

# The Ethnic and National Identities of the Hong Kong People: A Liberal Explanation

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*This study examines the existing ethnic identity, national identity, and liberal consciousness of the Hong Kong people and analyzes their relationships to each other. Based on the results of a telephone survey, the study finds that Hong Kong people have a very strong indigenous identity and high ethnic pride. At the same time, they also strongly identify themselves with the Chinese nation, though they feel somewhat alienated from the existing Chinese nation-state and skeptical of future Chinese national development. As for liberal consciousness, the study discovers that over 60 percent of the Hong Kong people believe that freedom and human rights are more important than the state and nation; more than 40 percent agree that Tibetans, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong people themselves have the right to self-determination; and about 37 percent indicate that if conditions permitted, they would consider leaving Hong Kong. More importantly, the liberal consciousness of Hong Kong's people is found to be closely related to their ethnic and national identities. Such findings basically substantiate the previous liberal explanations of ethnic/national development, i.e., liberalism can be the foundation of ethnic awareness, secessionism, and nationalism.*

**Keywords:** ethnic identity; national identity; liberalism; Hong Kong people; Chinese nation

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In less than a year, Hong Kong will be returned from British to Chinese rule. Though there have been similar sovereignty transfers of regional areas in modern history,<sup>1</sup> what deserves notice is that in the politics of nation-state, the transfers themselves are not merely

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<sup>1</sup>The transfer of Quebec from French to British colonial rule in 1766 and the return of Taiwan from Japan to the Republic of China in 1945 are two known examples, though their natures are different.

about the shift of a subordinated area from a sovereign government to the other. They also embody an integration of ethnic groups in the area with the national culture of the new sovereign country. Thus, possible tensions and conflicts between ethnic and national identities are problems that the subordinated local ethnic group(s) and the new sovereign country must deal with seriously. If the problems are not recognized or mistreated, their far-reaching effects will inevitably harm the country's national integration and development.<sup>2</sup>

Though the relationship between ethnic and national identity is so important to the internal integration of a nation-state, and though Hong Kong has been facing the problem, especially since the signing of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration which sets the return of Hong Kong to China on July 1, 1997, relevant studies have been scarce.<sup>3</sup> Most of them often describe the strength or feebleness of the two identities and their relationship, and make less effort to explore the identities at the theoretical level.

This paper will explore the Hong Kong people's ethnic and national identities on the eve of sovereignty transfer, and examine whether the liberalism taking root in Hong Kong culture and society influences identity. Unless otherwise noted, the data used here are from a telephone survey conducted during February 11-16, 1996.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The separatist movement of French Quebec in Canada and the ethnic conflicts and independence movement in Taiwan are to a great extent derived from the integration problem among ethnic groups; the integration problem consequently harms the stability of the nation-state.

<sup>3</sup>Siu-kai Lau and Hsin-chi Kuan, *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1988), 178-87; Siu-kai Lau, "Political Attitudes," in *Indicators of Social Development: Hong Kong 1990*, ed. Siu-kai Lau et al. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, 1992), 152-53; Lynn White and Li Cheng, "China Coast Identities: Regional, National, and Global," in *China's Quest for National Identity*, ed. Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 180-90; Ming-kwan Lee and Sai-wing Leung, *Democracy, Capitalism and National Identity* (Hong Kong: Occasional Paper Series No. 4, Department of Applied Social Studies, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 1995).

<sup>4</sup>The telephone survey was conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The sampling was divided into two steps. First, we randomly selected 5,386 telephone numbers from the latest *Hong Kong Residential Telephone Directory* (the 1995 English edition). In order to include those telephone numbers unpublished in the *Directory*, we replaced by computer the last two numbers of the selected telephone numbers with two new, random numbers. Second, after successfully reaching the selected resident, we asked for a family member aged 18 or above as our respondent. The survey was done from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. during February 11-16, 1996. Among the 5,386 sampled telephone numbers, 1,201 had line problems (including long sound and fax lines) or were non-residential telephone numbers; 831 were unanswered (we tried twice at different times). We successfully contacted 3,354 numbers, of which 1,034 refused the interview and 764 had no suitable respondents (e.g., they were foreigners or no adults were at home, etc.). Finally, we

## **Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and Liberalism**

The concept “identity” originates from psychology and generally refers to people’s universal, biopsychological search for “commonality/difference.” Through this, people construct their relationships with the world, minimize ambiguity and uncertainty, and make their lives more meaningful and manageable.<sup>5</sup> The concept is now used in many social science disciplines (e.g., sociology, political science, and anthropology), and its content has developed to the point that these disciplines can link their research on group interaction with one another.

In a sense, developing the concept of “identity” is to observe the dialectical linkage between the micro-aspects of individual psychology and the macro-aspects of societal formation. At the micro-individual-psychological level, identity is generally seen as the origin of people’s motives and behavior. It leads people to believe that their own imagination and cognition are true, as seen by others. At the macro-societal level, identity is the cultural code which makes individual life meaningful, linking individuals to the outside world through social interaction.<sup>6</sup> In short, identity is a bridge through which individuals become social group members and social groups are consolidated. Since the world includes various social groups with different functions, individuals’ identities are multiple, not single,<sup>7</sup> with hierarchies among the identities.<sup>8</sup>

Ethnic and national identities are two very important kinds of collective identities, as evidenced by the frequent conflicts among and between different ethnicities and nations worldwide. For ordinary people, “ethnicity” and “nation” are interchangeable and rarely separate concepts. The two terms, however, are essentially different, especially in social science. “Ethnicity” refers in general to social

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successfully interviewed 1,556 respondents. Excluding the unsuitable respondents, the successful response rate was 60.1 percent. At the 95 percent confidence level, the estimated sampling error was within the range of -3 percent and 3 percent.

<sup>5</sup>Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963).

<sup>6</sup>Andrew Weigert et al., *Society and Identity: Toward a Sociological Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 27-28.

<sup>7</sup>Michael H. Bond, “Between the Yin and the Yang: The Identity of the Hong Kong Chinese,” *Chinese University Bulletin Supplement* 31 (1993).

<sup>8</sup>Gun-wu Wang, *China and Overseas Chinese* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1994), 233-64.

groups whose members share the same blood, customs, cultural values, religion, etc.; they do not necessarily have the political motivation to build an independent country. "Nation," however, has not only the social and cultural properties carried by ethnicity, but also the political motivation to create a sovereign state. In other words, ethnicity is not necessarily nationality, but nationality must embody an internally cohesive ethnicity which seeks a nation-state. Thus, many scholars believe nationalism is a political process in which an ethnicity ultimately seeks the unity of ethnic and political boundaries.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of blood, culture, and history, most Hong Kong people are Chinese. They still retain certain primordial sentiments toward traditional China (including its history, culture, blood, territories, etc.). Yet at most, these primordial sentiments can only constitute what historian Gun-wu Wang calls "historical identity," and are not fully equivalent to the national identity necessary to build a modern nation-state. As mentioned above, though modern nation-states more or less originate from the struggles and endeavors of traditional ethnic groups, they are still a political construct that never existed before. Thus, any national experiences generated by the construct must be totally new for all traditional ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup> What is distinctive in Hong Kong's case is that before China became a modern nation-state, Hong Kong was ceded to Britain. On the other hand, many Chinese people who settled in Hong Kong around 1949 had been baptized through Chinese nationalism, although their national identity withered or was smashed by the KMT-CCP civil war.<sup>11</sup> In other words,

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<sup>9</sup>E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 1; J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 3.

<sup>10</sup>The reason that nation-state is a new phenomenon mainly lies in the fact that centralized state power is consciously involved in the nation-building process. The artificial nature of this is very strong and in sharp contrast with the more-or-less natural formation of traditional ethnic groups. See Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992); Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup>From the perspective of political ideology, the eventual outbreak of the Chinese civil war, in which the KMT and the CCP chose to fight against each other to the end without any willingness to compromise, had to do with the irreconcilable difference between the two parties in constructing the Chinese nation-state. In fact, the struggle between the two parties' national ideologies—the KMT's capitalist-oriented "The Three People's Principles" and the CCP's communism—highlighted to a great extent

up to now, the development of the modern Chinese nation-state has either been independent of the Hong Kong people's current consciousness, or seriously distorted by the longtime KMT-CCP confrontation. In the past several decades, the political reality experienced by the Hong Kong people has been British colonial rule instead of the construction of the Chinese nation-state. Although new immigrants from mainland China have flowed into Hong Kong and carry certain nationalist feelings, they are the minority and cannot represent the society's mainstream experience.

According to Benedict Anderson, a key condition for the formation of modern ethnic identity is colonial boundaries and rule.<sup>12</sup> Colonial boundaries provide a common sense of space for the colonized, while colonial rule shapes a new ethnic experience or history. Before the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, though Hong Kong was ruled by Britain, its political boundaries were not strictly controlled. During that time, people from mainland China were basically free to enter and leave Hong Kong.<sup>13</sup> However, after 1949, as people from mainland China flooded in and troubled the colonial government,<sup>14</sup> and the East-West Cold War was intensified by the Korean War, the Hong Kong government tightened its "open border" and carried out a more restrictive immigration policy.<sup>15</sup> Since then, a sensitive political fence has been erected between Hong Kong and mainland China, and the Hong Kong people have taken root. To a large extent, it is after 1950 that the so-called "Hongkongese identity" or "Hong Kong ethos" began to gradually emerge.<sup>16</sup> The Hong Kong people's emergence has highlighted their arrival as a distinctive, regional ethnic group, though most of its members come from or are descendants of people from mainland China, are an-

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the artificiality and illusion of the term "nation" in nationalism. They also echo what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls the "imagined community."

<sup>12</sup>Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 163-85.

<sup>13</sup>G. B. Endacott, *Government and People in Hong Kong 1841-1962* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1964), 4-5.

<sup>14</sup>According to G. B. Endacott (*Government and People in Hong Kong*, 197), from the beginning of 1949 to the spring of 1950 alone, 776,000 refugees flooded from mainland China to Hong Kong, nearly paralyzing the society.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>16</sup>Hugh Baker, "Life in the Cities: The Emergence of Hong Kong Man," *The China Quarterly*, no. 95 (1983): 467-79; Hoi-man Chan, "Culture and Identity," in *The Other Hong Kong Report 1994*, ed. Donald H. McMillen and Si-wai Man (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press), 443-68; Lau and Kuan, *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese*.

thropologically Chinese, and identify in various degrees with the "historical" China and the existing "political" China.

Clear and stable political boundaries are just an important external condition for the formation of ethnic identity. Whether a temporary social aggregate can develop into an enduring, highly self-conscious ethnic group depends on many other internal social and cultural factors. Among these factors, liberalism is the one that has attracted significant scholarly attention in recent years.

On the surface, linking liberalism with ethnic or national consciousness might be unimaginable, as the former concerns individuality, while the latter emphasizes primordial sentiments and natural solidarity, believing that collectivity is beyond and irreducible to the sum of individuals. However, this seemingly oppositional dichotomy has been questioned in recent years. Yael Tamir has philosophically demonstrated the collective base of liberalism by putting forth the concept of liberal nationalism.<sup>17</sup> He argues that although liberalism does not deal with the issue of collective identity, the political constructs it seeks are implicitly based on collective identity. For example, in liberal states, citizenship lies not in free choice but ethnicity and kinship; it lies not in choosing the most just government but in political loyalty to the government (as long as the government is more or less well-behaved). Also, the government only distributes welfare to its citizens and often ignores non-citizens. While liberalism is manifested in and through collectivity, the appearance of liberal nationalism is natural as long as a social group forms and develops either on the basis of liberal values and ideals (e.g., the fight for individual rights) or for the sake of liberalism itself.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Harry Beran has pointed out that liberalism is the theoretical base of secessionism, a tributary of nationalism.<sup>19</sup> According to liberalism, the most ideal society is one which is formed most voluntarily. The unification of a country can be seen as a voluntary unity; if some members of a country want to separate from their motherland and form an independent nation-state, and if the existing conditions are permissive, they should be allowed to do so. Along this line, Nai-te Wu has proven in his survey study that lib-

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<sup>17</sup>Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 9, 117.

<sup>19</sup>Harry Beran, "A Theory of Secession," *Political Studies* 32 (1984): 24-25.



eralism is a major foundation of Taiwanese nationalism, which advocates Taiwan's de jure independence from mainland China as a new sovereign nation.<sup>20</sup>

Liah Greenfeld has also discovered that Americans' national identity does not stem from the cultural properties of their ethnic origin (e.g., their British suzerain), but the legitimacy of their political independence derived from Britain's liberalist constitution.<sup>21</sup> Britain's constitution adores liberalism and democracy, which promotes universalism instead of the particularism generally advocated by ethnic cultures. As such, the thirteen American states' call for independence from Britain's colonial rule did not violate but fundamentally realize the ideal of Britain's constitution, using liberalist universalism to negate the legitimacy of Britain's colonial domination. What attracted early immigrants to America were not only its abundant resources but also liberalism and democracy. In fact, since its independence, liberalism and democracy have been the ground of Americans' national identity and education.<sup>22</sup>

If liberalism is the origin of collective awareness and the base of nationalism as well as secessionism, it has a huge impact on the relationship among ethnic groups and nations. As Jurgen Habermas points out, the democratic citizenship advocated by liberalism has become essential to modern nation-states; it smashes traditional, collectivist-oriented national identities (e.g., the former Soviet Union), and also catalyses new national integrations (e.g., the European Community as a nation-state in the making).<sup>23</sup>

The influence of liberalism on Hong Kong cannot be neglected. For a long time, the ideology of laissez-faire and social and cultural noninterventionism has governed Britain's colonial rule over Hong Kong, and its values are basically convergent with liberalism, which has deeply influenced the Hong Kong people's collective awareness.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, although Britain's rule over Hong Kong has been

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<sup>20</sup>Nai-te Wu, "Ethnic Awareness and Liberalism: Searching for the Foundation of Taiwanese Nationalism" (Paper presented at the First Annual Conference of the Taiwan Political Science Association, Taipei, December 17-18, 1994).

<sup>21</sup>Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 395-484.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>23</sup>Jurgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity," in *The Condition of Citizenship*, ed. Bart van Steenbergen (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 20-35.

<sup>24</sup>Siu-kai Lau and Hsin-chi Kuan, "Public Attitudes Toward Laissez Faire in Hong Kong," *Asian Survey* 30, no. 8 (August 1990): 766-81.

politically undemocratic, in recent years there has been limited democratization, due to many reasons (e.g., the promotion of representative systems by the Hong Kong-British government, resistance to mainland China's communist rule through democracy, the struggle among local elites for the power vacuum which will be left by Britain, etc.). If the liberalist tradition links gradually with political democratization, the Hong Kong people's understanding and support of liberalism should be strengthened. This development of course will affect the Hong Kong people's ethnic and national identities during the late transitional period and beyond.<sup>25</sup> Let us first look at the current Hong Kong people's ethnic and national identities.

### The Hong Kong People's Ethnic and National Identities

Similar to the findings of previous studies,<sup>26</sup> our survey discovered that the Hong Kong people's own ethnic identity (i.e., a Hong Kong-oriented awareness) is very strong. As table 1 shows, 88.6 percent of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that "Today's success of Hong Kong is totally due to the Hong Kong people's cleverness and diligence"; 80 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "Hong Kong is the most felicitous Chinese Society"; 79 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "Hong Kong's economy is the most vital in the world." Obviously, these figures show that Hong Kong people are very proud of their ethnic "personality," the status of Hong Kong in Chinese society, and the vitality of Hong Kong in the world economy. In particular, the Hong Kong people almost unanimously affirmed their ethnic personality—cleverness and diligence; only 2.5 percent thought otherwise.

On the other hand, while the Hong Kong people have a strong indigenous identity, their identification with China is considerable, even though this Chinese identity may not be deeply embedded in

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<sup>25</sup>For example, according to a telephone survey on Hong Kong youths' civic awareness during the late transitional period, more than 50 percent of the respondents said their most worrisome problems amid the 1997 sovereignty transfer are democracy, freedom, and human rights. See Ka-ying Wong and Kwok-cheung Shum, *Civic Awareness of Hong Kong Young People in the Late Transitional Period: A Comparison of Hong Kong as a Whole and the Shatin District* (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, 1996), 16.

<sup>26</sup>Lau and Kuan, *The Ethos of the Hong Kong Chinese*; Lau, "Political Attitudes,"; Lee and Leung, *Democracy, Capitalism and National Identity*.



**Table 1**  
**Respondents' Hong Kong and Chinese Identities (%)**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	So-so	Agree	Strongly agree	Do not know/ not sure
Today's success of Hong Kong is totally due to the Hong Kong people's cleverness and diligence	0.3	2.2	8.0	72.9	15.7	0.9
Hong Kong is the most felicitous Chinese society	0.1	9.7	8.3	70.4	9.6	1.9
Hong Kong's economy is the most vital in the world	0.2	7.0	8.1	71.4	7.6	5.7
Chinese people are hard-working and ambitious, with strong competitive power	4.4	7.4	0.0	77.8	10.0	0.4
China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long history and profound culture, and these deserve pride	0.1	10.4	11.1	67.7	8.6	2.2
The next century will be the Chinese people's century	0.8	21.2	15.0	48.9	4.2	10.0

the Chinese nation's current political construction (this point will be elaborated later). According to our survey, 87.8 percent of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that "Chinese people are hard-working and ambitious, with strong competitive power"; 76.3 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long history and profound culture, and these deserve pride"; 53.1 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "China has been taking off, and the next century will be the Chinese people's century." It should be noted that the Hong Kong people's Chinese identity obviously tends to emphasize the Chinese nation's personality (hard-working and ambitious) and its history and culture. Their confidence in China's future, however, is weak, especially in contrast with their praise of Hong Kong's vitality in the world economy. The contrast may be based on the respondents' evaluation of objective reality, as Hong Kong's economy is far more prosperous than China's. What should also be taken into account is the "closeness/estrangement" complex caused by the longtime political separation between Hong Kong and China.

Indeed, the Hong Kong people's indigenous identity does not clash with their Chinese national identity. As table 2 indicates, all

indices between the two identities are statistically significant and positive, as are their correlations. The correlation between the Hong Kong people and Chinese people's personalities has the highest coefficient of 0.2935. The correlation coefficient on the Hong Kong people's personality and "the next century will be the Chinese people's century" is the lowest, but still strong (0.1509). In other words, Hong Kong identity and the Chinese national identity do not conflict with one another; instead, they tend to be harmonious, complementary, and symbiotic.

The above analysis on the relationship between the Hong Kong people's indigenous identity and the Chinese national identity is static. How did the respondents define their identities and choose between the two? When asked whether they considered themselves more "Hongkongese" or Chinese, 36.3 percent of them answered Chinese; 49 percent answered Hongkongese; 11.2 percent said they were both Chinese and Hongkongese; 0.5 percent said neither; and only 3 percent failed to give a definite answer. In other words, even on the eve of Hong Kong's return to China, the Hong Kong people still tend to identify with Hong Kong far more than China. However, compared with Lau Siu-kai's studies in the past decade, it seems that the number of people who identify with Hong Kong is decreasing, while that of those who identify with China is on the rise.<sup>27</sup>

The above inquiry into how the Hong Kong people locate themselves in terms of their indigenous identity and Chinese identity can only give us an abstract sketch. To make the picture more concrete, it is necessary to link the people's views on identity with other related and concrete issues.

Table 3 lists the results of the Hong Kong people's views on some key issues concerning their indigenous and national identities. At least four features can be identified. First, the Hong Kong people's own ethnic awareness is much stronger than their national awareness: 67.5 percent of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that "to develop, China should model itself on Hong Kong and make itself into

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<sup>27</sup>Siu-kai Lau points out that the percentage of respondents who called themselves "Hongkongese" rather than Chinese dropped from 63.6 percent in 1988 to 57.2 percent in 1990; the percentage of respondents who called themselves Chinese rather than "Hongkongese" only slightly dropped from 28.8 percent to 26.4 percent. It should be noted that the research design in 1988 was different from that in 1990, since the former did not include the answer choice of "both Hongkongese and Chinese," while the latter did. See Lau, "Political Attitudes," 152.

Table 2  
Correlations between Respondents' Hong Kong and Chinese Identities +

	Hong Kong's success is totally due to Hong Kong people's cleverness and diligence	Hong Kong is the most felicitous Chinese society	Hong Kong is the most vital in the world	Chinese people are hard-working and ambitious, with strong competitive power	China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long history and profound culture, and these deserve pride
Hong Kong is the most felicitous Chinese society	.2637*				
Hong Kong's economy is the most vital in the world	.1962*	.2244*			
Chinese people are hard-working and ambitious, with strong competitive power	.2935*	.2176*	.2773*		
China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long history and profound culture, and these deserve pride	.2284*	.2145*	.2096*	.2825*	
The next century will be the Chinese people's century	.1509*	.1890*	.1678*	.1934*	.2830*

+ : All index measurement rods in the table are from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree."  
\* means that the statistical significance is less than 0.05.

a Hong Kong"; only 17.8 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. In addition, 74.2 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "Hong Kong's interests are above China's interests"; only 9.8 percent held the opposite view. These statements plainly show that most respondents are proud of Hong Kong's past and present development, emphasize Hong Kong as a model for China, and put Hong Kong's interests above China's.

Second, despite their strong Hong Kong identity, the Hong Kong people are relatively clear about their national identity and state sovereignty: 67.7 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "China's problems, including those of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, are problems that should be solved by the Chinese themselves, instead of with help from foreigners"; 57.2 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "it is necessary for China to garrison the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Hong Kong because otherwise, China's sovereignty over Hong Kong cannot be manifested." Moreover, 50.5 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "the Chinese are the Chinese; they should not have a dual nationality." In short, more than half of the respondents supported Chinese state sovereignty, the PLA garrison in Hong Kong, and a single nationality, all of which are major values of a modern nation-state. The results more or less indicate that Hong Kong identity does not render Chinese national identity ambiguous. Indeed, if the respondents considered the issues, especially the PLA garrison and single nationality, purely from a pragmatic or ethnic point of view, they might have different views. Hence, it is reasonable to infer that national identity does matter in the respondents' answers.

Third, the Hong Kong people are quite willing to help develop the Chinese nation: 57.8 percent of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that "for the sake of a country's well-being, individuals' interests should be sometimes put aside"; only 21 percent disagreed/strongly disagreed. In addition, 42.8 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "if Hong Kong has a financial surplus, it should allocate part of the surplus to the Chinese government for the development of mainland China," though a significant proportion of the respondents (39.7 percent) thought otherwise. In sum, the sincerity of the Hong Kong people in promoting the Chinese nation is unquestionable. This sincerity does not contradict the preference to place Hong Kong's interests above China's, as mentioned above. True, the Hong Kong people tend to put Hong Kong first when facing insurmountable conflicts of interest between Hong Kong and China. The tendency, however, is not peculiar, as similar phenomena also exist in other

nation-states; it also does not necessarily imply a negation of national interests. The reason is simple: ethnic and national interests do not necessarily conflict. Therefore, while emphasizing their ethnic interests, the Hong Kong people of course can offer help in various areas of Chinese national development.

Fourth, the Hong Kong people are quite willing to better educate themselves about the Chinese nation: 89 percent of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that "to fulfill the obligation of being Chinese, we should learn more about China's history and culture"; 82.1 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "for the sake of communicating with members in a nation, Hong Kong's people should make an effort to learn Mandarin"; 53.8 percent agreed/strongly agreed that "as Chinese, we Hong Kong people should of course learn the national anthem," though 32.8 percent disagreed/strongly disagreed. The results confirm that the Hong Kong people's Chinese national identity is embedded in the Chinese history and culture. Their relative hesitation over the need to learn the national anthem perhaps reflects alienation from and even resistance to the PRC, a key political construct in Chinese national identity. After all, singing the national anthem is a direct and explicit expression of national identity in the modern world. Nevertheless, the hesitation of Hong Kong's people is understandable, since their perceptions of the PRC, to a great extent, stem from their life experiences. On the other hand, since Hong Kong is a Chinese society, it is easier for the people to naturally and unintentionally form an identification with the Chinese nation's history and culture.

If we further examine the respondents' views on the correlations between Hong Kong identity and Chinese identity (see table 4), two points are noticeable. First, as mentioned before, the Hong Kong people's indigenous identity and Chinese identity are not conflictual, but symbiotic. Nevertheless, among all statistically significant index correlates, the Chinese identity indices have stronger correlations (i.e., the coefficients are bigger) with the indices on identification with China than with Hong Kong identity. However, its correlations with the indices on identification with Hong Kong are weaker (i.e., the coefficients are smaller). Second, respondents who plainly claimed themselves as "Hongkongese" rather than Chinese have indices on identification with China which are statistically significant and negative, while their indices on identification with Hong Kong are statistically significant and positive. In addition, no matter whether the correlation coefficients are positive or negative, their magnitudes

**Table 3**  
**Respondents' Identification with and Situation Between Hong Kong and China (%)**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	So-so	Agree	Strongly agree	Do not know/ not sure
Chinese people should not have a dual nationality	1.5	31.0	8.2	45.2	5.3	8.8
Individual interests should sometimes be subordinated to national interests	0.6	20.4	13.3	54.1	3.7	7.9
Hong Kong people should learn the national anthem	1.2	31.6	10.1	49.0	4.8	3.2
Hong Kong people should learn Mandarin	0.2	9.5	7.2	71.6	10.5	1.1
Hong Kong should provide financial support for mainland China	2.6	37.1	9.8	40.7	2.1	7.8
The PLA garrison manifests Chinese sovereignty	1.7	25.3	9.8	52.8	4.4	6.0
China's problems should be solved by the Chinese themselves	0.9	17.3	7.8	57.8	9.9	6.3
Chinese people should learn more about Chinese history and culture	0.3	5.0	3.8	78.4	10.6	1.9
China should model itself on Hong Kong	0.6	17.2	10.9	60.6	6.9	3.8
Hong Kong's interests are above China's interests	0.3	9.5	8.9	65.7	8.5	7.1

are not weak (between 0.1 and 0.2), except for two items ("Chinese people should learn more about Chinese history and culture" and "China should model itself on Hong Kong").

Based on the above two points, we can claim that although Hong Kong identity and Chinese identity are not mutually exclusive, if they become hierarchical, the dominant identity will suppress the subordinated one. For example, people who identify themselves as "Hongkongese" will suppress their Chinese identity, and vice versa.

### **Indices for Measuring the Hong Kong People's Liberal Consciousness**

As noted before, the influence of liberalism on ethnic and national identities is double-edged. It can be the base or goal of a



Table 4  
Correlations between Respondents' Hong Kong/Chinese Identities and Their Identification with and Situation Between Hong Kong and China +

	Hong Kong's success is totally due to Hong Kong people's cleverness and diligence	Hong Kong is the most felicitous Chinese society	Hong Kong's economy is the most vital in the world	Chinese people are hard-working and ambitious, with strong competitive power	China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long history and profound culture, and these deserve pride	The next century will be the Chinese people's century	Hongkongese/ Chinese
Chinese people should not have a dual nationality	.0799*	.0676*	.1056*	.1898*	.1797*	.2048*	-.1993*
Individual interests should sometimes be subordinated to national interests	.0780*	.0779*	.0983*	.0778*	.1500*	.1855*	-.1341*
Hong Kong people should learn the national anthem	.0840*	.0842*	.1474*	.0712*	.1643*	.2298*	-.2333*
Hong Kong people should learn Mandarin	.0995*	.0815*	.1557*	.1236*	.1752*	.1876*	-.1226*
Hong Kong should provide financial support for mainland China	.0061	.0503	.0430	.0899*	.1062*	.1902*	-.1269*
The PLA garrison manifests Chinese sovereignty	0.572*	.0223	.0841*	.0989*	.1606*	1774*	-.1677*
China's problems should be solved by the Chinese themselves	.0969*	.0807*	.1147*	.0892*	.1647*	.2088*	-.2055*

Table 4 (Continued)

	Hong Kong's success is totally due to Hong Kong people's cleverness and diligence	Hong Kong is the most felicitous Chinese society	Hong Kong's economy is the most vital in the world	Chinese people are hard-working and ambitious, with strong competitive power	China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long history and profound culture, and these deserve pride	The next century will be the Chinese people's century	Hongkongese/Chinese
Chinese people should learn more about Chinese history and culture	.0765*	.0962*	.1247*	.1292*	.2008*	.1335*	-.0860*
China should model itself on Hong Kong	.1663*	.1964*	.0585*	.1341*	.1076*	.1408*	.0594*
Hong Kong's interests are above China's	.1735*	.1958*	.0856*	.1692*	.1400*	.0666*	.1489*
Hongkongese/Chinese	.0043	.0028	-.0266	-.0350	-.0323	-.1262*	

+: Except for the item "Hongkongese/Chinese," all index measurement rods in the table are from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"; the measurement for Hongkongese/Chinese is 0 = "Chinese," 1 = "Hongkongese."

\* means that the statistical significance is less than 0.05.

self-constructed ethnic group or nation, but it can also be the rationale behind the internal split of an ethnic group or a nation. In this section, we will attempt to ascertain the respondents' degree of identification with liberal values, specifically their views on three indices closely related to liberalism: (1) freedom and human rights; (2) ethnic group self-determination (independence); and (3) consideration of emigration. This approach to liberalism basically originates from Harry Beran's theory of secessionism, which treats liberalism as the theoretical base of separatism and argues that the unity or split of social groups should be voluntary. The indices thus chosen provide a multi-level framework for judging the Hong Kong people's liberal awareness. The index of freedom and human rights measures their general attitudes toward liberalism; the index of self-determination measures their collective sense of freedom; and the index of consideration of emigration measures their individual sense of freedom.

First, regarding support for freedom and human rights, we asked: "Which do you think is more important—the state/nation or freedom/human rights?" About 60 percent of the respondents said freedom and human rights, 13.5 percent said state and nation, 20.8 percent said both are important, 0.8 percent said neither is important, and 4.8 percent failed to give a definite answer. At the general level, it is obvious that the majority of the respondents put freedom and human rights before state and nation.

The strong support for the ideas of freedom and human rights, however, substantially declines when it encounters the concrete issue of Chinese ethnic groups' self-determination. As table 5 shows, only 41.5 percent of respondents agreed/strongly agreed on the self-determination of Tibetans (the question was: "If Tibetans hold a referendum and finally decide to separate from China, becoming independent, do you agree that they have the right to do so?").<sup>28</sup> Support for the self-determination of Taiwan and Hong Kong was even weaker, with 39.4 percent favoring the former and 38.2 percent the latter.<sup>29</sup> The results indicate that concrete interest considerations can often dilute the support for ideas.

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<sup>28</sup>This question is modified from Wu, "Ethnic Awareness and Liberalism."

<sup>29</sup>It should be noted that the focus of the question is on the right, not the content, of self-determination. We should differentiate between the right to self-determination

It appears that the Hong Kong people hold different criteria for judging the self-determination of Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, as their support for each is different. They treat Tibetans most leniently and themselves most harshly. The reasons for the difference are not clear. It may be due to blood and culture (e.g., Tibetans are not Han people), political reality (Taiwan is separated from mainland China), national feelings or pragmatic considerations (the relationship between Hong Kong and China is too close), etc. Despite these puzzles, the Hong Kong people's liberal awareness is definitely not weak.

On the other hand, when asked whether they wanted to emigrate if conditions permitted, 58.4 percent of the respondents said they did not, 5.6 percent said they might, 32.1 percent said they would emigrate or had made the arrangements, and 4 percent did not know or were not clear. For many people, leaving their ethnic group or nation when necessary is an expression of freedom and human rights being placed higher than their identification with the nation-state they belong to. Indeed, quite a number of the respondents would or might consider emigrating. The situation, however, should not be overinterpreted, since emigration involves many practical considerations and does not necessarily imply the weakening of ethnic or national identity. Many previous studies have pointed out that although some people have been naturalized in other countries, they still strongly identify with their original ethnic groups or nations.<sup>30</sup>

In any case, correlations among respondents' views on freedom and human rights, ethnic self-determination, and consideration of emigration are significant (see table 6). The links between the three types of self-determination (Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) are the strongest, with the highest correlation coefficient at 0.7551 and the lowest still at 0.6594. Links between state and nation/freedom and human rights and ethnic self-determination are weaker, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.35 to 0.37. Correlations between consideration of emigration and state and nation/freedom and human

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and support for self-determination. Indeed, a survey done in 1995 shows that only 27 percent of the Hong Kong people supported "the independence of Taiwan." See Ka-ying Wong, "National Identity and Cross-Strait Relations: Hong Kong People's Attitudes toward the Relationships of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong" (Paper presented at the Third International Conference on the Coordination System of the Chinese Economies, Taipei, December 12-15, 1995).

<sup>30</sup>K. Victor Ujimoto and Hirabayashi Gordon, eds., *Visible Minorities and Multiculturalism: Asians in Canada* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1980).

**Table 5**  
**Respondents' Views on Ethnic Self-determination (%)**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	So-so	Agree	Strongly agree	Do not know/ not sure
Tibetans have the right to self-determination	2.8	32.8	4.8	39.1	2.4	18.1
Taiwanese have the right to self-determination	3.6	37.1	4.3	37.6	1.8	15.5
Hong Kong people have the right to self-determination	4.5	40.6	3.9	35.3	2.9	12.8

rights, as well as the three types of ethnic self-determination are the weakest; their coefficients are around 0.19 and 0.22 only. The magnitudes of the correlations are understandable. First, the three types of ethnic self-determination only represent three kinds of viewpoints with the same nature. Their high correlations are not surprising. Second, the index of state and nation/freedom and human rights aims to check respondents' views on individual freedom and rights in the context of state and nation, as do the indices of ethnic self-determination; what is special is that the individual freedom and rights the three indices imply are manifested through the collective freedom of a voluntarily formed ethnic group. Thus, it is reasonable that there are mild correlations between state and nation/freedom and human rights and ethnic self-determination. Lastly, emigration has the weakest correlations with other indices. The situation is quite natural, since emigration always involves concrete interest considerations rather than "big" issues about state and nation. Nevertheless, we should note that the terms "strong" or "weak" are merely relative, especially when considering such complex and abstract ideas as liberalism: 0.7 is no doubt a very strong correlation coefficient; 0.2 is lower than 0.7, but it cannot be seen as very weak. Indeed, what is at issue is not finding a perfect measurement index but how to use indices to reasonably explain a phenomenon.

### **Relationship Between Liberalism and Hong Kong and Chinese Identities**

What is the relationship between the Hong Kong people's views on freedom and human rights/ethnic self-determination/consideration

**Table 6**  
**Correlations of Respondents' Views on Freedom/Human Rights, Ethnic Self-determination and the Consideration of Emigration +**

	State and nation/ freedom and human rights	Tibetans have the right to self- determination	Taiwanese have the right to self- determination	Hong Kong people have the right to self-determination
Tibetans have the right to self-determination	.3779*			
Taiwanese have the right to self-determination	.3735*	.7473*		
Hong Kong people have the right to self- determination	.3557*	.6594*	.7551*	
Consideration of emigration	.1991*	.1918*	.2165*	.2096*

+ : The index measurement rod for each item in the table is from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree," except the items of "nation and state/freedom and human rights" and "consideration of emigration." The measuring rod for nation and state/freedom and human rights is 1 = "state and nation," 2 = "freedom and human rights"; the measuring rod for consideration of emigration is 1 = "do not consider," 2 = "may consider," 3 = "considered"/"have made the arrangements."

\* means that the statistical significance is less than 0.05.



of emigration and their Hong Kong and Chinese identities? From table 7, we can conclude several findings that are quite subtle and distinctive. First, there are no significant links between state and nation/freedom and human rights, the three types of ethnic self-determination, and the Hong Kong people's indigenous identity. In other words, the Hong Kong people's views on state and nation/freedom and human rights and ethnic self-determination do not affect their Hong Kong identity. Second, except for two cases (between state and nation/freedom and human rights and "Chinese people are hard-working and ambitious, with strong competitive power," and between "Tibetans have the right to self-determination" and "China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long history and profound culture, and these deserve pride"), there are salient negative correlations between views on nation and state/freedom and human rights/ethnic self-determination and those on the three indices on Chinese identity, although the magnitudes of the coefficients are limited, ranging from -0.05 to -0.06 (e.g., the correlations between state and nation/freedom and human rights/the self-determination of Hong Kong's people and "China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long history and profound culture, and these deserve pride"). The negative correlations suggest that Chinese identity tends to be suppressed by the prioritization of freedom and human rights over state and nation, or the support of the self-determination of Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Third, except for one item ("Hong Kong's economy is the most vital in the world"), the correlations between consideration of emigration and all indices on the Hong Kong and Chinese identities are negative. This indicates that consideration of leaving the original ethnic groups or nation can weaken ethnic or national identities.

Lastly, table 8 further demonstrates the correlations between ethnic self-determination/consideration of emigration and identification with Hong Kong and China. The findings are quite similar to the above analysis. First, state and nation/freedom and human rights/ethnic self-determination have significant negative correlations with all indices about Chinese identity, but their correlations with Hong Kong identity indices are mostly significantly positive. That is to say, respondents who identified with freedom and human rights or agreed on the self-determination of Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong viewed all indices on Chinese nationality with varying degrees of reservation, yet they tended to favor the indices on Hong Kong identity. Despite the positive or negative correlations, the magnitudes of all coefficients on significant correlations are not too weak, mostly

Table 7  
Correlations between Respondents' Views on Freedom/ Human Rights, Ethnic Self-determination and Consideration of Emigration and Their Hong Kong and Chinese Identities +

	State and nation/ freedom and human rights	Tibetans have the right to self- determination	Taiwanese have the right to self- determination	Hong Kong people have the right to self-determination	Consideration of emigration
Today's success of Hong Kong is totally due to Hong Kong people's cleverness and diligence	.0068	.0151	-.0276	-.0091	-.0616*
Hong Kong is the most felicitous Chinese society	-.0257	-.0288	-.0320	-.0154	-.0828*
Hong Kong's economy is the most vital in the world	-.0383	.0104	-.0109	-.0459	-.0449
Chinese people are hard- working and ambitious, with strong competitive power	-.0395	-.0688*	-.1103*	-.0737*	-.0675*
China has vast lands and rich resources, with a long and profound culture, and these deserve pride	-.0651*	-.0552	-.0954*	-.0582*	-.0949*
The next century will be the Chinese people's century	-.1486*	-.1631*	-.1668*	-.1331*	-.1816*

+ : All index measurement rods in the table are the same as previous tables.  
\* means that the statistical significance is less than 0.05.

between -0.1 and -0.2. Second, in terms of Hongkongese/Chinese identity preference, respondents who emphasized freedom and human rights rather than state and nation and supported self-determination tended to identify more with Hong Kong, and vice versa. Indeed, the correlations of Hongkongese/Chinese with freedom and human rights and self-determination are generally strong, up to 0.3628; its weakest coefficient is still 0.2811. Third, consideration of emigration has a significant relationship with indices about Hong Kong identity, but its correlations with indices about Chinese identity are significantly negative, with significant coefficients between -0.1 and -0.2. In other words, respondents who considered emigrating do not view China from Hong Kong's standpoint. They also tend to reject viewing Hong Kong from China's standpoint. Furthermore, they tend to emphasize themselves as "Hongkongese" rather than Chinese, as the correlation between consideration of emigration and being "Hongkongese" is quite strong (0.2462).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper has explored the Hong Kong people's indigenous identity as well as their Chinese identity in light of ethnicity and nation concepts. The results show that the Hong Kong people's indigenous identity is very strong. They are proud of their "cleverness and diligence" and Hong Kong's status in Chinese society as well as in the world economy. At the same time, the Hong Kong people's Chinese national identity is considerable, tending to emphasize the personality, history, and culture of the Chinese nation, while being slightly alienated and vacillant in viewing current Chinese nation-state development.

How the Hong Kong people situate themselves in relation to their Chinese identity is quite complicated. On the one hand, most of them identify with Hong Kong more than the Chinese nation; they believe that they are "Hongkongese" rather than Chinese and tend to view China from Hong Kong's standpoint. On the other hand, they are quite eager to learn more about the Chinese nation and help in its development, displaying a clear awareness of national and state sovereignty. The Hong Kong people's indigenous identity does not necessarily clash with the Chinese national identity, but when the two identities are hierarchical, the dominant one will suppress the subordinated.

Since the formation of ethnic and national identities, as many

**Table 8**  
**Correlations between Respondents' Views on Freedom/Human Rights, Ethnic Self-determination and Consideration of Emigration and Their Identification with and Situation between Hong Kong and China +**

	State and nation/ freedom and human rights	Tibetans have the right to self- determination	Taiwanese have the right to self- determination	Hong Kong people have the right to self-determination	Consideration of emigration
Chinese people should not have a dual nationality	-.2195*	-.2271*	-.2443*	-.1676*	-.2459*
Individual interests should sometimes be subordinated to national interests	-.1835*	-.0967*	-.1233*	-.1315*	-0.924*
Hong Kong people should learn the national anthem	-.2554*	-.2020*	-.2378*	-.2337*	-.1453*
Hong Kong people should learn Mandarin	-.0880*	-.0780*	-.1123*	-.1501*	-.0667*
Hong Kong should provide financial support for mainland China	-.1319*	-.1214*	-.1211*	-.0923*	-.1452*
The PLA garrison manifests Chinese sovereignty	-.2184*	-.2175*	-.2706*	-.2463*	-.1724*
China's problems should be solved by the Chinese themselves	-.2277*	-.2298*	-.2867*	-.2421*	-.1802*

Table 8 (Continued)

	State and nation/ freedom and human rights	Tibetans have the right to self- determination	Taiwanese have the right to self- determination	Hong Kong people have the right to self-determination	Consideration of emigration
Chinese people should learn more about Chinese history and culture	-.1339*	-.0600*	-.1156*	-.1266*	-.0714*
China should model itself on Hong Kong	.0590	-.0071	-.0198*	.0874*	-.0415
Hong Kong's interests are above China's	.1558*	.1032*	.0607	.1341*	.0095
Hongkongese/Chinese	.3628*	.2811*	.3293*	.3232*	.2462*

+: All index measurement rods are the same as previous tables.

\* means that the statistical significance is less than 0.05.

scholars argue, is closely linked with the development of liberalism, this paper has chosen three groups of typical indices—freedom and human rights, ethnic self-determination, and consideration of emigration—to explore the Hong Kong people's views on liberalism in relation to their ethnic and national identities. The results show that the Hong Kong people's liberal awareness is significant: more than 60 percent of the respondents favored freedom and human rights rather than state and nation; more than 38 percent agreed on the self-determination of Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong; and if conditions permit, some 37 percent would consider or have made emigration arrangements.

More importantly, a subtle relationship exists between the three groups of liberalism indices and the Hong Kong people's indigenous and Chinese national identities. That is, those who favored freedom and human rights, supported ethnic self-determination, or considered emigrating had a stronger Hong Kong identity than Chinese national identity. This situation confirms the longstanding liberal explanation of ethnic and national development: liberalism can be the base of ethnic awareness, secessionism, and nationalism.

This situation could create problems for Hong Kong and its future sovereign, China. Given that liberalism can strengthen the Hong Kong people's own ethnic identity and weaken their Chinese identity, if liberalism continues to grow in Hong Kong after 1997, will it hinder the national integration of China? To eliminate this problem, only two methods may work: either slow or slash the development of liberalism in Hong Kong to fit current Chinese nation-building, or promote liberalism in mainland China to converge with Hong Kong. Regardless of which method is used, or whether a compromise using both is implemented, it will involve the complicated problem of ethnic/nation politics, which is beyond the scope of this study. Further academic research and cooperation between Hong Kong and mainland China are needed to seek more understanding and consensus.