*Issues & Studies*© 41, no. 2 (June 2005): 37-74.

# Chinese Nationalism Contested: The Rise of Hong Kong Identity

ABANTI BHATTACHARYA

*The mass pro-democracy protest in Hong Kong for the first time raised doubts about the "one country, two systems" model that was adopted by Deng Xiaoping to unite Hong Kong with mainland China in 1997. This has considerably alarmed the People's Republic of China (PRC) whose nationalist ideology is underpinned by its policy of successful reunification not only with Hong Kong but, in the future, with Taiwan. In fact, the rise of a distinct Hong Kong identity contests the "one China" principle. This exposes the weakness of the notion of Chinese nationalism which defines the current ideology of the PRC and gives the Chinese party-state its legitimacy and enables it to survive. This study looks into how a Hong Kong identity has emerged and contests the notion of Chinese nationalism today. It also examines how China attempts to impose its notions of nationalism on the Hong Kong identity. The present crisis in Hong Kong thus represents a clash between Chinese nationalism and the Hong Kong identity. In essence, what China needs is a new definition of nationalism which, instead of submerging the "other," can try to build a plural identity in which competing identities coexist and do not clash.*

KEYWORDS: **Chineseness; identity; restoration nationalism; Basic Law; Greater China.**

---

ABANTI BHATTACHARYA is Associate Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi. She specializes in domestic and foreign policy issues of China with a special interest in nationalism and ethnicism. She received her doctoral degree in "Chinese nationalism" in 2004 and has contributed research papers and articles related to Chinese studies. She can be reached at <awanti_b_711@hotmail.com>.

* * *

On July 1, 2003, when half a million Hong Kong people took to the streets to protest against the passage of Article 23 of the Basic Law, it became evident that all was not well with the "one country, two systems" (一國兩制) framework which was implemented after the People's Republic of China's (PRC) resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong on July 1, 1997.[1] Again on January 1, 2004, another similar-sized crowd surged through the streets of Hong Kong demanding full democracy.[2] These demonstrations alarmed Beijing, and the Chinese authorities became more concerned after the Legislative Council elections which took place in September 2004. The mass protests in Hong Kong raise a number of questions. First, does a distinct Hong Kong identity exist and how can this be defined? Second, is there a clash between Chinese nationalism and this Hong Kong identity? And third, how do the developments in Hong Kong throw light on the ideology of Chinese nationalism in mainland China?

In order to answer these questions, this paper looks first into the notion of nationalism in China. Chinese nationalism, which is primarily based on the paradigm of state nationalism, discourages the rise of a sub-nationalism in Hong Kong characterized by the demand for democracy and a distinct Hong Kong identity. This state nationalism manifests in the Chinese notion of sovereignty as reflected in the "one China" principle. The "one China" principle is the crux of Chinese nationalism and national greatness. Since Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity are concepts intrinsic to the "one China" principle, the rise of demands for representative democracy in Hong Kong conflicts with Chinese nationalism. The paper moves on to discuss the notion of identity and its formation in general. It is not intended to enter into a highly complicated academic discourse on

---

[1]The Chinese newspapers did not carry any exclusive news reports on the protest march. A report in the July 2 issue of the *China Daily* was merely headlined "Security Bill Will Not Affect Freedom."

[2]The population of Hong Kong is approximately 6.8 million. About half a million people taking to the streets is quite a significant number for the small territory.

identity but to outline the broad contours of the notion of identity. This broader notion of identity is then applied to an examination of the notion of "Chineseness" and how this "Chineseness" shapes itself in Hong Kong. The fluid character of identity in Hong Kong has taken a definite shape in interaction with political and economic developments both under British colonialism and the Chinese Communist regime. However, the paper argues that under the influence of Chinese nationalism, Hong Kong identity has reached a crossroads. The PRC's present strategy is to thwart democratic developments in Hong Kong and consistently work towards the imposition of Chinese notions of nationalism there. Although there is growing dissent in Hong Kong and increasing demands for democratic rights, the formation of a separate Hong Kong political structure based on democracy and a non-authoritarian ideology is highly unlikely. Given the strength of Chinese nationalism, any transition to representative democracy will be a long drawn-out process in Hong Kong. In fact, Hong Kong is more likely to continue to have an executive-led system in which Chinese nationalism will prevail. Future political developments in Hong Kong will test the strength of Chinese nationalism, which defines the current ideology of China and gives the Chinese party-state its legitimacy and basis for survival.

## The Concept of Chinese Nationalism

There is no one meaning to the notion of Chinese nationalism, and indeed, Jonathan Unger's edited volume on the subject explores the multi-layered complexity of Chinese perceptions of nationhood.[3] A careful reading of Chinese nationalism reveals that it essentially follows the paradigm of state nationalism, primarily drawn from the Chinese notion of the state as it existed in imperial times. The Chinese imperial state was a civilizational state based on Confucian culturalism, two characteristics

[3]Jonathan Unger, ed., *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

of which are traceable in modern-day China.[4] First, Confucian culturalism served as an ideology of empire, justifying Chinese rule over non-Chinese.[5] Its perspective was universally applicable and transcended the political entity of China. This was reflected in the term "all under heaven" or *tianxia* (天下), the traditional term referring to China. Second was the assumption of the superiority of Han (漢族) Chinese culture as evidenced in the development of China's institutions, system of thought, language, and culture to the extent that the neighboring powers acknowledged Chinese supremacy, accommodated themselves to it and, in some cases, voluntarily assimilated with it. These two elements fused together and gave a distinct civilizational identity to the Chinese state.

In the nineteenth century, confronted with the threat from the West and the dismemberment of the country, the primary task before the Chinese nationalists was the salvation of China. The quest to save China and achieve freedom prompted Chinese nationalists, such as Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙), to define the Chinese nation. This involved defining both the "people" of China and the Chinese state. The definition that was arrived at included a conscious imposition of the imperial concept of the civilizational state on to the modern idea of the nation-state. Thus, Chinese nationalism amalgamated the modern definition of a territorial nation-state with imperial Confucian culturalism.

In modern-day China, this perspective of the civilizational state was manifested in the notion of state nationalism. An incipient notion of state nationalism may be found in the writings of Liang Qichao (梁啓超, 1873-1929) who was one of the first reformers in China to realize the dangers of promoting anti-Manchuism or racial nationalism and who called for a new definition of the nation. Liang made conceptual distinctions between nation and state and between ethnic nationalism and state nationalism.[6] Liang viewed the "people" or "group" as an important

---

[4]James Townsend, "Chinese Nationalism," ibid., 15.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 65-66.

criterion for human survival. According to Liang, "of all the groups, the nation was the most perfect, for only through it could men defend themselves in wars and share their lives in peace."[7] His definition of nation underscored the notion that "a state could encompass more than one nation and a nation could also be scattered over many states."[8] Hence Liang invented two Chinese terms, "*da minzu zhuyi*" (大民族主義, large nationalism) and "*xiao minzu zhuyi*" (小民族主義, small nationalism), explaining that the latter refers to the Han nation and the former encompasses the various ethnic groups in China including the Han.[9] This large nationalism echoes the paradigm of state nationalism where all ethnic groups are subject to state interest.

In modern-day China, three strands of state nationalism can be identified. The first strand represents the interest of the people as a whole regardless of their past cultural and political differences. This means that territoriality rather than ethnicity is the essence of the Chinese multi-ethnic unitary state. This state nationalism further implies that all identities can be accommodated without raising the question of self-determination. Thus, Chinese civilizational identity incorporates all identities: interior identity and peripheral/coastal identity, Han identity and minority identity, and northern Chinese identity and southern identity. In fact, the rhetoric of Chinese nationalism has sought to submerge these disparate identities into one national, Chinese identity. In the context of Hong Kong, an increasingly distinct Hong Kong identity has come to contest this unitary concept of a Chinese national identity.

The second strand of state nationalism can be identified in the goal of achieving territorial sovereignty and integrity. The modern Chinese state has sought to incorporate and restore all the areas that were under the rule of the Qing (清朝) empire. Chinese nationalism is thus defined as state

---

[7]Quoted in Y.C. Wang, *Chinese Intellectuals and the West: 1872-1949* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 214. Also see Maria Hsia Chang, *Return of the Dragon: China's Wounded Nationalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001).

[8]Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*, 65.

[9]Ibid.

nationalism in which the Chinese state's primary goal is to compensate for a century of humiliation and restore its past glory and national greatness. This goal is aptly characterized by Wang Gungwu (王賡武) as "restoration nationalism."[10] Restoration nationalism, according to Wang, "stresses the recovery of sovereignty, the unification of divided territory, and national self-respect."[11] The term implies that China wants to restore its imperial conception of a civilizational state and thereby achieve national greatness and great-power status. Associated with the term "restoration nationalism" is the concept of "Greater China."[12] Although there is much debate over the term "Greater China,"[13] which conveys several meanings and is popularly used to describe the economic integration of China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, nevertheless the concept does carry the connotation of China as a great power. Tu Wei-ming (杜維明) has observed that the remarkable economic performance of the Asia-Pacific region has led to the creation of a powerful nexus between mainland China on the one hand, and Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan on the other. This economic dynamism has given rise to the idea of a "Greater China" or a "Chinese Commonwealth."[14]

The Greater China concept is again linked to the idea of restoring the Chinese state as it existed in China's historical past. It thus holds echoes of the Chinese civilizational state and attempts to restore the notion of an "imagined community." In this sense, ethnic Chinese living outside mainland China are seen as part of Greater China and thus they promote a "global Chinese culture."[15] This notion of a Greater China led by the PRC

---

[10]Wang Gungwu, *Bind Us in Time: Nation and Civilization in Asia* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2000), 14.

[11]Ibid., 114.

[12]The concept of "Greater China" has been discussed in an article by Harry Harding, "The Concept of 'Greater China': Themes, Variations, and Reservations," *The China Quarterly*, no. 136 (December 1993): 660-86.

[13]Changqi Wu, "Hong Kong and Greater China: An Economic Perspective," in *Hong Kong under Chinese Rule*, ed. Warren I. Cohen and Li Zhao (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 114-32.

[14]Wang, *Bind Us in Time*, 12.

[15]Neil Renwick, "Greater China, Globalization and Emancipation," in *Political Communica-*

reinvigorates and complements the notion of Chinese nationalism.

The third strand in state nationalism is the survival and strengthening of the state itself. In this task there is no place for individual liberty, only a strong authoritarian state. In fact, nationalism is equated with national freedom rather than individual freedom. The concepts of individual liberty and democracy have no place in Chinese state nationalism, and thus Hong Kong's quest for democracy and civil liberties clashes with this Chinese authoritarian state identity. The reversion of Hong Kong to China in 1997 only served to vindicate China's state nationalism.

In sum, state nationalism carries dual implications: first, it means the restoration of China's sovereign rights over its territory, and second, it implies national greatness which in turn signifies the restoration of the civilizational state underscored in the Greater China concept. However, the Chinese leadership failed to understand that the resumption of Chinese authority over Hong Kong did not cancel out Hong Kong's historical experience. Here arose the problem. First, the rise of a Hong Kong identity has brought with it a different notion of political culture that is opposed to the socialist culture of the mainland. Second, the Hong Kong democratic identity questioned the relationship between the Beijing authorities and the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and attacked the "one China" principle. Third, it exposed "one country, two systems" as an unsustainable policy and struck at the roots of the PRC's civilization-based state system. All this evidently weakens the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that draws its legitimacy from the success of state nationalism.

## Why a Hong Kong Identity: Chineseness Contested

Political developments in Hong Kong have proved that the people of Hong Kong are not apathetic toward democracy and that they share a deep

---

*tions in Greater China: The Construction and Reflection of Identity*, ed. Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2003), 294.

mistrust of China.[16] Some scholars have identified the rise of a distinct Hong Kong identity as the impetus for democratization.[17] However, this prompts the question of whether there is a sense of identity in Hong Kong and whether it is different from that of the mainland. Given the racial and ethnic similarity between the Chinese of the mainland and those of Hong Kong, as well as the fact that Hong Kong was originally part of Chinese territory, it is indeed intriguing to ask what this Hong Kong identity consists of. A brief summary of the notion of identity is necessary in order to identify the markers that shape the distinct identity of a particular region.

The notion of identity has revolved around two diametrically opposite aspects: essentialism and anti-essentialism or constructivism. Essentialism holds that identity is something given and fixed, whereas anti-essentialism perceives it as always being constructed and reconstructed and hence not a static phenomenon. Stuart Hall explains that identities are formed on the basis of identifications, but in this process of forming identity, "identifications are continually being shifted about." Generally, from this point of view, all identities are constructed, drawing upon materials from history, geography, biology, collective memory, power apparatuses, and religious revelations.[18] In this way, identity is constructed and reconstructed through socio-historical action.[19]

A balanced view, however, would enable us to view identity as never formed in isolation but only existing when it is juxtaposed to the "other." It is the "other" which draws the contours of the "self." Furthermore, while

---

[16]This deep mistrust is evident in the protest demonstrations against Article 23 of the Basic Law. The opponents of the Bill saw it as the first serious signs of interference in Hong Kong's internal affairs by Beijing and a blow to the principle that the HKSAR should have a "high degree of autonomy."

[17]Steve Tsang, "The Rise of a Hong Kong Identity," in *China Today: Economic Reforms, Social Cohesion, and Collective Identities*, ed. Taciana Fisac and Leila Fernandez-Stembridge (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2003), 222-39. Also see Nicholas Thomas, *Democracy Denied: Identity, Civil Society, and Illiberal Democracy in Hong Kong* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999). In chapter five, entitled "The Hong Kong Identity," Nicholas Thomas describes how Hong Kong's identity is separate from the mainland identity.

[18]Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 7.

[19]Anton du Plessis, "Exploring the Concept of Identity in World Politics," http://www.kas.org.za/Publications/SeminarReports/PoliticsofIdentityandExclusion/duplessis.pdf.

"given" characteristics such as race, language, and ethnicity are critical inputs in defining a distinct identity, identity is also negotiated and redefined according to time and place.[20] As a result, identity can never be static. Also, due to the dual factor of time and place, acquired identity is multilayered and this evidently leads to a hybrid identity. Thus, the "Chineseness" of the mainland Chinese differs from that of the Chinese diaspora. "Chineseness" encompasses the common ancestry, homeland, mother tongue, and basic value orientation of the Chinese people.[21] However, Chineseness is not a unitary concept but a multiple and fragmented one owing to its very essence of identity. As Nonini and Ong have pointed out,

> Chineseness is no longer ... a property or essence of a person calculated by that person's having more or fewer "Chinese" values or norms; but instead can be understood only in terms of the multiplicity of ways in which "being Chinese" is an inscribed relation of persons and groups to forces and processes associated with global capitalism and its modernities.[22]

Wang Gungwu explains that Chineseness is not a unitary concept. The diasporic Chinese defined their Chineseness in negotiation with their immediate non-Chinese environment. Factors like the numerical strength of the population, religion, and the politics of the host government all contribute in a variety of ways in building "how to be Chinese, how to remain Chinese, how to become Chinese, or how to lose one's Chineseness."[23] In addition, the diaspora displays civilizational identity.[24] Since the Chinese diaspora identifies with Chinese civilization, Chinese worldwide can be said to have a civilizational identity.[25] This civilizational identity does

---

[20]Mary Flanagan, "Time and Identity," February 2001, http://www.culturelestudies.be/student/kunst_identiteit_media/papers_final/degreef_ackerman.pdf.

[21]Tu Wei-ming, ed., *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), vi.

[22]Donald M. Nonini and Aihwa Ong, "Chinese Transnationalism as an Alternative Modernity," in *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Donalid M. Nonini (London: Routledge, 1997), 4.

[23]Wang Gungwu, "Among Non-Chinese," in Tu, *The Living Tree*, 17.

[24]Wang Gungwu interviewed by Laurent Malvezin from *Asian Affairs*, http://www.asian-affairs.com/Diaspora/wanggungwu.html.

[25]Ibid.

not imply identification with the Chinese state but with the Chinese people and Chinese culture. Furthermore, while the Chinese diasporic identity represents a common civilizational identity, it also possesses a heterogeneous identity born out of local conditions or as a reaction to the host country. Therefore, diasporic identity is ambiguous and the meaning of "Chinese" is contestable and ever-changing, varying from place to place. These characteristics of the Chinese diaspora have a definitive impact on the meaning of the term "Chineseness." In this respect, the Chinese diaspora has exploded the notion of "Chinese" as a fixed authentic category and instead introduced a diasporic paradigm to the study of "Chineseness."[26] As Ien Ang puts it, "'Chinese' can no longer be limited to the more or less fixed area of its official spatial and cultural boundaries nor can it be held up as providing the authentic, authoritative, and uncontested standard for all things Chinese."[27] The Chineseness of the diaspora has been most forcefully discussed in Tu Wei-ming's *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*. Tu describes here the notion of "cultural China" as consisting of symbolic concentric spheres, the core of which is the Chinese mainland and the periphery being the diaspora. Tu refers to the "fluidity of Chineseness as a layered and contested discourse" and challenges "the claims of political leadership."[28]

Tu Wei-ming argues that China faced a cultural crisis with the intrusion of the West. Its civilization based on Confucian culturalism failed to meet the Western challenge and this plunged China into a "collective amnesia" during which its intellectuals questioned the efficacy of China's tradition, Confucian values, and Chinese culture. In effect, they questioned the meaning of being Chinese or Chineseness. While the intellectuals of the mainland groped for ideas for how to marry modernity to tradition and retain a Chinese identity, the Chinese overseas achieved dynamic economic

---

[26]Ien Ang, "Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm," in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 282.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Tu, *The Living Tree*, viii.

growth based on the principle of humanistic Confucianism, thus proving that Chineseness is not incongruous with modernity. In fact, the participation of the Chinese diaspora in the booming East Asian economies demonstrated that Chinese people could achieve modernity by retaining their Chineseness and that Confucian philosophy as embodied in the principles of industry, discipline, and familial/clan networks could determine their modern transformation. The success of East Asian industrial capitalism has thus had an impact on Chinese on the mainland by reviving the concept of Chineseness. Thus, Tu Wei-ming believes that the periphery presents powerful and persistent economic and cultural challenges and will come to set the economic and cultural agenda for the center. This de-centering of Chinese culture and the defining of Chineseness by the periphery has basically challenged the conception of a monolithic Chinese identity.

The discussion of Tu Wei-ming's notion of cultural China is important here as it shows how the periphery/Hong Kong has adopted the notion of Chineseness and engendered a contested notion of Chineseness. It demonstrates how identity in Hong Kong is defined and reconfigured situationally. In China, modern Chinese identity has been divided in several ways: between Han and minority areas, between north and south, and between the coast and the interior.[29] Hong Kong is a typical example of a coastal identity. Being a coastal territory, it came under the influence of not only the interior but also global developments. This paper identifies certain phases in the development of a distinct identity and Chineseness in Hong Kong. It is contended that from a very fluid notion of identity among the people of Hong Kong, a local identity has gradually evolved and this local identity has been further crystallized into a more autonomous identity. With the resumption of Chinese rule, this autonomous Hong Kong identity came under strain and today there is a clash of identities between Hong Kong and the mainland.

---

[29]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), 164.

## Phases in Hong Kong Identity

*Fluid Identity*

The cession of Hong Kong to the British in 1842, after the defeat of the Qing dynasty in the Opium War, turned Hong Kong into a British colony. When the British arrived, Hong Kong was by no means a barren land, but had served as a major trade route since the Tang (唐朝) and Song (宋朝) dynasties. In fact, the first major migration from northern China to Hong Kong occurred during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). By the end of the Ming Dynasty (明朝, 1368-1644), Hong Kong had developed into a cultural territory, acquiring its identity from the literati and authority of the center. Interestingly, while the landed elites easily identified with the Confucian center, the trading communities developed commercial ties with their foreign counterparts and these ties were not only material but also cultural (as witnessed by the influence of Christian missionaries).[30] Hong Kong came to be exposed to both the Confucian and Western tradition, and as such its identity was fluid. In fact, by the eve of the Opium War, the livelihoods and cultural affiliations of people on the South China coast were tied to imperial and foreign interests in complicated ways.[31] As such, Hong Kong did not share the same identity as the center. However, Hong Kong did not relinquish its essentially Chinese identity either. Instead, its identity became diluted on account of its coastal location. This fluidity of identity was basically due to the "sojourner mentality" of most Chinese migrants prior to World War II. This mentality, as explained by Wang Gungwu, originated from the Chinese experience of migration.[32] Until the nineteenth century, the Chinese government did not encourage emigration. If those who left the country did not obtain prior approval from the govern-

---

[30]Helen F. Siu, "Hong Kong: Cultural Kaleidoscope on a World Landscape," in *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the 20th Century*, ed. Gary G. Hamilton (London: University of Washington Press, 1999), accessed from http://www.ciaonet.org/book/hamilton/wong.html.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 42.

ment, they would be punished as criminals on their return. Those who did migrate had every intention of returning home eventually,[33] and Hong Kong witnessed a regular movement of people in and out of the territory after the founding of the British colony. Such inflows and outflows of people made Hong Kong, as Elizabeth Sinn has described it, a "place of transit."[34] Therefore, there occurred a dual slippage of identity among the sojourners, one in their act of remembering the homeland and the other in their daily experiences of living in the host country. This dual slippage between the home and the host country caused their identity to be amorphous. This explains their failure to strike roots locally.

*Local-Dual and Colonial Identity*

After the CCP came to power on the mainland, the Hong Kong government imposed permanent restrictions on immigration, while the PRC enforced border controls that reduced emigration to a trickle. This turned the Chinese population of Hong Kong into a settled one, and allowed Hong Kong to "develop a political culture and identity" of its own.[35] Lynn White and Li Cheng have defined this identity as Hong Kong's "regional identity," shaped by a "fear of politics."[36] They contend that the economic chaos that engulfed the mainland during the civil war (1945-49) and the rigid sociopolitical doctrine of the Communists disenchanted the immigrants and led them to settle down in Hong Kong. From this point onwards the territory's community, which had consisted largely of sojourners, "began to be comprised of 'potential' citizens."[37] The next thirty years thus saw a profound change in the territory's development of a local identity owing to the settled nature of Chinese immigrants. As Hong Kong's last governor, Chris Patten, writes, "Social and economic progress had helped to reinforce

---

[33] Ibid.

[34] Elizabeth Sinn, ed., *The Last Century of Chinese Overseas* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998).

[35] Tsang, "The Rise of a Hong Kong Identity," 223.

[36] White and Li, "China Coast Identities," 181.

[37] Thomas, *Democracy Denied*, 79.

the stability of a community made up of the potentially restless—just arrived, and with bags ready to pack, prepared to depart again."[38]

This identity, however, took shape under British rule. Colonization led to the subjective effacement of the people of Hong Kong and the imposition of a colonial government that systematically downplayed or silenced the "other." Ackbar Abbas, in his discussion of the colonial experience in Hong Kong, claims that Hong Kong had no pre-colonial past to speak of.[39] Being set apart culturally and intellectually from the mainland, Hong Kong's identity and culture primarily evolved out of its colonial history. The colonial experience alienated the Chinese population of Hong Kong from developments on the mainland and at the same time facilitated the growth of Hong Kong as a modern free port economy. This experience caused the livelihood and culture of the Hong Kong people to take a different shape from those of the Chinese interior. A kind of local-dual identity emerged that was a blend of Chineseness and a sense of Britishness.

The influence of the British was primarily seen in two broad areas—the economy and society. In the former sphere, Hong Kong witnessed a transformation from an entrepôt economy to a capitalist economy. This led to the creation of a large middle class which included both an industrialized working class and a new-rich upper class.[40] In society, the major development was the importance of the English language which became the primary vehicle of Western cultural intrusion. This led to a proliferation of English-medium schools in Hong Kong. Nicholas Thomas identified the germination of a local variant of the Cantonese language. He saw this as the product of three factors: first, the separation of the Hong Kong population from the mainland; second, the intermingling of the elite-based English with the local Cantonese; and third, the socioeconomic changes in the territory that brought new elements and new understandings into the Hong Kong variant of Cantonese. These developments of a modern

---

[38]Chris Patten, *East and West* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 23.

[39]Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[40]Thomas, *Democracy Denied*, 81.

industrial-based economy, a common language, and an educated class served to create a specific cultural space for Hong Kong. These factors also led to the development of a free media and an emergent film industry. Thus, under British colonialism, Hong Kong developed a culture that was a blend of both Western and Chinese influences, engendered by colonial rule and typical diasporic experience. This blend gave rise to a specific identity which was both local and dual in character as the population came to feel that they were both Hong Kong people and Chinese people at the same time. This duality can be distinctly discerned, for instance, in the way that the children of Chinese merchants who attended local schools became bilingual and bicultural professionals.[41] This local-dual identity was further reinforced by the widening gap in terms of economic and social development between the mainland and the colony. This notion of a dual identity thus came to be accepted uncritically, until it was cut short by the beginning of negotiations between the United Kingdom and the PRC, although the Hong Kong people's sense of Britishness was first undermined by the British government's decision in 1981 to limit the rights of holders of Hong Kong British passports.[42]

*Autonomous Identity*

The quest for identity among the Hong Kong people was fuelled by several developments in both mainland China and Hong Kong. These included the 1966-67 Hong Kong riots arising out of socioeconomic discontent, the 1960s Cultural Revolution on the mainland, the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, and the 1989 Tiananmen (天安門) democracy movement. The cumulative effect of these developments was to foster political activism among the people of Hong Kong, who redefined their conception of Chineseness. As Chris Patten writes, "The real dividing line in Hong Kong was less between those who believed in democratic values and those who did not than between those who trusted China and

[41]See note 14 above.

[42]Patten, *East and West*, 28.

those who did not."[43] This caused the emergence of an autonomous identity in which the Hong Kong people sought a cultural space for themselves and which could not simply be subsumed either under mainland China or the crown colony.

The 1966-67 riots in Hong Kong that left forty-eight people dead was a wake-up call for the Hong Kong colonial government, alerting them to the need to bring in administrative reforms. A series of social and economic reforms were introduced in areas such as housing, welfare, community development, and broadcasting policies. The political reforms included the establishment of the City District Office, a local-level structure mediating between the government and the people; improvements in public relations within government departments; and an increased number of advisory committees and consultative forums.[44] These political and economic changes were, however, conservative in nature, aimed only at maintaining stability and preserving the legitimacy of colonial rule. Nevertheless, by the 1980s, conditions had been created for a demand for greater political participation. This demand was precipitated by several developments.

Broadly the impetus came from two sources, as Brian Hook has pointed out, one indigenous and the other exogenous.[45] The indigenous source was the result of growing economic prosperity in the territory that led to the broadening of the middle class, which demanded more political participation. This trend was visible from the 1970s onwards with the growth of reformist groups like Hong Kong Observers Limited.[46] This group's aim was to achieve wider participation in the government of Hong Kong. The experience of Martin Lee, the leader of the Democratic Party, is a case in point. Under British colonial rule, Lee, a successful lawyer,

---

[43]Ibid., 29.

[44]Rosanna Yick-Ming Wong, "From Colonial Rule to One Country, Two Systems," in Hamilton, *Cosmopolitan Capitalists*, http://www.ciaonet.org/book/hamilton/wong.html.

[45]Brian Hook, "Political Change in Hong Kong," *The China Quarterly*, no. 136 (December 1993): 842.

[46]Ibid.

initially kept out of politics, and would have continued to do so had not the threat of Communist rule after 1982 motivated him to plunge into politics in order "not to save the British Empire, but to safeguard some of its institutions."[47] By 1982 a three-tier system was introduced for popular representation in Hong Kong. Below the Legislative Council, two Municipal Councils and eighteen District Boards were established.

The second impetus for political change came from the Tiananmen democracy movement in mainland China. About one million residents of Hong Kong staged a silent protest march against the brutal suppression of that movement by the PRC in June 1989. This reaction clearly stemmed from concern about the future of Hong Kong under "one country, two systems." Jermain T.M. Lam's study of the political culture of Hong Kong shows that from the 1980s onwards, Hong Kong people adopted various methods, including demonstrations, strikes, and petitions, as valid ways of articulating their demands to the colonial government.[48] Quoted in Lam's article is a study conducted by Anthony Cheung and Kin-shuen Louie which revealed that the number of social conflicts in Hong Kong increased from twenty-seven cases in the period 1975-80 to ninety cases in the period 1981-86.

The exogenous factor precipitating these demands for political participation was the Sino-British negotiations and the enactment of the Basic Law that specifically included the promise of representative democracy in Hong Kong. During the transitional phase from the signing of the Joint Declaration to the formation of the HKSAR in 1997, a political "public space" developed in Hong Kong, though it was controlled by the state. In particular, this period saw the development of political groups into political parties. These parties were formed in the context of questions over the territory's political future, Sino-British confrontation, conflict and mistrust between the Chinese government and the Hong Kong people, and

---

[47]Ian Buruma, *Bad Elements: Chinese Rebels from Los Angeles to Beijing* (New York: Random House, 2001), 218-19.

[48]Jermain T.M. Lam, "The Changing Political Culture of Hong Kong's Voters," *Issues & Studies* 33, no. 2 (February 1997): 97-124.

disputes over the pace and form of democratic reform.[49] Mistrust of the PRC can be seen in a telephone poll conducted by Survey Research Hong Kong (SRH) in conjunction with a Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) public affairs program. Most of the respondents felt either that the Basic Law was useless or that the PRC would not respect their opinions on it.[50] Furthermore, the events at Tiananmen, Beijing's unilateral declaration of the Basic Law, the curtailment of civil liberties on the mainland, and Beijing's campaign against the reform package sponsored by Governor Chris Patten all contributed to demands for political liberalization.[51] Nicholas Thomas' study shows how the development of democratic ideals is to a large extent a natural component of Hong Kong's sociopolitical evolution.[52] Hong Kong achieved representative government with the introduction of indirect elections to the Legislative Council in 1985. With the introduction of direct elections to the Legislative Council in 1991, followed by the expansion of the electoral base of the functional constituencies, and the total abolition of appointed members of the legislature in 1995, a distinct participatory culture became evident among the Hong Kong people and democratic aspirations rose. These growing democratic aspirations have played a large part in shaping Hong Kong's identity. This quest for representative democracy struck deeper roots with the resumption of Beijing's rule over Hong Kong.

These indigenous and exogenous developments have produced a distinct sense of Chineseness among the Hong Kong people. Simply put, Hong Kong's vibrant free economy, coupled with exposure to modern concepts like the rule of law, freedom of speech and movement, respect for human rights, and a limited government, all combined to produce a distinct Hong Kong identity which was different from the mainland socialist cul-

---

[49] Lau Siu-Kai and Kuan Hsin-chi, "Partial Democratization, 'Foundation Moment' and Political Parties in Hong Kong," *The China Quarterly*, no. 163 (September 2000): 716.

[50] "Almost 50 Percent Believe Basic Law 'Irrelevant'," *South China Morning Post*, July 28, 1989, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *China Daily Report* (henceforth *FBIS-CHI*), 89-144 (July 28, 1989).

[51] Thomas, *Democracy Denied*, 278-79.

[52] Ibid.

ture.[53] This was, in fact, an "alternative Chineseness anchored in modern entrepreneurship and new standards of material and technological success."[54] Wang Gungwu observed that this modernity came less from "place" than from "practice";[55] that is, the Anglo-Chinese system of authority and management marked by efficient administration and the rule of law. The cumulative effect of these changes saw a change in the popular term for Hong Kong residents from *Gang Ao tongbao* (港澳同胞, Hong Kong and Macao compatriots) to *Xianggang ren* (香港人, Hong Konger).[56] This signified that—as Wang Gungwu rightly pointed out—Hong Kong Chinese "can claim to have developed their own version of a new Chineseness."[57] This new Chineseness, however, came under threat with Hong Kong's reversion to the mainland in 1997.

## Hong Kong Identity at a Crossroads: The Impact of Sinicization

After 1997, a feeling of unease existed among the Hong Kong people about their new identity. Polls carried out by the Hong Kong Transition project at the Hong Kong Baptist University revealed that the older generation referred to themselves as "Hong Kong Chinese," while the younger generation called themselves "Hong Kong people."[58] In the wake of integration with the mainland, Hong Kong faces a strong challenge to protect its democracy. Its high degree of autonomy, the hallmark of Hong Kong's democracy, is under threat from increasing Sinicization. This Sinicization is evident in the mainland's interference in the judicial system, the rule of

---

[53]Tsang, "The Rise of a Hong Kong Identity," 25.

[54]Quoted in Wang Gungwu, "Chineseness: The Dilemma of Place and Practice," in Hamilton, *Cosmopolitan Capitalists*, http://www.ciaonet.org/book/hamilton/wong.html.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Lee Kuan Yew, "Speaking to Hong Kong," *CSIS Hong Kong Update*, Winter 1999-2000, http://www.csis.org/html/HKUpdate99-00PDF.

law, the Hong Kong media, the education system, and the school curriculum. Hong Kong's identity is at a crossroads and it is facing immense pressure from Chinese nationalism.

The HKSAR faced its first constitutional crisis in 1999 over the right of abode issue.[59] In January 1999, the Court of Final Appeal (CFA), the highest court of the HKSAR, made a landmark ruling giving the right of abode in Hong Kong to every mainlander having a parent who is a Hong Kong permanent resident, regardless of whether the parent was a permanent resident at the time of the mainlander's birth. In December the CFA reversed this ruling under pressure from China's National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee which had a different interpretation of the Basic law. This clearly impinged on the independence of the Hong Kong judiciary and indicated a step toward Sinicization.

A second significant step toward Sinicization involved the Hong Kong media. This was evident in April 2000 when a Chinese official, Wang Fengchao (王鳳超), a deputy director of Beijing's Liaison Office in Hong Kong, called on the media not to publicize pro-Taiwan independence views and asked them to uphold the integrity and sovereignty of the country.[60] This was not only a violation of Hong Kong's autonomy but also an assault on the territory's long-held freedoms of expression and the press. The passing of Article 23 of the Basic Law, which sparked a massive demonstration on July 1, 2003, was another example of Beijing's disregard for Hong Kong's autonomy and thwarting of civil liberties. Another blow to press freedom occurred in July 2004 when the morning talk-show host, Albert Cheng, resigned.[61] Reports hold that he was forced out of his job under intimidation from China on account of his criticism of Beijing's refusal to allow universal suffrage. Moreover, the raids carried out on seven Hong Kong newspapers by the territory's anti-graft body were a fur-

---

[59]Rev. Kwok Nai Wang, "The Right of Abode Controversy," HKCI's *Newsletter*, no. 126 (March 11, 1999), http://www.democracy.org.hk/EN/mar1999/op_02.htm.

[60]Frank Ching, "Hong Kong's "Softly, Softly" Approaching to Beijing," *Hong Kong Update*, Fall 2000, http://www.csis.org/html/hongkong.html.

[61]"Hong Kong Talk Show Host Resigns after Press Freedom Row," Channel News Asia, July 29, 2004, http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/98190/1/.html.

ther sign of threats to press freedom.[62] The Hong Kong Newspaper Society, a trade advocacy group representing the dozens of newspapers published in the territory, said the raids had a "chilling effect on the press."

With regard to Sinicization of the school curriculum, Edward Vickers and Flora Kan have observed that the post-1997 changes to the curriculum, in particular the history curriculum, were made in order to distort local history and aspects of Hong Kong's past that shaped its identity.[63] This was aimed at destroying the ability of Hong Kong's younger generation to reassess what it meant to be a "Hong Konger." Changes in the history curriculum have tended to stress the homogenous "Chineseness" of the region. By indoctrinating Hong Kong youth with the notion of "one China," the Chinese authorities aimed to turn this "historical fiction" of "one China" into "political fact."[64]

The resumption of Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong had an immediate impact on the education of Hong Kong students. The SAR government called for the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in all but 114 secondary schools.[65] Before 1997 a greater part of secondary education in Hong Kong had been in English. The dominant Chinese (Cantonese) after 1997 can be observed from table 1.

The 1999 Policy Address by the Hong Kong government called for education reform and emphasized trilingual and bilingual education. It said, "It is the SAR government's goal to train our people to be truly bilingual and trilingual."[66] The *Christian Science Monitor* reported that

---

[62]Ambrose Leung, "Hong Kong: Fight to Protect Your Rights, Says Anson Chan," *South China Morning Post*, August 21, 2004.

[63]Sinicization of the school curriculum in Hong Kong has been treated in detail in Edward Vickers and Flora Kan, "The Reeducation of Hong Kong: Identity, Politics, and Education in Postcolonial Hong Kong," *American Asian Review* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2003), \\server05\\productionA\AMA\21-4\AMA401.txt.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Information Paper, Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools, Education Department, August 1997, http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr97-98/english/panels/ed/papers/ed1508-6.htm.

[66]Chief Executive's Policy Address 1999, http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/pa99/english/part4-1.htm.

**Table 1**
**Language of Instruction in Hong Kong Schools, 1960-1997 and after 1997**

| School Level | Language of Instruction | 1960-1997 (%) | After 1997 (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Primary | English medium | 5-10 | Less than 10 |
| | Cantonese medium | 90-95 | Greater than 95 |
| Secondary | English medium | 60-90 | 25 |
| | Cantonese medium | 10-40 | 75 |
| University | English medium | 80-86 | 86 |
| | Cantonese medium | 14-20 | 14 |

**Source:** Christy Ying Lao and Stephen Krashen, "Implementation of Mother-Tongue Teaching in Hong Kong Secondary Schools: Some Recent Reports," http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/discover/05hongkong.htm.

"students have protested, school councils have threatened lawsuits, and parents have been burning up the telephone lines to complain."[67] However, the Hong Kong Department of Education argued that "educational research worldwide and in Hong Kong [has] shown that students learn better through their mother tongue."[68] The Hong Kong government's education policy is not only leading to a reduction in English language proficiency but the introduction of Mandarin (普通話, *Putonghua*) as the third language also hints at the growing influence of the center and the Sinicization of Hong Kong.

Apart from growing Sinicization, there are also concerns about how far Hong Kong's capitalist identity differs from that of the Chinese mainland where the economy is developing at high speed. Mention may be made of the announcement of a new Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) between the mainland and Hong Kong which demonstrates the fact that it is the mainland which is assisting the territory toward

[67]Christy Ying Lao and Stephen Krashen, "Implementation of Mother-Tongue Teaching in Hong Kong Secondary Schools: Some Recent Reports," http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/discover/05hongkong.htm.

[68]Ibid.

economic recovery. This indicates that the mainland has appropriated the economic leadership of Greater China. Furthermore, in the long term, one can visualize a scenario in which the two systems converge and "one China" prevails. Already the "Three Represents"[69] (三個代表) has sanctified the notion of a "capitalist class" in China. The Tenth NPC annual meeting on March 14, 2004, passed an amendment to the Chinese constitution that gave protection to "lawful private property." The accommodation of capitalist forces in China is diluting the concept of "two systems" and heralding the formation of "one country, one system."

Furthermore, economic prosperity has remarkably changed the lifestyle of the Chinese people on the mainland. The "McDonald's culture" is fast spreading its influence. High-rise buildings and Western fashions have become a common sight in China today. Therefore, that part of the Hong Kong identity based on its more Western culture is fast losing its distinctiveness.

Against this growing Sinicization, Hong Kong has witnessed a spate of mass demonstrations, including the July 1, 2003 protest march against the passing of Article 23 and the January 1, 2004 demonstration demanding universal suffrage for the election of a new Chief Executive in 2007 and the direct election of the entire Legislative Council in 2008. A survey commissioned by the policy think-tank Civic Exchange found that 88 percent of the 836 respondents wanted constitutional change by 2007. Only 8 percent wanted consultation on constitutional reform to begin after the 2007 elections for the Chief Executive, while 4 percent opposed any reform.[70] Despite Beijing's fierce retaliation against the launching of the "patriotism debate" (over moves to obstruct "non-patriotic" Hong Kong democrats from standing in elections), as well as the declaration by the Tenth NPC

[69]The so-called "Three Represents" theory refers to that the Chinese Communist Party represents the requirement to develop advanced productive forces, an orientation toward advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China.

[70]"Survey Finds Majority Want Full Democratic Reform 'Before 2007'," *The Standard* (Hong Kong), January 13, 2004, in *FBIS-CHI*-2004-0113 (January 14, 2004).

Standing Committee on April 6, 2004 (that ruled out direct elections for the Chief Executive and legislators), the spirit of democracy and dissent has not died down in Hong Kong. Rather, on June 4, 2004, a record number of people gathered in Hong Kong to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre. According to one estimate, the demonstrators numbered about 82,000, including some people from the mainland.[71] As Ian Buruma has rightly pointed out, the Tiananmen anniversary event "signifies a kind of Chinese unity, but it is the unity of dissidents, democrats, and citizens who value their freedom, not of government. The patriotism of this imaginary China is the antithesis of the official patriotism promoted by the Communist government."[72]

It may be noted that there is still insufficient space for dissent in Hong Kong society since the growth of participatory politics.[73] Hong Kong is therefore demanding a change in the political system, notably the right to elect the Chief Executive through universal suffrage, instead of by appointment from Beijing. The September 2004 election to the Legislative Council was also significant in that it was regarded as a referendum on the pace of democratization in Hong Kong.

While the growth of dissent in Hong Kong indicates the maturation of the Hong Kong identity, it also demonstrates the restraints on Hong Kong's democratic aspirations. The patriotism debate essentially reflected the conservative views of the Beijing authorities, while the April 6 declaration demonstrated that the NPC alone has the right to interpret the Basic law. This clearly violates the autonomy of Hong Kong and promotes the Sinicization of the territory.

Under the impact of Sinicization, the Hong Kong identity is under strain. There is a growing tussle between Hong Kong's democratic aspirations and Beijing's nationalistic policies.

---

[71]"'Record Numbers' of Mainland Chinese Joined Hong Kong Tiananmen Vigil," *Hong Kong AFP*, June 7, 2004, in *FBIS-CHI*-2004-0607 (June 9, 2004).

[72]Buruma, *Bad Elements*, 214.

[73]Lam, "The Changing Political Culture of Hong Kong's Voters," 97-124.

## The Impact of Hong Kong Identity on the "One China" Principle

The development of a distinct Hong Kong identity based on democratic aspirations is worrying the Chinese authorities in Beijing. It is particularly worrying because it indicates that the Hong Kong model of "one country, two systems"—that was originally devised for the reunification of Taiwan with China—seems to be unsustainable.[74] The reelection of Taiwan's pro-independence president, Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), on March 20, 2004 has further exacerbated this concern. Chen Shui-bian has argued that Hong Kong's experience under Chinese rule demonstrates the danger of unification with the mainland.[75] Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests have undermined China's image in Taiwan, and this is likely to strengthen Chen Shui-bian's calls for a referendum and revision of Taiwan's constitution.

The Hong Kong factor not only weakens China's case with regard to Taiwan, but also emboldens pro-democracy dissent in China itself. Democratic reform in Hong Kong may increase the pressure for democratization in mainland China, particularly in the wealthier areas of the east coast and Guangdong Province (廣東省) where what happens in Hong Kong has the greatest impact. It can be argued that Guangdong's rapid economic development, its regional identity, and its political proximity to Hong Kong increase the potential for its separation from the PRC.[76] In fact, Beijing's influence and power over the coastal region is steadily eroding. Some scholars visualize the emergence of a powerful "Cantonese linguistic bloc" where Hong Kong and Guangdong, with their cultural and linguistic homo-

---

[74]Enbao Wang discusses in detail the framework of "one country, two systems" for Taiwan in his book *Hong Kong, 1997: The Politics of Transition* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

[75]Chang Yun-Ping, "Taiwan: Former President Says 'One Country, Two Systems' Is 'Self-Contradictory'," *Taipei Times*, August 18, 2003, in *FBIS-CHI*-2003-1215 (August 19, 2003).

[76]David S. Goodman and Gerald Segal, eds., *China Deconstructs* (London: Routledge, 1994). Also see Hans Hendrischke and Feng Chongyi, *The Political Economy of China's Provinces: Comparative and Competitive Advantage* (London: Routledge, 1999).

geneity, would exert greater influence in decision-making and economic management.[77] Other scholars identify the rise of sub-state regionalism in the south;[78] that is, the tendency of provinces to become more independent of the central authorities in terms of the sharing of tax revenues, thus allowing them gradually to deviate from the central government.[79] Beijing is therefore distinctly worried not only with regard to Hong Kong, which is supposed to set an example to Taiwan, but also about its prosperous regions which might go the Hong Kong way. Another concern for Beijing is closer economic links between the HKSAR and the mainland. Kennedy Wong, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, has said that Beijing's concerns have been heightened by Hong Kong's increasing economic integration with the mainland. One-third of the SAR's GDP comes from economic activities with the mainland,[80] so Beijing has reason to be worried if mass demonstrations and instability look like undermining Hong Kong's economy.[81]

Third, Beijing is apprehensive of the possibility of external interference in the event of turmoil in the territory. This is because of Hong Kong's status as an international city with close links with the international community. Moreover, the Sino-British agreement granted Hong Kong a "quasi-independent foreign policy" in technical areas such as aviation, attendance at international trade meetings, World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, and membership of the Olympic movement.[82] This has widened the scope for foreign interference. For instance, the United States

---

[77]Ibid. Also see Tai Ming Cheung, "Hong Kong's Strategic Importance under Chinese Sovereignty" (1997), www.rand.org/publications/CF/CF137/CF137.chap10.pdf

[78]Ngai-Ling Sum, "Politics of Identities and the Making of the 'Greater China' Subregion in the Post-Cold War Eras," in *Subregionalism and World Order*, ed. Glenn Hook and Ian Kearns (London: Macmillan, 1999), 210.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Joseph Li, "Reasons for Beijing's Concern with HK Situation," *China Daily*, February 28-29, 2004.

[81]Hong Kong's economy is looking up after six years of recession. The Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that was signed between Hong Kong and China in June 2003 has turned out to be the chief driver in Hong Kong's economic recovery.

[82]Andrew J. Nathan, *China's Transition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 132.

has substantial economic interests in Hong Kong, with US$14 billion of investment and annual bilateral trade of US$24 billion.[83] Furthermore, more than 1,100 American firms have established a presence in the territory and more than 40,000 Americans live in Hong Kong,[84] and in 1992 the U.S. Congress adopted the McConnell Act, which identified U.S. national interests with Hong Kong's freedom and prosperity.[85] Therefore, any trouble in Hong Kong would prompt foreign interference, thus threatening Chinese sovereignty.

Of more crucial impact than the above is the way in which the Hong Kong identity undermines Beijing's "one China" principle. Before exploring what "one China" signifies, one should ask why such a principle evolved. The answer lies in the economic and political significance of Hong Kong to China. Hong Kong has played a central role in China's economic development and its opening to the outside world since the late 1970s. Many Hong Kong companies have made huge investments in China. Hong Kong today is China's fourth largest trading partner, second largest export market, and its largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI). Hong Kong's economic position in the world is phenomenal. It is the world's seventh largest foreign exchange market and ninth largest banking center, and it is the second largest destination for FDI in Asia. Statistics apart, Hong Kong has played a crucial role in creating the economic boom in Guangdong Province. The bulk of Hong Kong's manufacturing sector has relocated to the Pearl River Delta (珠江三角洲) in southern Guangdong and these industries are the largest source of employment in the province, with more than three million workers. The Hong Kong-Pearl River Delta nexus has emerged as one of the fastest-growing economic regions in the world.[86] Politically, the Hong Kong model of "one

---

[83]Cheung, "Hong Kong's Strategic Importance."

[84]"The United States and Hong Kong: Challenges in the Next Three Years" (Remarks by U.S. Consul General, James R. Keith to the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, September 23, 2002), http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/cg/2002/092301.htm.

[85]See note 82 above.

[86]Cheung, "Hong Kong's Strategic Importance."

country, two systems" also serves as a model for reunification with Taiwan. Therefore, the Hong Kong model is a test case for China's reunification policy.

More fundamentally, the "one China" principle essentially encapsulates the Chinese notion of nationalism. The rhetoric of "one China" built up by Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) was essentially aimed at homogenizing "the nationalist time/space of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as communal spaces with shared memories and culture."[87] The narrative of "two systems" served to incorporate the differentiation existing in Hong Kong and Taiwan under their prevailing capitalist systems. This was in fact a unique formula for reestablishing China's sovereignty over Hong Kong and removing once and for all the humiliation of the "unequal treaties" imposed on China after the Opium War. By definition, "one country, two systems" simply meant that, within the PRC, the mainland would remain socialist, while Hong Kong would continue under its capitalist system.[88] The implication of this is that there is only one China and that the two systems will coexist within it. That the "one China" principle is the basic underlying factor is evident in the Basic Law, Article 5 of which states that in the HKSAR "the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years." This article is careful to use the words "way of life" rather than "culture," thus denying the rise of a separate Hong Kong identity, since "culture" has a similar meaning to "system of values."

Thus, Deng Xiaoping's "one country, two systems" was devised to achieve three things. The first was the peaceful settlement of the Hong Kong issue. Since war was out of the question, the only solution lay in a peaceful settlement and the practice of two systems in one country.[89] Second, and more importantly, this model allowed the capitalist economy of Hong Kong to remain undisturbed. Third, the unique model of "one country, two systems" vindicated China's notion of nationalism.

---

[87]Sum, "Politics of Identities," 200.

[88]Deng Xiaoping, "One Country, Two Systems," in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1210.html.

[89]Ibid.

Under "one country, two systems," Beijing allowed Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy in all matters, with the exception of defense and foreign affairs. However, Beijing's authority was reinforced by its right to appoint the Chief Executive of the HKSAR. This right not only symbolized China's sovereign rights but also served as a mechanism of supervision over the government of Hong Kong.[90] Another aspect of China's sovereignty lay in the NPC's ultimate power to interpret and amend Hong Kong's Basic Law. In fact, the very manner in which the Basic Law was drafted and the way the Basic Law Drafting Committee (BLDC) was formed indicated that the PRC's interests would predominate.[91] The appointment of the BLDC's members by Beijing as well as the numerical imbalance favoring mainland Chinese (thirty-six mainlanders vs. twenty-three Hong Kong representatives) indicated that conservative elements and pro-Chinese interests would prevail. The third way in which Beijing reinforced its sovereignty over Hong Kong was by the symbolic stationing of People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces in the SAR.[92] In addition to the underlying features of "one country, two systems," Deng Xiaoping used the rhetoric of patriotism that would finally bind the SAR to the central authority. He said that "patriots" should form the main body of administrators in the SAR government.[93] The implications of "one country, two systems" were that China's notion of sovereignty in effect would prevent the HKSAR from achieving "complete autonomy." According to Deng, "complete autonomy" was tantamount to two Chinas, not one. Therefore, he insisted, "different systems may be practiced but it must be the PRC alone that represents China internationally."[94] Under "one China, two systems," while Hong Kong enjoyed independent powers in the economy and finance, the PRC exercised its sovereign power over the SAR in the political

[90]Wang, *Hong Kong*, 120.
[91]Thomas, *Democracy Denied*, 185.
[92]Wang, *Hong Kong*, 200.
[93]See note 88 above.
[94]Ibid.

sphere. This implied the triumph of Chinese nationalism and an end to the "century of humiliation."

## The Response of Chinese Nationalism

In response to the increase in mass demonstrations in the HKSAR, China had recourse to the rhetoric of the "patriotism debate" in order to ensure Hong Kong's loyalty.[95] This debate was aimed not only at reinforcing China's sovereign rights over Hong Kong and upholding the "one China" principle, but also at reinforcing China's nationalism. China's basic premise was that "Hong Kong should be governed by the people of Hong Kong with patriots as its main body." This "patriotism debate" was essentially derived from Deng Xiaoping's thought. In a meeting with a Hong Kong industrial and commercial delegation in 1984, Deng had said:

> The concept of "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong" has its boundaries and standards, which include: patriots should form the main body of Hong Kong rulers ... and the yardsticks for patriots are respect for the Chinese nation and sincere support for the motherland's resumption of the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong and no harm to Hong Kong's prosperity and stability.[96]

Deng's concept thus reinforced the PRC's policies toward Hong Kong and provided an appropriate tool to attack dissenters there. Based on Deng's ideas, Beijing has identified the following three standards for defining who is a patriot: (1) a person's loyalty towards his own country; (2) the things a person does and whether they are beneficial to the country and the race; and (3) whether a person cares about his country's security.[97]

This patriotism debate served as a tool to promote Chinese nationalism. Based on the definition of a patriot, China adopted both carrot and stick polices to isolate the democrats in the crucial 2004 Legislative Council elections. On the one hand, China offered a series of economic

---

[95]Editorial, "Great Patriots Show the Way," *China Daily*, March 1, 2004.
[96]Ibid.
[97]Ibid.

incentives to Hong Kong in the run-up to the elections, including a free trade pact and the relaxation of exit visa restrictions. To shore up support for its allies in Hong Kong, the Chinese government promoted patriotism with military parades and, most recently, a gala celebration for its Olympic medalists. On the other hand, Beijing linked patriotism with business and warned democratic-minded people against carrying out business on the mainland. Beijing also used the rhetoric of "patriotism" to prevent anti-Beijing groups from standing in the elections. Furthermore, close to the election date, scandals were exposed in an effort to spoil the democrats' chances of success.

Apart from the measures adopted by Beijing to stifle opposition, the electoral policies from the inception were aimed at weakening the Legislative Council elections. Such policies ensured that genuine democracy was thwarted in Hong Kong. The provision of multi-member rather than single-member geographical constituencies was aimed at splitting voting within the Legislative Council, thus weakening the pro-democracy camp.

Beijing's efforts succeeded when the democrats won only eighteen out of the thirty directly elected seats, and seven of the functional constituency seats, a total of twenty-five seats altogether. The pro-Beijing party won twelve of the geographical constituency seats and twenty-three from the functional constituencies, giving them a total of thirty-five.

Although in 2004 the democrats won three more seats than they had in the 2000 Legislative Council election, they were disappointed not to get the desired majority. Beijing hailed this as an indication of Hong Kong's desire for stability and pro-Beijing stance. Beijing also claimed that the election indicated that the Hong Kong people were "masters of their own house." Control of the chamber for the next four years will rest with the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB), the business-oriented Liberal Party, and other pro-Beijing independent politicians.

However, the increase in voter turnout from 43.57 percent at the previous elections to 55.63 percent does not indicate a decline in democratic aspirations. In fact, the high turnout led to a shortage of ballot boxes in one constituency. Also, it was interesting that the democrats gained two new seats from among the functional constituencies which are a stronghold of

pro-Beijing groups. Furthermore, this time people like the radical anti-Communist Leung Kwok-hung, popularly known as "Longhair," and the popular former radio host Albert Cheng were elected. Both came from different sectors of society from previous legislators, who were often lawyers or members of political families. This is indicative of the growth of diverse forces in the legislature and an increase in political involvement in Hong Kong.

However, the Legislative Council election results failed to reveal any major shift in public opinion. Hong Kong people did not want to earn Beijing's wrath by completely siding with the democrats and thus opted for the status quo. By far the most significant outcome of the Legislative Council elections is that "one country, two systems" remains paramount in the Chinese political system. The result also signifies the triumph of Chinese nationalism. The Chinese Communist Party is thus not under threat. Nevertheless, the 2004 Legislative Council elections also indicate that Hong Kong voters are not politically apathetic, signaling that Beijing's high-handed policies might cause fresh tensions in the future.

## Conclusion

During the pre-1997 phase there was a kind of war of words between Beijing's pragmatic nationalism and Governor Chris Patten's democratic discourse. The Chinese authorities constructed the idea of China's "century of humiliation" and "historic shame" derived from its defeat in the Opium War and the consequent cession of Hong Kong to the British. Since China had signed the unequal treaties under duress, the treaties were null and void. To retrieve China's position as a great power and to remove the "historic shame," it became the avowed duty of the Chinese leadership to end colonial rule in Hong Kong. Deng Xiaoping thus informed the British Prime Minister that China would recover all territories of Hong Kong by 1997. Deng said, "If we failed to take Hong Kong back in fifteen years, the people would no longer have any reason to trust us, and any Chinese government would have no alternative but to step down and voluntarily

leave the political arena."[98] The reversion of Hong Kong to mainland rule has been hailed in China as a success for the reunification policy and therefore a triumph of state nationalism. This state nationalism supports a unified China under the Communist Party, and in this framework no place is assigned to the notion of an elected representative government.[99] Democracy is antithetical to Chinese nationalism for democracy is opposed to authoritarianism and has the potential for independence.[100] Therefore, in Deng Xiaoping's principle of "one country, two systems," "one country" means the Chinese Communist state alone.

Since the Hong Kong issue is essentially linked to China's nationalism policy, the future of representative democracy in Hong Kong is not promising. China will never want to see an independent Hong Kong, for that would strike at the root of Chinese sovereignty, national security, and national integration. In the run-up to the 2004 Legislative Council elections, China showed clear signs of being worried about losing its grip on Hong Kong. *China Daily* carried an editorial warning that Hong Kong's executive-led government would "collapse" and central authority and national security would be undermined if the democrats took a majority of seats.[101] Similar apprehension was raised in another editorial column that stated, "It is no longer a debate of political reform, but a battle for survival between patriotic supporters of Hong Kong's return to the motherland and a colonial carry-over with the back up of foreign forces. There is no room for compromise."[102] These editorials clearly reflected the grave political implications the legislative elections could have had for China's sovereignty. For this reason, Beijing's present policy is to restrain representative

---

[98] Deng Xiaoping, "Our Basic Position on the Hong Kong Question," *Beijing Review* 36, no. 41 (October 4, 1993): 7-8.

[99] Baogang He, "China's National Identity: A Source of Conflict between Democracy and State Nationalism," in *Nationalism, Democracy, and National Integration in China*, ed. Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 179.

[100] Ibid., 176.

[101] Cannix Yau, "Democratic [Legislative Council] Will See Executive Collapse," March 3, 2004, http://www.thestandard.com.hk/thestandard/news_detail_frame.cfm? articleid=45617&intcatid=1.

[102] Ibid.

democracy in Hong Kong. Beijing maintains that Hong Kong has a responsibility toward the overall interests of China as a whole. "One country" takes precedence over "two systems."[103] Since the question of Hong Kong's identity and the territory's democratic aspirations are central to the current crisis in Hong Kong, it will be interesting to see how far Beijing will tolerate dissent in Hong Kong and what compromises the Chinese state will make in its definition of Chinese nationalism.

Hong Kong today resembles a dissident territory competing to shape China's national identity. The Chinese civilizational state submerges "other" identities into the "one Chinese" identity. The emergence of a representative democratic culture in Hong Kong has therefore led to a clash between the two identities, which are based on their respective political cultures. The crisis in Hong Kong also reflects the weakness of the Chinese nationalist project based on the civilizational state identity. Perhaps the problem lies in the Chinese state's being—as Ross Terrill described it—neither an empire nor a modern state.[104] China today should understand that the Chinese state need not necessarily submerge the "other" but can try to build a plural identity in which competing identities can coexist and not clash. What is needed is a new definition of Chinese nationalism.

## Bibliography

Abbas, Ackbar. 1997. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ang, Ien. 2000. "Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm." In *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow, 281-300. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

---

[103] Editorial, "Giving Priority to National Interest," *China Daily*, July 8, 2003.

[104] Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire: And What It Means for the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

Buruma, Ian. 2001. *Bad Elements: Chinese Rebels from Los Angeles to Beijing.* New York: Random House.

Castells, Manuel. 2000. *The Power of Identity.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Chang, Maria Hsia. 2001. *Return of the Dragon: China's Wounded Nationalism.* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Chang, Yun-Ping. 2003. "Taiwan: Former President Says 'One Country, Two Systems' Is 'Self-Contradictory'." *Taipei Times*, August 18. *FBIS-CHI*-2003-1215.

Cheung, Tai Ming. 1997. "Hong Kong's Strategic Importance under Chinese Sovereignty." www.rand.org/publications/CF/CF137/CF137.chap10.pdf.

*China Daily*. 2003. Editorial, "Giving Priority to National Interest." July 8.

_____. 2004. Editorial, "Great Patriots Show the Way." March 1.

Ching, Frank. 2000. "Hong Kong's "Softly, Softly" Approaching to Beijing." *Hong Kong Update*, Fall. http://www.csis.org/html/hongkong.html.

Deng, Xiaoping. 1984. "One Country, Two Systems." In *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*. http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1210.html.

_____. 1993. "Our Basic Position on the Hong Kong Question." *Beijing Review* 36, no. 41 (October 4): 7-8.

du Plessis, Anton . 2001. "Exploring the Concept of Identity in World Politics." http://www.kas.org.za/Publications/SeminarReports/PoliticsofIdentityandExclusion/duplessis.pdf.

Flanagan, Mary. 2001. "Time and Identity." February. http://www.culturelestudies.be/student/kunst_identiteit_media/papers_final/degreef_ackerman.pdf.

Goodman, David S., and Gerald Segal, eds. 1994. *China Deconstructs*. London: Routledge.

Harding, Harry. 1995. "The Concept of 'Greater China': Themes, Variations, and Reservations." *The China Quarterly*, no. 136 (December): 660-86.

He, Baogang. 2004. "China's National Identity: A Source of Conflict between Democracy and State Nationalism." In *Nationalism, Democracy, and National Integration in China*, ed. Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang, 171-95. London: Routledge/Curzon.

Hendrischke, Hans, and Feng Chongyi. 1999. *The Political Economy of China's Provinces: Comparative and Competitive Advantage*. London: Routledge.

Hook, Brian. 1993. "Political Change in Hong Kong." *The China Quarterly*, no. 136 (December): 840-63.

Lam, Jermain T.M. 1997. "The Changing Political Culture of Hong Kong's Voters." *Issues & Studies* 33, no. 2 (February): 97-124.

Lao, Christy Ying, and Stephen Krashen. 1999. "Implementation of Mother-Tongue Teaching in Hong Kong Secondary Schools: Some Recent Reports." http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/discover/05hongkong.htm.

Lau, Siu-kai, and Kuan Hsin-chi. 2000. "Partial Democratization, 'Foundation Moment' and Political Parties in Hong Kong." *The China Quarterly*, no. 163 (September): 705-20.

Lee, Kuan Yew. 1999-2000. "Speaking to Hong Kong." CSIS *Hong Kong Update*, Winter. http://www.csis.org/html/HKUpdate99-00PDF.

Leung, Ambrose. 2004. "Hong Kong: Fight to Protect Your Rights, Says Anson Chan." *South China Morning Post*, August 21.

Li, Joseph. 2004. "Reasons for Beijing's Concern with HK Situation." *China Daily*, February 28-29.

Nathan, Andrew J. 1997. *China's Transition*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nonini, Donald M., and Aihwa Ong. 1997. "Chinese Transnationalism as an Alternative Modernity." In *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini, 3- 33. London: Routledge.

Patten, Chris. 1998. *East and West*. London: Macmillan.

Renwick, Neil. 2003. "Greater China, Globalization and Emancipation." In *Political Communications in Greater China: The Construction and Reflection of Identity*, ed. Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, 293-316. London: Routledge/Curzon.

Sinn, Elizabeth, 1998. *The Last Century of Chinese Overseas*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Siu, Helen F. 1999. "Hong Kong: Cultural Kaleidoscope on a World Landscape." In *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the 20th Century*, ed. Gary G. Hamilton. London: University of Washington Press. http://www.ciaonet.org/book/hamilton/wong.html.

Sum, Ngai-Ling. 1999. "Politics of Identities and the Making of the 'Greater China' Subregion in the Post-Cold War Eras." In *Subregionalism and World Order*,

ed. Glenn Hook and Ian Kearns, 197- 221. London: Macmillan.

Terrill, Ross. 2003. *The New Chinese Empire: And What It Means for the United States*. New York: Basic Books.

Thomas, Nicholas. 1999. *Democracy Denied: Identity, Civil Society, and Illiberal Democracy in Hong Kong*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Townsend, James. 1996. "Chinese Nationalism." In *Chinese Nationalism*, ed. Jonathan Unger, 1-29. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.

Tsang, Steve. 2003. "The Rise of a Hong Kong Identity." In *China Today: Economic Reforms, Social Cohesion, and Collective Identities*, ed. Taciana Fisac and Leila Fernandez-Stembridge, 222-39. London: Routledge/Curzon.

Tu, Wei-ming, ed. 1991. *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Unger, Jonathan, ed. 996. *Chinese Nationalism*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.

Vickers, Edward, and Flora Kan. 2003. "The Reeducation of Hong Kong: Identity, Politics, and Education in Postcolonial Hong Kong." *American Asian Review* 21, no. 4 (Winter). \\server05\\productionA\AMA\21-4\AMA401.txt.

Wang, Enbao. 1995. *Hong Kong, 1997: The Politics of Transition*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner.

Wang, Gungwu. 1999. "Chineseness: The Dilemma of Place and Practice." In *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the 20th Century*, ed. Gary Hamilton. London: University of Washington Press. http://www.ciaonet.org/book/hamilton/wong.html

_____. 2000. *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

_____. 2002. *Bind Us in Time: Nation and Civilization in Asia*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.

Wang, Kwok Nai. 1999. "The Right of Abode Controversy." HKCI's *Newsletter*, no. 126, March 11. http://www.democracy.org.hk/EN/mar1999/op_02.htm.

Wang, Y.C. 1966. *Chinese Intellectuals and the West: 1872-1949*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

White, Lynn, and Li Cheng. 1993. "China Coast Identities: Regional, National, and Global." In *China's Quest for National Identity*, ed. Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, 154-93. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Wong, Rosanna Yick-Ming. 1999. "From Colonial Rule to One Country, Two Sys-

tems." In *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the 20th Century*, ed. Gary G. Hamilton. London: University of Washington Press. http://www.ciaonet.org/book/hamilton/wong.html.

Wu, Changqi. 1997. "Hong Kong and Greater China: An Economic Perspective." In *Hong Kong under Chinese Rule*, ed. Warren I. Cohen and Li Zhao, 114-32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yau, Cannix. 2004. "Democratic [Legislative Council] Will See Executive Collapse." March 3. http://www.thestandard.com.hk/thestandard/news_detail_frame.cfm? articleid=45617&intcatid=1.

Zhao, Suisheng. 2004. *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.