



Research on the Transition of National Identity for Hong Kong People

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Abstract. Since 2019, Hong Kong has experienced another wave of social movements against the intervention of extradition policy of mainland China, which caused devastating effects to Hong Kong society meanwhile made people start to consider the origin of Hong Kong social movements. The dramatic changes of national identity for Hong Kong people seem to be roughly positive correlation with the frequency and intensity of Hong Kong social movements in recent years, which reflects the gradual increased strength of closed localism trend in political resistance with central government of China. This article aims at arguing that under the political influence from mainland China and long-time sufferings from British imperialism governance, this positive relation couldn't achieve the purpose of democratization. Therefore, it's reasonable for Hong Kong to conduct certain partial democratic system for maintaining the stability and prosperity of itself with the different understanding of democracy.

Keywords: National identity · Social movements · Hong Kong

1 Introduction

The formation of localism identity of Hong Kong people was related to the colonial history and political changes. Starting from the occupation, British had recognized that it was impossible to establish colonial institutional governance except for business trade due to special geo-economic and political association with the mainland. Continuous political changes, along with the handover with People's Republic of China (PRC) has forced Hong Kong people to form their specific national identity with twisted recognition of CPG's policy.

Starting from the colonial period, the debate of "New Chinese" and "Old Chinese" has cultivated the confusion for Hong Kong people for their national belongings. According to Qiang Shigong, Hong Kong people were refractory to accept the New Chinese identity based on the introduction of Marxism in mainland China. Instead, they were willing to remain the original legitimacy in traditional Confucianism thought foundation similar to Taiwan [1]. As we could see, Qiang regarded the traditional national legitimacy, in other words, the previous term "Chinese", has appeared breakage in the separation with mainland China. With the growth of economy and the prosperity of Hong Kong local culture, Hong Kong people established the superiority for their formation of indigenous

complex, which laid down the foundation of localism identity after the handover. Not only for the internal social improvements in Hong Kong, but Scholars also found that the dramatic changes from another side also triggered the excursion away from Marxism Chinese. For scholar Yew and Kwong, cultural revolution symbolized continuous political suppression towards democratic institutions and citizen participation [2]. With the joint effects from both Hong Kong and mainland China, the recognition was gradually illustrated as the conservative psychology to maintain traditional values and resist any potential change from Chinese Central Government. British government also noticed the trend and developed cultural cultivation system to Hong Kong after 1980s, including but not fixed to introduce urban council for democratic election. The recognition of political elites and the appeal of normal citizens combined together to leave potential intensity for the era of regime transformation.

After the handover, the hidden and less relevant repellent thought from getting away intervention from CPG became dramatic due to the transfer of sovereignty. Hong Kong became the specific political entity with the mixture of external Socialism regulations from mainland China but internal spiritual core of Capitalism from left British ruling. The signing of CEPA was an important turning point for scholars to argue that CPG was conducting invisible policies to enhance the confrontation towards the disobedience from Hong Kong people. For Ngok Ma, CEPA was originally aimed at offering assistance to revitalize the economy of Hong Kong, including but not fixed to the decline of tariff and promotion of employment for Hong Kong people in mainland China. However, it also mentioned the side effects that CEPA gradually strengthen the economic control towards Hong Kong to make the city more depend on the integration from mainland China [3]. One of the most apparent side effects of CEPA, which was discovered by scholar Stan Wong, was the occupation of limited resources of Hong Kong by the increased mainland tourists. CEPA relaxed the restrictions towards mainland citizens to visit Hong Kong, which caused amount of people, including workers and tourists, flow into Hong Kong to find their opportunities. Stan mentioned that due to the extreme competition in labor market, the young generation of input region will produce the increased anxiety due to the occupation of job opportunities [4]. For Hong Kong youngsters, they couldn't enjoy much economic profits led by CEPA. Instead, they faced the decline of wages in their family because of the invasion of national capital and the rise of rent. Allied with the middle-low class of Hong Kong, the anti-integration emotion of CEPA was gradually politicalized into the hostility towards mainland China. Not only this, the launch of IVS, which was the attached convenience of CEPA, was regarded as the double sword for Hong Kong citizens to recognize the integrated benefits. According to Kwin Wong and Victor Zheng, the disappeared policy towards border-cross for mainland tourists produced great political distrust towards CPG. That Buying agents purchased cheap products from royal areas like Sha Tin and Sheung Shui pushed the price risen for daily products, which harmed the local small commodity economy. Besides, increased mainland gravidas came to Hong Kong to bear their children and scramble the scarce resources in hospitals and kindergartens [5]. As we observe, CEPA was regarded as the essential beginning for Hong Kong to enhance its twisted recognition towards the intervention from mainland China, it brought side effects that Hong Kong people had more hostility towards the integration policy of CPG.

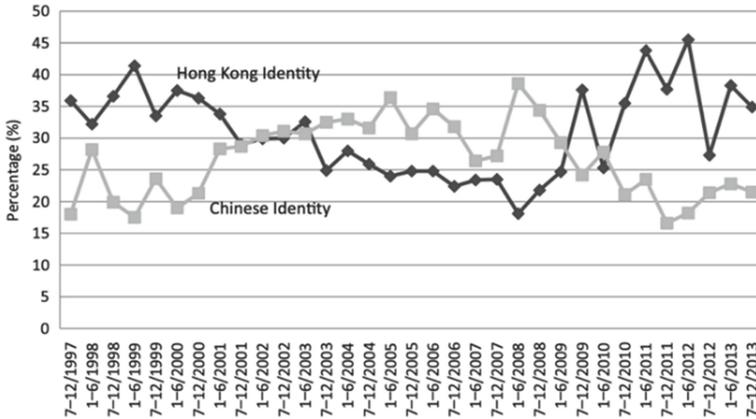


Fig. 1. Identity trends in Hong Kong, Public Opinion Program, University of Hong Kong (HKU POP), People’s National Identity, accessed November 5, 2012, <http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/pop-express/ethnic/index.html>

Experiencing the handover, Hong Kong people gradually formed certain “Refugee Mentality” which could be described as rejecting any external interactions with collective notion and keep certain distance with CPG [6]. However, the intension to enhance political control towards the special administrative region resisted this mentality and gradually politicize the original Hong Kong national identity. Apparently, the process of declining the distinction between old Chinese and new Chinese for Hong Kong people could also be regarded as the accumulation of localism identity nourishment. Much suppression from CPG has made Hong Kong people realize the lack of democracy and freedom in mainland China, which were regarded as the core value of Hong Kong society. Passive return to PRC produced unevenness sense of Hong Kong people [7]. Therefore, Hong Kong localism identity was eventually mentioned as protection of local values and resistance towards the control and intervention of CPG.

2 Localism Identity and Social Movements

Since the handover, the changes of Hong Kong people’s national identity have reflected as the dramatic and unregular tendency. Figure 1 showed that after 2000, debates between Chinese national identity and Hong Kong localism one became more unpredictable. When Chinese identity take the lead, it’s obvious that their occupation percentage didn’t gain great advantages. While after 2010, the rise of Hong Kong localism identity observed in Fig. 1 had reached far more than that of Chinese. This unequal comparison motivated us to associate the changes of national identity with the rise of social movements. With policy comparisons, it is concluded that social movements gradually replaced the moderate coordination with Beijing’s autocracy governance to become the main way for new Hong Kong teenagers to express their dissatisfaction and anger towards the current democracy system.

Signing of Joint Declaration in 1984 started the de-colonization and democratization process and the promise of “Hong Kong people rule Hong Kong” had encouraged to establish instituted democratic system after the handover [3]. When the closed colonial administration was broken to open more opportunities to participate in the democracy movements for securing a more democratic system, including preparing elections in different levels and articulating political programs for post-colonial administration [9]. As shown in chart of Fig. 1, it was not difficult to see the combination between Chinese national identity and Hong Kong localism identity until 2003. Because the July 1st protest movement indicated that public realized the importance of conducting straight street politics to fight against the paternalistic governance. During the forced legislation of Article 23 and the outburst of SARS, 500 thousand Hong Kong residents were organized to gather around Victoria Park and show their passive emotion towards the inaction of government to deal with SARS and the surrender towards CPG’s intervention, with the result that Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa was forced to postpone the formation of laws related to national security [10]. Therefore, in the transition period from 1997 to 2008, where the Chinese national identity were taking the lead in Fig. 1, both government and public were trying to explore the potential moderate solutions for the conflicts caused the confusion of regime transformation. The cultivation from colonial transition motivated the appearance of civil notion, which invisibly made the accumulation turn into the power to declare more democratic institutions. For government, during transition period, the political structure was still characterized by the bureaucratic dominance but facing challenges from increasing social and political demands. Therefore, the structural contradiction between accumulation and legislation may suffer in the conflicts if the balance is not controlled [11]. Government didn’t want to have full conflicts with people’s ideal democratic wishes, which was the reason of retirement of CE Tung and the compromised abolishment in 2003. Meanwhile, the street politics were still stuck in the confusion that whether Hong Kong localism shall be excluded from the National identity of mainland China. Moderate Pro-demo camps claimed that Hong Kong People shall negotiate with Beijing for gaining any potential peaceful opportunities for democracy and denied behaviors of some radicals for irritating CPG to lose the last hope in political reforms [12]. Therefore, Chinese National identity gradually took advantages over the Hong Kong identity by the vague explanation of protesting approach and the moderate negotiation of mainland. Figure 1 illustrates that the recognition identity of Chinese identity reached the peak possibly due to the success in Beijing Olympics. But sporadic external excitement in sports would only cause disordered fluctuation instead of fundamental changes. The July 1st movement in 2003 wasn’t the end of straight and physical expressions of Hong Kong. Instead, it was just an enormous potential beginning.

It was not surprised that Hong Kong localism identity took advance after 2008 along with the research of the scale and participating rate. Taking examples of Preserving Queen’s Pier in 2007 and Anti-express Railway link in 2009, the numbers of participants went beyond from 450 to 8500, even reaching 120000 in the anti-curriculum protest [13]. This predictable uprising speed of participation indicated the trend of new activism for new generation. When the accumulation of disappointment towards the slow progress in democracy and free election achieved the critical point, Hong Kong people would realize that traditional politics and negotiation couldn’t protect the rights that had already

existed or potentially would have in the future, which made them almost lose confidence towards the principle of “One Country Two System”. In 2007, current CE Donald Tsang raised the notion of “New Hong Konger”, whose factors were completely against the traditional notions of local values. It mentioned that Hong Kong people should grasp their own locations in the country’s development and declined the original superiority of Hong Kong [14], which let localism more fear of the enforced control towards the disappearance of Hong Kong core values. When the current chairperson of PRC HU Jintao suggested the mixture of national education into CE’s policy address, Hong Kong government greatly devoted their efforts to inculcate the nationalist sentiments into in youth, including the funding of national education activities and the enforcement for students to participate in the ceremony of raising national flag [2]. In this process, Hong Kong identity positively absorbed the accumulating passive emotion from audience to transform itself into the actual weapon for pro-demo camp to completely separate it from the national sense. Due to the continuous suppression of government, in 2014, the occurrence of umbrella movement represented the kick point of Hong Kong democratic movement and finalized the approach of top-down activism, mainly because the new generation decided to use the full dramatic or even violent way like occupation the financial center of the city to show their ambition for re-formation of systems [13].

Roughly speaking, the linear relation between national identity recognition and Hong Kong social movements basically appears as the positive trend. With the turning point in 2008, we observe that social movements appeared different developing tendency. When Hong Kong people couldn’t confirm their localism identity as the spiritual basis to maintain their values and the CPG couldn’t have full conflicts with local citizens, continuous negotiation with mainland China gave hope to Hong Kong people for achieving democracy. However, when the accumulation of disappointment made Hong Kong residents use dramatic and violent way to express themselves, it means that the localism identity has full awoken and became the instructor mentality for Hong Kong people to strive for freedom and democracy.

3 Helpless and Inevitable Choice of Hong Kong

Along with the worldwide spread of democracy, many states are in the middle of continuum anchored by democracies at one pole and dictatorship in another, whose factors are strong executive, weak checks and balances and institutionalized informality [15]. It will easily encourage certain countries to seek irrelevant power for the concentrative authority practice with the excuse that transforming certain areas. This partial and twisted model, who was academically named soft authoritarianism, clearly defined the politics development of Hong Kong since 1970s. From 1997, Hong Kong people have always claimed the achievement of universal suffrage of Chief Executive and legislative council, which made democracy appeal became the main thread for exploring the increased intensity and localism identity, whose aim was to realize the ultimate transition towards democracy in political system. However, with the participation of 1.7 million in umbrella movement, we couldn’t discover any trend of this ambitious goal. After the handover, CPG has tried to transplant the ruling model of itself to clutch Hong Kong governance of itself instead of any intervention in external foreign political force. Huge business treasure has made

Hong Kong as the Asian financial center meanwhile increased the probability to develop its own soft-authoritarian model. Due to the explanation of “One country, Two system” set by DENG Xiaoping, purposely blurred the notion of “democracy” in Hong Kong society. In the globalized background, whether the legitimacy of left wings to recognize new PRC or the one of right wing to defend the Hong Kong traditional colonial values to govern Hong Kong resulted in the confusion, which further led to the international status of Hong Kong [6]. Hong Kong people always mixed up the ideal institutions of western democracy and the actual practice measures of this city. Therefore, the positive relation of Hong Kong people reflected that under the system of soft authoritarianism both in the governance of British colonial government and PRC, it was difficult for Hong Kong to interpret democracy as universal suffrage in the election system. Instead, the partial democratic institutions was essential to maintain the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong before 2047, the first era of “One country, two System”.

From the colonial period of British governance, Hong Kong didn't enjoy much democracy rights in political participation. As the ethical diversity of colonial Hong Kong, it suited the factors of semi-ethnocracy ruling. The regime features the dominance of ethical group but without totalizing it. The dominant ethical group derives certain privilege based on their particular ethical culture. While the non-ethical dominant group members are exposed to the discrimination in employment, education, and housing etc. [16]. To surpass the binary opposition of British and Chinese, migrants from mainland China and other Eastern Asian countries would be regarded as the lowest level of Hong Kong society, while local citizens speaking Cantonese would be the middle class between migrants and British elites who spoke fluent English. As we could observe, language became the distinguished factor of the non-democratic social hierarchy in Hong Kong. For the local citizens and migrants' conflicts, “Cantonese chauvinism” played a role for giving discriminations towards certain cultural groups. As for the research, the spoken and written Cantonese took the majority of Hong Kong residents while for the English. By contrast, only few citizens could speak English fluently [17]. And in the language census in 1961, mandarin was fully ignored to indicate its lowest positions in Hong Kong. Ethical groups who spoke dominant language wanted others to be aware of their dominant status in society. Therefore, within the background of golden economy and Cantonese culture around 1970s, Hong Kong people gradually formed the inexplicable superiority over the immigrants from mainland China and other Asian foreigners. For example, children from Nepal and Pakistan were refused to obtain the same education privilege in junior high school as local students did. And hired labor could only have two-years contract for the convenience to fire them flexibly to leave Hong Kong within two weeks. What's interesting was that if we compare the education level, we could easily observe that no matter for Chinese immigrants or foreign workers, their literacy level was much higher than that of Hong Kong people [17]. But Hong Kong residents thought that education was the harm towards obedience. While for the conflicts of English and Chinese speaking, the hierarchy was more apparent between upper British elites and normal Hong Kong Chinese. Colonial governance regarded English as the symbol for class distinction. After the colonial occupation, British thought that there was more friendly political environment for English teaching. In the early colonial period, the government took advantages of the new school for students' English teaching and coordinate their thoughts

with the imperialism in the Victoria era [17]. In fact, although English never gets involved into the daily lives of people, it still be treated as the noble moral capital for the minority Chinese elites. They devoted efforts to maintain the privileged status for English to conduct certain elitism system in election and social lives [9]. Government suppressed any transition for the weak at the bottom of society to democracy to maintain the current system with stability. Ethnical distinction was mobilized into class discrimination inside this partial-democracy society. Among this, languages played the dominant roles in class divergence.

After the handover, Hong Kong inherited certain values from British colonial government, along with the advanced economy position of Asian financial center. During the transition period, any potential and unnecessary changes would lead to the collapse of current system, not even to mention that Hong Kong people still positioned themselves as the opposition to mainland China. Therefore, the emergent mission for CPG was to maintain the normal operation of Hong Kong's economy and take advantages of its Capitalism system to assist the open door and reform policy. Hong Kong has remained certain traditions from British governance, including independent legal system, relative freedom in press, speaking and religion. However, for the core argued contradiction of Hong Kong people universal suffrage, there is no living space under the specific political system and deep business culture in Hong Kong. For Ngok Ma, he concluded the political system after the Handover as "Patron-clientelism", which was referred to using the election system to make alliance with elites in business and pro-establishment camp and share certain values, narrowing the representativeness but enhancing the stability [18]. In the authoritarian election in Hong Kong, with the purpose of caring legitimacy, Government must use measures to enlarge legal support to make their governance justified. For the election of CE, there was always the representative organization named election committee that presented the straight voting from the public. Taking use of the CE election in 2017 with 1200 members in election committee, we could observe that there was hugely proportioned occupation for Pro-Establishment Camp. For example, Constituency in finance occupied 1/4 seats formed by commerce chamber and big merchants. Along with different social constituency who has strong profitable relations with CPG, also occupied 1/5 seats [19]. The same was designed in the functional constituency in the election of legislative council, which nearly occupied half of seats in the election in 2016.

Therefore, we could observe that the superior election design in CE and legislative council both appeared the factor of partial democracy by giving certain privileges to the business elites and let them play dominate roles in the election system. In this process, CPG also intend to unify the interests of great merchants in Hong Kong to make itself fully control the flow of capital. In the first 25 years after handover, avoiding the loss of investment and the decline of prosperity is the common goal for both CPG and Hong Kong citizens, whose necessary achievement must depend on the increasing confidence of entrepreneurs. Economic policies like low tariff and free port must rely on the operation of political power. If universal suffrage was conducted, there is high possibility that Hong Kong will become the welfare society and betray the original Capitalism system which made it prospering. And the benefits of big merchants will not be guaranteed. Therefore, the functional constituency in legislative council and election committee

could let them gain more public resources and policy convenience to make themselves gain discourse power in political election. With the integration with mainland China in recent years, the regime transformation from British governance to Chinese ruling has been the fixed fact for All Hong Kong people. After 1997, more companies have enlarged their business in mainland China due to the launch of CEPA while for more Chinese national capital such as Sinopec and China Mobile intervened Hong Kong's local market. Capitalists understood that there was no possibility for them to escape the interactions with CPG and support the Pro-Democratic camp in political election. For Beijing, moderate pacification such as nomination of deputy of national people congress with local business elites was also necessary to maintain the relations. Because Hong Kong government also need numbers of delegation and local leaders to be the medium for legitimacy construction and benefits distributions. As we could see, when there is a balance between business elite and political power, the choice of partial democracy in the election system instead of universal suffrage is essential to the normal operation in Hong Kong.

Obviously during the colonial period, the main social conflict was the contradiction between different races with the distribution of privileges. Before the handover, Hong Kong people were suffering from the confusion about their own identity vacuum. On the one hand, they were separated from the closed Socialism system from mainland China while on the other hand, the strict hierarchy from British setting prevented any opportunity for the potential upward mobility into the higher status. Therefore, CPG inherited the similar partial-democracy system by making alliance with business elites to make Hong Kong stable as previously did. From the political logic, there must be the top priority to maintain the current system and examine whether the soft-authoritarianism model in the election which would match the principle of "one country, two system" in the transition era.

4 Conclusion

Hong Kong localism identity was the joint production of British colonial governance and different political recognition with mainland China. After the handover, Hong Kong people intended to use a more dramatic way through social movements to express their awakensness for protecting local values and resist intervention from mainland China. However, due to the failure of democratization under the partial-democracy system. It is concluded that CPG successfully inherited the legacy of distinction from previous British colonial experience and conducted alliance with business elites. This specific model of partial democracy was regarded as the suitable one for Hong Kong to go through the transition smoothly.

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