

# Research on the Development Strategies of Hong Kong Identity Recognition

Boyuan Xue<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>LeadingTop International Education, Jinan, China

\*Corresponding author:  
cenduolan@ldy.edu.rs

## Abstract:

One significant development in China's contemporary history is the repatriation of Hong Kong, which is of great significance in shaping national identity and community consciousness. Hong Kong used to be a British colony, under which it achieved modernization and great economic development. Therefore, the identity of the people before and after the return of Hong Kong has great research value. The identity of Hong Kong residents will be examined in this paper as the research object, through the literature research method, summarized the history of Hong Kong and its identity recognition, analyzed the changes in the social environment behind the return of Hong Kong, and examines academic study and scholarly investigations on Hong Kong people's identity from Hong Kong's return to the present. The results show that Hong Kong people have both regional identity and less significant national identity, which is particularly obvious among youth. Based on this, this article proposes three suggestions to enhance the identity recognition of Hong Kong's youngsters.

**Keywords:** Hong Kong people; identity; identity politics; literature review.

## 1. Introduction

Identity has a significant impact in the contemporary academic context. The concept was first mentioned in the 1960s and "became a consistent subject in the social sciences" in the 1990s (Richard Jenkins). In the context of philosophy, the word identity, on the one hand, refers to the uniqueness of the subject, on the other hand, it means the identity between the subject and the subject. At the same time, the confirmation of identity cannot rely solely on oneself, but must have the existence of an "other".

By the Treaty of Nanjing and other unfair treaties, Hong Kong was given to Britain following the Qing

Dynasty's defeat in the Opium War in 1842, and became one of Britain's colonies throughout the world. Japan briefly invaded Hong Kong in World War II. Following World War II, Japan withdrew from Hong Kong. Over time, Hong Kong flourished as a British colony, and became an important trading port and developed economy in the world, referred to be one of the "Four Asian Tigers", and also regarded as the "Pearl of the Orient". Early on in the reform and opening up movement, with the influence of the worldwide decolonization movement, the governments of China and the United Kingdom discussed matters relating to Hong Kong's sovereignty. They

signed the Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong between the Governments of the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on December 19, 1984, which decides that the People's Republic of China's declaration of sovereignty over Hong Kong on July 1, 1997. Following Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, the "one country, two systems" policy has been adhered to diligently, enabling Hong Kong to continue to prosper and develop [1].

Hong Kong people's identity is an important topic worth studying. Prior to the return of Hong Kong, the identity of Hong Kong locals was shaped under colonial rule. People had an independent identity as "Hong Kong people" and retained a sense to identify with Chinese culture (especially an affinity for the neighboring Guangdong culture). Moreover, many middle and upper class people were ruled by a developed country like Britain and had access to the British community, so there is a sense of British identity.

The author of this essay will use the theme of how the identity of the people of Hong Kong changed following the city's return to examine these changes through literature review and related historical overview. In terms of the structure of the article, the first part Outlines the background of the return of Hong Kong and the changes of the social environment, the research findings of academics on the identity of Hong Kong people are compiled in the second section, and the third part puts forward the author's suggestions on Hong Kong people's identity.

## 2. Farewell Britannia: The Return of Hong Kong and the Changing Social Environment

On July 1, 1997, with the sound of the "March of the Volunteers", a five-star red flag was flown in Hong Kong to signify the government of mainland China had taken control of the territory, and since then, officially, China now recognizes Hong Kong as a special administrative area. The Xinhua News Agency's newsletter "Farewell Britannia" referred to the departure of the British cruise ship Britannia as the departure of Britain from Hong Kong. It seems that Hong Kong will henceforth proceed smoothly under the defense of one country, two systems.

However, Britain is not willing to return Hong Kong to China. During the British Hong Kong era, the Education Ordinance prohibited any political content, deliberately downplayed the concepts of country and nation, emphasized the superiority of the system and culture of the suzerainty, and avoided education on colonial history [2]. Prior to the return of Hong Kong, Britain began to forcefully accelerate the process of "democratization" in Hong

Kong, which resulting in the erroneous perception among Hong Kong people that they would be treated unfairly after Hong Kong's return. They also instilled a negative impression of Chinese Mainland in young people through education and other means, and sprouted opposition based on local consciousness [3]. This democratization was not entirely positive or altruistic, but was built on the background of the privileges of the British colonists relative to the local population, so it can be thought that it may contain a desire to foster separatism after the return.

Following the British colonization of Hong Kong in 1841, People from Hong Kong "are just (temporarily) Chinese in Hong Kong, but have no essential distinction in cultural psychology and values with residents of the mainland." They don't acknowledge or agree with British colonial rule in Hong Kong, nor do they support the British occupancy and "lease" of the city [4]. During the period from the Second World War to the reunification, Zhou Yongxin, a professor from the University of Hong Kong, summed up the identity of Hong Kong people this way:"From the end of the war until 1967, Hong Kong residents usually referred to themselves as 'refugees' (refugees from Mainland China), looking for a secure living in Hong Kong; Between 1967 and 1984, the identity of "Hong Kong citizens" began to take shape, people in the city were dedicated to making their lives better; Residents of Hong Kong have realized since 1984 that with the reunification, they will become "Chinese citizens", and their rights to the rule of law, freedom, democracy and human rights are protected by the Basic Law [5]. However, in the final stage before the return, Hong Kong people did not quickly accept the fact that the government was about to return to the mainland as summarized by Zhou Yongxin.

To a large extent, this change is due to the outstanding economic development of Hong Kong within the capitalist system under the British government in Hong Kong following World War II. Following the adoption of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the assurance that Hong Kong will return, Hong Kong people have strong uncertainties about the future. They worry that future officials do not have the experience to govern a modern city to keep Hong Kong prosperous, and they doubt that the mainland government will give Hong Kong full rights and respect. In an attempt to placate Hongkongers, Deng personally spoke to the Basic Law drafting committee's fourth plenary meeting, seen as the SAR's post-1997 constitution, making it clear that China would remain committed to reform and opening up, that Hong Kong's basic political and administrative systems would not alter for 50 years, and that he specified the personal freedoms Hongkongers could expect. These measures have calmed Hong Kong people's feeling uneasy for the time being. Until the

end of the 1980s, a series of political events in China and Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten's temporary advocacy of democratic reform in Hong Kong was rejected by the Chinese government following the handover, the originally thriving momentum appeared a certain rebound [6].

### 3. Research Status of Hong Kong People's Identity

For contemporary China, Hong Kong is an important and noteworthy region, with an important economic and political status, as well as a crucial part in shaping the integrated identity of contemporary China.

As a vocal group, young people are a very worthy object of study. The research of Zhao Yongjia, Leung Kaicheng and Huang Hantong found that Hong Kong's youngsters who have lived in the mainland China for a long time have a more favorable opinion of China than other young people, but their identity tendency is still rigid and difficult to change. Accordingly, they proposed to increase the mainland experience of Hong Kong's youngsters to counter the negative Internet opinion about China [7]. Xu Xiaoda analyzed in detail the surface causes of contemporary Hong Kong youth's identity confusion: Hong Kong youth lack a systematic understanding of Chinese history, lack of sufficient confidence in future development, the influence of new media, and the adverse reaction of realistic interests to Hong Kong youth (concept implantation of general education); And the underlying reasons: the asymmetry of rights and obligations, the rise of radicalism and populism, the serious phenomenon of lawlessness among some young people, and the coexistence of pluralism and heterogeneity in Hong Kong society. These arguments profoundly and comprehensively point out the causes that result in the status quo of Hong Kong youth identity, and have strong reference value [8].

It is clear that education is an important means of shaping youth's national identity, and studies of students can also significantly show how their identity is affected by their schooling. Shi Yudan analyzes Hong Kong people's national identity by focusing on civic education, and believes that there is a certain sense of national identity among Hong Kong residents, but the regional identity is significantly stronger. In view of this, she proposed a development direction of Hong Kong's civic education that based on the concept of active citizen [9]. Wang Yanwei's analysis of young students in Hong Kong believes that as the main force of Hong Kong's previous movements and social events, the lack of national identity of students cannot be ignored. Her proposal is to shape national identity by integrating culture into education [10]. Peng Ai de-

tailed the evolution of education throughout Hong Kong's history, emphasizing the deepening of local awareness in the democratic reform of the government of British Hong Kong, and argued that "civic education's conscious avoidance of young people's needs for constructing national identity directly led to the youth of Hong Kong's lack of a sense of national identity to a certain extent." At the same time, he conducted a questionnaire survey, believed that Hong Kong students' national identity was relatively low, and proposed his reasons and solutions, but the study also had the disadvantage of having a small sample size that was not representative of all students in Hong Kong [11].

There is also a lot of research on the wider population. With his personal experience, Zhou Yongxin summed up the change of Hong Kong people's identity as "refugee-citizen-Chinese citizen", and concluded: "The identity stresses that they are citizens of Hong Kong, and that frequently everything is about Hong Kong first, opposing or even excluding harmony between Hong Kong and the mainland; people who cherish their identity as Chinese should focus more on finding a balance between "one country" and "two systems [5]." Hui Ming and Xu Haibo believe that the contradictory and united characteristics of both national and local identities are evident in the identity of the people of Hong Kong. The deep cause of the imbalance between local identity and national identity is the imbalance of economic development and the disharmony of interest relations between mainland China and Hong Kong. It is suggested that the government should develop Hong Kong's economy and solve livelihood problems to eliminate the insecurity of Hong Kong people, in order to cultivate national identity [12].

There are also some studies that analyze the shaping of the identity of Hong Kong people through the study of media. From the perspective of social constructionism, Chen Wei studies the media construction of Hong Kong identity. She combs the presentation of mainland image by Hong Kong media and indicates that there is a trend of "re-nationalization" in the decade before and after the reunification, and "the media's presentation of mainland image after the reunification is no longer as negative as it has been since the 1970s" [13]. Feng Qingxiang studied the literature on the analysis of Hong Kong identity in the academic circles of Hong Kong, Macao and the mainland China, and pointed out that "many young Hong Kong students' strong identification with local consciousness forms a great contrast with their weak identification with the country"[14].

In addition, the vast majority of relevant papers cite various years of civic awareness surveys published by various committees, civic organizations or government bodies (such as the Hong Kong Council for Civic Education), and most of these studies confirm that the identity of Hong

Kong people with the mainland is much higher than their national identity with China.

The author believes that the contemporary study of Chinese Mainland in Hong Kong is basically according to the consciousness of the Chinese national community. For the purpose of maintaining national unity and stability, it emphasizes the consciousness of the community and identity with China, and opposes excessive regionalism and separatism.

## 4. Suggestion

Based on the policy “one country, two systems” policy of contemporary China and the historical requirement of shaping the nation state and community, the author makes the following suggestions for the development prospects of Hong Kong’s identity.

### 4.1 Education Reform

Many researchers have pointed out that one important factor contributing to Hong Kong youths’ regionalization of identity is civic education, which has a nativist tendency and emphasizes the uniqueness and internationalization of Hong Kong as an autonomous region. In my opinion, Hong Kong is back in the homeland, and the mainland and Hong Kong are mutually beneficial in terms of trade, production, etc. Therefore, the trend of separatism and the “Hong Kong independence” of the youth group should not be accepted. Regarding this, the Hong Kong independence incident in 2019 has already brought us a precedent. While respecting the characteristics of Hong Kong people and ensuring that “Hong Kong people govern Hong Kong”, more elements of cultural identity could be added to Hong Kong’s education, so that students can have a basic understanding of Chinese Mainland, and not only rely on Internet hearsay and the excitable characteristics of young people to conduct groundless smear and violence.

### 4.2 Increasing Exchanges between the Mainland China and Hong Kong

Based on the research of Zhao Yongjia, Liang Kaicheng and Huang Hantong cited above [7], it can be argued that mainland life experience can help Hong Kong people establish a more favorable impression of China, thus countering the negative public opinion on China on the Internet. Although the study found that this did not actually affect cultural identity, increasing exchanges between the mainland and Hong Kong, so that Hong Kong and mainland people have a better understanding of each other, did have a positive effect on helping Hong Kong people to enhance their Chinese identity.

### 4.3 Public Opinion Propaganda

Because China has not paid enough attention to worldwide publicity and international politics, there are a lot of negative information about China on the Internet, some of which are true, but some are biased or even false. Based on the same study [7], this information can mislead Hong Kong residents who have never been to mainland China, leading to a negative impression of the mainland and thus having a negative impact on the shaping of cultural identity. China can increase real publicity, and give Hong Kong people and other Internet users a more positive impression of China by showing the living conditions of the mainland people.

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, Hong Kong has gone through the process of transitioning from a colony to an autonomous region, from a small place in the south to an international metropolis over the past century, and has also achieved great economic development under colonial rule. That history has given Hong Kong a strong regional identity and, for some of its beneficiaries, a sense of British rule. Because of this, when Hong Kong returns to China and becomes a special administrative region of China, the identity of Hong Kong people has become a very important research topic, which will significantly affect the Mainland China, Hong Kong, China and even the world economy.

According to the collation of previous studies, we can see that since the return of Hong Kong to the present, Hong Kong people have both a regional identity and a less significant national identity, which is particularly evident among young people. The strong regional identity is reflected in seeing themselves in the capacity of a “Hong Kong people”, and they do not show a positive attitude towards mainland culture, and some people even have a discriminatory attitude due to the economic backwardness of the mainland back then. After the return of Hong Kong, in recent years, the mainland’s economy has been developing faster and faster, and the mainland’s political, economic and cultural propaganda or intervention in Hong Kong has additionally grown, and people in Hong Kong have also demonstrated a not particularly significant national identity toward China, which can be confirmed by the survey data mentioned above.

As a member of the mainland people, from the standpoint of shaping the ethnic community, the author puts forward three suggestions for how the Hong Kong people can increase their national identity while retaining regional characteristics. From the perspective of the author, the increase in the national identity of the Hong Kong people

can benefit Hong Kong, the mainland China and even the world.

## References

- [1] John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.
- [2] Lv Dakun. *Research on Hong Kong national education from the perspective of cultural identity*. Beijing Forestry University, 2014.
- [3] An Dongping. *National identity of Hong Kong youth in the context of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area construction: contemporary values, realistic dilemmas and reconstruction path*. *Lingnan Journal*, 2020, (01):40-46. DOI:10.13977/j.cnki.lnxk.2020.01.006.
- [4] Shen Qingli. *Hong Kong's historical changes and identity construction*. *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 2016, (04):28-35.
- [5] Zhou Yongxin. *Identity and values of Hong Kong residents*. *Hong Kong and Macao Studies*, 2015, (04):66-76+96.
- [6] Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2013.
- [7] Zhao Yongjia, Liang Kaicheng, Huang Hantong. *The impact of Mainland experience on Hong Kong youth's perception and identity of China*. *Hong Kong and Macao Studies*, 2017, (03):38-47+94-95.
- [8] Xu Xiaodi. *Research on the path of Hong Kong youth identity*. *Youth Exploration*, 2016, (05):98-105. DOI:10.13583/j.cnki.issn1004-3780.2016.05.011.
- [9] Shi Yudan. *The development of civic education in Hong Kong based on Active Citizenship: the perspective of national identity*. *Journal of South China Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2011, (01):109-114+159.
- [10] Wang Yanwei, Lu Moxing. *An analysis on the cultivation of national identity of Hong Kong young students from the perspective of culture education*. *Public Relations World*, 2020, (12):65-67.
- [11] Peng Ai. *Research on national identity education of Hong Kong youth*. *Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*, 2018.
- [12] Hui Ming, Xu Haibo. *An analysis of Hong Kong people's dual identity*. *Lingnan Journal*, 2016, (02):51-58. DOI:10.13977/j.cnki.lnxk.2016.02.010.
- [13] Chen Wei. *The Media Construction of Hong Kong Identity in Youth Journal: A Social Constructivist Perspective*. *Hong Kong and Macao Studies*, 2017, (01):86-92+96.
- [14] Feng Qingxiang. *Hong Kong Local Consciousness and Youth National Identity: A Literature Analysis Based on Mainland and Hong Kong/Macau Academic Circles*. *Youth Journal*, 2020, (01):93-101.