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A special territory: visions of Hong Kong and its people

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Chapter Two: Nation, State, People

In the realm of nationalism, each culture lays claim to its own people and advocates for their autonomy within a nation-state. The ideology of nationalism has sculpted our world maps, dividing territories into distinct nation-states adorned with national symbols like flags and anthems. Nations trace their lineage back through time, weaving narratives of historical continuity over their inhabited territories. The PRC claims to be the inheritor of previous empires that controlled similar territory, and so do Japan, France, and many other countries for the respective regions over which they hold dominion. The nation absorbs the heterogeneity of the past as governments promote national histories that show how the present nation is the logical outcome of a history of struggle. In the age of nations, usually taken to start from the seventeenth century onwards, characterized by the proliferation of print and the rise of bureaucratic structures, individuals find their relationships with the state and fellow citizens evolving into more indirect and abstract forms. Local allegiances diminish as people belong to the nation, and the nation-state now demands loyalty.

The concept of "the people" is central to the nation-state framework. According to the doctrine of nationalism, the authentic expression of the nation necessitates that its inhabitants govern themselves. The nation-state idealizes self-governance by the people as the pathway to realizing its true essence. If, for example, secessionists or irredentists claim that they are a national people separate from their host country, they make a political claim whose end is autonomy. In Hong Kong, the matter of people is contentious. Hong Kong is a state under OCTS but not a nation, an anomaly in the modern international world of nation-states. Whether or not the inhabitants of Hong Kong form part of a collective identity that can be called a people, in the national sense, is a matter that has, indirectly, been the source of major civil unrest after the 1997 handover.

In this chapter I discuss how key theorists consider the nation and the people. I will further go into how these conceptions relate to Hong Kong under OCTS and how, in turn, classificatory schemes (for Chinese, for Hong Konger) form and are practiced in creating and maintaining the nation (state). It is not inevitable that collective differences between groups become enshrined as nationness or ethnicity. As Malešević (2006, p. 26) argues, this is not only due to the vague and dynamic quality of national characteristics but also because of the arbitrary nature in which those forming a nation pick certain practices out of a "nearly unlimited repertoire of potential myths and memories". Our need for belonging does not necessarily lead to nation-states, and nation-states are not unmalleable structures that have existed since the dawn of civilization. As Lie posits, "polemically put, isn't the very idea of modern peoplehood absurd? By contemporary racial, ethnic or national categorization, we might call Moses black or Egyptian and Abraham Arab or Syrian. (...) Why do we simplify and reify people into essentialized categories of modern peoplehood?" (2004, p. 11). Nations are one form of human political organization that has existed so far within a particular historical period and could, one day, be gone altogether.

2.1 Nations

As a political unit of organization, the nation emerged notably in conjunction with the Westphalian peace treaties of the seventeenth century. However, there is debate regarding the precision of this chronology (see Breuilly, 2013). While the historical genesis of nations remains a subject of ongoing debate, the focus of this study does not extend to such inquiries. Nations and modernity are often argued to be intertwined, and their relationship has been a significant source of debate (see Gellner, 1983; Greenfeld, 1996; Smith, 1998). While nations with nationalism as their unifying principle are usually linked with the modern period, mainly in Europe and its colonies, there have been attempts to situate nations outside this context. One such attempt is by Tackett, who, in *The Origins of the Chinese Nation State: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order* (2017), argues that the imperial Chinese Song dynasty in the eleventh century had the makings of a kind of proto-nationalism and an imagined community following Anderson's (1983) conception. The nation as the outcome of complications of history is a famous conception of the nation that still holds today, given by Renan (1882 / 2013), who called the nation a spiritual principle. Today this spiritual principle is called the ideology of nationalism.

Brubaker, among others, posits that rather than fixating on the essence of "what is a nation," researchers should ask how nations work "as a political and cultural form institutionalized within and among states? How does nation work as practical category, as classificatory scheme, as cognitive frame?" (1996, p. 16). Drawing attention towards understanding the mechanisms through which nations operate within the realm of politics and culture prompts exploration into how nations function as political entities, cultural constructs, and cognitive frameworks. Regardless of the ontological status of nations, they undeniably manifest as tangible realities with practical implications.

A crucial question for Anderson and others is how the people (and national culture, which binds the people together) have come to be. As Duara (1993) succinctly describes, the formation of a nation can be understood through two contrasting perspectives. One perspective, akin to functionalism, suggests that a nation is created by amalgamating various elements inherent within a society. Alternatively, the primordial perspective posits that nations arise from enduring, pre-existing societal elements. These differing viewpoints encapsulate ongoing debates regarding the origins and nature of nations. Smith (2009), as a proponent of the 'ethno-symbolic perspective', seems to follow the latter perspective as he considers nations as self-defining communities attached to a homeland with a distinct public culture that shares and nurtures symbols, myths, and memories. Anderson's and Smith's perspectives overlap through the role of people and a form of shared culture. Gellner (1983, 1994) notes the importance of creating a national culture as well. This culture is often based on the "high" culture that elites disseminate to the would-be citizenry through education. According to Gellner, nations are part of the consequence of modernity and the disappearance of the rigid social structure of agrarian society. As social bonds disappeared in the industrial age, the new age of

nationalism fostered a new type of abstract, anonymous community into which the government inducts the people (citizens) through mass education.

A nation needs to reproduce itself. Nations continually form and reform as the symbolic elements that make up the nation must be instilled in the people through nationalism. For now, nationalism can be understood as part of the general strategy of a (would-be) nation to create and maintain a nation through things such as education, mass media, and the promotion of national culture. National governments must fuse the people with their territory, creating a homeland region that ties them to the territory. The landscape becomes a part of the nation's history and its people as the landscape enters their psyche and collective being. To varying degrees, nations rely on invented or adopted traditions, which are made part of the national canon for national solidarity (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2000). Like the nation, these traditions often appear everlasting, masquerading as timeless rituals passed on for generations (Eisenstadt 1973). Nations work as container units harbouring language, culture and its outputs, identities, and anything else that comes from the unit of the nation (Smith 1998).

A passage from a conversation between a peasant and a captain in the army from Saramago's novel *The Elephant's Journey* illustrates the totalizing effect of the nation as a container unit or bounded territory that encompasses everything inside it (Saramago, 2010, p. 39):

Oh, I heard you, sir, but my master, is not at home, I know, but his steward is, and he understands his duty to the nation, The nation, sir, Have you never seen it, asked the commanding officer, launching into a lyrical flight of fancy, You see those clouds that know not where they go, they are the nation, you see that sun, which is sometimes there and sometimes not, that is the nation, you see that line of trees, where, with my trousers round my ankles, I first spotted the village this morning, they, too, are the nation, you cannot, therefore, deny me or obstruct my mission.

The trees, clouds, and even the sun all fall under the national banner as they exist within the nation's territory. And so do the people who should "understand their duty to the nation", as the commanding officer would have it. The conversation Saramago sketches between a peasant and the commanding officer is representative of a pre-modern versus the modern conception of political kinship, where the latter understands that both the peasant and commanding officer are part of an abstract, anonymous community, which the peasant fails to realize. The nation totalizes the community it encompasses. The people living within its territory are now part of an abstracted, imagined community that has often spread through force, as the conversation between the military officer and the peasant shows at the end.

Saramago's peasant and captain are both part of the same national people. Necessary for the nation is the ideal of the national people. Many definitions of nations focus on the roles mass education and media (e.g., newspapers) have in creating the people. Hroch (1996, p. 79), for example, defines a nation as an integrated social group (i.e., people) with "objective relationships", such as the economic, cultural, and religious dimensions, and a "subjective reflection in collective consciousness". Essential parts of this definition are memories of a shared past, linguistic or cultural

ties, and a conception of equality between members (i.e., citizens with rights granted by the nation). The equality of the people within nations is an important part of the nation and stands in stark contrast to many previous forms of political organization, such as feudal communities. Miller (1995), like Hroch, places the people at the centre of his definition of the nation. He defines it as a community of people who aspire to be politically self-determining and seek a state to do so. A classic definition of nations is Benedict Anderson's formulation in *Imagined Communities* (1983, p. 6), where the nation is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." The focus on imagining foregrounds the role of the people once again. In practice, however, this imagining often focuses on political or cultural elites' visions of the nation.

The nation is a social fact (Durkheim, 1982), created socially but external to the individual. By and large, nations strive to have some form of political agency over an area, often phrased as the self-determination of the people. The working definition of nation for this research is that the nation is *a community that shares a culture and wishes to hold some form of sovereignty over a territory*. Constituent elements of a nation can include language, customs, and ethnicity. In a nation, citizens are equal in theory, allowing for a degree of solidarity between them. Nations share a claim to a common past (however real or imagined) that shapes the national destiny. Almost every state is represented by a nation, which is a consequence of the global ideology of nationalism, as the word "inter-national" underlines; the concept of nation embeds itself in our understanding of the organization of society at a global level.

2.2 States and Nation-states

Nations are a more recent phenomenon than states, so why are nations and states, two seemingly separate things, often brought together? Ancient Carthage was not a nation, nor was the Ottoman empire, yet they were states. Gellner (1983, p. 4), in *Nations and Nationalism*, defines the state as "that institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order", following the spirit of Weber and the idea of the state as holding the monopoly on violence. This definition makes Hong Kong, as a special administrative region, a state but not a nation.

Nations and states came to be associated with each other in the industrial age. From around the 18th century onwards, the state is seen more in terms of its role as an educator (and creator) of the people. Gellner (ibid., p. 111) writes how this national state is, above all, "the protector, not of a faith, but of a culture, and the maintainer of the inescapably homogeneous and standardizing educational system". Present-day Hong Kong might not fit into this mould as the government of Hong Kong does not conceive itself to have a "homogeneous and standardizing educational system", as this educational system is geared towards creating people who (eventually) identify as citizens of the PRC rather than Hong Kong. According to Liu (2004), a nation-state can only imagine itself in sovereign terms existing alongside other nation-states. The nation-state is a state that concerns itself with creating a

class of citizens that will identify themselves as people of the nation, sharing a culture recognized as national amongst other hallmarks of the nation.

The modern nation-state is a state that holds itself to have a particular national culture in which it promotes and educates a people. It exists in a realm of other sovereign nation-states that recognize each other as unique, reinforcing the idea of nations and nation-states as normal bounded political communities. The two notions of independence and sovereignty on a national and international level are tricky, as the ideal of sovereignty that the nation-state prescribes is often just that, an ideal, as supranational organizations and corporations have traversed boundaries and nations since the inception of the nation-state (Boyd-Barrett, 2015; Hardt & Negri, 2000). In the early stages of forming most nation-states, coercion played (and still often plays) a significant role in nationalizing the people. Education and media are crucial in creating and maintaining (i.e., reproducing) the nation (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Hroch, 1996). Nationalism seeks the particular in the universal and the universal in particular, to paraphrase Billig (1995, p. 92). In other words, each nation is considered unique, but nations have similarities in having their own national signifiers such as the flag, anthem, and language.

Nations can exist without states; Minahan (2016), in the *Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations*, for example, identifies 420 stateless nations. These people or political communities lack a state of their own and seek a form of self-government. It is hard today to conceive of a sovereign territory without it (at least self-identifying as) as a nation. The awkward status of Taiwan and Palestine are examples of nations without strong international recognition. Both can be classified as nations and nation-states, host to the typical items and institutions of nations and nation-states such as a national people, flag, and anthem. Nevertheless, as they lack broad international recognition, they are left out of the club of nations and concomitant institutions such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations. Hong Kong state is one exception of a state without a national component that appears to have a monopoly on violence, as the army of the PRC cannot freely operate within Hong Kong. The Hong Kong police functions as the main coercive arm of the government as stipulated by article 14 of Hong Kong's Basic Law². The trend in Hong Kong since the 1990s has been to self-identify as a Hong Konger (A. Fung, 2001; Ip, 2020), mimicking in many ways a national people. That some, under the ideology of nationalism, would eventually seek self-determination is an almost natural consequence of the logic of nationalism.

² A document often referred to as Hong Kong's mini constitution. Article 14 of the basic law states the following: "Military forces stationed by the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for defence shall not interfere in the local affairs of the Region. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region may, when necessary, ask the Central People's Government for assistance from the garrison in the maintenance of public order and in disaster relief". (Basic law, Chapter II, art. 14 (H.K.))

2.3 Hong Kong as a State of Exception

Does Hong Kong, under OCTS qualify as a nation-state? Fong (2017) writes that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) is host to peripheral nationalism, which fulfills all the conditions of a nation-state. Hong Kong society, according to Fong, suffers from a “contrasting understanding” of OCTS (*ibid.*, p. 550). In Fong’s reading, the PRC seeks to integrate Hong Kong society through OCTS, while many in Hong Kong see it as a way to maintain their autonomy. Jiang Shigong (2008) offers another view, stating that Hong Kong, under OCTS, is characterized as a “Quasi State Polity”. Jiang’s framing agrees with Ip (2020, p. 3), who frames Hong Kong as a “more or less institutionally complete community”, hosting a distinct territory, culture, and language. Ip’s definition comes very close to that of the nation offered earlier. The construction of OCTS sits uneasily in international politics. Hong Kong falls under the government of the PRC, and the Hong Kong government does not consider itself a nation-state. Simultaneously, Hong Kong presents a nation-state-like experience, aligning with our structures of expectations of the modern state (Paasi, 1986). Matters such as border traversal, symbolic representation, and institutions underline the linkage between modern states and their dominion over sovereign territory, which is intertwined with the notion of nationhood.

Since the handover of 1997, the territory of Hong Kong is no longer a colony and has returned to the motherland, according to the official PRC narrative. Hong Kong society can prosper and move forward into a new era. Officially, however, the state and territory of Hong Kong have not been a colony since 1972, well before the handover date, when the PRC government requested that the United Nations remove Hong Kong from its register of colonies. The PRC government argued that Hong Kong was not a ‘usual’ colony, but that its status resulted from an unequal treaty, and that Hong Kong should return to China rather than be granted independence. The PRC has always considered Hong Kong a continuously occupied territory that would eventually be returned to China (Tsang, 2004). As Deng Xiaoping said to his staff during the handover negotiations, alluding to the Falkland Wars: “Hong Kong is not the Malvinas Islands, and China is not Argentina” (quoted in Jiang, 2008, p. 103).

The treaties that granted Hong Kong to England following the Opium Wars in the middle of the 19th century are considered illegitimate by the PRC, widely regarded as the successor government of the Qing Empire. However, the same could be said about any colony: it is an (illegitimately) occupied territory resulting from unequal power relations, often resulting in unequal treaties that legitimize the colony. The major difference is that rather than the complete colonization of China, only a part was colonized, meaning there was someone to whom the Hong Kong area could be returned. Whether or not the people in Hong Kong agreed to this return did not enter the geopolitical equation. The retrieval of Hong Kong was not a primary concern of the CCP until the 1970s (Tsang, 2004). Well before the petition to the UN, the label of colony went out of fashion in the Hong Kong government in the 1960s, and it stopped appearing in official announcements and visas (1976). The word ‘City’ was used in the early colonial period of Hong Kong, as the government spoke of the “city

of Victoria,” which was still used in government documents in the 1950s (Tsang, 1995). Over time, however, the distinction between places in Hong Kong as separate cities faded, and the idea of a larger homogeneous Hong Kong as a collective place of belonging grew; a Hong Kong that many people imagined not as a colony or a piece of territory that belongs to the PRC but something that belongs to itself, harbouring its own people and way of doing things.

Most analyses of Hong Kong begin by acknowledging its distinctiveness, encompassing its people, culture, state, and territory. Hong Kong society is, for example, positioned as having both little history as well as having a unique history (Cheung, 2001; Erni, 2001). It is a place of exception (Abbas, 1997), an unusual case of decolonization without independence (Tang, 1994; Tsang, 2004). Its economy is unique as well, a miracle of capitalism (Baker, 1983; Chan, 2007; Hughes, 1976), and despite its status as a state it has been excluded from being a nation-state (Fung & Chan, 2017; Mathews et al., 2007). Regarding some of Hong Kong’s unique characteristics, Lam and Cooper wrote in 2017 that “the most important task before Hong Kong is to preserve and defend her [sic] unique characteristics such as freedom of speech, freedom of information and the rule of law” (Lam & Cooper, 2017, p. 169). The unique characteristics given here are those made in contrast to Mainland China, which does not have freedom of speech, freedom of information, or the rule of law.

A common narrative of Hong Kong society before the handover is that it was a cultural desert with its people lacking a sense of history (Abbas, 1997; Lam & Cooper, 2017). These were either not there or not recognized as being there, as the inhabitants of Hong Kong were concerned with other things, such as earning money (e.g., Baker 1983; Turner 2003). This lack of culture can be read in terms of lacking a culture that can be identified as national. As is evident, Hong Kong is not part of the typical nation-state experience. Instead, it is fomenting something like nationalism, as the people have only been forming in the past fifty years. Hong Kong is a colony without independence, but there are similar colonies in the world, such as those found in the neighbouring Macau or dependent territories of France, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, or the Netherlands. The uniqueness of the political construction of the Hong Kong state is, in itself, a part of the story of Hong Kong. The uniqueness of Hong Kong society, in effect, mirrors national thinking, where the nation is considered unique amongst other singularly unique nation-states.

The end goal of a sovereign territory is to become a nation-state in the modern world, which makes Hong Kong an anomaly: one country, two systems, or in other words, one nation, two states, or perhaps even one country: two nations. Hong Kong can be ascribed to be a nation ruled by what amounts to a proxy state, a colonial gatekeeper state that takes its legitimacy not from the people of Hong Kong but from the PRC government. The phrases “institutionally complete community” or “quasi-state polity” discussed earlier come to mind again as the Hong Kong state seemingly fulfils all the requirements of a nation-state. As a territory with a high degree of autonomy, Hong Kong society, under OCTS, seems incommensurable with the idea of nationhood that the PRC adheres to. The Hong Kong state is an uncomfortable fit with nationalism theory, which makes it an instrumental case as the exception to the rule.

2.4 The People and National Identity

When discussing nations and nationalism, the concept of the “the people” often makes its appearance. But how are the people related to the nation? There can be no nation without people that feel like they belong to the nation. Miller (1995, p. 22-25) highlights five aspects of the national community that distinguish it from other forms of collective sources of identity. These are:

- 1) National communities are constituted by a belief that nations exist when their members recognize one another as compatriots
- 2) National communities embody historical continuity.
- 3) National community is an active identity.
- 4) National communities connect a group of people to a particular place (homeland).
- 5) National communities require a common public culture, a sense that the people are together because of their shared values, characteristics, and ways of being.

Together these five characteristics make up the national identity. The goal of a people is self-determination through the nation. Since its rise to dominance, the nation-state has become the primary way for a people to achieve self-determination, and that there exist a people that can achieve self-determination in the first place is a consequence of the doctrine of nationalism (Kedourie, 1961). The national government, therefore, needs to instill some form of national identity in its inhabitants, usually through education. National identity will, in turn, maintain the nation.

The people of Hong Kong do not form a national community in the typical sense. Still, as many in Hong Kong construct an idea of homeland, public culture, etc. in the past decades, they can be defined as such. Hong Kong identity does check all five of Miller's aspects of the national community in that there exists a separate Hong Kong identity in which members recognize each other as Hong Kongers; that Hong Kong embodies a historical continuity since the founding of the colony; that it is an active identity, as the unrest in Hong Kong post-handover shows; that it connects a group of people to a particular homeland; and that it has an idea of a common Hong Kong culture. What sets national identity apart from Hong Kong or other place-based identities is that citizens are ‘active political agents’ – the bearers of sovereignty, as Miller calls it. The nation's politics reflect the citizens, and the national will reflects the will of the citizens, connecting the idea of popular sovereignty and nations. Popular sovereignty does not necessarily imply democracy but rather the idea that political decision-making now comes from the citizen body rather than (feudal) lords vested by divine decree. For example, the idea of the people granting power to the nation is seen in many authoritarian nations today as they still claim to speak for the people. The government of the PRC considers the people of Hong Kong to be an extension of the Chinese people, meaning there is no separate national identity for Hong Kong people and Chinese people, and that Hong Kong people as active political agents in Miller's sense would only refer to the people in reference to the PRC, rather than any would-be Hong Kong nation.

Miller argues that what holds nations together are beliefs transmitted through cultural artefacts, referencing Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983). In creating a national identity, official histories project present-day notions of the national character onto the past. National identity is formulated partly based on (the interpretation of) history and partly on a selection of now national myths. These myths reassure citizens of their unique history and their part in a long historical tradition. They further show the people how to be good citizens, showcasing virtues and morals that the citizens of a (new) nation should uphold. Miller distinguishes between national histories arranged through a collective process and imposed histories. The collective myths that much of Hong Kong identity-making (and most Hong Kong nationalism) is based on are seen as periods of shame and humiliation in PRC official discourse. The people of Hong Kong are now facing the distinction between imposed and collective history as the collective mythmaking of many of Hong Kong's local intellectuals, which promoted a separate Hong Kong identity, stands in contrast to official government history that supports a story of integration with the PRC. As I will also show, what makes a good citizen in the eyes of the PRC often differs with the interpretation of localist Hong Kong intellectuals.

In his *National Identity* (1991, p. 14), Smith distinguishes five attributes fundamental to national identity:

1. historic territory or homeland,
2. common myths and historical memories,
3. a common, mass public culture,
4. common legal rights and duties for all members,
5. common economy with territorial mobility for members.

Like the different aspects of the national community given by Miller above, these fundamental attributes provide me with comparative material for the Hong Kong case. Is Hong Kong a homeland, and if so, how is it made through the popular imagination? What common myths or memories does Hong Kong share, and is a distinct Hong Kong culture distinguishable? The fourth and fifth points are ambiguous as Hong Kong now stands between two systems. Smith is one of the leading proponents of the ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism. In his framework, Smith gives a role to the 'ethnic intelligentsia' in turning a community into a nation by re-evaluating the historical culture. The emphasis on intelligentsia coincides with Gellner (1983; 1997), who describes the importance of the elites, or the role of high culture in fostering nationalism and homogenizing the pre-existing culture to create a fundament to base the nation on. The role of intellectuals (discussed in 3.4) in creating a national story and national identity is often essential.

Within China and Chinese nationalism, the words for the national people *minzu* [民族], can be translated as "nation", "nationality", or "ethnicity". This term emerged relatively recently in the Chinese political vocabulary, promoted at first by prominent intellectuals such as Liang Qichao [梁啟超] to foster a unified sense of nation in the waning days of the Qing Empire and burgeoning Republic (Cao, 2023). Presently, the PRC officially recognizes fifty-six ethnic groups within its borders, comprising fifty-five minorities alongside the Han majority (Mullaney, 2004). Similarly, this

categorization is a modern construct stemming from governmental census activities and other nation-quantifying measures (such as border delineation) conducted from the 1950s to the 1970s. These efforts by the government served to codify distinct ethnic identities into official classifications, solidifying differences and offering a clear depiction of the nation's populace, now categorized into fifty-six ethnicities (Mullaney, 2019). This has led to the visibility of the recognized *minzu* and the disappearance of unrecognized groups, as Mullaney (ibid., p. 140) writes: "To the extent that the fifty-six officially recognized peoples of China have achieved ubiquity, the unrecognized groups have undergone a diametrically opposite process of disappearance". The role that PRC social scientists have played in our current understanding of the makeup of China's *minzu* was significant (Mullaney, 2010) and informs our understanding of China's ethnic makeup today. Hong Kong people can be classified as majority Han. This classification implies that, according to the perspective of the PRC government, the majority of Hong Kong residents should align with the Han majority in the Mainland. The ethnic categorization of Hong Kongers holds significant ramifications for their sense of Chineseness, a topic to be explored further in chapters four and five. One notable consequence of this classification arose during the handover negotiations between the governments of the PRC and Britain, where Han Chinese leaders asserted their ability to represent the interests of the Hong Kong people, claiming an understanding of their desires (Rafferty, 1989a).

The discussion of *minzu* in China and the power of categorization takes me to Malešević's *Identity as Ideology* (2006), which issues a word of warning about the concept of identity, as the author engages directly with the frameworks of Smith and many others. In a precise analysis of the analytical use of the term 'identity', Malešević argues that the concept of ideology is better suited to the study of nationalism than identity. One of his arguments against the term "identity", particularly in the study of national identity, is that the term has acquired too many meanings to be useful. Identity is an overlapping name for a host of distinct processes. Using identity as an over-arching name will only generate misunderstanding, as identity has no precise and agreed-upon meaning. Its explanatory power is wanting, Malešević tells us. He argues that qualitative and quantitative attempts at operationalizing identity show it faces "symptomatic problems" (ibid., p. 55). Malešević argues that while many studies about national identity have added to the understanding of national formation, spatialization, or the representation of nations, these authors have failed to explain the concept of national identity. Most studies that engage with national identity reify it in the first place. This is done through survey questions such as "how proud are you of your national identity". Malešević argues against the notion that group identity is "out there", observable, and measurable, noting how group identities fluctuate and can be activated depending on circumstances. Malešević resists the flattening notion of national identity as it denies individual variation, stating that "'national identity' can never be assumed from group designation" (ibid., p. 47).

I have outlined the discussion on identity and its flaws as they serve as warning posts for my study of Hong Kong nationalism. Identity, in particular Hong Kong identity, is a frequent theme in the study of Hong Kong localism and nationalism (for example, Fung, 2001; Jiang, 2013; Lau et al.,

2012). Careful consideration of these core concepts is necessary to, as Malešević powerfully argues, not fall into the operational phantom of identity.

2.5 An Overview of Hong Kong Identity

Can one typify Hong Kong or Hong Kongers' identities without falling into stereotypes? There is no such thing as a single Hong Kong identity just as there is no such thing as a single Chinese or German identity. There are, however, always commonalities between national or nation-like identities. The vast majority of those with a German identity would agree that Germany is a country, that Berlin is the capital, and that there are things such as German history, culture, music, or language. People might disagree on what to include in these broad categories, but that they exist is taken to be true. This is different for Hong Kong. While many might agree that Cantonese and English are the prevalent languages of Hong Kong, Hong Kong culture and history are categories still under construction. Since the 1997 handover, discussions on what it means to be a Hong Konger have grown, with popular and academic publications on Hong Kong (for example Hong Kong studies as an area studies discipline focused only on Hong Kong) growing alongside them. Another example is the increase in books about Hong Kong life, culture, merchandising of Hong Kong things, the growing appreciation of its food culture (Mak, 2021), and many other facts about Hong Kong life and what it means to be a Hong Konger. As I will show, these discussions mirror other societies that undergo a development that retrospectively qualifies as the rise of nationalism. This is comparable to the likes of Herder, who, in the period of the German romanticists in the 18th and 19th century, found value in German Folk-culture. Before, elites sometimes regarded German culture as base and barbaric compared to the French, but now it was considered unique and down to earth (Berlin, 1980; Herder, 2017/1778). A similar process is taking place in present-day Hong Kong, where people now find Hong Kong culture in local customs, from tea house culture to the colloquial language.

Education is one of the fundamental ways a government creates and maintains a national people. In Hong Kong, many have argued (e.g., Kennedy and Kuang 2014; Luk 1991; Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2007) that the Hong Kong government has not historically instilled nationality in its citizens. Nevertheless, I submit that something like a national Hong Kong identity does exist, and that there are several phases in its development, as seen in figure one, which shows my approximation of the overall development of Hong Kong people in four stages.

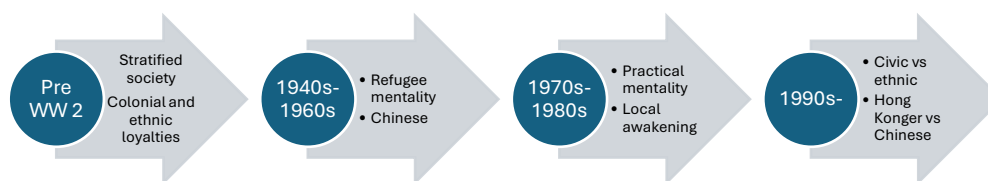


Figure 1 The typical narrative of the phases of Hong Kong identity

The first phase of a typical history of Hong Kong identity (Faure, 1997; Tsang, 2004; Carroll, 2005; Law, 2010) begins at the colony's founding and ends with the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong during the Second World War. Ethnic and class lines divided identity. The English, people from other British colonies such as India and Sri Lanka, local inhabitants such as the Tanka people, and people from Guangzhou lived together and formed the present colony. There is evidence that elites at the time did think of themselves as Hong Kongers, even in the earlier days of the colony (Carroll, 2005, for example). In general, however, in the colony's early days, Hong Kong was a stratified society comprised of refugees and fortune seekers. The people in Hong Kong did not seem to hold to a common ethos.

In the decades following the Second World War, a fundamental concept of Hong Kong identity emerged in the refugee identity. Hong Kong as a place of belonging began forming after the Japanese occupation (Tsang, 2004; Turner, 2003). Nevertheless, amidst upheaval on the Mainland, including civil war and the tumultuous socio-political campaigns under the CCP, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, numerous individuals sought refuge in Hong Kong, which came to be regarded as a sanctuary or "*fukdei*" [福地], a land of abundance. This influx of migrants contributed to what is often referred to as a "refugee society" (e.g., Abbas, 1997; Faure, 1997; Ma, 2021, who all discuss or make reference to the refugee society in various contexts), characterized by a lack of deep emotional attachment to their place of residence, and a sense of mobility wherein relocation held little difficulty. This portable characteristic stemming from the refugee identity is further expounded upon by Chow (1993) through the lens of Hong Kong's status as an entrepot city. Describing Hong Kong as a quintessential port city, Chow (1993, p. 213) emphasizes the portability of goods, cultures, ways of life, and identities, asserting that "if Hong Kong remains in the avant-garde of world city culture, it is because it makes portability, including the portability of postmodern cultural identities, a fact of life". This sentiment is succinctly captured by the Taiwanese author Long Ying Tai [龍應台] in her book recounting her experiences in Hong Kong. Reflecting on the disparity between Taiwanese and Hong Kong society, she observes, "Taiwan is not a temporary refuge, but a destination." (Long, 2020, p. 20).³

The development of the Hong Konger identity post-1960s has to be viewed in its geopolitical context. Lo Wing Sang [羅永生], in *Thinking Hong Kong* [思想香港] (2008), describes how the CCP in Hong Kong was straddled between, on the one hand, preparing an acquiescent people for a future handover while, on the other hand, supporting goals that aligned with Mainland government policy. If the people in Hong Kong became too politically active, pushing for government reforms and popular representation, the PRC would inherit a population whose civic nature seems wholly incompatible with Mainland China's. Following the 1967 unrest, the colonial government, notably under Governor MacLehose's leadership, initiated a series of reforms in Hong Kong aimed at addressing the pressing issues of the time. Stemming from the Cultural Revolution in the Mainland, the riots saw numerous bombings and street violence, instigated by the CCP, causing widespread upheaval in Hong Kong and

³ 台灣不是一個暫時的逃生門，反而是一個目的地。

resulting in numerous casualties. The riots eventually ceased after intervention from the CCP to quell the unrest. These events prompted the colonial government to implement measures aimed at gaining popular legitimacy and support among the populace (Tsang, 2004). The measures included social housing, education, and avenues for political representation in the form of district councillors. During the MacLehose period, the economy of Hong Kong grew exponentially, and its popular culture went around the world in what many see now as the golden age of Hong Kong.

The descendants of the refugee generations comprise the third phase. The 1960s and 1970s heralded a new generation of Hong Kong people born and raised in Hong Kong. Hong Kong, as Chan (2007, p. 387) writes, “evolved from an enclave of refugees, floating passers-by and migrants into a society of permanent settlers with a shared identity”. This new generation mostly consisted of the descendants of the refugee generation, who grew up in an economic and cultural golden age. Pop culture prominently featured the southern Chinese Cantonese language, now with Hong Kong accents, in which a new generation of artists often used Hong Kong society as inspiration (Chu, 2017; Gold, 1993; Wong, 2003). Hong Kong became a home rather than a refuge for this generation. The third phase of Hong Kong identity is captured by Baker (1983, p.193), who describes ‘Hong Kong man’ [*sic*]:

He is go-getting and highly competitive, tough for survival, quick-thinking and flexible. He wears western clothes, speaks English or expects his children to do so, drinks western alcohol, has sophisticated tastes in cars and household gadgets and expects life to provide a constant stream of excitement and new openings. But he is not British or western (merely westernized). He is not Chinese in the same way that the citizens of the People's Republic of China are Chinese.

Baker describes the ‘Hong Kong man’ as a hybrid character, Chinese and not Chinese, affluent and money-seeking, a capitalist, a consumer who is tough and quick thinking and flexible about life, one who makes use of the city but does not hold any particular affection towards it. This Hong Konger is a man, a capitalist man, a trader who works hard and presumably provides for his family. In a similar vein, the people of Hong Kong have been described as self-serving or self-interest-driven (Lo & Pang, 2007). The Hong Kong identity as a practical identity is a common theme. Mathews et al. (2007) describe the character of the Hong Kong people as pragmatic and having a trading character. Ip (2020) corroborates this characterisation. Analysing government discourse, Ip writes that the “government frames the Hong Kong people as a ‘pragmatic majority’ who, like a kind of ‘economic animal’, always bravely concentrate on seizing the economic opportunities” (ibid., p. 44). These descriptions conjure up a specific vision of the Hong Konger as a globetrotting capitalist salesman, ignoring the less affluent, not to mention featuring an overbearing focus on Hong Kong *men*.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the growing discussion of the handover and what it means to be a Hong Konger, especially in relation to the PRC which, in light of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, was seen as a hegemonic force that would wipe out otherness (Tsang, 2004). As the 1997 handover date approached, many in Hong Kong began to perceive their way of life as increasingly

threatened. This growing sense of unease prompted a need for individuals to define themselves and their identity amidst the impending change. As Fung (2001, p. 595) writes, the Hong Kong people have “no urgent need to put up strong defense for their identity” before the handover period. Mathews (1997), in a classic piece published the year of the handover, discusses ‘the past, present and future of Hong Kong identity’, noting the distinction between Hong Kong as “part of China” or Hong Kong as “apart from China”, and how differentiating between these two will determine Hong Kong’s future. Matthews describes different versions of the Hong Kong identity, all stemming from Chinese plus something else: “Chineseness plus affluence / cosmopolitanism / capitalism” or “Chineseness plus English / colonial education / colonialism” or “Chineseness plus democracy⁴ / human rights/the rule of law.” (1997, p. 9). Matthews repeats the adage of Hong Kong as a place of transition where roots are shallow and “money and a passport can make any place home”. Matthew once again harbours the typical narratives identified so far, such as the pragmatic identity and the role of Chineseness in Hong Kong’s identity. Lastly, he notes that the adherence to values such as freedom and the rule of law by many Hong Kong people is a fragile fundament for an identity. I will explore this further in later chapters.

In the years following the handover in 1997, the tension between fostering Hong Konger identity and the demands of the PRC for the people to identify as national citizens increased. Decades later, the identity of the Hong Kong people for many advocates of Hong Kong autonomy or even independence has crystallized. An illustrative example is found in a book detailing the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement, approached from the viewpoint of radical protestors. In this book, the author conceives the Hong Kong people as innovative, civic-minded, independent, and liberal (note once again the focus on civic values as a fundament for identity). Protest-aligned Hong Kongers are depicted as actively establishing networks and infrastructure that would be aimed at “creating the society we envisioned and strove for, the sort of place we hoped Hong Kong would one day become” (Kong, 2020, p. 43). This stands in contrast to the vision promoted by the Hong Kong government during this same period, after a major social movement in 2019, which focused on promoting patriotic education to foster loyalty to China.

Following the handover, scholars have paid increasing academic attention to the identity of the Hong Kong people. Numerous surveys about Hong Kong identity (Fung & Chan, 2017; Chan & Fung, 2018; Chow et al., 2020) have argued for the Hong Kong people’s increasing Chineseness and acceptance of China. With the growing localist movement, other surveys have shown the opposite (Kwong, 2016; Steinhardt et al., 2018). Major questions of this strand of research are to what degree the people in Hong Kong identify as Chinese, the values associated with being a Hong Konger, and whether multiple identities such as Chinese, Hong Konger, and Citizen-of-the-Mainland can co-exist. Nationalism is a popular theoretical framework with which to analyse Hong Kong identity. The

⁴ With regards to the use of the term “democracy,” when I use this, I mean more than just the idea of one person and one vote. It refers to the larger set of democratic practices and institutions such as freedom of the press, opinion, gathering and believe. While it is often said Hong Kong was never a democracy, it did hold certain democratic practices due to the liberal tradition of the British colonial government.

identity of the people in Hong Kong has been framed as pragmatic nationalism (Mathews et al., 2007), near nationalism (Mak, 2013), civic and ethnic nationalism (Kwan, 2016; Veg, 2017), and in contrast to the Chinese nationalism against which it is competing or resisting (Lee, 2007).

Nationalism in Hong Kong is often set against cosmopolitanism and Chinese nationalism. Can nationalism in Hong Kong coincide with the forms of Hong Kong identity that emphasize cosmopolitanism? Can localism in Hong Kong coincide with adherence to the supposed Hong Kong core values of being 'Asia's World City' (e.g., Chow, 1993; Choi, 2007; Ou-Fan Lee, 2007)? Contrarily, localism post-handover emphasizes much of the working-class culture in Hong Kong, from drinking milk tea to bamboo scaffolding (Kaeding, 2017; Mak, 2021).

Erni (2012), writing about the role of non-ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong, suggests that Hong Kong can be imagined without Chineseness. Other ethnicities, mostly from other former British colonies such as India and Sri Lanka, have a history in Hong Kong that continues from the founding days of the colony. In fact, many of those who immigrated to Hong Kong did so well before the major immigration waves from Mainland China. Erni further identifies a silence on race in many discussions about Hong Kong that leads to a danger of erasure of the other, the racial minority. This silence holds in most research cited and even for the present discussion so far, leaving the role of non-Chinese and British in the margins. As I will show, the development of localist ideology deals with the question of ethnicity in different ways, from inventing a new ethnicity altogether to calling for an entirely civic-based identity. Despite the awareness of the role non-Chinese have played in the story of Hong Kong and the value of civic and cosmopolitan forms of identity given by many authors, the argument still starts with the assumption that the Hong Konger must reconcile with Chineseness.

Whether the Hong Kong identity forms a substantive base to establish a Hong Kong people is not only a matter left to the people. The governments in Hong Kong and China do not wish a separate Hong Konger to form, as they want the people of Hong Kong to form an extension of the people of the PRC. However, more radical advocates for Hong Kong autonomy might argue that the people of Hong Kong are already their own people and deserve autonomy or even independence. In this, they lay claim to the ideology of nationalism in which the sovereignty of a territory is vested in the bodies of those who inhabit it. As Billig (1995, p. 29) writes: "In the modern state the claim to sovereignty has descended from heaven to earth, from the clouds to the soil of the homeland and to the collectively invoked bodies of its inhabitants". Or, as Saramago (2010) puts it, as cited earlier in this chapter: "You see those clouds that know not where they go, they are the nation, you see that sun, which is sometimes there and sometimes not, that is the nation". For the PRC, the collectively invoked bodies of the inhabitants include Mainland and Hong Kong. Hong Kong autonomists and nationalists, however, identify two separate bodies, one belonging to Mainland China, which grants sovereignty to the Mainland, and one to Hong Kong, which ideally grants sovereignty and autonomy to Hong Kong. The ideology of nationalism spurs the people towards independence.