

# The Effect of "Police Image" in Hong Kong Gangster Films on the Public's Perception of Police

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**Abstract:** *The intricate interplay between the portrayal of Hong Kong police in gangster films and the public's perception of law enforcement signifies a dynamic relationship between entertainment media and societal realities. This study delves into the multifaceted influences that shape public attitudes towards law enforcement in Hong Kong, with a specific focus on media representations, personal experiences, and cultural variables. Conducting semi-structured interviews with 22 Hong Kong residents, this research employed a rigorous three-step coding analysis – encompassing open, axial, and selective coding – to unveil patterns and themes within interview data. The findings reveal a diverse array of factors contributing to public perceptions of law enforcement. Media portrayals, particularly in gangster films, emerged as influential, with positive portrayals correlating with favorable opinions, and negative portrayals leading to more negative attitudes. However, the impact of media was just one facet. Personal interactions with police were pivotal determinants, with positive encounters fostering trust, and negative ones contributing to skepticism. Cultural variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, also played significant roles in shaping attitudes. Cultural values, such as Confucian principles and liberal ideals, underpinned varying perspectives on the police. The practical ramifications of this research include providing legislators and law enforcement agencies with ideas on how to strengthen relations between the police and the community and foster public trust. It also establishes the framework for further research, encouraging investigation into the influence of media on public opinion in various cultural situations. In summary, this study unveils the complex relationship between media, culture, and public perceptions of law enforcement in Hong Kong, providing a nuanced understanding of this intricate interplay.*

**Keywords:** *Police Image, Hong Kong Gangster Films, Public Perception, Media Portrayal*

## Introduction

In every society, the concept of law enforcement is an indispensable pillar that upholds societal order, ensures compliance with laws, and safeguards the security and well-being of its citizens (Lawrence Ka-Ki, 2020). However, the perception of law enforcement is not solely a product of lived experiences or institutional interactions. Rather, it is often colored and shaped by the omnipresent influence of popular culture, with films and television being primary conduits for the dissemination of these influential narratives (Reilly, 2023). Within the context of this complex interaction, there is a particular location that emerges as noteworthy - Hong Kong, a bustling urban center recognized not just for its diverse cultural fabric but also for its unique cinematic category: gangster films. For several decades, these cinematic works have significantly influenced and captivated the imaginations of viewers on both a local and worldwide scale. However, it is not solely the aesthetic allure that is engrossing (Lawrence Ka-Ki, 2020). These films have constructed a distinct narrative perspective that shapes the public's perception and understanding of the police force by means of their portrayal.

In a number of nations, investigations into the public's perception of law enforcement have been conducted. The findings indicate that a number of factors can affect the public's perception of the authorities (Ibrahim, 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Wang & Teo, 2020). Such as perception of law enforcement of the general public is shaped by various factors, including personal encounters with police officers, the level of crime and disorder

in their locality, and their socioeconomic status (Dennison & Finkeldey, 2021; Peck & Elligson, 2021; Watson et al., 2021). Limited research has been conducted on the subject matter in Hong Kong, with the majority of studies concentrating on the depiction of law enforcement by the media (Ho & Sewell, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Seminal research by Chan (2015) empirically examined the varying representations of the Hong Kong Police Force during the Occupy Movement and found negative portrayals in order-maintenance work and positive images in crime-fighting duties. Interestingly, the author argued and validated the impact of different police roles on public perception. There are various existing issues in the field of study on the public's view of Hong Kong police (Shek, 2020). Recent protests and demonstrations in the city have highlighted the intricate dynamics between law enforcement and the general public. Consequently, there is an increasing imperative to comprehend the varying perspectives of diverse groups regarding the police (Ho, 2021). Second, there is a need to understand how the media and other external forces influence the public's opinion of the police (Stott et al., 2020).

Zooming in on this complex relationship, it becomes evident that the multifaceted dynamics of public perception of the police cannot be distilled to a single source or factor. It is shaped by an intricate interplay of various elements, including media representations, personal encounters, societal values, and demographic factors (Miethel et al., 2019). While this intricate web of influence has been extensively explored in various global contexts, the unique socio-political landscape of Hong Kong adds an additional layer of complexity. Recent events in the region, including the implementation of the National Security Act and the pro-democracy protests, have profoundly altered the manner in which the public engages with its law enforcement agencies (Clift, 2020; Toru, 2020). These events have catalyzed a renewed interest in comprehending the intricate nuances of public perceptions, particularly towards the police.

In light of these developments, this research endeavors to provide an empirically grounded exploration of how the citizens of Hong Kong perceive their police force. Its central focus is on understanding the influence wielded by popular culture, specifically the portrayal of the police in Hong Kong's iconic gangster films, and how this influence shapes public perception. This study expands on the previously defined research subject by examining five key elements that impact public opinion and the intricate interaction between law enforcement and popular culture:

First of all, the impact of television and movies in today's media-rich environment cannot be understated. This study examines how society norms, values, and media representations of the police interact. How do these portrayals mirror and mold societal perspectives on law enforcement? Secondly, beyond the screen, this study explores the current social attitudes held by the residents of Hong Kong towards their police force. What sentiments prevail, and how are these sentiments expressed and influenced? Thirdly, recent political developments have cast a long shadow over the region. This research delves into how these political and social changes have reverberated through the prism of public perception, affecting the image of law enforcement. Fourthly, personal encounters with police officers often serve as powerful influencers of perception. This study seeks to understand how these individual experiences shape and color the public's perception of the Hong Kong police. Lastly, culture, a reservoir of shared values and norms, holds a profound influence. How does Hong Kong's rich cultural tapestry shape the image of its police force? What cultural symbols and narratives contribute to this image?

This research assumes a paramount significance. By shedding light on the intricate relationships between media, society, politics, personal experiences, and culture, it offers a nuanced understanding of what shapes public impressions of the Hong Kong police force. Beyond academia, the empirical insights derived here can guide policymakers in the endeavor to enhance police-community relations, foster accountability, and strengthen public trust—a quest that is perhaps more crucial now than ever. Moreover, it paves the way for broader theoretical discussions about the potency of popular culture in molding public opinion, transcending its immediate Hong Kong context. In essence, this research embarks on an empirically rigorous journey to

decode the multifaceted relationships that converge on the canvas of public perception, casting a profound and critical light on the unique socio-cultural landscape of Hong Kong.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical Background***

For many years, researchers have focused on police image and public impression of the police (Xu, 2022). According to studies, how police are portrayed in movies and television shows has a substantial impact on how the public perceives law enforcement (Franklin et al., 2019; Wozniak et al., 2021). In Hong Kong, where the police have always played a major role in shaping the city's identity, this is an especially pressing concern (Johanson, 2021). The Hong Kong police film genre has a long and illustrious history, and its popularity continues to grow (Van den Troost, 2020). The heroes of these films are usually rugged, brave cops who risk their lives for the greater good (Harris, 2022). Hong Kongers fear police violence and corruption more nowadays. The public's trust in law enforcement as a result of this has plummeted (Xiao et al., 2022).

The application of force by law enforcement officials is a specific area that has raised significant apprehension (Engel et al., 2020). In recent years, Hong Kong has witnessed several instances of police violence that have garnered significant attention, leading to widespread protests and demands for reform (Tang, 2022). Many Hong Kong residents now perceive the police force to be unduly aggressive and unaccountable, harming the city's reputation of law enforcement (Lo et al., 2021). Given these reservations, it is critical to comprehend how the representation of police in films and television shows may be influencing the public's opinion of law enforcement in Hong Kong (Yeh, 2023). The goal of this qualitative research is to look into the relationship between the police image in Hong Kong police and gangster films and the public's perception of the police.

To acquire a full knowledge of public perception, numerous elements such as media exposure, perceived reality, personal experience, and demography must be examined. The impact of media exposure on attitudes is largely attributed to its ability to influence beliefs (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Meanwhile, the concept of perceived realism delves into how media content affects people's perceptions of reality (Lin, 2022). The influence of law enforcement on individuals' attitudes can be influenced by their personal experiences, which provide them with firsthand interactions (Railey et al., 2020). Variations in attitudes can be attributed to demographics, including age and socio-economic status (Liaqat et al., 2021). The consideration of these factors is crucial for policymakers and law enforcement agencies as they work towards developing effective strategies that can improve public trust and cater to the diverse needs of the population.

### ***Media and Societal Influence***

One key potential component that may influence the public's perception of police is media exposure (Kaufman et al., 2020). Individuals who consume more law enforcement-related media content may have stronger attitudes toward police, both positive and negative (Levan & Stevenson, 2019). Individuals who regularly watch police-related movies or television shows, for example, may develop more favorable attitudes toward police officers and their work (Lyon, 2022). Those who watch more negative media information, such as news reports about police violence or corruption, on the other hand, may develop more negative opinions toward the police (Choi, 2021). Self-reported measures or tracking participants' media intake can be used to analyze the amount and type of media exposure (Shin, 2020).

Media studies and communication research have focused on media's impact on public perception. Media exposure can affect reality, according to George Gerbner and Larry Gross' 1970s cultivation theory (Kaufman et al., 2020). Media depictions of police can promote prejudices and influence public opinion. Media can also impact public priorities, according to agenda-setting theory. Media shapes public discussions on policing and crime in law enforcement. Numerous empirical research have examined how media affects law enforcement perception. Researcher examined how UK media portrayals of police affect public trust (Shin, 2020). In the US, a study evaluated police portrayals in TV dramas and viewer attitudes (Choi, 2021). These studies show that media strongly influence law enforcement public sentiment. Media studies and communication research

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### ***Social Attitudes Towards Law Enforcement***

Understanding social attitudes toward law enforcement involves drawing from social psychology and sociology. Social identity theory, proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, suggests that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, which can include perceptions of police and law enforcement agencies (Schwarz & Williams, 2020). These categorizations can affect intergroup attitudes, including those related to the police. Moreover, the theory of moral foundations, introduced by Jonathan Haidt, explores the moral values and foundations that shape individuals' attitudes toward societal institutions, including law enforcement (Alpaslan & Mitroff, 2021). Empirical studies in this area have yielded insights into social attitudes towards law enforcement. Research examined public perceptions of the police in Chicago, emphasizing the role of trust and legitimacy (Kochel & Skogan, 2021). Another study investigated the impact of procedural justice on public attitudes toward law enforcement in the United States (K. Nalla & Nam, 2021). These studies underscore the importance of factors like trust and fairness in shaping public attitudes toward police.

### ***Political and Social Factors Affecting Police Image***

Political and social factors are integral to understanding the image of law enforcement agencies. Social conflict theory, proposed by Karl Marx and expanded upon by scholars like Randall Collins, emphasizes how power dynamics and social inequalities can affect perceptions of law enforcement (Bhandari, 2023). In the context of Hong Kong, the influence of political events, such as the National Security Act and pro-democracy protests, underscores the significance of political factors in shaping public perceptions (Post Ruiz, 2023). Studies examining political and social factors affecting police image often take into account specific historical and political contexts (Hardeman et al., 2022). A study delved into the dynamics of crowd behavior and police interventions during protests, shedding light on how such events can influence police image (Van Ginneken, 2003). Research explored the impact of political climate on public trust in the police in Hong Kong, illustrating the connection between political factors and public perceptions of law enforcement (Bhandari, 2023).

### ***Individual Experiences with Law Enforcement***

Individual experiences with law enforcement are rooted in social interaction theories, including symbolic interactionism (Serpe et al., 2020). This theory, developed by George Herbert Mead, posits that individuals construct their self-concept through social interactions, including those with police officers (Matsueda et al., 2020). The concept of procedural justice, proposed by Tom Tyler, emphasizes the importance of fair and respectful treatment by law enforcement in shaping individuals' perceptions. Empirical studies have investigated the impact of individual encounters with the police (Engel et al., 2022). In the United States, a study explored the relationship between stop-and-search encounters and public perceptions of the police (Matsueda et al., 2020). These studies highlight the role of individual experiences in shaping public opinion of law enforcement.

### ***Cultural Factors Shaping Police Image***

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping police image. Cultural theories, such as cultural criminology, highlight how cultural narratives, symbols, and representations influence perceptions of crime and law enforcement (Muzzatti et al., 2023). Cultural factors can be deeply ingrained in societal values and traditions, contributing to the image of the police (Kurtz & Colburn, 2019). Empirical studies exploring the influence of

cultural factors on police image often delve into specific cultural contexts. For instance, a study examined the impact of cultural factors during the Occupy Movement in Hong Kong, shedding light on the role of cultural narratives in shaping public perceptions of the police (Muzzatti et al., 2023). Research in the United Kingdom explored cultural factors related to community policing (Kurtz & Colburn, 2019). These studies emphasize the importance of cultural understanding in understanding police image. These theoretical and empirical frameworks provide a foundation for comprehending the intricate relationships between media, society, politics, individual experiences, and culture in shaping public perceptions of law enforcement, as explored in this research.

### Methodology

In this research study, a qualitative approach was employed to investigate the intricate relationship between the portrayal of police in Hong Kong gangster films and the public's perception of law enforcement (Sharma & Chirom, 2022). This qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences concerning the subject matter. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 22 Hong Kong residents (see table 1). This method was chosen to facilitate rich and nuanced insights into the participants' views and perspectives (Anwar et al., 2021). Interviews were conducted in a manner that encouraged participants to express their thoughts freely, fostering a deeper understanding of their perceptions.

**Table 1** Respondents Profile

| Participant ID | Gender | Age | Occupation    | Political Affiliation |
|----------------|--------|-----|---------------|-----------------------|
| P01            | Male   | 28  | Student       | Pro-Democracy         |
| P02            | Female | 45  | Teacher       | Neutral               |
| P03            | Male   | 62  | Retired       | Pro-Beijing           |
| P04            | Female | 33  | Journalist    | Pro-Democracy         |
| P05            | Male   | 50  | Lawyer        | Neutral               |
| P06            | Female | 29  | Marketing     | Pro-Beijing           |
| P07            | Male   | 41  | Engineer      | Pro-Democracy         |
| P08            | Female | 56  | Doctor        | Neutral               |
| P09            | Male   | 23  | Student       | Pro-Beijing           |
| P10            | Female | 38  | Business      | Pro-Democracy         |
| P11            | Male   | 47  | Teacher       | Neutral               |
| P12            | Female | 31  | Artist        | Pro-Democracy         |
| P13            | Male   | 55  | Retired       | Pro-Beijing           |
| P14            | Female | 27  | Banker        | Pro-Democracy         |
| P15            | Male   | 43  | IT            | Neutral               |
| P16            | Female | 33  | Entrepreneur  | Pro-Beijing           |
| P17            | Male   | 59  | Accountant    | Pro-Democracy         |
| P18            | Female | 26  | Student       | Neutral               |
| P19            | Male   | 39  | Civil Servant | Pro-Beijing           |
| P20            | Female | 48  | Homemaker     | Pro-Democracy         |
| P21            | Male   | 32  | Consultant    | Neutral               |
| P22            | Female | 51  | Social Worker | Pro-Beijing           |

To ensure diversity and representativeness within the Hong Kong community, a purposeful selection method was employed to choose participants. This method involved selecting participants based on key demographic and contextual factors, including age, gender, occupation, and political affiliation (Mangi et al., 2023). The

aim was to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences related to the portrayal of police in gangster films. Participants were recruited through a combination of approaches, including outreach through social media platforms and word-of-mouth recommendations. This strategy aimed to maximize the diversity of participants and provide a range of viewpoints (Zaman et al., 2021). Prior to participating in the study, all subjects provided informed consent, acknowledging their willingness to share their views and experiences. This ensured ethical research practices and respect for participants' autonomy (Anwar et al., 2023). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants, lasting approximately 30-60 minutes each. To accommodate participants' language preferences, interviews were conducted in English, Cantonese, or Mandarin, as per their choice (see table 2). The flexibility in language allowed for greater comfort and authentic expression during the interviews (Mangi et al., 2023).

**Table 2** Interview Questions

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**Interview Questions**

***Perceptions of Police Image in Hong Kong***

- How do you perceive the image of the police force in Hong Kong?
- What factors contribute to your perception of the police image?
- Have you noticed any changes in the police image over time?

***Personal Experience with the Police***

- Have you had any personal interactions with the police?
- Can you describe the experience and how it made you feel?
- Have you ever been a victim of a crime?
- How was your experience with the police in that situation?

***Attitudes and Opinions Towards the Police***

- What is your overall opinion of the police force in Hong Kong?
- Do you trust the police? Why or why not?
- Do you think the police treat everyone equally?
- Have you ever witnessed police misconduct?
- How do you think the police force can improve its image?

***Reflections on Media Representations of the Police***

- Have you watched any Hong Kong police or gangster films?
  - How are the police portrayed in those movies?
  - Do you think those representations accurately reflect the police force in Hong Kong?
  - How do those representations affect your perception of the police image?
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To maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities, interviews were videotaped and subsequently transcribed. All identifying information was anonymized to ensure privacy and data security. Data analysis followed a rigorous three-step coding technique (Anwar et al., 2021; Zaman et al., 2021). The first step involved open coding, where transcripts were meticulously examined line by line to identify and categorize emerging concepts and themes. In the second phase, axial coding was employed to organize these concepts and themes into coherent categories based on their interconnectedness. Finally, the third step, selective coding, aimed to refine and integrate these categories to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research issue.

To enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study's findings, several measures were taken. First, researcher reflexivity was established, acknowledging and addressing any potential biases throughout the research process. Second, member checking was employed to validate the

accuracy of the findings by allowing participants to review and provide feedback on their interview transcripts. Third, data triangulation was performed by incorporating various data sources to enhance the research's robustness and trustworthiness. Lastly, a detailed description of the research methodology was provided to ensure transparency and replicability. This comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis aligns with best practices in qualitative research, ensuring the rigor and reliability of the study's findings.

**Interviews Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the police image in Hong Kong police and gangster films and the public's impression of police. The literature study found six potential variables: media exposure, perceived realism, personal experience, societal context, demographics, and political orientation. To obtain insight into this relationship, 22 Hong Kong citizens were interviewed about their perceptions of police and media portrayals of police. The discussion that follows provides an examination of the interview comments in respect to the study's six potential factors. The data structure derived based on analysis is presented in table 3.

**Table 3** Data Structure

| <b>Themes</b>   | <b>Theoretical Dimension</b>  | <b>Aggregate Dimension</b>                          | <b>Theoretical Dimension</b> |
|---|---|---|------------------------------|
| Police portrayal in movies  | Stereotypes and archetypes in media portrayals of police                                  | Media and societal influence                        |                              |
| Police brutality and misconduct in media                          | Media representations of police violence and misconduct                                   |   |                              |
| Cinematic techniques used in police movies                        | Use of film techniques to portray police image  |   |                              |
| <b>Themes</b>   | <b>Theoretical Dimension</b>  | <b>Aggregate Dimension</b>                          | <b>Theoretical Dimension</b> |
| Public trust and confidence in police                             | Factors influencing public perception of police   | Social attitudes towards law enforcement            |                              |
| Police accountability and transparency                            | Police accountability and transparency as factors affecting public trust                  |   |                              |
| Police response to protests and demonstrations                    | Police use of force and impact on public trust  |   |                              |
| <b>Themes</b>   | <b>Theoretical Dimension</b>  | <b>Aggregate Dimension</b>                          | <b>Theoretical Dimension</b> |
| Political ideology and police image                               | The relationship between political affiliation and attitudes towards law enforcement      | Political and social factors affecting police image |                              |
| Government policies and police image                              | The role of government policies in shaping police image                                   |   |                              |
| Police corruption and political influence                         | The impact of political corruption on police image  |   |                              |
| <b>Themes</b>   | <b>Theoretical Dimension</b>  | <b>Aggregate Dimension</b>                          | <b>Theoretical Dimension</b> |
| Personal experiences with police                                  | The influence of individual interactions with law enforcement on attitudes towards police | Individual experiences with law enforcement         |                              |
| Perceptions of fairness and equity in police-citizen interactions | The impact of perceptions of fairness on public trust                                     |   |                              |

| The role of race and ethnicity in police-citizen interactions<br><b>Themes</b> | The impact of race and ethnicity on police-citizen interactions<br><b>Theoretical Dimension</b> | <b>Aggregate Dimension</b>            | <b>Theoretical</b> |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Historical and cultural context  | The impact of historical and cultural factors on police image                                   | Cultural factors shaping police image | shaping            |
| Global influences on police image  | The impact of international events on police image in Hong Kong                                 |                                       |                    |
| Impact of colonialism on police image  | The role of colonial history on police image in Hong Kong                                       |                                       |                    |

Participants' attitudes of police and media depictions of police emerged as a major variable in the study. Several participants stated that they have seen numerous police-related movies and television shows, which they believe have influenced their attitudes toward the police. *"I think I've seen almost every police movie there is,"* one attendee added. *"It makes me believe that police job is thrilling and that they are heroes who protect us."* This viewpoint is confirmed by previous research, which indicates that persons who watch more law enforcement-related media information are more likely to have positive opinions toward the police (Cross & Fine, 2021).

Participants' impressions of police portrayals in the media were similarly influenced by perceived realism. Many participants questioned the accuracy of police portrayals in films and television shows. *"I don't think police work is as exciting and glamorous as it is portrayed in movies,"* one participant stated. *"There's a lot of paperwork and red tape."* This viewpoint is consistent with previous research, which indicates that when viewers consider media portrayals of police to be realistic and truthful, they are more likely to acquire attitudes and opinions based on these depictions (Keese et al., 2021).

Personal experience revealed as an important factor in participants' attitudes of police and media representations of police. Participants who had negative interactions with the police were more critical of police portrayals in the media. *"I've been stopped and searched by the police many times, even though I haven't done anything wrong,"* one participant stated. *"I don't trust the police, and I dislike seeing them depicted positively in the media."* This finding is consistent with previous research, which implies that people who have had bad interactions with police in the past may be more critical of media portrayals of police (Lloyd et al., 2020).

The societal backdrop was identified as a component that influenced participants' impressions of police depictions in the media. Participants cited recent political tensions and high-profile cases of police brutality as influences on their attitudes toward police portrayals in the media. *"After the protests and the police brutality, I am very critical of police portrayals in movies and television shows,"* one attendee remarked. *"They are, in my opinion, biased and unrealistic."*

Demographics were also found to have a significant factor in participants' impressions of police portrayals in the media. Because of previous experiences with discrimination or unequal treatment by law enforcement, participants from marginalized groups indicated more critical views of police portrayals in the media. *"As a person of color, I don't like how police are portrayed in the media,"* one participant stated. *"I've encountered police prejudice and harassment, and I don't believe they should be glorified in movies and television shows."* This conclusion is consistent with previous research that finds people from marginalized groups are more critical of police depictions (Brunson & Wade, 2019). Finally, participants' perceptions of police portrayals in the media were influenced by their political orientation. Participants who identified as liberal or progressive were more critical of police portrayals in the media, whereas those who identified as conservative or right-leaning were more positive. *"I am very critical of police portrayals in the media because I believe the police need to be held accountable for their actions, especially after recent cases of police brutality,"* one participant

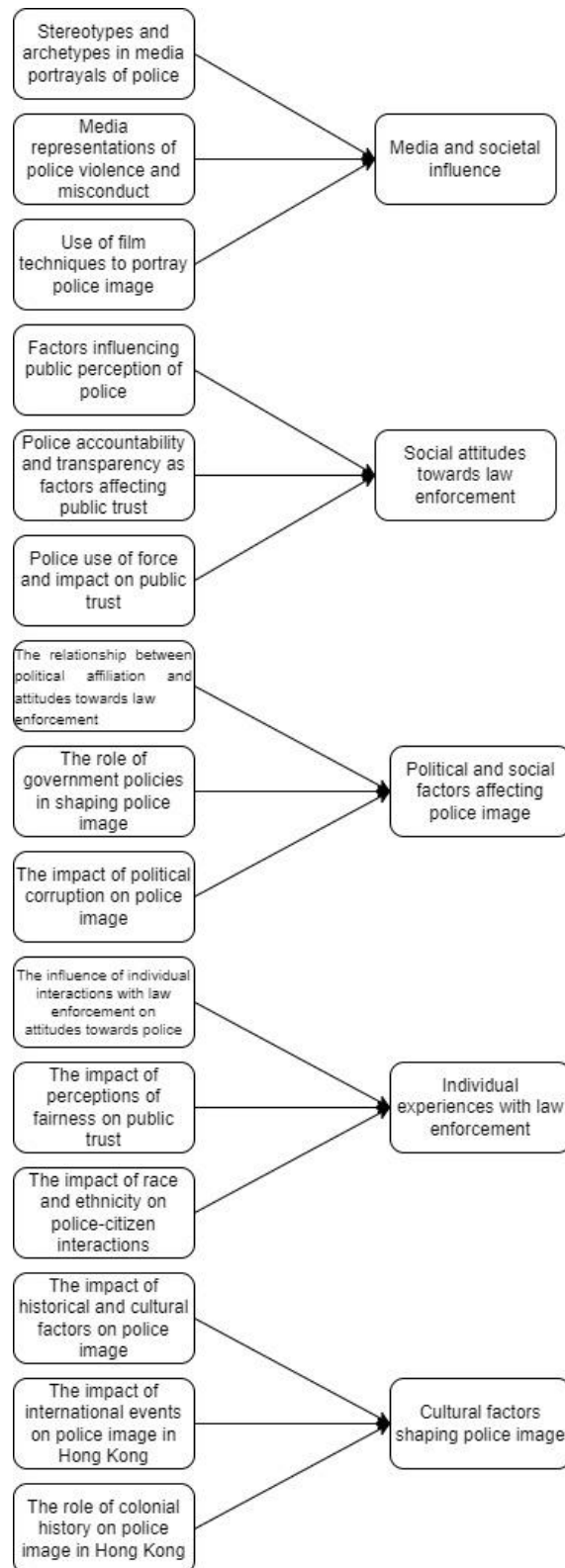


stated. *"But my conservative friend believes that the police are always correct and that they should be portrayed positively in movies and television shows."* This finding is consistent with previous research, which indicates that political ideology might influence people's impressions of law enforcement and media portrayals of cops (Adubato et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the interview feedback sheds light on the complexities of people's perceptions of police and media portrayals of police. Participants indicated varied and multifaceted attitudes on law enforcement, acknowledging both positive and negative aspects of law enforcement. *"I think the police play an important role in keeping us safe,"* one participant stated, *"but I also think they need to be held accountable when they abuse their power."* The present study's results suggest that people's attitudes towards law enforcement officers are not entirely positive or negative, but rather a combination of both.

The implications of the study's findings extend extensively to both the media industry and the government. It is vital that those who create content for the media are mindful of the possible effect that their depictions of law enforcement officials may have on the general public's perspective of the police force. They should attempt to generate realistic and truthful depictions of police officers while also keeping in mind the societal context in which these depictions are received. When making decisions about law enforcement practices and reforms, policymakers should also consider the public's perception of police. It should be noted that this study has significant limitations. The small sample size of 22 participants may not be representative of Hong Kong's larger population, and the study's qualitative character indicates that the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. The study's qualitative technique, on the other hand, allowed for a more in-depth analysis (see Figure 1) of individuals' opinions and provided useful insights into the complexities of attitudes about police portrayals in the media.

Finally, this study emphasizes the significance of comprehending the relationship between the police image in Hong Kong police and gangster films and the public's perception of police. The 22 participants' interview feedback provides useful insights into the various elements that influence persons' opinions of police portrayals in the media. These findings have ramifications for the media business, legislators, and law enforcement organizations, as well as laying the groundwork for future research in this field (see table 4).



**Figure 1** Analysis Structure and Findings

**Table 4** Summary of analysis

| Theme | Subtheme | Definition | Example Quotes |
|-------|----------|------------|----------------|
|-------|----------|------------|----------------|

|                                       |   |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Police portrayal in movies            | Stereotypes                               | Simplified and exaggerated portrayals of police in movies (Bjarnason et al., 2021)  | "Police in movies are always portrayed as being tough and aggressive."   |
|                                       | Archetypes                                | Idealized or villainized representations of police in movies (Horton, 2021)   | "Police in movies are either the hero or the villain, there's no in-between."  |
|                                       | Cinematic techniques                      | The use of film techniques to portray police image (Zhang et al., 2019)   | "The way police are shot in movies can make them look more intimidating or heroic."                                  |
| Public trust and confidence in police | Factors influencing trust                 | Factors that affect public trust in the police (Trinkner et al., 2019)  | "Transparency and accountability are important for building trust between the police and the public."                |
|                                       | Police accountability and transparency    | The ways in which police accountability and transparency affect public trust (Hope Sr, 2021)                                    | "If the police are transparent about their actions, it's easier to trust them."                                      |
|                                       | Police response to protests               | The impact of police use of force on public trust (Bennell et al., 2021)  | "The police response to protests can either build or erode public trust."  |
| Political ideology and police image   | Political affiliation                     | How political ideology affects attitudes towards law enforcement (Reny & Newman, 2021)  | "People with different political beliefs view the police differently."   |
|                                       | Government policies                       | The ways in which government policies affect police image (Walsh & O'Connor, 2019)  | "Government policies can either support or undermine police image."  |
|                                       | Police corruption and political influence | The impact of political corruption on police image (Malik & Qureshi, 2021)  | "When politicians are corrupt, it can lead to distrust of the police."   |
| Personal experiences with police      | Impact of interactions                    | How individual interactions with police affect attitudes towards law enforcement (Rengifo et al., 2019)                         | "My interactions with the police have influenced my views on them."  |
|                                       | Perceptions of fairness                   | How perceptions of fairness affect public trust in the police (Solomon, 2019)   | "If people perceive the police as being unfair, they are less likely to trust them."                                 |
|                                       | Role of race and ethnicity                | The impact of race and ethnicity on police-citizen interactions (Posick & Dawson, 2021)   | "The police treat people differently based on their race."   |
| Historical and cultural context       | Cultural factors                          | How cultural factors affect police image (McLean et al., 2020)  | "In Hong Kong, the police have a unique culture that affects how they are perceived."                                |
|                                       | Global influences                         | How international events affect police image in Hong Kong (Jackson, 2020; Wen et al., 2020)                                     | "Events that in other countries can affect how Hong Kong residents view the police"                                  |
|                                       | Impact of colonialism                     | The impact of colonial history on police image in Hong Kong (Ho, 2020)  | Hong Kong's perception of law enforcement is still influenced by the historical effects of colonialism.              |
| Media bias and influence              | Impact of media bias                      | The impact of media bias on public perception of the police (Richardson et al., 2019)   | The manner in which the police are portrayed in the media can result in either favorable or unfavorable perceptions. |
|                                       | Role of social media                      | The impact of social media on public perception of the police (Walsh & O'Connor, 2019)  | "The emergence of online communities has eased the endeavor of ensuring police accountability for their activities"  |
|                                       | Police events and media coverage          | This study investigates the relationship between media coverage and public perception of police incidents (Miethe et al., 2019) | "The way the media reports of police actions has the potential to influence the public's perception of the police."  |

## Discussion

In this discussion, we delve into the intricate findings of the study, shedding light on the complex dynamics surrounding public perceptions of the police force in Hong Kong. Through a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, we have uncovered rich insights into the multifaceted factors that influence these perceptions.

First and foremost, our research underscores the substantial impact of cinematic representations on the public's perception of the police. Participants in our study pointed out that police portrayals in movies often rely on stereotypes that simplify and exaggerate the image of law enforcement. These portrayals commonly depict police officers as tough and aggressive, perpetuating preconceived notions about their behavior. Furthermore, cinematic archetypes were observed, with police characters being polarized as either heroic figures or antagonists, leaving little room for nuanced or realistic portrayals. The use of cinematic techniques, such as camera angles and editing, was also acknowledged as a potent tool in shaping police image, with the potential to make them appear either intimidating or heroic. These findings emphasize the need for a critical examination of media representations and their influence on public attitudes toward the police; and are also in line with the findings of Li et al. (2019).

Public trust and confidence in the police emerged as a central theme in our study, closely intertwined with factors that influence trust. Transparency, accountability, and openness in police operations were identified as pivotal elements that could significantly impact public trust. When the police were perceived as transparent about their actions, participants noted that it facilitated a higher level of trust among the public. Additionally, our study highlighted the critical role of police responses to protests and demonstrations in shaping public trust. The present discovery aligns with a previous investigation that established a correlation between media depictions of law enforcement and the public's perception of law enforcement (Mustafaj & Van den Bulck, 2021). Participants indicated that the use of force during such events could either build or erode trust in the police, underscoring the importance of balanced and measured responses by law enforcement agencies. This finding is consistent with earlier research that has connected personal police encounters to views toward law enforcement (Rengifo et al., 2019).

Political ideology also emerged as a significant factor influencing public perceptions of the police in Hong Kong. Participants noted that individuals with varying political beliefs held different views of the police force. This finding aligns with broader discussions about the polarization of political ideologies and their impact on attitudes toward law enforcement. Furthermore, government policies were identified as influential in shaping police image. These policies could either support or undermine public perceptions of the police, highlighting the interconnectedness of political decisions and public attitudes. Additionally, the study delved into the role of police corruption and its influence on police image, emphasizing the detrimental effects of political corruption on public trust in law enforcement. The conclusion drawn is in line with prior research that has established a correlation between cultural values and the attitudes of law enforcement officials (Laniyonu, 2022).

Personal experiences with the police were another critical dimension of our findings. The study illuminated how individual interactions with the police could significantly affect attitudes toward law enforcement. Participants shared personal anecdotes, revealing that their experiences with the police had a profound impact on their views. The perception of fairness in police interactions played a crucial role, with participants expressing that perceptions of unfair treatment could diminish trust in the police force. The study also explored the role of race and ethnicity in police-citizen interactions, uncovering concerns about differential treatment based on these factors (see table 5).

**Table 5:** Research Propositions

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| No. | Research Proposition |
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| 1 | Investigate the impact of different genres of Hong Kong films on public perception of police (White, 2021)                      |
| 2 | Examine how social and cultural factors shape the public's perception of police in Hong Kong (Barber, 2020)                     |
| 3 | Conduct a longitudinal study to observe changes in public perception of police over time (Peyton et al., 2019)                  |
| 4 | Compare the perceptions of police portrayed in Hong Kong movies with those portrayed in other Asian countries (Ho et al., 2020) |
| 5 | Examine the role of social media in shaping public perception of police in Hong Kong (Tsoy et al., 2021)                        |

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Finally, our research delved into the historical and cultural context that shapes public perceptions of the police in Hong Kong. Cultural factors were identified as influential in framing the image of the police. Those who adhered to conventional Confucian principles, emphasizing respect for authority, tended to view law enforcement as essential for societal stability. In contrast, individuals with more liberal values, prioritizing individualism and democracy, were inclined to view the police as oppressive and corrupt. Moreover, our study acknowledged the impact of global events and international influences on police image in Hong Kong. Events occurring in other countries could resonate with Hong Kong residents and affect their views of the local police force. Additionally, the study underscored the enduring impact of colonial history on police image in Hong Kong, highlighting the need to consider historical legacies when examining public attitudes toward law enforcement.

In conclusion, our study has provided a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing public perceptions of the police in Hong Kong. These findings offer valuable insights for law enforcement agencies, policymakers, and researchers seeking to understand and address the complexities of public attitudes toward the police.

#### ***Future Research Directions and Limitations***

The present investigation exhibits a number of constraints that necessitate careful consideration when interpreting the findings. The survey was restricted to the viewpoints of individuals residing in Hong Kong with regards to law enforcement. Therefore, the generalizability of the results to other contexts may be limited. The study utilized a convenience sampling method to recruit participants from Hong Kong, which may potentially constrain the extent to which the results can be extrapolated to the broader population. Future research should employ a more representative sample to improve the findings' generalizability. Third, the study relied on participant self-reported data, which could be skewed due to social desirability bias. To validate the findings, future study should include other methodologies such as observation or experimental designs.

This study proposes various next research directions. For starters, further research may look into the impact of various media portrayals of law enforcement on public perception, such as television series and news media. This could aid in identifying specific sorts of media that have a strong influence on public perception of law enforcement. Second, future study might look into how police-community involvement programs affect public view of law enforcement. This could aid in the development of effective measures for fostering trust between law enforcement and the community. Third, future research might look into how cultural influences influence public view of law enforcement. This could aid in identifying cultural elements that influence good or negative attitudes toward law enforcement, as well as informing methods for strengthening police-community interactions in various cultural situations. Overall, this survey gives vital insights into Hong Kong's popular attitude of law enforcement. This study has major practical and theoretical consequences by pinpointing the factors that impact public views about law enforcement, and it lays the groundwork for future research in this area.

### ***Theoretical and Practical Implications***

The conclusions drawn from the study hold noteworthy practical implications for law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong. The study highlights the significance of presenting law enforcement officers in a positive light through media outlets. This can significantly influence the public's attitude towards law enforcement. Collaboration between law enforcement agencies and media outlets can be established to ensure positive portrayal of police officers in films and other media forms. The study highlights the importance of establishing mutual trust between law enforcement and the community. Enhancing police visibility in the locality, engaging in community outreach programs, and providing opportunities for community members to have positive interactions with law enforcement personnel can achieve this objective. Thirdly, the research suggests that police departments should engage in collaborative efforts to address issues related to police violence and misconduct. Enhancing police officer training, implementing more efficient supervision procedures, and augmenting transparency in the investigation and prosecution of police misconduct can lead to achieving this objective.

The findings of this study have significant theoretical implications. The study highlights the importance of understanding the role of media in shaping the public perception of law enforcement. The recommendation is to direct future research towards media literacy and critical analysis of media depictions of law enforcement. The research sheds light on the significant role that individual experiences have in determining how the general population views law enforcement. It is suggested that future study explore the influence of various personal experiences, including meetings with law enforcement agents, on the attitudes of the general public towards law enforcement. This is because of the importance of this topic. The findings of this study demonstrate how important it is to have a comprehensive understanding of the intricate connection that exists between cultural and social norms and how the general public views law enforcement. It is strongly suggested that more study be carried out in order to investigate the influence that societal issues have on the ways in which individuals see law enforcement. In order to strengthen the connection between law enforcement and the community, it is essential to conduct an assessment of the capabilities of various law enforcement organizations to deal with social problems.

### **Conclusion**

The present research endeavor aimed to ascertain the prevailing public sentiment towards the Hong Kong police force through an analysis of the portrayal of law enforcement in Hong Kong cinema. The present study aims to investigate the public's perception of the Hong Kong police force. The researchers have a particular interest in exploring the attitudes and beliefs held by the general populace towards this law enforcement agency. The present study's findings indicate that motion pictures possess the capacity to influence the public's perception of law enforcement. The findings from a sample of 22 interviews support the aforementioned claim. According to the results of the current research, the cinematic genre and the portrayal of law enforcement officials in visual media have a substantial impact on public attitudes of the police. Several major factors that affect the public's view of law enforcement have been identified through this investigation. This research looks at how many factors, such as media, social norms, and interpersonal dynamics, determine how specific features are portrayed. This research intends to provide light on how these factors affect the representation of these traits in various settings. The findings of this study may have implications for understanding the broader societal and cultural factors that shape the representation of these characteristics. This study has conducted an inquiry into the factors that contribute to the overall perception of law enforcement among the general populace in Hong Kong. The present study has facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the aforementioned factors through its findings.

The analysis has uncovered a number of potentially fruitful fields for the continuation of scholarly research. The proposed research endeavors include an investigation into the impact that various genres of Hong Kong cinema have on the populace's outlook towards law enforcement; an exploration of the role that social and

cultural factors play in shaping attitudes towards law enforcement. In future it is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study aimed at tracking changes in public perception over an extended period of time; and a comparative analysis of the portrayal of police in Hong Kong films vis-à-vis their depiction in other Asian films. The purpose of this research is to investigate the complicated interaction that exists between the media, society, and the public's view of law enforcement in Hong Kong. It is possible that a better knowledge of these dynamics may help government and law enforcement organizations improve the quality of interactions between police and communities and promote a more favorable society impression of law enforcement. This is one of the potential benefits that could result from the improved understanding.

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### **Competing Interests**

The author(s) declare no competing interests.

### **Data Availability**

To protect the privacy of the interviewees, the content of the interviews in this paper will not be published. The data analyzed during the current study could be available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### **Ethical Approval**

Approval was obtained from the ethics committee of XXX University. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki.

### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants and/or their legal guardians.