

June 3, 2015

The Making of Hong Kong Nationalism

Alvin Y. So

Division of Social Science

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Paper forthcoming in *Asian Nationalism Reconsidered*, edited by Jeff Kingston. Routledge.

Over the past two centuries, even though Hong Kong was turned into a British colony and completely cut off from communist China after 1949, the people of Hong Kong always identified themselves as Chinese and embraced Chinese nationalism from an ethno-cultural angle. Therefore, when Leung Chun-ying, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, in his 2015 policy address accused *Undergrad* (the University of Hong Kong Student Union official magazine) of “putting forward fallacies” and “advocating independence” in a book it published entitled *Xianggang mínzu zhuyì (Hong Kong Nationalism)*, he unwittingly sparked a rise in sales and the book sold out in many bookstores around the city that day (Cheung and So, 2015). Unlike Taiwan, Hong Kong has never held public discussions concerning Hong Kong nationalism, and the city had never experienced any independence movement. After the 2015 policy address, however, the term “Hong Kong nationalism” suddenly received widespread attention in the mass media.

The aim of this paper is to trace the historical emergence of the discourse of “Hong Kong nationalism.” It argues that although this discourse has gained widespread attention only in 2015, its roots can be traced to the socio-political transformations that Hong Kong experienced in the late 2000s. This paper also discusses the future prospect of Hong Kong nationalism and its political implications for China’s national unification project.

In order to understand how Hong Kong could develop such a nationalism discourse, it is necessary to trace the historical transformation of Chinese nationalism over the past two centuries.

Metamorphoses of the discourse on Chinese nationalism

Pre-1949: The Sojourner Identity and Chinese nationalism. Although Hong Kong became a British colony in 1842, there was no border separating the colony from mainland China. Residents needed no passport to enter or leave the colony.

Most Hong Kong residents were transients from the neighboring provinces. Peasants and workers in the Pearl River Delta came to Hong Kong to work, and they returned to their homeland when they retired or during political unrest (i.e. World War II). Since Hong Kong residents never had the intention to settle in the colony, most Hong Kong Chinese could be labeled as “sojourners.” Hong Kong was not their home. They still embraced Chinese nationalism as their identity and were oriented toward China rather than toward Hong Kong (Faure, 1997).

Partly this was because the colonial state of Hong Kong granted few rights to the Chinese residents in the territory. The Hong Kong Chinese had no voting rights and no power to select their own governor, and the colonial state granted minimum civil, political, and social rights to Chinese residents in Hong Kong. Tsai (1993) points out due to such repressive colonial policies discriminating against the Chinese, HongKongers tended to be highly nationalistic and anti-colonial, as shown by the protracted Hong Kong-Canton Strikes against the colonial state in the 1920s. Most Hong Kong Chinese identified with Chinese nationalism and were loyal to the Chinese nation-state across the border up through the first half of the twentieth century.

1949-1960s: Chinese Refugee Identity. After the 1949 Chinese communist revolution, however, the sojourner identity of the HongKongers changed. Over a million Chinese entered

Hong Kong right after the 1949 Revolution, and these “refugees” could not return to communist China anymore. To stop the influx of refugees, the colonial state quickly erected fences along the Hong Kong border. No mainlander Chinese were allowed to enter Hong Kong except those possessing a valid entry visa. Moreover, afraid of capitalist contamination, the communist government reciprocated by closing itself off from Hong Kong through vigorous border controls and interrogations, making it difficult for Hong Kong Chinese to visit their relatives in their native villages (Chan, 1995).

Aside from imposing a border to separate Hong Kong from the mainland, the colonial state also carried out the following “*de-nationalization*” policies. Economically, there was a de-linking with the Chinese economy, a shifting of Hong Kong’s economic orientation from a China-based entrepot economy to globally oriented export-industrialization. Second, despite a liberal reputation, the colonial state was quite active in suppressing communist infiltration and also banned the Chinese Communist Party from operating in Hong Kong. Third, on the education front, English was maintained as the dominant language of instruction, while Chinese was downgraded. The colonial University of Hong Kong was the only one that was considered legitimate, while various universities set up by mainland refugees or missionary professors had a poor reputation and received neither funding nor recognition from the colonial state in the 1950s.

In the 1950s, colonial discrimination against Hong Kong Chinese was further intensified. Not only were they deprived of civil, political, and social rights, but the colonial state also sought to suppress the residents’ loyalty to China and thereby manipulate their identity. HongKongers in the 1950s were seen as having a refugee identity that drew on the concept of “a borrowed time, a borrowed place.” Refugee capitalists and refugee workers generally cooperated with the colonial state in order not to rock the boat. Lau (1984) formulates a concept of “utilitarianism

familism” to describe how HongKongers possessed a refugee mentality that focused on making money for their families rather than engaging in any political protests against the colonial government. As refugees, Hong Kong Chinese had an ambiguous orientation toward the Chinese nation-state. Although they were highly hostile toward the communist party-state, they still identified themselves as Chinese nationals and very much cared about the Chinese nation across the border.

Still, when the winds of the Cultural Revolution reached Hong Kong in the mid-1960s, leftist unions, students, newspapers, and business organizations in Hong Kong staged strikes, street protests, public demonstrations, and even issued bomb threats to condemn British imperialism, calling for the downfall of the colonial state. To solve this legitimacy crisis, the colonial state began to realize that it needed to deepen its “*denationalization*” project to craft a new “HongKonger identity” in order to promote the residents’ commitment to Hong Kong rather than to the Chinese nation.

The 1970s: The Birth of a HongKonger Identity. Three crucial events in the 1970s led to the formation of a new HongKonger identity. First, a new generation of Hong Kong-born university student came to age. Unlike their parents, this new generation was born and raised in Hong Kong and did not have much interaction with the mainland because of the border closure. However, when the Maoists welcomed HongKongers visit their Chinese motherland as the Cultural Revolution ebbed, this Hong Kong-born generation suddenly felt the warmth of the “China heat”. In the early 1970s, these students started a nationalist movement in Hong Kong, organizing patriotic tours and China exhibits, advocating a campaign to use Chinese as the official language, and urging their fellow students to pay more attention to mainland affairs (So and Kwitko, 1992).

By the mid-1970s, these students had graduated and became middle class professionals like social workers, journalists, lawyers, and environmentalists. They began to turn their attention from mainland affairs to Hong Kong affairs. They formed concerned citizenship groups, pressure groups, and started an urban movement in Hong Kong. They condemned rampant corruption in the Hong Kong government, the arrogance of expatriate British officials, the dislocation of grassroots population caused by squatter removals, substandard public housing, and the persistence of poverty in affluent Hong Kong.

The second critical event is that the colonial state modified its citizenship policies in the 1970s. In order to gain more support from the local population, Governor MacLehose initiated a series of public policies to grant more social rights to Hong Kong residents, including setting up a massive public housing program; instituting labor laws to make sweat shop production more humane and more consistent with international labor conventions; increasing welfare expenditure to help the poor, the widowed, the elderly; and expanding free education to nine years. In addition, the colonial state mounted public relations campaigns such as “I Love Hong Kong”, “Clean Up Hong Kong” campaign, and staged an annual Hong Kong Expo. These campaigns were aimed at cultivating a community feeling among Hong Kong residents so they would identify Hong Kong as their home.

The third crucial event is the new wave of mainland Chinese migrants in the 1970s. To meet the needs of the expanding manufacturing sector, the colonial state relaxed its control over illegal immigrants. Any illegal immigrants who were caught at the border were immediately returned to Mainland China, but those who succeeded in reaching the urban areas of Hong Kong were permitted to stay. This “touch-base” concession encouraged illegal immigration, leading to an influx of about 500,000 legal and illegal immigrants into Hong Kong in the late 1970s.

It was this massive influx of new immigrants in the late 1970s that finally gave birth to a new HongKonger identity. Although the coming to age of a Hong Kong-born generation and the community policies of the colonial state had laid the foundation for such identity, it was the conflict, misunderstanding, and distrust between the old and the new residents that brought the old residents together to form a new “HongKongers” identity. The mass media, especially popular TV dramas, played an important role in portraying the “old” Hong Kong residents as urban, hardworking, upwardly mobile and intelligent while stereotyping the new immigrants from mainland China as rural, undisciplined, unmotivated, and ignorant. The colonial state reinforced these differences by launching a new Hong Kong ID card policy in 1980. Any person found not carrying a Hong Kong ID card would be treated as an illegal immigrant and sent back to the mainland (Mathews, Ma, Lui, 2008).

1980s-1997: A Multi-layered Identity. A new era emerged between the 1980s and 1997, as Hong Kong entered the phase of decolonization, national reunification, and democratization. During this period of profound social, economic, and political transformation, HongKongers’ identity became infused with multi-layered identities.

The first layer was the strengthening of the HongKongers’ identity. The uncertainty of Hong Kong during the denouement of British colonial rule and long transition to Chinese administration led to worries and anxieties, triggering a new pattern of identity politics in the form of a democracy movement. Positioning itself as the protector of HongKonger’s interests, lifestyles, and freedom, and labeling itself as a HongKonger’s political party to speak for Hong Kong against mainland intrusion, the Democratic Party won landslide victories in popular legislative elections in 1991 and 1995. In this respect, HongKongers’ identity became politicized and was used by pro-democratic forces to further their goals.

Aside from the HongKonger identity, a patriotic Chinese identity also emerged during the 1997 transition. Massive relocation of Hong Kong manufacturing industries across the border and the enormous investment opportunities opened up by the mainland's economic reforms reconfigured HongKongers' interests and identity. A new "unholy" alliance between elite Hong Kong's businesspeople and mainland government officials, and marriages between Hong Kong's working class and their cross-border cousins, worked to promote a strong patriotic identity toward the mainland (So, 1999; So, 2003).

This co-existence of a HongKonger identity and the resurgence of Chinese nationalism in Hong Kong during the transition period reflected the peculiar institutional arrangement of "*One Country, Two Systems*." This concept meant that after China resumed exercising sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, the city would retain its capitalist system and not be forced to adopt communism; it would retain a high degree of autonomy to run its economic, political, and cultural affairs and maintain its own police and armed forces, currency, and capitalist social habits and institutions, and Hong Kong would be ruled by HongKongers, not by mainland officials (So, 2011).

1997-2008. Rising Chinese nationalism. In the early post-1997 period, there was little ostensible intervention from Beijing in Hong Kong's social and economic policy making. The worst fears of the Hong Kong people were not realized.

As Ma (2015) explains, the economic downturn brought by the Asian financial crisis in 1997-98 turned the public's attention to bread-and-butter issues. When China became an economic superpower of the world and the Hong Kong economy was increasingly dependent on China, Hong Kong people began to identify themselves as Chinese more than as HongKongers.

Public opinion polls conducted by the University of Hong Kong shows that the percentage of Hong Kong people identifying themselves as “Chinese” increased from 18.0% in 1997 to 38.6% in 2008, whereas the percentage who identifying themselves as “HongKonger” decreased from 35.0% to 18.1% in the same period. The strong nationalist sentiment can also be seen from the fact that whenever natural disaster struck China, donation campaigns received enthusiastic responses from the Hong Kong populace (Ma, 2015: 47-48, 64-65).

What then explains the unexpected emergence of the discourse on “Hong Kong nationalism” and the accusation charging that the Hong Kong University’s student journal *Undergraduate* was advocating independence? This paper focuses on two factors: the 2015 policy address by Leung Chun-ying’s (Hong Kong’s chief executive) and socio-political changes since 2008.

Leung Chun-ying’s Policy Address and The Making of Hong Kong Nationalism

Although the discourse on localism had been simmering in the late 2000s, it was the annual policy address of Leung Chun-ying, Hong Kong’s Chief Executive, which escalated official grumbling about the new trend to a full-blown mainland instigated campaign against Hong Kong separatism and independence. It was an unprecedented departure from the norm because Leung began his policy address by blasting the HKU leaders and *Undergrad* for recent articles that were compiled into an edited volume entitled *Hong Kong Nationalism*. Leung later explained that he made the criticism because the magazine’s editors persistently advocated independence and expounded fallacies of self-determination (Cheung and So, 2015).

However, the magazine's student editors flatly denied charges that the publication was advocating Hong Kong independence, because they only called for an overhaul of the territory's political system, without mentioning sovereignty or independence from China. Indeed, they thought they were only insisting on what Beijing had long promised in the "One Country, Two Systems" model, which stipulates a high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong politics, economy, and society (Pepper, 2015).

The real question is why Leung Chun-ying wanted to target the issue of independence and went after the students at the beginning his policy address? From the editor's viewpoint, Leung was using a scare tactic against the young generation: "The one who stood at the front of the Umbrella Movement and "ate up" all the pepper spray and batons were all teenagers and many of them were my friends and classmates. So they try to frighten the student movement, to avoid another Umbrella Movement that might stir up students from different universities. It sends us a message for us not to do or write anything radical" (Harbor Times, 2015).

Second, the editors offer a conspiracy theory regarding Leung's action: "Leung wants to create a concrete independent faction within the Hong Kong political sphere, so he has an enemy to attack. If he wants to seek a second term as CE (Chief Executive), he needs to be trusted by the central government. In the process of defeating this enemy, he can claim allegiance" (Harbour Times, 2015).

Pepper (2015) speculated that Leung wants to turn the "anti-democracy" battle into an "anti-independence" battle. If the discourse of anti-independence becomes hegemonic in Hong Kong society, Chinese nationalism could be used as a yardstick to measure the loyalty of Hong

Kong politicians to the Chinese communist party-state, and Beijing could freely interfere in Hong Kong politics on the grounds of national security.

The book *Hong Kong Nationalism* was relatively unknown beyond academic circles until Leung Chun-ying singled it out in his 2015 Policy Address. Joseph Wong (2014) reports that Hong Kong nationalism is a “extremely fringe movement. Hong Kong nationalists can get together a rally of 200-500 people, which is pretty insignificant as Hong Kong rally goes. They also have no representative in the Legislative Council; there is no political figure who either favors or is even sympathetic to Hong Kong nationalism, and there aren’t enough Hong Kong nationalists to even try to run a candidate.” In this respect, Leung Chun-ying, by publicizing the discourse of Hong Kong nationalism, inadvertently moved it from the fringe to the mainstream.

Maybe Joseph Wong is right about the limited appeal of Hong Kong nationalism, but researchers still need to explain what triggered its emergence in the first place?

The Socio-Political Roots of Hong Kong Nationalism.

As Ma Ngok (2015) explains, the “One Country, Two Systems” model sought to insert mechanisms of separation between mainland China and Hong Kong after the handover. However, increasing mainland-Hong Kong integration since 2003 made this separation difficult, leading to an influx of immigrants and tourists, growing social inequalities, and the rise of localist organizations and anti-mainland protest activities in Hong Kong society.

Influx of Immigrants and Tourists. For immigrants, 150 mainlanders would get a one-way entry permit to legally reside in Hong Kong each day after 1997, many of whom are wives and children of Hong Kong residents. This amounts to about 55,000 mainland immigrants every year, or 0.55 million mainland immigrants every decade.

For tourists, before the 1997 handover, mainlanders had to visit Hong Kong on official tours and go through a complicated application process, which sometimes took months to process. A new “*Individual Traveller’s Scheme (ITS)*” was introduced in 2003. Mainlanders in nine Chinese provinces can visit Hong Kong independently without joining an official tour. ITS was meant to boost tourism and consumption in Hong Kong, still ailing from the 2003 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic. ITS was quickly expanded to include mainland cities, leading to a rapid increase of mainland tourists to Hong Kong. In 2004, the number of individual tourists from mainland China was only 4.3 million, but the number of tourist has quickly jumped ~~ten-fold~~ tenfold to 47 million in 2014. This massive influx of tourists and immigrants has sparked new social tensions in Hong Kong society (Ma, 2015).

A lot of “hot money” followed mainland immigration and tourism, pushing property prices to record levels. Many Hong Kong workers and middle class professionals complained that they could not afford to buy homes due to the mainlander housing bubble. In addition, when mainland spenders arrived in droves to purchase luxury goods (e.g., jewelry and brand name items), major shopping malls saw a mushrooming of high end boutiques catering to this influx of nouveau riche wealth and consumption habits, driving up rents and knocking small local shops out of business. Mainland visitors were also very interested in other basic necessities (e.g., drugs and milk powder), believing that Hong Kong had better quality control. When mainland China

was plagued by the tainted baby milk scandal in 2008, mainland visitors descended on Hong Kong supermarkets and drug stores, causing a temporary shortage (Ma, 2015).

Furthermore, the competition for scarce resources aggravated hostility against mainlanders. For years, pregnant women were allowed to give birth in Hong Kong hospitals, regardless of their nationality after paying a surcharge. The child would automatically acquire Hong Kong permanent residence status, even if neither of the parents was a Hong Kong resident. After the “Individual Visitor Scheme” was introduced in 2003, tens of thousands of mainland mothers came to Hong Kong to give birth, to take advantage of better medical facilities and make their children eligible for all the welfare benefits accorded permanent residents in Hong Kong. In 2011, there were 35,736 children born of non-Hong Kong parents, leading to an outcry about the invasion of mainlanders who would drain public resources in the future (Ma, 2015: 47-48).

Growing Social Inequalities. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Hong Kong workers have been facing the problems of declining numbers of manufacturing jobs (which were relocated across the border to mainland China) combined with a massive influx of new immigrants. The neoliberal policies of the Hong Kong SAR government, like cutting the welfare budget, elimination of long-term civil servant positions for new hires, and privatizing public utilities further aggravated social inequalities and poverty in Hong Kong. As a result, Hong Kong became one of the most unequal places in the world. Hong Kong’s Gini coefficient rose to a dangerous level of 0.537 in 2011, the highest point since records began in 1971 (Yan and Sautman, 2015: 11). Sze (2007: 204, 232) observed that “the living condition of those at the bottom has been deteriorating over the last decade, ... the income and wealth gap between the haves and the have-nots has widened.” Similarly, Lui (2007: 222) points out that “issues

concerning poverty, growing income inequalities, and the emergence of the so-called ‘working poor’ have become public concerns. ... Social tensions are growing. Increasingly, people are becoming anxious, self-protective, and insecure in the face of growing competition for scarce resources.”

Localist Political Organizations and anti-Mainland Protest Activities. Increasing social integration with mainland China, the massive influx of tourists and immigrants, and growing social inequality have led to the formation of many new “*localist*” organizations, which declared their mission is to protect Hong Kong’s resources and Hong Kong’s way of life from the mainland invasion. These new political organizations includes “Hong Kong First,” “Hong Kong Resurgence,” “Hong Kong Autonomy Movement,” “Population Policy Concern Group”, “North District Parallel Imports Concern Group,” “Civic Passion,” “Indigenous Democratic Front,” “People Power,” and “Proletariat Political Institute” (Yan and Sautman, 2015).

So (2008) reports that these new political organizations were small and highly autonomous. In terms of participants, they tended to be more inclusive, more open, more diversified, and appealed to different classes and different sectors. With the organization so small, independent, and diverse, they tended to rely on Internet or social media, like Facebook, YouTube, and bulletin blogs, to mobilize their participants. These localist organizations seldom planned ahead or had a long-term coherent strategy. Instead, they are prompt to take spontaneous, creative, and discontinuous action. Each participant or each subgroup could choose its own mode of demonstration, and they seldom coordinated with each other to wage large-scale collective action.

These new political organizations started a new mode of social protests in Hong Kong society. Whereas previous anti-mainland protests in the democracy movement were directly against the communist party-state, anti-mainland protests by the localist organizations targeted mainland tourists and immigrants. For example, a series of “*anti-locust*” protests were waged during 2012-15. The protest is called “*anti-locust*” because some localists depict mainlanders as locusts ruining the territory and bringing an end to Hong Kong’s vaunted way of life (Yan and Sautman, 2015).

Groves et al (2014) remark that although participants in previous anti-mainland democratic protests tended to be better educated, anti-locust protests attracted many participants from a working-class background. Anti-locust activists complained that they were subsidizing the costs of mainland tourists (in term of crowding in public transport, heavy traffic, long lines at bus stops, etc.) while only the large chain stores were reaping the financial benefits from tourism. Concerns about socio-economic status featured heavily among the local protesters. Chiefly among their worries were rising housing prices, particularly the cost of housing and rising rent over the past few years. Protesters said they were forced to pay higher “tourist prices” for local restaurants and other goods as a result of the influx of mainland tourists.

In addition, anti-locust activists accused mainland tourists of violating certain codes of civility that HongKongers have long taken for granted. Mainland tourists, they say, jump lines, defecate in the street, and talk loudly in public places. Furthermore, anti-locust activists complained that stores catering only to the needs of mainland tourists flooded local neighbourhoods. Thus the activists advocated the preservation of local communities in Hong Kong and resisting the devastating onslaught of mainland tourists.

In sum, this paper has identified the influx of tourists and immigrants, the increase of social inequality, and the emergence of localist organizations and new anti-mainland protests as the underlying socio-political factors that sparked localism discourse, calling for the protection of Hong Kong's resources and way of life against the mainland invasion. However, Leung Chun-ying's 2015 policy speech transformed the discourse of localism to "Hong Kong nationalism" and political independence. But what exactly is the discourse on Hong Kong nationalism?

Hong Kong Nationalism

Before 2015, Hong Kong nationalism was merely a set of fragmentary ideas articulated by local activists waging their anti-mainland movement. The discussion was confined to calling for self-reliance, self-determination, and autonomy of Hong Kong. Chin Wan's (2011) *Xianggang Chengbang Lun (On Hong Kong as a City State)* may be the first serious attempt to raise the self-determination discourse to a theoretical level.

Chin's book triggered fierce public debate and was hugely popular among local activists; it became a bestseller since its publication in late 2011. The following discussion on Chin draws heavily upon Ho-fung Hung's excellent summary of Chin's work in *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (Hung, 2014).

Chin wants to highlight the significance of Hong Kong autonomy for the sake of HongKongers. One important starting point for Chin's book is that China needs Hong Kong more than Hong Kong needs China, and that was true in the past as it is at present. The

conception that Hong Kong was one-sidedly dependent on China for food and water in the colonial era, and for capital and market access in the post-1997 era, is dismissed as propaganda devised by Beijing to destroy the self-confidence of the Hong Kong people. Chinese supply of food and water to colonial Hong Kong in the 1950s/1960s was one of the few channels through which China could earn foreign currency in the face of the US blockade during the Cold War. Chin argues still needs Hong Kong now. As of 2012, investment channeled through Hong Kong still made up a staggering 64 percent of all foreign direct investment into China (Chin, 2011: 112-27, 135-40).

A key argument of Chin (2011) is that Hong Kong is a de facto *city-state*. Although Hong Kong was a British colony before 1997, Hong Kong enjoyed substantial autonomy from London. Chin reports that Beijing did try its best to maintain the city-state character of Hong Kong during the early years of the post-1997 transition, but Beijing reversed its hands-off strategy in 2003 after half-a-million people in Hong Kong protested against the National Security Bill. Since 2003, Beijing started to dissolve the city-state boundary of Hong Kong in the name of economic rejuvenation and Hong Kong-China economic integration (Chin 2011: 145-63).

One key policy under this initiative is to open the floodgate for mainland tourists to Hong Kong. Mainland tourists reached 35 million in 2012, five times Hong Kong's total population [of](#) about 7 million. The crux of the problem, Chin explains, lies in the fact that the Hong Kong government has no authority to reject or restrict mainland tourists and the sudden surge in arrivals generated escalating conflict between Hong Kong residents and mainlanders.

Chin also points out that local CCP organizations escalated efforts to organize mainland migrants into loyal voting blocs. New mainland immigrants who moved to Hong Kong during

1997-2012 now constitute about 10 percent of Hong Kong's total population. Chin reported that the CCP (which has no legal existence in Hong Kong) has been quite successful in guaranteeing new immigrant votes for its favored candidate via vote buying and other electoral maneuvers (Hung, 2014).

Asserting that the influx of tourists and immigrants poses the largest threat to the established institutions and social customs of Hong Kong, Chin advocates that Hong Kong regain authority to screen incoming migrants from mainland China (Chin, 2011: 36-56).

Chin further advocates "*Hong Kong First*" and "*Hong Kong-China separation*" positions in lieu of the "China First" and "China-Hong Kong integration" advanced by mainstream democrats in Hong Kong. For many years, democrats in Hong Kong dreamed of a liberal and democratic China. To them, the democratic movement in Hong Kong is subsidiary to that in China. But for Chin, fighting China's neo-imperial approach to colonize Hong Kong through the influx of tourists and immigrants, and rejecting the democrat's subordination of Hong Kong's opposition movement (to their larger struggle for China's democratization) are equally important in defending and advancing Hong Kong's city-state autonomy, without which Hong Kong can never be genuinely democratic.

Articulating a new perspective on Hong Kong as a city-state, Chin's brand of localism has the following themes which distinguished it from the previous discourse on HongKonger identity:

Separation. The previous discourse on HongKonger identity is ambiguous in terms of Hong Kong's ties to mainland China. Although previous discourse emphasized that HongKongers were more modern, cosmopolitan, and civilized than mainland cousins (Ma 2004),

it never totally rejected Hong Kong's mainland ties and Chinese national identity. In contrast, Chin advocates "Hong Kong-China separation" in lieu of "China-Hong Kong integration." Hong Kong is a separate city-state from mainland China, and HongKongers in his view should drop their Chinese identity.

Defense and Protection. Previous discourse highlighted the superiority of HongKonger identity; HongKongers were proud of their identity and need not learn from their Chinese cousins across the border. Indeed, Shenzhen was set up close to Hong Kong so mainlanders could learn from Hong Kong (Guldin, 1995). Thus, this discourse asserted, Hong Kong's way of life was not threatened by its socio-economic ties with the mainland before the late 2000s.

In contrast, Chin argues that the influx of mainland tourists and immigrants are now endangering Hong Kong. Thus, Chin advocates "Hong Kong First" in order to defend Hong Kong's way of life and to safeguard Hong Kong's resources being depleted by the mainlanders' invasion.

Militancy. The previous discourse regarding HongKonger identity was pragmatic, highly civilized and embraced the rule of law. At most, the discourse called for peaceful democratic protests against injustice or undemocratic behavior of the party-state. In contrast, recent localist discourse tends to be highly polemic. It labels the democratic, liberal and the pro-Beijing groups as "leftist pricks"; it stereotypes mainland tourists and immigrants as "locusts" devouring Hong Kong's scarce resources and advocates direct confrontation with the police and mainland tourists.

Populist. Previous discourse on HongKonger identity tended to be elitist in orientation. It targeted university students and middle-class professionals. In contrast, post-2008 localist discourse is populist, appealing to a wider constituency, including the working class. It accuses

the Hong Kong government of not addressing the social problems caused by mainland tourists and immigrants. Thus, the localist discourse calls for a truly autonomous city-state that serves the needs of locals and addresses grassroots grievances.

Conclusion

This paper examines the historical process and the socio-political roots of the making of “Hong Kong nationalism” discourse. Over the past two centuries, the discourse of Chinese nationalism was hegemonic in Hong Kong society. However, the discourse of Chinese nationalism evolved since the late 2000s and now emphasizes regaining separation between Hong Kong and China and the need to defend Hong Kong’s way of life. This discourse also stereotypes mainlanders as “locusts,” and taps into grassroots resentment. This paper identifies the influx of mainland tourists and migrants and growing social inequality as the underlying structural forces that lead to the shift from Chinese nationalism to a Hong Kong localist discourse. The Chief Executive’s policy speech in 2015 transformed this discourse into an incipient “Hong Kong nationalism”.

Since this “Hong Kong nationalism” just emerged in 2015, it is still under construction. It is not yet an ideology and it is uncertain how much public support it commands. Anti-locust protests remained very small and the mass media generally condemned this militant approach, reflecting perhaps state intervention to derail this movement. Nevertheless, the emergence of a discourse of Hong Kong nationalism has served to polarize Hong Kong society and complicate Hong Kong politics. If Beijing continues to wage a hardline policy toward Hong Kong and

interfere extensively in the city, such actions could radicalize HongKongers and promote self-determination (self-autonomy). In this sense, Beijing may ignite support for political independence in Hong Kong, just like Leung Chun-yin did in mainstreaming “Hong Kong nationalism” in 2015.

References

- Chan, Ming K. (1995). "All in the Family: The Hong Kong-Guangdong Link in Historical Perspective," in Reginald Kwok and Alvin Y. So (ed.) *Hong Kong-Guangdong Link: Partnership in Flux*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 31-53.
- Chin, Wan. (2011). *Xiangang Chengbang Lun* (On Hong Kong as a city-state). Enrich Publishing.
- Cheung, Terry and Peter So. (2015). "CY Leung's Hong Kong Independence Criticism sparks Controversial Book Sales Rush." *South China Morning Post* 16 January. URL <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1680411/cy-leungs-hong-kong-nationalism-comments-spark-sales-rush> (accessed 26.5.15).
- Faure, David. (1997). *A Documentary History of Hong Kong: Society*. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press.
- Harbour Times. (2015). "Hong Kong Nationalism Student Editors: Not Advocating Independence, But it's An Option." *Harbour Times*, January 20. URL <http://harbourtimes.com/2015/01/20/hong-kong-nationalism-student-editors-not-advocating-independence-but-its-an-option/> (accessed 26.5.15).
- Hung Ho-fung. (2014). "Three Views of Local Consciousness in Hong Kong." *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 12 (44.1) November 3.
- So, Alvin Y. (2011). "One Country, Two Systems" and Hong Kong-China National Integration:

A Crisis-Transformation Perspective.” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41(1), 99-116.

Lau, Siu-kai. (1984). *Society and Politics in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

Lui Ta-lok. (2007). “Class Relations After 1997.” In Rey Yip (ed.) *Starting From 1997: Civil Society’s First Ten Years*. Hong Kong: SynergyNet, 222-231.

Ma Ngok. (2015). “The Rise of “Anti-China” Sentiments in Hong Kong and the 2012 Legislative Council Election.” *The China Review* 15 (1), 39-66.

Mathews, Gordon, Eric Kit-wai Ma, and Tai-lok Lui. (2008). *Hong Kong, China. Learning to Belong to a Nation*. London and New York: Routledge.

Pepper, Suzanne. (2015). “An Independent Hong Kong?” URL <http://chinaelectionsblog.net/hkfocus/?p=1221> (accessed 26.5.2015).

So, Alvin Y. (1999). *Hong Kong’s Embattled Democracy*. Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press.

_____. (2003). “Cross-Border Families in Hong Kong: The Role of Social Class and Politics.” *Critical Asian Studies* 35(4), 515-34.

_____. (2008). “Social Conflict in Hong Kong After 1997: The Emergence of a Post-Modern Mode of Social Movement?” in Ming K. Chan (ed.) *China’s Hong Kong Transformed*. Hong Kong: City University Press.

_____. (2011). “One Country, Two Systems and Hong Kong-China National Integration.” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41 (1), 99-116.

So, Alvin Y and Ludmilla Kwitko. (1992). "The Transformation of Urban Movements in Hong Kong." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 24 (4), 31-42.

Sze, Lai-shan. (2007). "Poverty in an Affluent Society." In Rey Yip (ed.) *Starting From 1997: Civil Society's First Ten Years*. Hong Kong: SynergyNet, 232-78.

Tsai, Jung-fang (1993). *Hong Kong in Chinese History: Community and Social Unrest in the British Colony, 1842-1913*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wong, Joseph Wong. (2014). "Does "Hong Kong nationalism" exist?" URL <http://www.quora.com/Does-Hong-Kong-nationalism-exist> (accessed 26.5.2015).

Yan Hairong and Barry Sautman. (2015). "Localists and "Locusts" in Hong Kong: Creating a Yellow-Red Peril Discourse." Unpublished paper presented to the School of Social Science, University of Irvine. April 3.