually, I told the media about a student whose mother was suddenly detained and couldn't return home. The child was a Hong Kong ID holder—a doubly non-permanent resident child[children born in Hong Kong to mainland women whose spouses are not Hong Kong permanent residents] who lived on the mainland side but came to the Hong Kong border to study. When his mother went back to the mainland from Hong Kong, she was arrested, because her Home Return Permit had expired. It was confiscated, and when she applied for a replacement, they said no—she had to pay some unclear sum to 'redeem' her old permit. That made no sense. Even if you 'redeem' it, you'd just be applying for a new permit. She got a new one, went back, and then got detained because she hadn't 'bought back' her old one. This kind of absurdity doesn't just happen to mainlanders; Hongkongers rely on Home Return Permits too. These things can happen. Eventually they found a human rights lawyer, and she was released.

I'm just saying that for people who really know the mainland—maybe they do business or whatever—they feel the stakes more urgently. But there's also a group of people who understand that we must oppose this kind of tyranny, push for democracy, and fight for genuine universal suffrage. Of course we have the five demands—those came along later. The movement kept evolving. One of the demands was for universal suffrage, though in the beginning, that wasn't on the table.

G: [1:01:36] Our project involves connecting Hong Kong's Harcourt Road and the Harcourt Road in Sheffield, UK. So first, have you been to Harcourt Road in Sheffield?

M: [1:02:09] Doesn't look like I have.

G: [1:02:15] Or maybe any place named similarly in the UK?

M: [1:02:18] I might have passed somewhere in Altrincham named "Harcourt" with a restaurant? Not sure. I planned to go but never did.

I do have the Harcourt Road Wild Grass badge from your Sheffield project though(laughs).

C: [1:02:48] You have the wild grass from Harcourt Road. That's great.

G: [1:03:03] Harcourt Road might be just one place, but for those of us who champion freedom and democracy, it's a symbolic point. Looking back at the ten years since the Occupy Movement, how would you say Harcourt Road contributed to the fight for freedom?

M: [1:03:56] All protest marches pass through there. You always cross Harcourt Road. Also, there's the concept of "Harcourt Village." People from that era—like us—know about "Harcourt Village" and "villagers," a symbol of people sharing a collective ideal or goal, even sacrificing some things to be there. They stayed on that road for over seventy days. I recall that living together for so long helped people form tight bonds. Instead of just relying on phone contact, we bonded face-to-face, doing real things together—like building stuff or bringing food for each other. Especially for older folks who couldn't walk far, people would go buy food for them. Everyone was bored and tried to find ways to keep occupied—playing ukuleles, teaching ukuleles, skateboarding. I hadn't skated since I was a teen, so I borrowed someone's board for fun. That's the kind of real communal experience. You also ran into old friends you hadn't seen in forever. After 2014, some people stayed connected right up to 2019. I wrote an article saying I wanted not just universal suffrage but an actual civil society. Because even if we had universal suffrage, without a civil society, we wouldn't know how to use it. So building that civil society began right there. People formed groups—some thrived, some folks fell through the cracks if they lacked a group. But others flourished, creating local screening events and discussion circles. In that sense, "Harcourt Village" or "villagers" shows that though originally we were all separate, we could come together.

C: [1:07:59] Now that you've come to Sheffield in the UK, do you have any wishes or hopes—either for Hong Kong or for building civil society in Hong Kong? Any messages you'd like to end on?

M: [1:08:23] First, I'd like to see a UK-based Hong Kong civic society flourish. Let's keep supporting Hong Kong from here, but also integrate with British society. Like with your project—if we hold a rally, we should avoid speaking only Cantonese, it should be bilingual, so local people understand what's going on. Otherwise, we'll look like some closed-off group. As for hopes for Hong Kong—of course, that all the political prisoners can be freed and we can have a barbecue or whatever, all together again (laughs), and that I can return too.

C: [1:09:23] Let's document this—we need to make it happen.