

Changing Hong Kong Street Food Culture:  
An Analysis of the Hong Kong Food Truck Pilot Scheme

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## ABSTRACT

*Hong Kong has a rich history with street food. Street food vendors have influenced Hong Kong's cultural identity, providing affordable food to residents and visitors for centuries. However, in the 1970s the Hong Kong city government drastically changed their stance towards street vendors. In an attempt to improve hygiene, safety, and street congestion, the city government stopped issuing new street vending licenses. Now, the number of street vendors have decreased from 70,000 in 1946, to only 6,000, according to the Hong Kong Hawkers Association. As a result of increased pressure from street food activists, the Hong Kong city government launched its own food truck pilot scheme in early 2017 as an attempt to bring back street food to Hong Kong. Yet strict regulations and high operating costs have generated unrealistic barriers for many street vendors to own a food truck and have generated a top-down form of street vending that is not sustainable. As a result, the Hong Kong city government should relax food truck regulations to promote a more organic, bottom-up food truck movement that more closely aligns with Hong Kong's existing street food culture.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Street food has played an integral role in shaping Hong Kong's cultural identity. Throughout the history of Hong Kong, street food has taken many forms. In recent years, however, the city government has taken strides to phase out street food to conform to an international standard of "modernity." This has sparked conflict between the government and local people. In 2016, a protest, known as the "fishball revolution," erupted as localist — activists who advocate for more autonomy from Mainland China — tried to defend unlicensed street food vendors from police forces. As a result from growing pressure, the city government introduced a new food truck pilot project in early 2017. However, it is unclear whether this new form of street vending will be successful as a top-down approach to street vending. This research attempts to understand the current shift in Hong Kong street food culture in the context of the city government's differential treatment between the new Food Truck Pilot Scheme and traditional street food vendors.

Analysis of the current Hong Kong Food Truck Pilot Scheme sheds light on the viability of food trucks to serve as a “modern” replacement for street food vending. Through in-depth interviews of street food vendors, food truck owners, customers, and non-governmental organizations, I assert that the current trajectory for food trucks in Hong Kong is unsustainable. Strict regulations and high operating costs that are set up by the city government as a top-down approach to introducing food trucks causes challenges for both food truck owners and street vendors. These barriers further restrict the accessibility of the food truck market for low-income street vendors and delegitimize their contributions to street food culture. This highlights the fact that the issue of street food is not just a political or economic issue, but is also deeply interwoven as a social justice issue. As such, the city government should relax regulations for food trucks and instead collaborate with street vendors and NGOs to help foster a bottom-up food truck movement that is both accessible, functional, and modern.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

My research attempts to understand the current shift in Hong Kong street food culture. In particular contrasting the new government promoted Food Truck Pilot Scheme with traditional street food hawkers, or vendors. Even though both groups provide street food to customers, the city government continues to implement policies that are phasing street hawkers out, while simultaneously promoting food truck entrepreneurs. The Hong Kong Food and Health Bureau cites environmental hygiene problems, noise nuisance and obstruction of public passageways for reasons to ban street vendors, and instead promote

food trucks (Hong Kong Food and Health Bureau, 2009). However, this poses the question: are food trucks a viable replacement for decades of traditional street vending stalls, especially as a top-down, government-implemented program?

The Hong Kong city government has been quoted as saying street vendors “gives rise to environmental hygiene problems, noise nuisance and obstruction of public passageways” (Hong Kong Food and Health Bureau, 2009). However, according to a 2006 study in South Africa, health authorities can help improve the safety of street food and lower the amount of public nuisance, instead of removing street vendors (Holy, 2006). In the case of Durban, South Africa, the municipal authorities registered street vendors and allocated specific locations that minimize public nuisance for vendors to sell food. These locations included wash facilities, running water, and other hygienic facilities that are paid and upkept by the street vendors. The street vendors were also required to comply with national hygiene regulations. Therefore, it is clear that the Hong Kong city council’s policy to stop issuing street hawker licenses demonstrates a discriminative policy against a largely low-income population, instead of working with street food vendors to improve the safety and functionality of street food vending. The Hong Kong city government instead decided to invest in food trucks as a replacement without working with street vendors to come up with a compromise.

While the literature on street food vendors and food trucks in Hong Kong is mainly limited to newspaper articles, research from other cities sheds light on how city governments have transitioned street vendors to food trucks and the challenges surrounding this issue. Through case studies in Chicago and Los Angeles, researchers have identified reasons for why each city has implemented policies to ban street food vendors or

promote food trucks. Some of these reasons include: attracting young urban professionals, promoting an image of a global city, and racial, cultural, and socio-economic discrimination. These reasons, however, have to be taken in the context of each individual city and cannot be directly applied to any other city. Therefore, my research attempts to analyze Hong Kong's unique characteristics surrounding street food vendors and food truck entrepreneurs to analyze the viability of food trucks as a replacement for traditional forms of street vending.

## **2.2. Chicago: A Case Study**

In the case of Chicago, street vendors are restricted from selling prepared food on the streets. Street vendors, the majority of which are immigrants, have fought for decades to get the city government to allow them to sell their food. However, despite a continued effort to work with city officials and regulate street food, progress has yet to be seen. On the other hand, young professionals were able to secure new policy to allow food trucks to sell prepared food within just two years of engaging with the city council. In her paper, "Food fight! Immigrant Street Vendors, Gourmet Food Trucks and the Differential Valuation of Creative Producers in Chicago," Nina Martin argues that the "marked contrast" between the city government's attitude towards immigrant street vendors and food truck entrepreneurs is due to the city council's attempt to attract young urban professionals and promote Chicago as a "creative city" (Martin, 2014).

Through her argument, Martin points to Richard Florida's theory of "creative cities" – the idea that "creativity has become the principal driving force in the growth and development of cities, regions, and nations" (Florida, 2005). In this, Martin critiques

Florida's theory that in creative cities, "tolerance of difference races, gender expressions, sexualities and the foreign-born are celebrated" because policies to attract the "creative class" often do not take into account issues such as income equality, political participation, and social justice (Martin, 2014). In the case of Chicago, immigrant street vendors are further marginalized by the promotion of food trucks, despite their ability to contribute to a "creative city."

As of 2015, street food vending was legalized in Chicago, allowing the street vendors to obtain licenses to sell food on the street (Chicago Tribune, 2017). However, the city is struggling to get street vendors to obtain licenses to legally sell their food. The Chicago Tribune cites strict regulations that are impractical for the majority of street vendors to follow (Ibid).

### **2.3. Los Angeles: A Case Study**

In Los Angeles, street food vendors have faced similar forms of discrimination as that of Chicago. However, as of February, 2017 the Los Angeles city council voted to decriminalize street vending (Branson-Potts, 2017). While street vending policies can still be improved to benefit the largely immigrant and low-income street vendors, this policy at least protects street vendors against criminal repercussions. Furthermore, this may prove to be a more effective solution for street vendors than complete legalization, as Chicago has struggled to register street vendors because the regulations are impractical.

However, in Los Angeles food trucks also face governmental and social push back as well. In Los Angeles, taco trucks, or *loncheros*, came under attack in 2008 and 2009 as the city government passed strict regulations on food trucks (Hernández-López, 2011). The

city cited street congestion, litter, and sanitation for passing this new set of regulations. However, Ernesto Hernández-López, in “LA's Taco Truck War: How Law Cooks Food Culture Contests,” argues that in fact, these regulations and policies are motivated by cultural, racial, and socio-economic subtexts. Because of the deeply integrated history of Mexican and Latin American immigrants in Los Angeles, even food trucks face differential treatment from the city government for the same reason other cities have promoted food trucks.

The case of street food vendors in Hong Kong, however, is different than that of both Chicago and Los Angeles. For one, street vending in both of these cities was originally illegal and street vendors and activists were pushing for legalization and decriminalization. However, in Hong Kong, street vending has played such an important role in its cultural history and has been legal and regulated for decades. It was not until the 1970s that the municipal council began to stop issuing new hawkers licenses, forcing legal street vendors to participate in illegal practices (Hong Kong Food and Health Bureau, 2009). Therefore, Hong Kong street vendors and relevant activists are instead fighting for a renewed right to continue a cultural legacy. As such, there is not only a socio-economic driver behind street food, but also a cultural identity that street vendors and activists are trying to preserve.

#### **2.4. Relevance of a Hong Kong Case Study**

Therefore, while city governments' differential treatment of street food vendors and food trucks is not unique to Hong Kong, the unique characteristics surrounding Hong Kong's street vending history makes it an important case study in the body of global street vending research. Literature from case studies in Chicago and Los Angeles has shed light on



different city governments' policies to promote street food changes. It has also highlighted the hidden drivers behind the implementation of policies that differentially treat street food vendors and food truck entrepreneurs, despite the similar function of both of these groups for providing street food. These drivers include attracting young urban professionals, promoting an image of a global city, and racial, cultural, and socio-economic discrimination. In my research, I will attempt to analyze the current shift in Hong Kong street food culture as the city government promotes food trucks through a differential treatment of street hawkers and food trucks and the viability of food trucks to be successful as a cultural replacement of street food vendors.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **3.1. Dai Pai Dongs**

Street food has been a part of Hong Kong's history since it was a small fishing village. In the early 19th century, unlicensed food stalls began appearing and quickly grew in popularity (Cheung, 2003). These street vendors provided affordable food to low-income workers and were located in neighborhoods such as Central and Wan Chai. The colonial Hong Kong government first began to regulate these street food vendors in 1945 as they began issuing licenses to families of those whose who had relatives that passed away or were disabled during World War II so their family could make a living wage (Ibid). These licenses were larger than normal food licenses and were required to be displayed on the stall. Thus these food stalls were known as "*Dai Pai Dong*" or big license stalls, and street food stalls continue to be called Dai Pai Dongs today.

Dai Pai Dongs continued to grow in popularity throughout the 1950s, despite the city government ending the issuing and transferring of Dai Pai Dong licenses in 1956. During this time, Hong Kong's population grew rapidly. From 1945 to 1950, the population grew from 600,000 to 2.2 million, largely due to an influx of immigrants fleeing the communist takeover of Mainland China (Ngai, 2004). As the population grew during this time, the need for public housing also grew. However the city government could not adequately provide enough public housing and were forced to build housing units without kitchens. This forced residents to eat at Dai Pai Dongs, as they could not cook for themselves. Even more, as cramped living areas were not suitable for social interactions, Dai Pai Dongs became a popular spot for social gatherings. This led to the perception of Dai Pai Dongs as "lower class but popularly supported" (Lee, 2010).

### **3.2. Dai Tat Dei Bazaar**

In the 1960s Dai Pai Dongs began to transform. Instead of Dai Pai Dongs selling food individually, many street hawkers began to gather together into bustling food bazaars. These food bazaars, also known as Dai Tat Deis, became incredibly popular among local Hong Kong people, most famous being the Sheung Wan Gala Point Bazaar. These Dai Tat Deis not only provided food, but also entertainment. For many, the street performances and operas at these bazaars were one of the only forms of entertainment that common people could afford. As such, Dai Tat Deis were coined "ordinary people's nightclub." In fact the memories of Dai Tat Dei bazaars are still nostalgic for many people. This led to Ocean Park, a popular amusement park in Hong Kong, opening a Dai Tat Dei style attraction in

2012, highlighting the contrast between local peoples' wants and government action as efforts continue to remove real street vendors out of the city (ABS-CBN, 2012).

### **3.3. Regulation of Dai Pai Dongs**

As Hong Kong's economy developed in the 1960s and 1970s into one of the Four Asian Tigers, the standard of living drastically rose. As such, Dai Pai Dongs and Dai Tat Dei Bazaars began to be seen as causing traffic congestion and public health concerns, despite still being widely popular among common people. Therefore, in the 1970s, the Hong Kong city government began to actively phase out street food vendors. Policies to push street vendors out included setting up cooked food centers for street vendors to move into and license buyback programs. In the 1980s buyback programs drastically decreased the number of street vendors, as many aging street vendors decided to trade in their licenses for monetary compensation. Kowloon City, for example, had 68 Dai Pai Dongs in the 1970s, but none by 1984 (Whitehead, 2014).

Strict regulations and continued buyback programs have continued to decrease the number of street food vendors. In 2013 alone 310 licenses were sold back to the city government for HK\$120,000, or slightly over \$17,000 USD (Ngo, 2014). Now, the number of street vendors has decreased from 70,000 in 1946, to roughly 6,000 in 2016, according to the Hong Kong Hawkers Association. Furthermore, the stringent licensing policy has created new challenges as many of the remaining license holders are too old to work, but do not want to sell back their street hawking license. As a result many of the license holder's rent their stalls to assistants that run their operation for a salary. This practice is

not only illegal, but also unfairly limits the economic opportunity of many potential street hawkers because they cannot obtain their own license.

### **3.4. Conflict**

The closure of Dai Pai Dongs entered the public conscious in May 2005 as a popular Dai Pai Dong, Man Yuen Noodles, was forced to close as the license holder passed away. Despite a large amount of media attention and attempts to preserve the stall, Man Yuen Noodles was closed a month later (Ibid).

In February 2016 a riot broke out in Mongkok, a neighborhood famous for its street food, as police attempted to remove unlicensed street food vendors who were selling Lunar New Year specialties. This event was later called the “Fishball Revolution” as fishballs are a popular local street food. In previous years, it was a tradition for unlicensed street vendors to come to neighborhoods such as Mongkok and Sham Shui Po to sell street food and other products during the Lunar New Year season without police intervention. However, in 2015 the Sham Shui Po District Council, passed a “zero tolerance” policy towards unlicensed Lunar New Year street vendors (Stand News).

On February 7th, 2016 Lau Siu-lai, a prominent activist, was arrested for helping a street vendor in Sham Shui Po sell cuttlefish, despite a Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) official’s warning to clear the street, in protest of the crackdown of street vendors during the Lunar New Year season. In an effort to preserve local Hong Kong identity and protest Lau Siu-lai’s arrest, localist groups contacted street vendors to come to Mongkok the next day. The localists also encouraged supporters to come and celebrate the Lunar New Year, as well as protect the street hawkers. On February 8th, riots broke out as

police forces moved in to remove the street vendors, ending in 50 arrests and almost 100 injured (Moss, 2016).

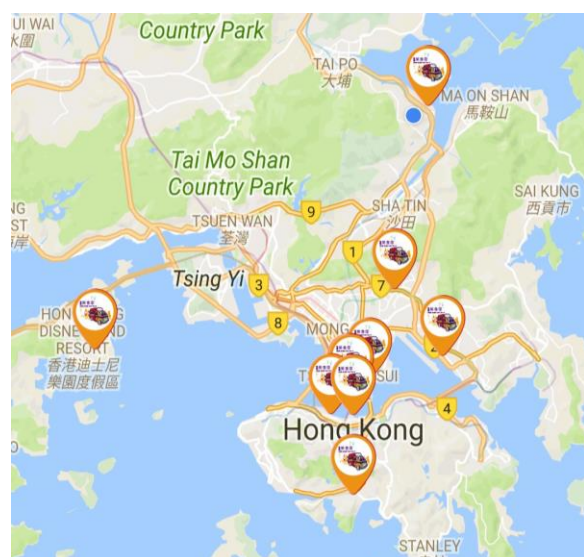
For many, the Fishball Revolution represented more than just street food, but also the growing concerns of a larger Beijing presence in Hong Kong. Tension between Hong Kong and Mainland China has been growing in recent years. In September 2014, a pro-democracy protest erupted in Hong Kong as Beijing passed a law limiting Hong Kong elections to pre-approved candidates. This movement was known as the Umbrella Movement, as umbrellas were used to protect protesters from tear gas attacks. These protests are representative of a growing “localism” movement, as Hong Kong people are aligning more and more with a strictly Hong Kong identity, especially as Mainland China’s presence grows larger and larger. While most localists focus on protecting the interests and identity of Hong Kong, others go as far as calling for complete independence from Mainland China. Because street food is tied closely with Hong Kong culture and identity, it can be asserted that its preservation is more important now than ever for local Hong Kong people.

### **3.5. Introduction of the Food Truck Pilot Scheme**

The Hong Kong city government first announced the Food Truck Pilot Scheme in February 2015. Prior to this scheme Hong Kong did not have any food trucks. The financial secretary of the city government at the time, Tsang Chun-wah, proposed introducing food trucks to Hong Kong as a potential way to both make Hong Kong a more international city and bring street food back to Hong Kong people as well as tourists (Yam, 2017). The Tourism Commission was tasked with carrying out this project and in 2016 commenced an application process to select 16 food trucks to participate in the Pilot Scheme. A total of 192

applications were submitted and 51 made it to a second round cook-off that was judged by a panel of government representatives and food experts (Ibid). After the 16 finalists were selected, logistical operations were finalized and the food trucks were fully operational in February 2017.

The 16 food trucks in Hong Kong differ from those in other countries because it is a government controlled operation. For example, the food trucks are only allowed to operate at eight designated tourist locations throughout the city and must alternate locations every two weeks based on a government designed schedule. These locations include the Golden Bauhinia Square in Wan Chai; Salisbury Garden and Art Square at Tsim Sha Tsui; the Central harbourfront; Ocean Park; Hong Kong Disneyland, the Energising Kowloon East harbourfront; Wong Tai Sin Temple (Hong Kong Tourism Commission). In June a ninth location, Science Park, was added to attract workers in Hong Kong's biotech business district. The Tourism Commission also allocates spaces for the 16 food trucks to come to large festivals to “enhance the attractiveness of the event” (Tourism Commission).



**Figure 1.** Food Truck Locations

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

My research attempts to understand the current governmental directed shift in Hong Kong street food culture away from traditional Dai Pai Dongs to modern food trucks. To conduct this research, I focus on qualitative data, such as conducting in-depth interviews with street food vendors, food truck owners, government employees, and relevant NGOs. First I interviewed two Dai Pai Dong owners in Wong Tai Sin District. For food trucks, I interviewed eight out of the sixteen food trucks, two of which were with the owner of the food trucks while the rest were with employees. I also visited six out of the nine designated food truck locations to gauge the effect location has on food truck reception. I interviewed two government employees working on and monitoring the progress of the pilot scheme. To engage customer reception of the food trucks and understand the effect that different locations have on the success of the food trucks, I stayed at two designated food truck locations, Energizing Kowloon East and Tsim Sha Tsui Art Square for one hour each at 3:00pm - 4:00pm and interviewed the customers at each food truck. At Energizing Kowloon East, there were no customers during that time frame so no interviews were conducted. At Tsim Sha Tsui Art Square, there were a total of four customers during the one hour time period, three foreign tourists and one local Hong Kong resident. Lastly I interviewed the Hong Kong Food Truck Association to understand the larger movement surrounding food trucks in Hong Kong outside of the pilot scheme.

There were also some limitations while conducting this research. Due to language barriers, conducting interviews with many street vendors was impossible. As Cantonese is the primary language used in Hong Kong, many local Dai Pai Dong owners cannot speak English or Mandarin. As such I was only able to interview two Dai Pai Dong owners whose

English was proficient enough to conduct interviews with. Both of these Dai Pai Dong owners lived abroad for a period of their lives so it cannot be asserted that they are representative of all Dai Pai Dong owners. But their interviews can still provide insight on the challenges for street vendors.

## **5. FINDINGS**

### **5.1. Dai Pai Dongs**

While the number of Dai Pai Dongs has been steadily decreasing since the 1970s, those that remain are fairly stable. I conducted interviews with two Dai Pai Dong owners in Wong Tai Sin District. These interviews provided insight on both the challenges for Dai Pai Dongs and a contrasting view of street food vending as portrayed in the media. During these interviews I focused on three main themes: 1) why do you street vend? 2) how has street vending changed for you? And 3) Are there concerns for job security?

Through these interviews I found that street vending is an easy way to make a living in Hong Kong. This is a contrasting view of the popular perception of street vendors. However, both Dai Pai Dong owners worked separate jobs before taking up street food vending. One street vendor lived in Seattle for over ten years and worked in human resources, but moved back to Hong Kong when her father became ill. Instead of finding a similar job she decided to work with her sister and sell grilled chicken wings because it was a less stressful lifestyle and a decent living. However the Dai Pai Dong owner noted that she worked from 3:00pm - 12:00am everyday and her sister worked from 6:00am - 10:00am everyday, noting long work days.



Both Dai Pai Dong owners had heard of the food trucks in the news but never tried it despite working less than 200 meters away from one of the food truck locations. The Dai Pai Dong owner from Seattle also noted that when she lived in Seattle, there were many food trucks and admitted eating at a food truck in Seattle. But when both owners were asked about how food trucks might affect Dai Pai Dongs, they were not concerned. To them food trucks are not seen as the same as Dai Pai Dongs and the flow of customers has remained steady throughout the implementation of the Food Truck Pilot Scheme.

## **5.2. Challenges for Food Truck Owners**

Analysis of the eight interviews I conducted with the Hong Kong food trucks provided insight on many of the challenges that food truck owners face. These challenges include the high initial investment and continual operating costs, strict regulations, slow government change, and limited selling locations.

Many media outlets have called out the Food Truck Pilot Scheme as a failure even though it is only seven months in. This is because of the dramatic lack of customers. According to an interview with a government official monitoring the progress of food trucks, food trucks at the Energizing Kowloon East location see an average of only 10-20 customers per day. Denise Hui, one of the operators of Pineapple Canteen food truck noted that the area has many workers that eat lunch nearby, but they struggle to attract these potential customers because they sell pineapple buns, which is a traditional Hong Kong snack, but is not a satisfactory meal. Moreover, she noted the food truck is limited because it cannot sell many different items. For this food truck, the owners are split among different shareholders, one of which is a restaurant that the pineapple bun recipe comes from and

the operators used to work at. The restaurant (天誠冰室), which has three locations throughout Hong Kong is popular for its pineapple buns, but also offers other food options as well as seating and air condition.

Another challenge that food truck owners face include the high investment and operating cost. After the 16 food truck license holders were selected they had to purchase a food truck that complied with the city government's regulations. For example, Gordon Lam, the owner of Table Seven X W. Burger food truck imported his food truck for \$800,000 HKD (slightly over \$100,000 USD) from Denmark with the financial support of a catering group. However this initial investment is too high for the average person and limits the access to the food truck market for low-income people. In fact this high cost of food trucks has stemmed a series of demonstrations in Sheung Shui and Causeway Bay where designers and hawker groups built low-cost food truck alternatives that ranged in cost from \$1,500 HKD to \$100,000 HKD (Yau, 2017).

On top of the high initial investment, the operating cost for food trucks is too high, causing prices to be equivalent if not more expensive than the same food in a restaurant. For example, the butter pineapple buns at Pineapple Canteen cost \$17 HKD whereas the same bun costs only \$10 HKD at their restaurant, which also has seating and air conditioning.

Evenmore, the location policy that limits food trucks to only nine designated areas greatly affects business. When asked about the biggest challenges for food trucks almost all respondents noted the location policy. Depending on each location, business can be very successful or practically nonexistent. For example, Disneyland sees hundreds of customers as opposed to locations such as Energizing Kowloon East sees as little as 10 customers a

day, according to government employees monitoring the food truck progress. As such, food truck owners have difficulties maintaining a stable income as it fluctuates so much.

However, despite this challenge, food truck owners consensus was that their income from the food trucks was enough to continue operation.

### **5.3. Customer Reception of Food Trucks**

Due to the large media attention surrounding the new Food Truck Pilot Scheme, many local customers were excited to try the food trucks in February when the program first started. However, for many local Hong Kong residents, the locations of the food trucks are not convenient because they are located at tourist destinations rather than near work places or commuter areas. In fact, multiple respondents noted they did not know where any of the food trucks were and have only stumbled upon them while out in the city.

Another common perception of food trucks by local people was that they were rather expensive. While each food truck sells different specialties and different cuisines, many of the foods can be easily found elsewhere in Hong Kong and many of the food trucks also have their own sit-down restaurant in the city as well. Many local Hong Kong people figured that they can eat just as good of food at a restaurant close to them for the same cost.

Foreign customers, however, have a different narrative. For foreign customers the food trucks are a familiar way to try Hong Kong food. Multiple respondents expressed concern over food safety when trying street food in Hong Kong so eating at a food truck is a safe way to try local street foods. Moreover, as compared to prices of food for many Western tourists, the prices at the food trucks are still rather affordable, which contrasts the response from local customers. In locations such as Tsim Sha Tsui where the food

trucks are located between the metro station and the star ferry pier, which is one of the most famous tourist attractions in Hong Kong, food trucks see many foreign customers. One interviewee from France admitted to trying “Creative Yummy” food truck because it sold Western style food. In Hong Kong access to Western restaurants is more limited so having a Western style food truck in Tsim Sha Tsui can serve as a niche.

#### **5.4. Non-Governmental Food Truck Movement in Hong Kong**

Before the Food Truck Pilot Scheme, there were not any food trucks in Hong Kong. However, the food truck trend had been growing across the globe in cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and London. Inspired by the food truck scene abroad, Simon Chung, started the Hong Kong Food Truck Association (HKFTA) in early 2015. Chung, who is trained as a chef wanted to bring a food truck culture to Hong Kong but found that government licensing did not allow for food trucks to operate in the city. As a solution, Chung and a team at HKFTA worked to design a motorless food truck that can be transported in a truck to different events or venues that resembled a food truck for people to use to sell food. Now HKFTA has 15 vehicles that can be rented out. While renting non-mobile food trucks is far from the typical image of food trucks, Chung hopes that these food truck-like vehicles will help popularize the idea of food trucks in Hong Kong so that one day regulations on food truck will loosen in Hong Kong. Now HKFTA has 24 members that use their food trucks at events, half of which applied for the two-year Pilot Scheme.

When asked about his thoughts on the Food Truck Pilot Scheme, Chung expressed excitement that the city government was finally taking strides to introduce food trucks to the city, especially since multiple of his members were accepted into the Pilot Scheme.

However, Chung believes there are issues with how the program is run and how the food trucks are regulated. For example, Chung noted that the menus cannot be changed so that the food truck owners cannot incorporate more popular foods.

But despite the lack of success in food truck popularity so far during the project, Chung is still hopeful of a growing food truck movement in Hong Kong. Chung noted there were 192 applications submitted, showing a healthy group of potential food truck entrepreneurs. Also even though the Food Truck Pilot Scheme is highly regulated, it is still progress from no food trucks before. But when asked about the status of the food truck pilot scheme, Chung did not express too much concern. Instead he noted the idea of food trucks are still novel in Hong Kong and believes that food trucks need to be organically grown in a distinctly Hong Kong context to be successful. But until government regulations are relaxed people and organizations are limited in their ability to promote food truck culture.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

Hong Kong is a culinary center throughout the world, famed for its street food. Street vending in Hong Kong has taken different forms, from unlicensed street stalls to lively Dai Tat Dei night markets. But with the decline in Dai Pai Dongs in the past forty years it is yet to be seen how street vending will change now. The city government is currently attempting to replace Dai Pai Dongs with food trucks through a top-down Food Truck Pilot Scheme. But based on the summation of findings from current Dai Pai Dong owners, food truck owners, customers, and non-governmental organizations, this top-down

approach is unrealistic. Due to factors such as a government led view of street vending, catering to tourists and not residents, high regulations, and a growing movement of localism, the Food Truck Pilot Scheme is likely to be unsuccessful. Instead, if food trucks are to be successful, a more organic, distinctly Hong Kong food truck movement needs to occur. In this, government cooperation needs to be undergone to remove barriers so that all street vendors can have economic access to the food truck market.

The Hong Kong city government implemented the Food Truck Pilot Scheme as a means to bolster the image of a global culinary center as street food culture has begun to deteriorate due to the shutdown of many street vendors. However, because this food truck project was government implemented from the top-down, there are many aspects of street food vending and food truck operations that were overlooked that can only be understood from the bottom-up. This one-sided view of street vending has led to an unsuccessful business operation for the 16 food truck operators. For example, the structure of the Food Truck Pilot Scheme in that it limits the locations for the food trucks and caters more to tourists than to local people greatly hinders the success of food truck business. Other regulations such as unrealistic initial investment costs and high operating costs due to strict regulations have created high prices, limiting entry to the market and creating barriers for customers due to high costs.

Furthermore, the issues surrounding street vending in Hong Kong are not independent from a larger movement of localism. Due to the “One Country, Two Systems” policy that governs Hong Kong’s relationship with China, many Hong Kong people have begun to voice concern over Beijing’s growing presence in Hong Kong. This group of people are called “localists” and have started a movement for greater independence from Mainland

China. Because of street food's unique role in Hong Kong's history, it also plays an important role in the Hong Kong identity. Therefore the preservation of Dai Pai Dongs and street food has also become a localist issue. At the announcement of the Food Truck Pilot Project, many were excited because it was seen as a way to preserve street food and provide economic opportunity for young people and street food vendors who can no longer get Dai Pai Dong licenses. However, as the structure of the Pilot Scheme became more clear, the less support the project has seen by local Hong Kong people, because it is catered to successful existing restaurants to expand their business, and to foreigners to eat the food instead of local Hong Kong people.

As such, there are simply too many regulations and barriers with the existing structure of the Food Truck Pilot Scheme. The high operating costs and low customer reception is not sustainable and is not a viable replacement for street vending in Hong Kong. Yet the number of Dai Pai Dongs continue to decrease, leading to the original question of what shape will street vending take? Even though Dai Pai Dongs are being phased out, street food will not be. Therefore, if the city government wants to continue on a path of modernity and internationalism in the lens of street food and food trucks as a "hip and trendy" form of street vending, it must loosen regulations of food trucks. The city government must let food trucks come out of a bottom-up movement in which customers, food truck owners, and NGOs structure the form in which food trucks operate in Hong Kong. The city government then can work with these bodies to regulate the safety and hygiene of food trucks to ensure the level of sanitation is up to a high enough standard.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Street Vending in Hong Kong is a complex entity that has taken different forms throughout history. From wooden stalls in the streets to lively night bazaars, street vending has provided affordable food to the citizens and visitors of Hong Kong for decades. Its cultural significance is undeniably Hong Kong in its ability to transcend different eras and thus is essential to preserve this cultural heritage, especially during the current shift in Hong Kong's governance in regards to the "One Country, Two Systems" policy. Yet the current government led initiative to move street food into food trucks is preconceived due to the one-sided nature of the Food Truck Pilot Scheme. The stringent regulations and structure of the program limits the success of food trucks while simultaneously creating barriers for street food vendors to sell food. Therefore, a more bottom-up approach is needed through the cooperation between vendors, customers, NGOs and the government to move street food forward towards food trucks while still preserving the cultural heritage that is street food.



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