Keynote Speech I:

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Citizenship in Hong Kong and the Identity Dilemma
Introduction

Citizenship denotes a sense of collective meaning and destiny for a community. It is ultimately about where one belongs to. However, citizenship and citizenship education have always been contested notions, especially in the new globalized world.

The conventional understanding of ‘citizenship’, following T. H. Marshall, has premised on the civil, political and social aspects\(^1\). The civil aspect refers to the “rights necessary for individual freedom\(^2\); the political aspect refers to the “right to participate in the exercise of political power, as member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body”\(^3\); and the social aspect refers to “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society”\(^4\).

Bryan S Turner’s analysis of Marshall’s model further extends the concept of Citizenship to the discussion of Global Citizenship based upon human rights\(^5\). Apart from the rights and entitlement perspective, the engagement with community - hence the acquisition, boundary, identification, and reflection of Citizenship - form another important aspect of study:

“… not only are the rights and obligations of citizens being redefined [under the evolution of class reconfiguration, rise of new international government regimes, new rationalities of government, new social movements and their struggle of recognition and redistribution], but also what it means to be a citizen and which individuals and groups are enabled to possess such rights and obligations have become issues of concern. In other words, the three fundamental axes, extent (rules and norms of inclusion and

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2 The freedom of speech, freedom of thoughts and faith, rule of law and rights to justice, property ownership and so on.
3 The right to political representation, the right to vote and seeking electoral office, participation in political discourse, and so on.
4 The rights to welfare, healthcare, education, social benefits, cultural heritage, and so on.
exclusion), content (rights and responsibilities) and depth (thickness or thinness) of citizenship are being redefined and reconfigured.\textsuperscript{6}

For Hong Kong, they are even more complex and contentious issues because of the city’s unique historical and political pathway. While Hong Kong citizens have now enjoyed their civil and social rights, as well as certain political rights (though there is some way to go in achieving the full right of universal suffrage), the clash of identities has always been central to how Hong Kong people discover and articulate their sense of relatedness – to their own habitat, their motherland, and to the world at large given the city’s global status.

Let me start the discussion by citing my own personal ‘identity’ experience:

*When I reached the age of 18, ready for getting an adult Identity Card in those days, I claimed myself to be Chinese without any further thought, and the ID Card at that time simply put down your “nationality claimed”. Then in 1973, as I needed to go abroad for the first time to attend some international conferences, I realized it would be so much more convenient if I used a British passport and I was eligible for that because I was born in British-ruled Hong Kong. When I arrived at Heathrow Airport, I joined the queue for British passport holders but was told by the immigration official that I was in the wrong line – I belonged to the ‘aliens’!*  

*Then in the mid-1980s, I travelled to Beijing by plane for the first time using my home-return permit (回鄉証) and I filled out the arrival form by stating “Chinese” as my nationality. However, the immigration official crossed it out and inserted instead: “Hong Kong and Macao compatriot” (港澳同胞).*

*I held the British National (Overseas) Passport until the 1997 Handover, and then switched to the Hong Kong SAR Passport. Still, I have found that when I visit other countries, I need to put down “Chinese (Hong Kong)” instead of just “Chinese”. In the early days after the Handover, when I arrived at Singapore and stated I were Chinese on my arrival form, the immigration official actually crossed it out and put down “HKSAR” instead.*

This forms the trilogy of the Hong Kong identity journey. Before the handover, I was neither British nor Chinese. After reunification, I am still not fully Chinese in the eyes of foreign countries. The Hong Kong identity is something historical, but it also carries a lot of contemporary political and cultural connotations, which form the subject of my paper.

In an article exploring the biculturalism of Hong Kong, Ng Sik-hung has alluded to the existence of Chinese self and Western self, in various combinations, within the Hong Kong bicultural person – hence Biculturals (where both selves are strong), Sinocentrics (strong Chinese self and weak Western self), Westerncentrics (strong Western self and weak Chinese self), and Marginals (both selves are weak)\textsuperscript{7}. He went


on to argue that the parallel processes of decolonization from Hong Kong’s past and its future psychological reunification with Mainland China may produce a new “biculturalism”, that would characterize the new Hong Kong person. Looking at the historical trajectory of the Hong Kong identity, there have been more dilemmas and tensions than what Ng captured when describing and explaining the bicultural integration of Hong Kong people.

The clash of identities has always been central to how Hong Kong people discover and articulate their sense of relatedness – to their own habit, their motherland China, and to the world given the city’s international status. In a sense, the Hong Kong identity has been a creation of a unique segment of history where three strands of forces – localization, nationalization and internationalization – together impose their footprint on its formation.

The transient identity: Borrowed time, borrowed place

Richard Hughes’ 1968 book has made famous Hong Kong’s features as a borrowed place in borrowed time. The colony was a result of the infamous Opium War which Imperial China lost to the expanding British Empire and had to cede it to the latter as a major port. However, the British colonials’ ultimate interest was not Hong Kong, but the mainland. Hence Hong Kong was not duly colonized in the way other British overseas territories were. There was no forced cultural or political integration, but a form of indirect rule through Chinese community leaders.

In the early years of the colony, most local Chinese regarded Hong Kong as a transient place, to escape from the frequent chaos and wars of the Chinese mainland, or to make a fortunate through trades with foreigners. Many still found their roots and ultimate destiny in the mainland. Before the closing of the Sino-British border and the imposition of immigration control in 1948, Chinese people could freely enter the colony. While some upper class Chinese families might have acquired English education, language, and etiquettes, the majority of the local popular remained distant from the dominant ruling elite.

The first sense of Hong Kong identity emerged during the period of detachment from the Chinese mainland following the communist takeover in 1949 and subsequent to the colony’s own economic takeoff from the 1970s onwards, which brought with it an indigenous notion of achievement and self-worth that could be cherished as home-grown. This period marked the early phase of real tensions in Hong Kong’s

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8 R. Hughes (1968) *Hong Kong: Borrowed Place, Borrowed Time*, London: Andre Deutsch.
9 These were often wealthy business people) exercised leadership of the local Chinese population and resolved disputes by way of Chinese customs and rules, under arm’s length control of the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs,
10 There were two main political undercurrents behind. *First*, the cutting off of Hong Kong from China was a result of both the new Communist regime’s close-door policy and a deliberate attempt by the West, led by the US, to contain Chinese communism. Hong Kong had henceforth become the enclave of the free world lying at the door of a tyrannical communist China. *Second*, industrialists and intellectuals fleeing from communism to find refuge in Hong Kong, together with waves of ordinary city and peasant folks escaping from war and political struggles, had nurtured a Hong Kong Chinese psyche that was China-centred and yet fiercely anti-communist.
unique politics of identity – whether to identify with the free West or with a Communist (and hence an ideologically alien and anti-traditional) China. For them, Hong Kong was the only place where the cultural legacy of China could be extended without political intrusions. The 1950s and 1960s also witnessed rival ideological camps – supported by the Communist and Kuomintang (KMT, the Nationalist Party) regimes on the mainland and Taiwan respectively – competing and virtually fighting for influence among the politically apathetic and by now largely refugee local Chinese population.

The ‘Hongkong Belonger’ identity under colonial reformism: Neither British nor Chinese

Following the 1967 pro-communist riots caused by a spillover of the Cultural Revolution on the mainland, the British colonial administration in Hong Kong, short of devolution, began a process of ‘localization’: (a) the localization of the civil service; (b) the localization of administration; and (c) the localization of public services. Concomitant with the new governing strategy, the government was active in promoting community building, to forge a new Hong Kong identity that could be independent of its British or Chinese links. The official attempts to establish a new ‘Hong Kong Belonger’ identity coincided with the further detachment of Hong Kong from an increasingly radicalized Communist mainland, and ironically, a calculated move by the British Government to dilute the claim of Hong Kong Chinese to full British nationality.

Although successive Chinese governments had never recognized the three Unequal Treaties which ceded Hong Kong and Kowloon Peninsula, and leased the New Territories for 99 years, to Britain, China had nonetheless admitted de facto British jurisdiction over Hong Kong, willing to deal with Britain on Hong Kong-related matters under the so-called “internal matters to be handled externally” (內事外辦)

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11 This was through the recruitment of more local Chinese into the British expatriated-dominated bureaucracy, including the elite Administrative Class and the Royal Hong Kong Police Force which hitherto were held highly exclusive for expatriate control; Many of Hong Kong’s first cohort of secretary-rank local officers were recruited in this period, such as Michael Yuen, Dominic Wong, Lily Yam, Michael Sze and Donald Tsang. Until after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, only locals with British nationality (acquired through birth in Hong Kong or naturalized) would be admitted to be administrative officers and police inspectors.

12 This was through the establishment of new City District Offices in the urban areas under the new Secretary for Home Affairs (renamed from the previous Secretary for Chinese Affairs) (on a par to traditional District Offices existing in the New Territories) and the proliferation of district offices set up by other government departments, later to evolve into a unique form of district administration in the 1980s with the addition of elected district boards.

13 This was through the rapid expansion of health, education, public housing and social welfare under the reformist governor Murray MacLehose during the so-called golden era of the 1970s, which also saw the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) and the modernization of the civil service, to give the colonial government a reinvented image as one that cared for the people and sought to improve their livelihood.

14 By 1983, full British passports were replaced by British Dependent Territory Citizenship passports which did not confer any right of abode to their holders, for those Chinese born in or naturalized in Hong Kong. Under the British Nationality Act 1981 which came into force on 1 January 1983, http://www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1981/cukpga_19810061_en_1
principle. Hong Kong Chinese were regarded as Hong Kong ‘compatriots’ rather than outright Chinese nationals in so far as their legal status was concerned, though they had to enter the mainland using China-issued home-return permits and not British documents of identity.

Hong Kong began to have a significant economic takeoff during the 1970s. The Hong Kong dollar was un-pegged from the British pound sterling, and Hong Kong was allowed to have its own delegation representing Hong Kong as opposed to British interests in international trade negotiations. Increasingly Hong Kong had acquired its own self-standing on the international scene. A new Hong Kong self began to emerge, grounded in the colony’s economic success and international image, as well as its unique home-grown Cantonese cultural and life-style forms – such as Hong Kong movies, Canto-pop music, television soap operas, and even Hong Kong-style cuisine and café food – which were becoming increasingly popular among the Chinese diasporas.

If there were multifarious elements ultimately accountable for the formation and consolidation of a self-sustained Hong Kong identity, it was ultimately the ‘political’ that conferred legitimacy to such identity. The Sino-British talks on Hong Kong’s future in the 1980s, had ironically paved the path for recognizing and legalizing a separate Hong Kong identity. Under the new Basic Law and the “one country two systems” framework, the Chinese central government retained the ultimate sovereign authority over the SAR, but otherwise left its political, administrative, legal, judicial and economic systems untouched, on condition, that Hong Kong should not pose as a threat to the mainland system. The underlying tone was: “you go your own way, and we go ours”.

The historical compromise underlining the ‘one country two systems’ framework was only possible because Hong Kong was perceived to have an institutional edge on the mainland and offered a role model on the latter’s economic development. That was the time of an odd combination of Hong Kong’s economic superiority cum political inferiority vis-à-vis China. It was under such special historical circumstances that Hong Kong people were granted a new citizenship status as ‘Hong Kong Permanent Resident’ under its Basic Law, with a full string of constitutionally-defined civil and political rights that befit some kind of ‘sub-national’ identity.

Hong Kong could revert to China’s sovereignty without being part of the real and mainstream China, and Hong Kong people (referring mainly to the Hong Kong Chinese) could travel inside and outside China not as PRC passport holders, but as Hong Kong citizens holding special entry permit and SAR passport holders respectively. Reunification (and nationalization) without being absorbed (and fully nationalized) seemed to be the underlying logic of the Sino-British political settlement on the future of Hong Kong.

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15 In the 1980s Deng Xiaoping urged that more ‘Hong Kongs’ should be built in China and that mainland cadres should learn about the external world and its modus operandi through the window of Hong Kong.

16 Under the Basic Law, any permanent resident, irrespective of nationality, can have full vote rights in elections of local authorities. However, it is stipulated that the Chief Executive, all principal officials and members of the Executive Council, the president of the Legislative Council as well as at least 80% of its members, must be both permanent residents and Chinese nationals.
The Hong Kong identity crisis from transition to handover: Some critical events

Since the late transition period, there has been a growing discourse on ‘identity’ issues in Hong Kong. Ngan-ling Sum, for example, traced the link between identity and local politics to the Sino-British struggle over ‘decolonization’ during the final phase under governor Patten prior to British departure (1992 to 1997) - “a dual struggle over the politics of identity and the social basis for a new economic and political regime in the approach to 1997”. Several critical events during the transition and after the handover illustrated the high tensions over identity.

The Tiananmen shock

The first identity crisis came along with the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in China. Over a million Hongkongers marched on the street during May and June 1989, first to express support for democracy, then to mourn the victims of the military crackdown. While Hong Kong was at first excited over its solidarity with mainland sentiments, such emotional excitement was only short-lived. People soon began to fear that what happened to Beijing then could well happen to a defiant Hong Kong after 1997. After the Tiananmen crackdown on democracy in 1989, mainland authorities suspected Hong Kong to be a base of subversion, and further warned that “the well water should not interfere with the river water”. But Tiananmen also reinforced some Hongkongers’ resentment towards the mainland government, and strengthened their desire and determination to shore up Hong Kong as a self-sufficient economy and polity.

The quest for British nationality

The harsh reality of the crackdown and the mainland’s subsequent shift towards political dogmatism again bred a new sense of despair among Hongkongers and their further drift from China. Many resorted to migration to the West in order to secure a safe exit for themselves and their families. London was forced by circumstances to grant 50,000 families (mainly business people, senior civil servants, and professionals) full British nationality in 1990. Subsequently, as more Hong Kong Chinese acquired a foreign nationality, the Hong Kong identity became more complicated. Out of pragmatic considerations, China was persuaded to allow those Hong Kong Chinese holding foreign passports to retain their Hong Kong permanent resident status and be


18 Ibid, p. 67.

19 The implication was that up to 250,000 Hongkongers would be eligible for a full British passport. See British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990 (c. 34): http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts1990/ukpga_19990034_en_1 (Accessed on 3 October 2008).
treated as Chinese nationals, conveniently regarding their foreign passports as only travel documents.\(^{20}\)

**Mother tongue policy in schools**

After the handover, an early case of identity politics was seen in the language issue, when the new SAR Government decreed to enforce the use of the mother tongue (Chinese in written form and Cantonese in verbal form) in place of the English language as the medium of instruction at the junior secondary level. This politically correct and pedagogically sound policy had proved to be highly unpopular with schools and parents alike. Some saw the school language policy not just a pedagogical issue but a political one because “the English language has not only become a habitus of society; it also serves to distinguish Hong Kong people from mainland Chinese”\(^{21}\). However the SAR Government had not been persistent in its national identity project. The irony of the language policy was that it permitted over 100 schools to be exempted and continue to be English-medium schools, thus creating a two-tier system actually in favour of English, causing much uproar from school principals and parents alike\(^{22}\). In May 2009, the government finally announced new ‘fine tuning’ measures to eliminate the English-Chinese medium bifurcation and allow schools flexibility in using more English in class.

**Right of abode controversy**

In 1999, following the reinterpretation of the Basic Law provisions by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress\(^{23}\), children born on the mainland of Hong Kong permanent residents were denied their right of abode in the SAR, in order to protect Hong Kong’s economic interests. At that time it was estimated that there might be a huge influx of over 160 million people from the mainland to Hong Kong if no restriction was imposed, to the detriment of local public services. The decision in effect dismantled the structure of national identity and “deepened the cleavage between the people of the two places, as well as creating significant internal disagreements within Hong Kong”\(^{24}\).

**Cultural and political assertiveness**

Economic self-interest aside, the return of Hong Kong to China has also led to local worries about a contraction of the city’s political sphere vis-à-vis the mainland, as the perceived unavoidable convergence of two different political structures could one day

22 Only those schools where teachers had been assessed as competent to teach in English and students as competent in learning in English were approved as English-medium schools. This virtually meant that such schools had gained in status and popularity in light of the great demand from parents for English-medium education for their children.
curb the articulation and development of local identities. Putting the identity issue within a broader construct of cultural and social autonomy in face of political subjugation, Fung argued that the ‘Hong Kong people’ label or category had been appropriated with a specific meaning for the ‘local’ to resist encroachment of the ‘national’:

“It was true that the high intensity of dominant national discourses during the political transition created a favourable atmosphere for re-nationalization. However, as soon as the political transition was over, Hong Kongers re-adhered to their own label in their struggle for cultural autonomy.”

While there have been various attempts to push the local population to assimilate into the national culture and identity, and there was suggestion that indigenous Hong Kong culture was in danger of ‘disappearance’, the resistance to surrendering the local identity remained visible and strong in the political, cultural and discursive arenas.

**Post-1997 identity tension: The preservation of ‘Hongkongness’**

Historically, the Hong Kong identity had grown out of being different from and superior to the mainland - its economic success, relatively more freedoms and liberties, rule of law, and since the late transition period, political pluralism. In a sense, the Sino-British negotiations of the 1980s were about preserving Hong Kong’s different system under China’s sovereignty. After 1997, such a Hong Kong identity has been increasingly called into question. Economically, many in government and business became concerned that Hong Kong might be at the risk of losing its competitive edge as Shanghai or even Shenzhen were fast catching up. Instead of leading China’s economic development, some saw Hong Kong now turning around to the mainland for economic support.

This seemed especially obvious following the Article 23 crisis of 2003 (over national security legislation as required by the Basic Law), when over half a million Hong Kong people joined a protest rally and march on 1 July. The central government was shocked and quickly moved to extend various economic benefits to the SAR as part of its new strategy of ‘the economic absorption of politics’. Politically, Beijing’s imposed version of instrumental identity for Hong Kong – namely that of an ‘economic city’ and a more submissive notion of patriotism in deference to the mainland’s definition of national interest – had rendered mainland-Hong Kong relations tense and difficult in face of the perceived threat to Hong Kong’s political space as discussed above, and the rising demand for democratization.

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27 Coined by this author to describe Beijing’s policy to use economic means to shore up the Hong Kong SAR so as to help alleviate grievances of the middle class who, in its view, have become increasingly restless politically due to economic slowdown which threatened their career opportunities and drove down their asset values.
Article 23 legislation

At the time of the drafting of the Basic Law, it was widely considered unacceptable to apply the PRC’s national security laws (which were then couched in terms of combating counter-revolutionary activities and any acts challenging the socialist system) to the future SAR via Article 18 of the Basic Law which prescribes such application of nation-wide PRC laws, such as those relating to the national flag, territorial seas and nationality. The compromise, in order to reassure Hong Kong people that any national security requirements imposed should be commensurate with a free capitalist economic system, was that it would be up to Hong Kong to legislate such laws; hence the provision of Article 23\(^\text{28}\).

All along public sentiments in Hong Kong had been in favour of postponing Article 23 legislation for as long as possible, or else enacting it in a manner consistent with the common law principles that underpin Hong Kong’s legal system. How harshly or leniently Article 23 is enacted would mark the Central Government’s as well as the SAR Government’s degree of tolerance of political opposition and dissident activities. Despite the government argument that legislation of Article 23 of the Basic Law was a constitutional duty of the SAR and a matter crucial to national security and integrity, it was widely interpreted by the general public as a test of Hong Kong people’s political autonomy and freedoms within the ‘one country, two systems’ framework.

Campaign for local democracy

The resentment towards Article 23 legislation was symptomatic of the deep-seated anxieties still prevailing among Hongkongers over their degree of freedom and autonomy, as well as their political future within the PRC. For Hong Kong people, the success in derailing Article 23 legislation through the mass protests of 1 July 2003 was in itself a historic show of force in safeguarding local autonomy and freedoms, as well as a demonstration of ‘people power’. What followed were widespread popular demands for democratization and the election of the Chief Executive by universal suffrage in lieu of the current electoral committee with a narrow franchise. It was argued that the more people felt that they owned the government (because of the presence of democratic institutions), the less they would have to worry about government enacting and implementing national security laws.

The public uproar over Article 23 and the mobilization of public opinion for constitutional reform had rekindled the Hong Kong identity debates. Increasingly the issue of identity has been taking centre stage in local politics, as exemplified in the new waves of articulation of political aspirations for democracy and autonomy and the preservation of Hong Kong’s ‘core values’\(^\text{29}\). In the eyes of the Central Government and many mainland people, however, the failure for Hong Kong to

\(^{28}\) However, in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, the original draft Article 23 was made much harsher by including new prohibitions against subversion and against “foreign political organizations or bodies … conducting political activities in the Region, and … political organizations or bodies of the Region … establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies”. The subversion clause has since been the source of much public anxiety because on the mainland even expressed opinions challenging the Communist Party or the socialist regime, in the absence of committed acts, could be construed as subversive. Another post-Tiananmen addition was provision for the imposition of a state of emergency in the SAR by the Central Government.

\(^{29}\) See [www.hkcorevalues.net](http://www.hkcorevalues.net).
legislate on Article 23 reflected its lack of concern for national security and integrity. After 2003, Beijing began to adopt a more hands-on policy towards what it considered to be a defiant Hong Kong, though at the same time also has become more ready to concede to the new demands for universal suffrage.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{The politics of heritage and collective memory}

Post 2003, apart from pro-democracy demands, there have also been a surge in pro-heritage sentiments and a nostalgia for the past, described as ‘collective memory’, that is not entirely cultural but also indicative of an underlying political assertiveness for a locally-rooted Hong Kong identity. The 2003 campaign against the reclamation of Victoria Harbour (seen as Hong Kong’s natural heritage) and the rows in December 2006 over the demolition of Star Ferry clock tower, and again in July 2007 over the removal of Queen’s Pier, were often portrayed as an ‘us-versus-them’ struggle between a local movement seeking to put heritage and collective memory first and an SAR Government accused of caring too much for wholesale infrastructure development. In both the Star Ferry and Queen’s Pier controversies, the heritage debate was just the tip of the iceberg of a more fundamental social transformation resulting from the concern for local roots and the quest for a positive identity of the city, as Hong Kong emerged from a subdued colony to become an autonomous SAR.

The new, post-transition, generation, like their jittery parents during the Sino-British talks and prior to the handover, worries losing the city's local worth and identity, something that can only be traced to its past colonial legacy if Hong they cannot be established by a future role and mission. Another case in point is the West Kowloon Cultural District proposal which triggered a huge controversy in 2005, forcing government to rethink the project and re-launch a new development package in 2007. The debate was not confined to a matter of choice among different architectural designs, or the building of a mega events hub, but bogged down to how the new cultural district could define the new vision and cultural face of the city. The growing public sentiments in recent years against demolishing landmarks of ‘collective memory’ articulate not merely a conflict between development and conservation in the ordinary sense, as frequently found in developed societies, but a collective call for policymakers to be more proactive in preserving symbols of local roots. In a nutshell, they mark the rise of a new politics of identity.

\textbf{Forging a new Hong Kong identity with a national and global face}

In the run-up to the handover, what China wanted from Hong Kong was an ‘economic city’ with minimum political disruptions. On its part, though a British crown colony

for over 150 years, Hong Kong had become, by default if not by design, an atypical colony by the time of handover. Its system of governance remained anachronistic, its economy and civil society, as well as its legal and administrative systems, were ironically already at the forefront of modernity. Here lies the inherent contradiction, or to put it more positively, the ‘hybrid’ nature of contemporary Hong Kong – the co-existence of the colonial and the modern and that of the Chinese and the English, so much so that in his departing speech, the last British Governor Chris Patten described Hong Kong as a Chinese city under the British, and hoped that it would continue its charm as an English city under the Chinese after 1997.  

Hong Kong’s modernization under British rule, and its transformation into a major cosmopolitan city of the world, should be seen as part of the larger project of China’s modernization. As a colony ruled by foreign power and yet closely related to the mainland by trade and family/clanship affinities, Hong Kong in contemporary times had played an unduly important part in both the Republican and Communist Revolution. By being of and yet not under the effective control by China, Hong Kong had thrived as a source of new ideas and safe house for political dissidents and economic refugees. That the ‘neither… nor’ can be turned into ‘either… or’ marks both the geopolitical constraints on as well as the potential influence of Hong Kong vis-à-vis mainland China, as two sides of the same coin. Perceived threats and opportunities together shaped the evolution of the Hong Kong psyche and identity from the transition to the decade after the handover, though there seemed more concern over the threats.

Viewing Hong Kong from a foreign perspective, The Economist (6 June 2009) has offered the following observation:

“It is not easy being Hong Kong. Ever since the British decided to return it to China, the city has suffered from bouts of hand-wringing about its role. Proudly Chinese yet also steeped in Western ways, many Hong Kongers are never sure how they fit into the People’s Republic. Confusion is always acute around June 4th, the anniversary of the Beijing massacre of 1989. … In a recent public-opinion poll 69% replied that the Chinese government did the wrong thing on June 4th 1989.

But politics did not set off the latest bout of collective angst. The trigger was the news in late March that the Chinese government had approved a plan to turn Shanghai into a global financial and shipping centre by 2020. Hong Kong’s political and business leaders gasped at this frontal assault on the enclave’s cherished role as an international gateway to the mainland.”

The politics of recognition

For historical reasons, Hong Kong had not gone through proper decolonization during the pre-1997 transition. But it is not immune from what many new (and post-colonial) nations have experienced in their transition from a nationalist to post-nationalist stage, where classical nationalism is giving way to the search for cultural identities and the

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single goal of economic development does not suffice to hold the community together. This new concern for identities can be compared to what Taylor called ‘the politics of recognition’. Decolonization has only just begun for Hong Kong. It entails both a process of national reunification and identification with China, as well as a process reconstructing a new distinct cultural identity, partly rationalized by the ‘one country two systems’ logic, and partly sustained by its historical experience once outside the China orbit and under foreign (British) rule, which has allowed it to develop an almost self-sufficient economic, legal and political identification. The anxieties and conflicts emanating from the cognitive gap between the mainland and Hong Kong community are as much a result of institutional differences as an outgrowth of decoupled cultural identities.

A decade after reunification, Hong Kong has yet to come out of the identity doldrums and take a more proactive perspective of the ‘one country two systems’ framework. Unless rediscovering a sense of purpose and destiny – i.e. a ‘new’ Hong Kong spirit – it may continue to be embroiled in the sentiments of threats, uncertainties and divisiveness. While respecting its colonial heritage and collective memory, Hong Kong cannot afford to remain being defined by its past. It is now an integral part of China, and as such should not be shy in displaying its features as one of China’s new faces. Its return to China can be taken as offering the premise for another era of development that could parallel the last century. Maintaining distinctness is one thing, but separateness could easily become separation that would lead to marginalization, with Hong Kong being cast to the periphery of China’s rapid development. Looking from the Hong Kong perspective, the worry about marginalization is not entirely unfounded. Great cities in history rise and fall. Geopolitical and geo-economic conditions change over time and new pressures of global and regional competition are constantly unfolding. Hong Kong cannot afford to be complacent or else risks becoming yesterday’s city.

**Integrating the local and the national**

Without questioning the reunification with mainland China, many Hong Kong Chinese are, however, worried about losing the city's Hongkong-ness, something emanating from its past legacy - including its various cultural forms, ways of living, core values and institutional expressions - that underscores the raison d’être of the Hong Kong system within ‘one country’. Most Hong Kong citizens want to be proud of being Hong Kong permanent residents not just because they are economically more affluent (as in pre-1997 days) or materially better endowed. Their pride ultimately lies in an institutional edge as represented by political pluralism, the rule of law, respect for human rights and civil liberties, accountable governance and democratic institutions. Beijing’s imposed instrumental identity of an ‘economic city’ for Hong Kong has not worked, but has even backfired. Hong Kong has remained detached from the mainland polity. The annual mass turnout in commemoration of the

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Tiananmen crackdown in a way denotes a sense of ‘moral superiority’ over the mainland, though regarded as a false one by some skeptics.\(^{35}\)

Still Hong Kong has to ultimately resolve an inherent dilemma between its local and national identity, so that “[r]enationalization then is not only a challenge but also an opportunity for local people to reconceive their own identity, to come up with something of their own, to think of what makes them unique”\(^{36}\). Hong Kong is not alone in facing such dilemma. As Shih observed of the complex Taiwanese psyche both pulled by forces of identification with China and pushed in the other direction by fierce forces of independence and even “de-Sinoization”, there existed in Taiwan a paradox of ambiguity (of the economic and the cultural) and clarity (of the political and national) as the political, economic and cultural power of mainland China ascended:

“Since there has not yet been a clear solution to the paradox, a state of confusion seems to have settled in, which in turn produces psychological disequilibrium, ranging from anxiety to displacement, mentalities of the present that are devoid of visions of the future…”\(^{37}\).

The same anxiety and uneasiness can be found in the Hong Kong psyche even though Hong Kong is not heading towards any debate on nationhood as in Taiwan’s identity politics\(^{38}\).

The international dimension of Hong Kong

The advent of globalization and the rise of China are together rewriting the script for Hong Kong in the new century. China is fast moving into the world inasmuch as the world is going into China, as most recently exemplified by 2008 Beijing Olympics. If Hong Kong’s charm and glory under British rule had emanated from its East-West connection and hybrid, then its post-reunification strategic role should similarly be premised on the interface between China and the world. Hong Kong people need to balance the three selves of a new composite Hong Kong identity – the local self, the national self, and the international self. They should search for a proactive interpretation of ‘one country two systems’ which sees Hong Kong’s prospect not only in terms of respecting its past, but also of charting its future course into a more challenging world.

Hong Kong remains China’s truly international financial centre\(^{39}\). Such international status, though, is only sustainable and meaningful if functioning for the whole of

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\(^{35}\) Perry Lam Pui-li (林沛理) “A false sense of moral superiority”, Yazhou Zhoukan Weekly (亞洲周刊), 14 June, p. 42 (in Chinese). Some 120,000-150,000 people turned up at the June 4\(^{th}\) vigil in 2009 on the 20\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown at the Victoria Park.


\(^{39}\) Such claim is well underscored by Time Magazine’s (17 January, 2007) depiction of the ‘Nylonkong’ nexus – namely New York, London and Hong Kong. In its words, the three cities have created a financial network that has been able to lubricate the global economy.
Finding Hong Kong’s niche in the national and global scene is essential to give it a sense of destiny and mission, which is not merely economic. A more positive construct of the Hong Kong spirit is that it should underpin a cognitive capacity to see ‘value’ in diversity when relating to mainland China under the notion of ‘one country two systems’. Former New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani has once claimed that the city’s diversity is its greatest strength. It is an open city - never been afraid of people, no matter their colour, religion or ethnic background. New York is the world city not just because of the New York Stock Exchange, Manhattan, or the Statue of Liberty. It is colourful because of its cultural and ethnic diversity, which has not reduced its American-ness. Similarly, Hong Kong should become a melting pot of China, open to and attracting Chinese from anywhere within the country, and talent from other nations, who come for creativity, entrepreneurship, professionalism, freedom, and good governance. Multi-cultural and multi-lingual features can make Hong Kong truly a city of growth, tolerance and opportunity.

Hong Kong’s identity in relation to China

Hong Kong’s worth to China is not based on more of the same, but precisely on its difference from the mainland. The ‘one country’ consideration should be taken in its broadest sense otherwise it would lead to Hong Kong’s subservience to the mainland system which presently shapes the PRC’s national political life. Matters very often tend to be perceived within a zero-sum relationship, rather than a mutually beneficial one. But ‘one country two systems’ should represent a framework of mutual support, opportunities and possibilities, rather than constraints and stagnation. Hong Kong should not be content with being cast to the periphery of China, but should strive to be at the centre of things and a pioneer of the nation in her journey towards modernity.

Hong Kong’s modernization experience – in governance institutions, its mature market, free media and civil society - should form part of the broader national heritage.Hong Kong’s institutional strengths should contribute towards the modernization of the nation, and not just for the city population’s benefit. Instead of being passive at the margin, it should seek an outreaching frontier profile. Integrating with the mainland may well carry the risk of clash of institutions and cultures, or even reverse capture, but this is a standard case of trading risks with opportunities, which Hong Kong as an entrepreneurial city should not be averse to.

Concluding remark

Ultimately it is a question of awareness. If Hong Kong recognizes that it belongs to the same community of destiny along with the rest of China, then whatever it does and achieves will help shape the nation’s future and form part of its growth. When immersing more in China does not amount to so-called ‘mainlandization’, and maintaining strong links with the Western world does not mean deficit in national identity, then Hong Kong would have found its confidence. When one day outsiders will see China’s face through Hong Kong inasmuch as through other mainland cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin and Dalien, then the ‘one country two systems’ formula would have accomplished its goals.