A special territory: visions of Hong Kong and its people

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Chapter Five: Hong Kong's Contested Past, Present and Future

The Basic Law of Hong Kong (Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau 2021), enacted in 1997 as the territory's version of a constitution, opens by proclaiming that "Hong Kong has been part of the territory of China since ancient times; it was occupied by Britain after the Opium War in 1840". Article 24 of the Basic Law further distinguishes between Chinese and Non-Chinese people residing in Hong Kong. It is against these orthodoxies that localist authors, as I have shown, develop their argument to forward their vision of Hong Kong's people and territory. Or as Erni phrases it: "Inevitably, writing about Hong Kong involves a triangular articulation of Chinese nationalism, British colonialism, and globalism, which also evokes the impossibility of serving three masters" (2001, p. 391). Whether aiming to separate or distinguish Hong Kong from China as Yu, Chin and HKUSU attempt or to show Hong Kong's societal and territorial fit within China as Jiang envisions, distinguishing or affirming this fit from ancient and modern China is a necessary step.

In the previous chapter, I showed how the four works and the interviews interpreted Hong Kong people and their ontological status through applying the "what" and "who" questions to Hong Kong. In this chapter, "when" and "where" are central. What makes up Hong Kong's past, when does it start, what does it include, and where is it headed? Understanding the present and future of Hong Kong requires a consideration of the past, which serves as the basis for the future. Is the history of Hong Kong a source of pride, a golden age to aspire to, or is it a period of shame best forgotten? The pre-handover period is crucial, making up the bulk of collective memory and mythmaking today. As I will demonstrate, the portrayal of the past informs the future. A pessimistic perception of the past serves as material for a glorious vision of the future, while an optimistic view of the past emphasizes Hong Kong society's post-handover predicament.

Like Chapter Four, this chapter contrasts interviews with an analysis of the four works, starting with a general overview of history writing in Hong Kong. In the four works, I focus on their interpretation of the 1967 unrest, which were often seen as a crucial moment in forming Hong Kong's identity. Afterward, I discuss statecraft in Hong Kong, especially the matter of name versus practice. This refers to how Hong Kong, under OCTS, is a formal part of the PRC but largely functions as a separate polity in practice, which, depending on the author's perspective, leads to either problems or solutions.

Lastly, I will discuss how the future of Hong Kong is envisioned, ending with a discussion regarding the supposed death of Hong Kong and its status as a homeland, which has come to the fore on various occasions in both the interview and the works.

5.1 Re-interpreting Hong Kong's History

"We Hong Kong people are very unfamiliar with our own history," I-11 told me. This section is about the varying interpretations of Hong Kong's colonial history and how they relate to the present and the future. I will show how conventional histories are challenged by both localist and pro-PRC narratives, as well as the connection of the writing of histories to nationalism.

The conventional story portrays the city of Hong Kong as an evolution from a barren rock at its establishment to a city awash with refugees post-war, leading to continuous growth. From the 1960s to the 1980s, this latter period is often characterized as Hong Kong's golden period, identified by its booming economy and influential pop culture. This is the period of the Hong Kong Myth, which refers to Hong Kong's rapid economic growth and financial standing (Flowerdew, 2004). Rags-to-riches stories floated around Hong Kong as old business empires such as Jardine and Swire suddenly had to compete with up-and-coming upstarts from humble beginnings (Rafferty, 1989). According to its proponents, the Hong Kong myth has four elements that make Hong Kong one of the world's major financial centres. These are the free market, individual freedom, the rule of law, and democracy (Ip, 2020). As discussed previously, some of these would later morph into the discourse surrounding Hong Kong's core values and have become a keyword in post-handover Hong Kong politics.

Most interviewees were uncertain when Hong Kong's history began and what it should include. Some suggested that it should start with the British colonization, while others included imperial China as part of Hong Kong's history. I-13's answer was typical: "history starts from the British Hong Kong colony". I-16 even asserted that "Hong Kong history begins from the colony, not from the Qing dynasty", marking a clear contrast between Hong Kong and Chinese Imperial history. Yet, others marked the beginning of various Chinese dynasties as the beginning of Hong Kong history, such as I-15, who proposed that "Hong Kong history starts from the Song dynasty because they have records of Hong Kong". As these excerpts demonstrate, the narrative of Hong Kong's history lacks consensus. Putting the beginnings of Hong Kong history in ancient Chinese history emphasises the diverging point with the colony's founding, which is then demarcated by a glorious or disastrous return to China, depending on one's point of view. Equally, putting its origins at the founding of the British colony reinforces the idea that Hong Kong is a new beginning and not a continuation of the Chinese state and territory and that Hong Kong can have its own history narrative and future.

Soon after the handover came the Asian financial crisis and other major economic and social crises, such as the SARS pandemic from 2002 to 2004 and the 2008 global recession. While British governance was far from ideal, the myth of the golden age and the popular narrative of the British colonial period cast a shadow on the post-handover government. Tsang (2004) writes that the British colonial government in the 1970s and 1980s fulfilled the five hallmarks of good governance (Government being 1. non-intrusive, 2. Efficient, 3. Fair, 4. Honest, in short, a form of 5. Benevolent paternalism), according to Chinese tradition, especially when compared with the Mainland, which underwent a series of tumultuous events from the 1940s to the late 1980s. Hong Kong was a haven for

those fleeing China, with a stable and transparent government constricted by law. This feeling is conveyed by I-10 who said that they were "Very grateful to British government for what they bring us (…) the Chinese government cannot maintain quality [of the British colonial government] Now, there are no quality politicians, so it is hard to have a good life." (I-10). As I-4 told me, "before 1997, Hong Kong was a kind of Utopia where people could just focus on themselves and not worry about politics". This feeling is captured in the novel *Hong Kong Trilogy* [香港三部曲], a book by well-known author Chan Koon Chung [陳冠中], wherein the main character describes his life in Hong Kong as "The handover was completed, but no worries. Hong Kong really is a blessed land. Our generation has never tasted bitterness, and we have had a good life for almost 50 years" (2007, p. 180).[65]

In classic nationalism, the rural countryside is the source of the primordial where the Romanticists would return in the nineteenth century to find some essence of the burgeoning nations (Gellner, 1983; Kedourie, 1961). In the new territories, the rural part of Hong Kong, and on the islands, the region of Hong Kong has a rich village tradition with numerous ceremonies and constructed landscapes (Atha, 2012). Yet, these are almost wholly overlooked when discussing Hong Kong culture and history. Abbas (1998), in his famous work about Hong Kong, does not mention the countryside in Hong Kong at all, promoting the idea that Hong Kong is nothing but a city. There has been a lack of attention on rural Hong Kong, which has only recently been rectified partly due to the localist movement. Supporting local farms and increasing awareness and appreciation for the history and customs of different villages in the countryside of Hong Kong has boomed in the past decade in Hong Kong. As I-11 said: "learning Hong Kong history starts from our own neighbourhood".

One source of the primordial, I argue, can be found in common tactics that localist history books make that aim to differentiate Hong Kong society from that of the Mainland by highlighting the contrast between North and South China. These books drawing often stress the differences between the primarily Cantonese, Lingnan, and Guangdong cultures as distinct from Northern Chinese culture, which is the basis for much of the PRC state culture. Yu and Chin's works, as discussed previously and in the coming sections, are two examples of this approach. Recall I-8, who said North China had "always dominated southern China" (I-8). In this conceptualization, the Hong Kong – Mainland dichotomy becomes part of a centuries-long struggle between Southern and Northern China, paving the way for alternative interpretations such as Hong Kong society becoming the potential vanguard for Cantonese culture. Many interviewees were proud to be Chinese or part of Chinese culture. One of the most fervent supporters of Hong Kong independence also stated that they were "proud of being Chinese" in sharing the heritage of "5000 years of culture" (I-4) while at the same time emphasizing that they were not Mainlanders or pro-CCP. The story of 5000 years of culture falls alongside Chin's conception of Chineseness and its relation to Hong Kong. Another mocked the Chinese claim of 5000 years of history, saying, "I think it is propaganda, just a part of human history, not PRC -Chinese history" (I-5). Chineseness is often compared to the PRC government´s reading of Chinese, and some

[65] 回歸已經完成冇事冇事.香港真是福地，我們一代人都沒有吃過大苦，過了快五十年的好日子。

distinguished explicitly between Northern and Southern Chinese culture, a move made by Yu and Chin in their books as well. However, the interpretation of Hong Kong as primarily a South Chinese cultural identity would clash with cosmopolitan interpretations of Hong Kong history that emphasize Hong Kong's port city nature. This tension is apparent in Yu, HKUSU, and Chin as well, who, while pulling away from China, at the same time position Hong Kong society and its people as more Chinese than China, or even a superior version of Chinese as put forward by Yu. As noted, these and other localist historical narratives mimic nationalist histories that seek to locate a sense of Hong Kong identity and possible nationhood in a typical nationalist-teleological fashion.

Hong Kong's status as a homeland is said to be troubled because it has no primordial history upon which to draw. The often-cited refugee mentality of Hong Kong (e.g. (Abbas, 1997; Tsang, 2004; Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2007; Ma, 2021) is in itself part of the (national) myth of Hong Kong. The idea that most Hong Kong people are descendants of Mainland refugees and, therefore, have loose ties to the territory has been criticized due to the growth of localism following the handover. The idea of Hong Kong's loose ties to the territory underlies an assumption of primordialism, wherein ties to the place would most likely have been formed through a history of living there. This idea stems from a more significant assumption of unmovable national people who, over time, have gained their identity. I-6 took the immigrant status of Hong Kong as a source for its identity, stating that "In Hong Kong, everything collectively developed as an immigrant status [*sic*]. We shared the common experience of immigration and poverty before". Both history and identity can be created and reshaped.

This brings me to the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement of 2019, of which one of the main slogans was "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of our times" [光復香港時代革命], which further stresses the tension between different interpretations of Hong Kong society and territory. This phrase has been subject to intense scrutiny by the government due to its possible ties to independence. Yet, analysis of the slogan's usage during the movement found that its meaning was ambiguous and not directly related to independence (Lee et al., 2020). The first phrase, "Liberate Hong Kong," uses the word 光復 [*gwongfuk*], emphasizing the idea of reclaiming something lost. It harkens back to an idea of Hong Kong that many feel precedes CCP influence. It conjures up the idea of a mythical golden age in Hong Kong, which people can return to if they can liberate themselves. It is a decisively nationalist idea, as the ideology of nationalism teaches that an individual's freedom can only come through the nation. While many during the protests did not necessarily advocate for independence, they were, as Lee et al. observe, "less reserved about expressing such 'nationalistic sentiments.'" (2020, p. 35) regarding the use of nationalist slogans, emblems, or the creation of a Hong Kong national anthem in the 2019 movement.

Of note were two interpretations of Hong Kong history in the interviews. The first was conveyed by I-13, who posited that Hong Kong society before the British was just a place, geography without meaning, and only during the British became a concept. As I-13 said:" Hong Kong is a concept for us, but for CCP, it is just geography, economy". By concept, she meant that it is something people can believe in, the idea of Hong Kong people belonging to the territory as their home. This

sentiment was echoed by I-10, who related how Hong Kong society before the British was divided into many villages that had little to do with each other. Accordingly, there was no sense of “Hong Kong” as a distinct place or people before British colonialism. Both interpretations of history are familiar with how nation-states justify the move from, for example, loose semi-independent territories to a more centralized idea of the nation. Hong Kong's becoming a concept that I-13 described is remarkably similar to that of the nation.

The transformation of Hong Kong from only a geographical location to a concept or idea can be tied to administrative structures creating the people. As Hong Kong became a colony with a defined shape under the British, so did the people express themselves in this area. Especially as the border closed with the Mainland in 1951, isolating Hong Kong by land and shaping the idea of the people belonging to this territory. The tension between Hong Kong as an idea or concept and Hong Kong as a place is the source of uncertainty for many, sometimes morphing into a fear of the erasure of local culture and identity. Or as I-3 stated, “I have heard people say that Hong Kong, that we are just a speck of dust in China”. While Hong Kong society and territory might indeed appear to be a speck of dust in the greater constellation that is China, in the eyes of the Hong Kong and PRC governments, for many in Hong Kong, this “speck of dust” is bound up in a category of its own. The discussions surrounding history in Hong Kong are deeply intertwined with broader questions about identity, belonging, and the trajectory of the city's future. They are not settled matters and speak much of the territory's current social, cultural, and political winds. The discussion in Hong Kong regarding patriotic education following the 2020 NSL is but one example of this. The matter of history, presented in the next two sections, is part of the ongoing debate about who the people in Hong Kong are, where they belong, and crucially, where they are going.

5.2 Four Views of Hong Kong’s Past and Present: Shameful or Glorious?

The four works do not speak much of pre-colonial history, generally basing their arguments on the colonial period and how this made positive or negative impact in Hong Kong society. They identify key moments, such as the closing of the border with Mainland China, the Cultural Revolution in Mainland which influenced the unrest of 1967 in Hong Kong, and the Tiananmen protests as key “shock moments”, to adopt Brubaker’s conceptualization once again. As noted, I take particular interest in the evaluation of the post-handover period with the colonial legacy in hindsight and their depiction of the 1967 riots, which three of the four books present as a significant turning point in Hong Kong’s post-war history, Yu being the exception. These riots are a prime example of divergent interpretations. As discussed briefly in chapter two, and as Tsang notes As Tsang (2004) notes, the riots of 1967 were the first time the people in Hong Kong had to decide between a stable government under the British or trust the PRC government amid the Cultural Revolution. They marked a crucial juncture in Hong Kong’s history, as public opinion pivoted towards support for the colonial

government, which stood for stability and order amidst the growing news of turbulence in the Mainland which was in the midst of the Cultural Revolution.

1967 was a year of unrest as CCP-aligned revolutionaries used bombs and other extreme methods to try to incite a revolution in Hong Kong. Clashes between police and the leftists led to deaths on both sides, with several citizens killed by public bombings. What would today be described as terrorism or terror attacks are now remembered as riots by the British government and as a heroic struggle against the imperialist oppressor by the PRC. The CCP supported the movement in Hong Kong and framed it as a fight against British colonial fascism (Hughes, 1976). Describing the events riots highlights the colonial government's precarious position as it tried to foster a policy of neutrality towards the Mainland. The clashes ceased after direct orders from the Mainland, resulting in the PRC and British colonial government changing tactics to win the people's approval (Faure, 1997; Tsang, 1995, 2004). The colonial government framed these events and another large protest in 1966 as a "failure of communication between government and governed" (Tsang, 1995). It marked a turning point for Hong Kong's governance as the colonial government focused on promoting a sense of belonging amongst the people (Turner, 2003).

Jiang: Overcoming the Century of Humiliation After the Handover

Jiang largely glosses over the pre-colonial period, suggesting that Hong Kong, as it is known today, only emerged under British rule. He credits the prosperity of Hong Kong in part to the British system of governance. The prosperity of the post-war colonial history of Hong Kong poses a challenge for the narrative of the PRC government, as the economic miracle is part of the broader myth of Hong Kong. During this period Hong Kong's economic and cultural development stands in sharp contrast to the turmoil experienced on the Mainland from the 1950s to 1980s. Especially as a large part of Hong Kong's population stems from refugees and migrant from the Mainland during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Discussing Hong Kong's colonial history requires reflecting on the history of the Mainland under the CCP, per PRC political orthodoxy.

Jiang marks the events of 1967 as the beginning of the brainwashing campaign that left "scars on the soul of the Hong Kong people" as discussed earlier. He considers the British period as a dark period of colonial oppression in which the Hong Kong people were led astray by the colonial government. Tension is evident in Jiang's representations of two significant events in Hong Kong's history: the unrest in 1967 and the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protests. As Jiang himself says in an interview appendix with Hong Kong-based, CCP-aligned newspaper Wen Wei Po [文匯報], the government must untie these two "historical knots" to win the hearts of the Hong Kong people.

While he dedicated a chapter to 1967, the Tiananmen Crisis is briefly mentioned but never discussed outright. Jiang describes 1967 as a tragedy and a disaster, as it led the Hong Kong people away from the CCP and China, whose influence plummeted in Hong Kong society after the riots. He contends, as quoted in the previous chapter that the colonial government's social welfare programmes

following the riots "thoroughly altered the deep consciousness and the psychological structure of the Hong Kong people, leading to their extreme fear of 'the leftist,' 'the Communist Party,' 'the Mainland' and 'socialism'" (p. 35). Accordingly, in Jiang's view the aftermath of 1967 was a tragedy which was only rectified after the handover. He ends the chapter by describing an award ceremony for key figures from the 1967 riots, once considered as criminals, these leaders of the 1967 riots, were now issued medals, ceremonial titles, and even a government positions by the new CCP-aligned handover government. In Jiang's reading, the reappraisal of 1967 is indicative of the miracle of Hong Kong today, where the post-handover government is rectifying historical wrongs. However, the question remains on how far the sudden switch in government appraisal mirrors the general public's perception.

These events highlight a focus seen throughout the book on righting perceived historical wrongs, with the handover representing a major step towards China's national rejuvenation. Jiang's writing shows deep hurt regarding these issues and a staunch refusal to consider matters from what would be considered the localist Hong Kong side. Ignoring the sensitivities of the people living and experiencing these events is peculiar, as he denies them any substantial agency. His writing on Hong Kong does not allow the change of certain baselines. The CCP will always be China's vanguard leader, propelling the Chinese civilization into the future, and the territory of the Chinese people will never change. These grand narratives have little room other views or public opinion. Of course, in his view (and most likely that of the Hong Kong and PRC governments), the public opinion is vastly in favour of the national narratives that they propagate. With the localist perspectives discussed in this work most likely played off as fringe views instigated by foreign powers. Jiang stands alone among the authors of the four books in his primarily negative evaluation of Hong Kong's colonial history. While he acknowledges that the economic development of Hong Kong was an outstanding achievement, it came at too high a cost as it resulted in people losing their "Chinese hearts and soul". In Jiang's view, the colonial period created a host of problems and historical injustices that the new government is hard at work in setting straight in the post-handover period.

Chin: the Colonial Period and Post-Handover as Two Extremes

As should come as little surprise, Chin is generally positive about the colonial period and overwhelmingly negative in his treatment of the post-handover period. He describes the colonial history as glorious, explaining how the British could only rule over Hong Kong with gentle means due to the risk of a public uprising. Accordingly, benevolence guided the British as they taught Western civilization to Hong Kong society, contributing to Hong Kong's unique Chinese-British cultural hybridity. As he notes "Hong Kong has 170 years of history of development as an independent city state" (p. 12).[66] He considers that the British fulfilled the traditional Chinese ideas of good governance, and the people remember it fondly. He suggests that Cantonese culture and people always

[66] 香港有一百七十年的獨立城邦發展歷史。

bear the brunt of the pain inflicted by China, so it was before and during the Opium Wars (p. 204). The framing between North and South Chinese culture (here as being Cantonese culture) is noteworthy and is interspersed throughout the work.

Chin and Jiang consider Hong Kong to be, in essence, a Chinese territory, either as an autonomous city state or a Special Administrative Region. Jiang and Chin hold very similar views regarding the greater Chinese nation. Chin falls more in line with Chinese intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century who discussed China and Chineseness. Many scholars of the May Fourth movement, an intellectual movement that, amongst other, sought to find a new identity for the nascent nation-state of China following the fall of the Qing empire, named after a student protest on May Fourth, 1919, advocated a greater idea of Chineseness [華夏] (Wang, 2001). Jiang comes to a similar conclusion, conceiving a grand role for the Chinese state as a cultural empire based on the only remaining great civilization. The main disagreement between Jiang and Chin is about the role of the CCP as the steward of the Chinese nation and people. The position of the PRC, under the rule of the CCP, as an inheritor of what these authors consider to be China must therefore be considered as well. As Jiang argues, is the PRC to be considered part of an unbroken chain of Chinese states, with the CCP the legitimate successor of the previous dynasties? Or has the CCP taken over China and is an illegitimate government, as Chin and Yu might claim?

Like Jiang, Chin identifies the 1967 riots as crucial in Hong Kong's history. The moment when Hong Kong's identity gained shape as British policies and reflections of the Hong Kong people after the events created the Hong Kong identity known today. Chin barely mentions pre-colonial history in detail. While he acknowledged it has influenced Hong Kong society, he posits that it only became so as we understand it today due to benevolent governance under the British. To assess the post-handover period, Chin's often draws parallels with Imperial Chinese history and their rule over semi-autonomous territories. He, for example, depicts the Chief executive in charge of the Hong Kong state as a local emperor, describing at length how Hong Kong society is under threat of crony capitalism by "feudalistic landlords" in Hong Kong who have allied themselves with the CCP (p. 258). He asserts that the government post-1997 has continued to reduce the autonomy of Hong Kong society by integrating its economy with the Mainland. The government's strategy, according to him, is to rob the territory of Hong Kong of its wealth and take away what makes its society unique, turning into another just Chinese city. He cites the Greater Bay Area initiative—a government plan to integrate Hong Kong with nearby Mainland cities to form a super region— as an "existential threat" to Hong Kong that will kill Hong Kong's political and economic autonomy (p.146).

Chin argues that the post-handover government lacks the courage to push for policies that put Hong Kong society's interests first, especially regarding immigration and autonomy. He stresses that leading politicians in Hong Kong today follow the CCPs unification ideology, which tries to influence Hong Kong people through what he calls the "guilty conscience theory" [負疚論]. According to this theory, Hong Kong people must be grateful to China as it could only develop itself due to Chinese funds and talents escaping during the turmoil in the Mainland. Hong Kong society, it is argued,

benefited from China's suffering, and did not contribute to the motherland due to a lack of patriotism, so it should now atone for its sins. On the contrary, Chin argues that it is China that should express gratitude towards Hong Kong society, and that Hong Kong society bears no guilt. China should reflect on its sins, as the true benefactors in his reading were the British, Taiwanese, Americans, and Japanese, who invested in Hong Kong's economy and society during China's absence. Through comparing administrative standards and rule pre-handover, Chin draws on the past to prepare the groundwork for his future vision of Hong Kong.

HKUSU: the Pre-handover Period as the Source for National Mythmaking

HKUSU aims to seek a new history for the Hong Kong people. One that does necessarily rely on the legitimacy of the story of ancient China as Jiang does. Closing the border between Hong Kong and the Mainland in the 1950s was one of the first crucial events according to one of the HKUSU authors, as the closure Hong Kong's local consciousness to bloom (p. 143). 1967 is key in this rearticulation of the understanding of history as they mark it as a turning point, considering it the starting point of Hong Kong identity or a "turning point for local consciousness" (p. 148). One chapter argues that contrary to the 1967 riots being about anti-imperialism or anti-colonialism, it was in fact about imposing a totalitarian system in Hong Kong. And "who would be so stupid to support that" asks the author rhetorically (p. 169).[67] Another chapter in HKUSU links the "homemade bombs" of "the terrorist 1967 terror campaign" to today's governance under OCTS. To quote: "from the 1967 violence of homemade bombs to today's worsening [one country overriding two systems], these have all strengthened Hong Kongers' recognition of their own identity" (p. 69).[68] Whereas events of 1967 catalysed the initial formation of Hong Kong identity in their view, the, what they consider as, continued oppression post-handover is reinforcing the Hong Kong's people sense of self.

Like Chin, HKUSU draws a line after the 1967 period where the actions of CCP-backed terrorists pushed the Hong Kong people away from the PRC and towards an identity of their own making. While the colonial government was certainly not perfect, the alternative was a totalitarian government that supported a terror campaign that was bombing its citizens. The brutality of the CCP, HKUSU argues, pushed people to support the colonial government, which stood for stability and, following the reforms in the 1970s,[69] implemented many of the social policies fondly remembered in Hong Kong today.

One important contribution of HKUSU is their explicit consideration of possible national myths which might serve as the foundation of a possible Hong Kong nation. They argue that the economic myth of Hong Kong can serve as a foundational narrative for the nation as they write that:

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[67] 甚至六七暴動也不是反殖，左派只要英國人低頭，就不必走頭。根本沒有人要英國人離開，英國人一走，可怕的極權體制就會接手，誰這麼笨。

[68] 由六七暴動的土製炸彈，到今天日益收窄的「一國凌駕兩制」的管治，無一不在加強香港人對自身的民族認同。

[69] Often fondly remembered as the Maclehose era, the name of the governor from 1972 to 1982.

> The economic myth of the "four small dragons of Asia" was a creation of Hong Kong people. These Hong Kong people were not all refugees who had experienced difficult times, but the number of people involved and the meaning behind their story was enough to make the 'refugee wave to Hong Kong' part of Hong Kong's national myth (p. 68).[70]

There are several elements discussed previously in his suggested national myth. There is the idea of the Hong Kong man described earlier who can make their own destiny, a homo economicus who through hard work is in control of their own destiny. There is the theme of solidarity and identity by overcoming adversity, in this case through the shared experience of fleeing the turmoil of the Mainland. There is also the myth of the golden age as one of the four small dragons of Asia which works as a powerful tool of nostalgia and collective memory making. This was an economic myth that several interviewees (I-4, 5, 11, 12) also took pride in, often conveying that they were proud that that such a small place could boast such a worldclass economy. HKUSU engages with these founding moments in other nations' history and, through constant and explicit evaluation of Hong Kong's past and present, frames Hong Kong in nationalist terms. They also make overt comparisons to similar founding myths, such as the Mayflower for the United States of America (also mentioned by Chin as discussed earlier) or the battle of Trafalgar for the British. Drawing theories such as Anderson's imagined community, the national myth, as well as the distinction between civic and ethnic forms of nationalism, HKUSU formulates a conceptual space for the possible existence of Hong Kong nation.

Yu: Under the British, Everything Was Good, Under the Chinese, Everything is Bad

Yu holds that Hong Kong's societal roots trace back to England rather than China, asserting that the Hong Kong people are inheritors of the British tradition. He focuses more contemporary events such as the 1989 Tiananmen Movement and the 2014 Umbrella Movement, rather than the 1967 riots as key moments in localist awareness. This might be because this is an activist work, less concerned with history, and focusing on motivating the people towards action in the wake of the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill Movement. He contends that Hong Kong society has now experienced good colonialism under British rule, and bad colonialism World War Two, under occupation by the Japanese Empire, and currently, post-handover under the CCP, which he likens to the Japanese. Hong Kong governance post-handover, he writes, is a disaster: "It took a hundred years for Hong Kong to learn the protestant culture's concepts and order, before becoming the pearl of the orient; conversely barbarians only need a few hours to change a culture" (p.19).[71] Of note here is his reference to the Christianity and the importance he places on it for Hong Kong's flourishing.

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[70] [亞洲四小龍」的經濟神話，便是這一批香 港人所創。當然，不是所有香港人都是難民和曾經歷 過艱辛的逃亡過程，但當中牽涉的人數之巨和背後的 意義足以令「逃港潮」成為香港的民族神話（National Myth）。

[71] 香港花了一百年時間來學習大英帝國與新教文明的觀念秩序，才成為東方之珠；反之，野蠻改變文明，只需要短短幾個小時就能完成。

Regarding this legacy he further writes that:

> The most valuable legacy of the British rule era in Hong Kong is the spirit of the rule of law. The rule of law is the core value of Hong Kong and the cornerstone of Hong Kong's status as the Pearl of the Orient.[72] (p. 93)

The rule of law as the core value is the cornerstone of the British legacy and a critical part of Yu's utopian idea of a liberal Hong Kong nation-state. He emphasises how Hong Kong was lucky to be colonized by the British and experience a tradition of enlightened rule. Hong Kong had "six good kings" (governors) under the British while the PRC, on the other hand, had only tyrants, and now post-handover, Hong Kong too 'enjoys' this tradition having only bad Chief Executives. One example of the difference in ruling styles between the PRC China and the British is, Yu argues is that the governor of the colony had to swear allegiance to the ruler of England and subject to supervision by the government in England, which took its mandate from the people. The governor served the people, while after the handover, the Chief Executive only served Beijing (p. 183), lacking accountability to the people.

Elsewhere he asserts that that the PRC government knows very well what democracy means as he devotes several essays to Hong Kong's democratic path and cites former PRC premier Zhao Ziyang's [赵紫阳] downfall during the Tiananmen protests as a turning point. According to Yu, Zhao supported democratic reforms in China, which led to his fall from grace after the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Yu suggests that the internal power struggle within the CCP during the Tiananmen protests has contributed to the current challenges faced by Hong Kong. Important to note here is that Yu's view of democracy appears to be a limited one, only acknowledging liberal democracies in the Western tradition as the 'right' form of democracy, and therefore governing system.

In his view, Hong Kong society was a perfect receptable for British governance. He contrasts this to India, which due to the caste system could not absorb on to the British core values to a similar degree. According to Yu, the original character of the people in Hong Kong, here envisioned as Chinese, was receptive to British influence, which resulted in the "higher quality Chinese" mentioned in the previous chapter. He, like some other localist authors as discussed, considers Lingnan and Guangdong culture as the precursor Chinese cultures that greatly influenced Hong Kong's society and culture. As is clear, Yu's discussion of colonial history is often lacking in nuance, taking the path of least resistance to formulate his arguments to motivate the people into action.

Yu draws parallels with other national founding myths, comparing the Chinese who fled to Hong Kong before the PRC's opening to the Puritans on the Mayflower who fled Europe and founded the United States. He, like HKUSU, uses the Mayflower to create a founding myth for Hong Kong, writing that the people's origins in Hong Kong explain why Hong Kong is a rebellious city of people in revolt. [反抗之民; (…) 叛逆之城] (p. 291). The choice of the Mayflower is further pertinent considering Yu's self-professed Christian viewpoint. The Mayflower myth symbolizes the flight from

[72] 英治時代在香港留下最寶貴的遺產，就是法治精神。法治是香港的核心價值，也是香港成為東方之珠的奠基石。

religious persecution, a plight which he himself had experienced with his own works and beliefs, ultimately finding refuge and political asylum in the United States. Seen in this context, perhaps the story of the Mayflower in this regard is not necessarily the story of Hong Kong society, but the story of Yu himself who projects his own biography onto the people in Hong Kong, considering them as a salvational tool for the China that has rejected him.

As is evident from Yu and the other three works, culture and history in Hong Kong have been shaped and reshaped extensively over the past decades by various actors, such as the governments of Hong Kong pre- and post-handover, academics, and popular media. These efforts aim to either bring Hong Kong's identity closer to China or to cultivate a Hong Kong identity that can stand on its own. These latter attempts fall under Chakrabarty's (2008) history 2, a history written by the people—as discussed earlier in the chapter. However, not all Hong Kong localists agree on the degree of disconnect from China. That China, meaning the Chinese nation-state represented by the CCP, needs to be dealt with somehow is a common understanding for many. However, cultural China is harder to deal with. Yu is the most extreme example, as he condemns the entire Chinese culture as imperialist and not worth saving. Chin stands on the opposite end, saying that Hong Kong can represent an advanced form of Chinese culture. Like the interpretation of the people, the interpretation of history lacks consensus on many points, such as the starting point of Hong Kong's history or what and who to include.

5.3 Writing Hong Kong, Writing History

"Hong Kong", writes Erni four years after the handover, "should desire history" as Hong Kong society "is poised for a new social imaginary" (2001, p. 391–392). This history should be written by and for Hong Kongers from their perspective rather than a Chinese or British one. The post-handover growth of cultural studies in Hong Kong academia, Erni reasons, is evidence of a demand for local self-writing. Similarly, Cheung (2001) observes that works destabilizing the dominant colonial historical narrative create space for alternative readings and interpretations of this experience. A primer about Hong Kong society titled *First Lesson in Hong Kong* [香港第一課] (Lee, 2020) underlines this need to distinguish Hong Kong's history from China's, as is clear from its opening chapter, titled "Was Not Hong Kong Part of China since Ancient Times?", and another chapter that addressed the "who" question discussed in the previous chapter, titled "Hong Kongers are Chinese, why do we still need to discuss identity?"[73] The lack of local Hong Kong history hampers Hong Kong's self-understanding, according to Chan (2007) and the two questions posed by *First Lesson in Hong Kong* show how, following Erni and Cheung, Hong Kong must decolonize itself, despite renationalizing efforts of the PRC that hinder decolonization through local self-writing.

Conventional histories of Hong Kong, as the territory is understood today, start their narrative at the colony's founding by the British, highlighting its expansion into a metropole in the post-War

[73] 香港自古以來不就是中國領土嗎 and 香港人都是中國人, 爲何還要討論身份認同。

War Two period, with only cursory attention given to the pre-colonial period. Despite this typical history of pre-colonial Hong Kong has come under increasing scrutiny by localists and academics (Chan, 2012; Li, 2019). For example, the growing localist movements have spurred efforts to develop local history, which attempts to offer alternative readings of Hong Kong. Tsui's work is one such attempt at a Hong Kong history written by and for Hong Kongers, exemplifying Chu's argument that the "recent rise in localism can be seen as an attempt to claim back history 2" (2018, p. 1093) . The term "history 2" is taken from Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2008), where he posits that "history 1" represents the history written from the European, colonial perspective, while "history 2" encompasses alternative narratives. Claiming back "history 2" in this reading, means that Hong Kongers should write their history, using their own categories of analysis[74] rather than basing their history on the British government's (or now the government of the PRC's) master narrative. Localists must develop a "history 2," or a history written by and for Hong Kongers as Erni (2001) might contend.

The concepts of "history 1" and "history 2" emphasize the importance of time and history in nationalism and the narrative of the nation-state as Duara explains how "Individuals learn to identify with nation-states that have supposedly evolved over a long history to reach the self-conscious unity of the two and are thus poised to acquire mastery over the future" (1998, p. 288). Yet, Hong Kong society, at present, diverges in its perspective of time and history from that of the PRC, which poses problems for its integration. The "Century of Humiliation", for example, spanning from the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) to the end of the Second World War, is often portrayed as a period to overcome in the narrative of the PRC government (Gries, 2004). Hong Kong society, however, owes its existence to the Opium Wars, and, as discussed, there is often a debt of gratitude in the interviews and some of the works for the British in instilling civic, liberal values in the populace. Similarly, the post-handover era can be perceived as marking the beginnings of a glorious future, characterized by the narratives of the Chinese dream and China's rise, or as a period where Hong Kong society is dying. These contradictions in the perspective of time and history play a significant part in the tensions in post-handover Hong Kong.

Erni´s article published in 2001 foreshadows a great deal of localist literature on history, which affirms the local desire for a historical project after the handover that does not rely on a British or Mainland Chinese narrative of Hong Kong. One example of this Hong Kong-centric approach is Tsui's works. Tsui, one of the HKUSU authors, as discussed in the previous chapter, would go on to publish histories of his works, resulting in titles such as *Searching for the Homeland* [思索家邦], published in 2017, and *Melancholy Homeland* [鬱躁的家邦] published in 2020.
As he proclaims in *Searching for the Homeland*:

No history, no people, and thus no future

[74] In the context of India for example this meant studying the subaltern, or the lower castes that were ignored in the authoritative state sponsored 'normal' histories.

Hong Kong people: let us write our own history!

By writing our own history, we move forward[75]

Tsui's[76] and other works on Hong Kong history, authored from an often-self-described localist viewpoint, show the changes in attitudes towards Hong Kong society post-handover. Tsui's *Melancholy Homeland* and *Thinking of the Homeland* solve the matter of history by re-evaluating Chinese imperial history. I-11 made mention of the books stating that "Hong Kong should have more historical books like this", noting that in school, Hong Kong history was not a separate subject but part of Chinese history, written from the perspective of the Chinese Empire and capital. While the narrative of the Hong Kong government is increasingly aligned with the PRC narrative of Hong Kong integrating with China, localists oppose this by formulating counter-narratives wherein Hong Kong history and society are distinguished from the PRC.

Nevertheless, this localist project is bound to fail, as Jiang states in *China's Hong Kong* that

> In the past few years, some Hong Kong scholars have attempted to construct an independent identity of the Hong Kong people by writing an independent history of Hong Kong, trying thereby to separate the Hong Kong people from the Mainlander. Nevertheless, this cannot compromise the historical fact that Hong Kong people have always been Chinese (p. 23).

As is evident from Jiang in the preceding chapter, Hong Kong territory and its people are Chinese. In the eyes of Jiang and the government of both PRC (with the CCP as its vanguard party) and Hong Kong, these are indisputable truths. This reading solves the question of heritage and primordialism and forms part of the national telos wherein the nation-state holds a monopoly over a particular people's history, territory, and culture. Alternative narratives challenge this monopoly and are therefore contentious.

Taiwan's government faces a similar challenge and has been de-emphasizing its Chineseness over a Taiwanese identity under the rule of the Democratic Progressive Party (Kaeding, 2011). Taiwan's identity efforts, however, are sponsored by the state, while in Hong Kong, the state emphasizes a shared Chineseness with the Mainland rather than a unique Hong Kongness. Perhaps this is why primordialism is often overlooked when discussing Hong Kong, even among the localists. Hong Kong, the colony from which many histories begin, knows it's starting date and creator. However, the colony's foundation is a shameful event for the PRC, which now controls it. There can be no celebrated founder of Hong Kong as the founders of the colony are considered to be imperialist outsiders, non-Chinese who, through unequal treaties and imperialist war, forced the Qing Empire to cede the territory (Ip, 2020; Rafferty, 1989; Tsang, 2004). If Hong Kong's history and society are to be in a category of its own, it cannot draw on a history already claimed by the PRC government. The three localist works discussed in the previous section are some of the many examples of Hong

[75] 沒有歷史的國族，就沒有未來。香港人：自己歷史自己寫！香港人在改寫自己的歷史，而且是現在進行式。
[76] Noteworthy to note here that Tsui in the works cited, like Chin and Jiang, considers China to be something else or perhaps something more than a nation state, comparing it to an Empire, see Carrico (2023) for a brief discussion.

Kongers ´desiring their own history, inventing their own history and people, with the colony's founding often presenting a convenient origin.

5.4 Four visions of Statecraft and the Future of Hong Kong

As shown, the past in Hong Kong is a particularly contentious matter, with interpretations ranging from admiration to condemnation of both British and PRC governance in Hong Kong. It will come as little surprise that the authors take their interpretation of the past into the future. For instance, if we, as Yu believes, consider that most things good in Hong Kong society happened due British governance, then the future will be shaped in this perspective (which, as we will see means returning to the commonwealth in some way). Regarding the evaluation of the present, the four works show a similar spectrum of views in their framing of Hong Kong's present, ranging from considering the handover as a horrible mistake (and, in response, calling for action) to a blessing. One central point of contention is the evaluation of OCTS. Is it a genius political construction based on Mao's understanding of imperial Chinese politics, as Jiang would have it, a modern form of colonialism which Yu and HKUSU posit, or a blueprint for the future of Hong Kong, as Chin might argue? Is (further) integration with the PRC desirable, or will it lead to the "death of Hong Kong"? I will discuss each work, focusing on their discussion of the post-handover period and the future of Hong Kong society and territory.

Jiang: Towards the Rectification of Historical Wrongs

According to Jiang, many problems in Hong Kong today arise from the problem of name versus actuality. The state of Hong Kong, under OCTS, is a part of the PRC. Yet, the people cannot join the army or receive national education, as the PRC government considers the Hong Kong people a different category of citizens. While Hong Kong's territory is a sovereign part of China, the exercise of sovereignty differs from that of the Mainland, particularly in the diplomatic, legal, and economic domains. The PRC, for example, does not formally recognize dual passports but does so in practice for Hong Kong. The Hong Kong people are citizens of the PRC without enjoying any of the benefits as Jiang, describing how the Chinese state has watered down certain principles in Hong Kong, argues that

> Hong Kongers are not Hong Kong citizens, since citizenship reflects national sovereignty and Hong Kong is not a nation-state. For this reason, in the Basic Law, the "mini-constitution" of Hong Kong, Hong Kongers are referred to as "Hong Kong residents." (…) Nevertheless, despite being Chinese citizens, they neither enjoy the fundamental rights specified in the PRC Constitution nor shoulder the fundamental duties required by the Constitution (p. 143).

Unsurprisingly, to remedy this conundrum, Jiang sees Hong Kong's future as further integrating with the Mainland. He believes that people in Hong Kong will, over time, recognize their Chineseness,

meaning their duty towards the motherland, with the CCP as the vanguard party. To achieve national unity among the people, Jiang proposes that the Hong Kong government needs to make laws that promote citizenship identity and treaties that integrate Hong Kong with the Mainland. He even proposes that Mandarin (Putonghua) should become the language of instruction, as "a common language helps constructing 'one country'" (p. 147).

China's Hong Kong devotes two chapters to OCTS, or the "One Country conundrum" as Jiang terms it. What is the "One Country" of the "Two Systems" exactly, Jiang asks, and how do these "two systems" fit into the current world system of nation-states? How does this political framework fit in with the international standard, and how can it be used to show the ingenuity of the Chinese political system? Jiang's main argument is that OCTS is a brilliant solution drafted by Mao Zedong and later Deng Xiaoping, which draws on historical precedents from previous Chinese Empires. He affirms that OCTS was the solution by the CCP to maintain Hong Kong's prosperity after the handover. Prosperity which, contrary to popular belief, he argues had had "no direct relationship to Britain", to quote Jiang in full:

> Given that sovereignty indubitably belonged to China, it followed that the Chinese government had to consider how to maintain Hong Kong's economic prosperity, which had no direct relationship with Britain. Nevertheless, proceeding from the realities of the situation, Hong Kong's prosperity was indeed closely enmeshed with successful British governance. (p. 106)

This is why OCTS was created, as well as the assurance that Hong Kong society would remain unchanged for fifty years following the handover to safeguard this prosperity. How exactly this prosperity had no direct relationship to Britain while also citing "successful British governance" as a key factor is a contradiction he does not unpack. Rather, it seems that Jiang here plays a game of causality, saying that while British governance was important, in the end it was the hard-working Hong Kong people (which we must not forget are Chinese in his eyes) that made Hong Kong prosperous.

The paradoxes between Hong Kong society and China's, Jiang argues, are due to the Western political concepts that "coerce China's political reality" (p. 155). The country in One Country, Two Systems, to Jiang, refers to the civilization state of China that precedes modern nation-states. This civilizational state links Hong Kong and China together in a "community of destiny" due to their historical and cultural closeness, meaning that Hong Kong and China's community of destiny is disconnected from Western theoretical concepts of state and nation. This means that in Jiang's view, which is based on China's classical political traditions, the framework of OCTS predates the modern nation-state. OCTS, he notes, is inspired by the imperial governance of the outer regions of Chinese empires, such as Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang.

Similarly, Jiang draws on the word for country or nation, *guojia* [国家], which embodies both the meaning of the British state and country:

> The people are bound together through the natural attachment to land. Thus, the concept bears the meanings of "motherland," "territory" and the "countryside." Whereas state stands for a political organization constructed through abstract legal systems, and focuses more on the intrinsic relationship between "citizen" and "national polity" (p. 142).[77]

Jiang's analysis mirrors the sentiment expressed by I-9 in the previous chapter. Still, while I-9 considers this as a problem, Jiang sees it as showcasing the difference (and perhaps superiority) of the Chinese way of statecraft. Jiang goes on to argue that OCTS is one of the reasons why Western-centric conceptions of the nation cannot entirely apply to China. He draws comparisons to the rule of the outer regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang, which he considers historical examples of an OCTS-type rule on which the post-handover Hong Kong society is rooted. From Jiang's perspective, the Chinese state today is more akin to the Chinese empire than a nation-state, encompassing multiple political systems and ruling over a cultural and ethnic Chinese populace. To quote Jiang: "Hence, despite British rule, in terms of national governance, Hong Kong territory has always been part of China in the political ideology of the CPC because in traditional political ideas, the state is an entity of culture or civilization rather than a legal entity" (p. 93). Or, as stated in the introduction of the Chinese edition, regarding the word *Zhongguo* and how it is now translated as China: "so called '*Zhongguo'* is not only one of the hundred and more countries in the United Nations, it is first of all one of the great civilizations" (p. 1).[78] As I already showed in the previous chapter, Jiang positions China as a great civilization to manoeuvre China out of the nation-state. He draws on the political framework created by Deng and compares it to Napoleon's civil code as it "reincorporated the classical civilized China into the scope of the modern nation-state, thereby displaying an appeal distinct from Western political systems" (p. 211). While "Napoleon developed the political imagining of the modern nation-state to the extreme in France", Jiang writes, "Deng Xiaoping resurrected the political imagining of 'China'." Jiang is laying the groundwork for his vision of a Chinese world order.

A key to this framework is found in the interview appendix of the book where he introduces the work as he states that:

> Of course, we should place the issue of Hong Kong not only against the background of dispute between China and the West, but also the dispute between the ancient and modern times, especially from the prospective of modern nation-building put forward by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Two of them led an unprecedented transformation for ancient China in accordance with modern ideas, thus making the nation to go beyond the continental country to embrace the sea. We definitely should also recognize the intrinsic relevance and consistency between the classical tradition and the new socialist tradition, especially that the framework of

[77] "国家"这个概念在英文中有两个含义： country 与 state 。 country 是与特定的土地联系在一起的政治组 织，强调的是国民与所居住国家自然领土之间的内在关 系。" Original Chinese from Jiang (2008, p. 191) since it involves translation issues in the actual work itself.

[78] 但所谓 "中国"，并不仅仅只是联合国上百个国家 中之一"国"，而首先是一大文明母体。

> "one country, two systems" is derived from the wisdom of Chinese classical thought and wisdom to solve frontier issues. (p. 263)

Jiang's view is evident in this quotation, wherein the ancient China was transformed in accordance with "modern ideas", while simultaneously stressing a need to "recognize the intrinsic relevance and consistency between the classical tradition and the new socialist tradition", meaning that the nation-state model must be placed within the larger scope of China's political tradition.

In this regard, Hong Kong society, to Jiang, is an example to the rest of the world of the strength of China's governing style and why it is the only surviving ancient empire or civilization. Recognition of China by the people, he believes, will lead to prosperity for Hong Kong and the motherland whose destinies are linked. In his reading, the Hong Kong territory will remain China's gateway to the world, an international hub with OCTS becoming an example of how the resumption of sovereignty over Taiwan can be accomplished. OCTS, for Jiang, is an example of a Chinese or Confucian-based law model and (modern) states that can serve as an alternative to the Western model as he writes that:

> If we could want China's rise contributing to the history of humankind, then economic growth is not enough. We must provide a political system, which is different from that of modern western civilization, underpinned by our own political philosophy. We, the Chinese, should have that kind of ambition and confidence. In this regard, Hong Kong provides a vivid example and powerful stimulus for us to study the future of China's political system. (p. 287)

As is apparent, Jiang has grand aims for China and Hong Kong, even if the exact makeup of the kind of political system China should make is left uncertain in *China's Hong Kong*[79].

Chin: Preserve Hong Kong under OCTS and Dream of a Chinese Federation

There are two components to Chin's vision for Hong Kong's future. The first is in the short to medium term, stemming from his self-described realpolitik view in which he advocated persisting under OCTS, maintaining as much autonomy as possible under the PRC. The second consists of a long-term utopian dream of a Chinese Federation of which Hong Kong can be one part. He holds grand plans for the region, proposing a kind of Federation of Greater East Asia encompassing greater China (Mainland; Hong Kong; Macau; Taiwan), Korea, and Japan. Hong Kong, being a part of the proposed federation or union of nations, could serve a similar neutral arbitrator role that he considers Switzerland to hold within the European Union. Chin writes that the path ahead will be difficult and that Hong Kong society should continue to contribute to the Chinese All-under-Heaven China. He believes that Hong Kong society can bring change to the Mainland as the Hong Kong state is a vanguard city of the Chinese people in terms of its modernity, adherence to the rule of law, and civic

[79] Jiang has written about this in other publications such as Jiang, S. (2019).

values ushered in under the British. Only by viewing it through this lens can a long-term strategy for Hong Kong be considered.

For the first component, one of the main goals of *Hong Kong as a City State* is conveyed by the chapter titled "Hong Kong only needs autonomy, not necessarily independence." Chin's notion of city states is romantic, observing that the city state is a participatory state that works for the citizens rather than the citizens working for the state as in a nation or empire. Citing Aristotle's words about the good of the city state, Chin imagines Hong Kong as a place where everyone can participate and integrate into the city as long as they embrace its values. City states embrace liberal values, he writes, as they place freedom at their highest: "The German city states say 'the Air of the city state makes you feel free' (Stadluft macht frei) entering a city state, we can enjoy the air of freedom as abundantly as the wind" (p. 93).[80]

How this would work in Hong Kong, with a population of around seven million, rather than Aristotle's or even the German city states' much smaller populations, is unclear. Somewhat contradicting his utopian ideals of the Greater Asia federation, he writes that Hong Kong should abandon the idea of reuniting with China, and instead focus on cultivating local consciousness under OCTS, using it as a way to continue demarcating Hong Kong and Mainland society[81]. Looking towards the future, Chin mentions how Hong Kong used to have several cities: Victoria City, Aberdeen, and Kowloon City. These are examples of cities that have now merged into the larger city or territory of Hong Kong. Chin writes that like the historical city states, Hong Kong can have multiple areas that can function as cities. These cities could presumably foster their own sense of community and identity within the larger polity that is the would-be city state of Hong Kong

Chin proposes to practice realpolitik with idealism, advocating that Hong Kong society maintain its prosperity by carefully balancing its relationship with the Mainland. Despite its tumultuous relationship with the CCP, Chin asserts that Hong Kong remains indispensable to China as a financial hub and gateway to the global economy. Furthermore, he posits that Hong Kong's rule of law and international society make it a vital place to preserve. Therefore, maintaining Hong Kong as a city state rather than an independent state is the best course of action, as he motions that it might not be "the politically correct course, but the politically safe one" (p. 215).[82] His argument relies on the power of Hong Kong as a financial centre and the fact that Hong Kong's economy is still crucial to China's development. He warns Hong Kong people not to be naive about the CCP, which he describes in terms such as a bandit, robber party, or a party in which heartless brutality stands as a central ruling method (p. 47).[83] Chin imagines Hong Kong's city state as an indefinite continuation of OCTS indefinitely with nearly full autonomy. Apart from certain international affairs and defence left to protectors (Mainland), Hong Kong would be autonomous. He rejects the notion of Hong Kong as a

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[80] 德國的城邦諺語是「城市的風使人自由」Stadtluftmachtfrei，入了城邦，享受的自由如風一樣的舒服和充沛。
[81] 放棄中國大一統意識，改爲詮譯一國兩制之下的香港本土意識代表香港入與中共周旋，在政治鬥爭之中劃出中港之間的楚河漢界。
[82] 香港自治議程是不政制正確但政治安全的議程。
[83] 地獄鬼國，匪黨賊民。p. 47, and 無悔意的殘暴是中共統治的心法。 p. 48.

relic of past Chinese empires, instead framing it as a modern European-style city-state with its own distinct identity and governance structure.

This means that despite being a fierce critic of the current Chinese government, he does see a future for Hong Kong under OCTS as it can help to foster the localist consciousness he envisions. He recognizes that the future of Hong Kong hinges on the recognition of its indispensable role for China, which is why he gambles that the Hong Kong economy is needed for its financial and international capabilities and for being the only place in China with the rule of law. He warns that the PRC government will harm Hong Kong's society and economy in its attempts to control and integrate Hong Kong society with the Mainland. Contrary to Jiang, Chin argues that rather than a brilliant invention of China, OCTS was something the PRC was forced to give to Hong Kong. It is a continuation of the British system that allowed Hong Kong to prosper and develop its culture and identity. As is clear from the previous sections, Chin has little positive to say about governance under OCTS. If the CCP integrates Hong Kong, it will lose Hong Kong's strengths. The CCP, Chin reasons, should allow Hong Kong under OCTS be autonomous and benefit financially from the territory. China should not kill the goose that laid the golden eggs, a metaphor often used for Hong Kong (e.g., Rafferty, 1989; Tsang, 2004).

To maintain their autonomy, Chin proposes that "Hong Kongers should continue exercising their civil power through culture and economic means, knowing that it will be difficult to deal with the tyrannical government and property moguls, not to mention the evil murderous, face-loving neo-colonial overlord" (p. 174).[84] He claims that the PRC government might either let Hong Kong maintain autonomy out of necessity or alternatively, there is the possibility that the PRC finally acknowledges the value of Hong Kong's economy. Rather than waiting for this possibility, however, he outlines six points for what the Hong Kong localists and autonomists need to do:

1. "Know local history, re-establish cultural glory,
2. Participate in politics and have positive interactions,
3. Seek knowledge, wisdom, and benevolence,
4. Keep the faith, stop doubting,
5. Establish Hong Kong's cultural symbols and emblems,
6. Connect with overseas Hong Kongers and create a global network. (p. 174)"[85]

These points advise Hong Kong society to turn inward, consider what makes the local, and consider their strengths. As he writes elsewhere, Hong Kong should distance itself from China and save itself, as China, he argues, is not a stable nation and is headed for disaster (p. 204). According to Chin, Hong Kong needs China to survive, but it can also not depend on China. The people should in his view not be swayed by ideas of cultural China or China as the hometown [文化中國、鄉土中國], as these terms only serve to distract people of Chin's imperative of saving Hong Kong. He mirrors Yu here in

[84] 假若中共並無改變作風，香港人將要用民間力量發動文化復興和經濟復興，與港共暴政和地產霸權周旋，甚為吃力。此外，更要應付兇惡、愚笨而愛面子的新殖民宗主。

[85] 一 識本土歷史，重建文化榮譽;二參與政治，良性互動; 三　讀書求學，尚智行仁; 四堅定信念，停止疑惑 ;五建立香港文化符號象徵; 六 、聯 繫 海 外 港 人 ， 擴 闊 世 界 網 絡。

some way in his rejection of Chineseness, but rather than rejecting it wholesale, Chin's argument is directed more towards opposing PRC state narratives. Or as he argues in another part, "the weapon of the CCP is the idea that China is in a permanent transition state which allows the party to demand the people's unity" (p. 40).[86]

In the long term, Chin states that Hong Kong's society should hope for a democratic China. While a democratic China might not immediately benefit Hong Kong society, it might benefit in the long run. Chin invokes the tyranny of the majority, drawing a comparison to the Nazi regime, which he notes did also enjoy popular support at the time. This presumably means that even if China becomes democratic, Hong Kong might still be susceptible to the tyranny of the majority. Autonomy for Hong Kong is therefore paramount, no matter the situation on the Mainland. In Chin's judgment, the CCP has brainwashed most people in the Mainland and cannot be trusted (p. 47), which is another factor that rules out the benefits of democracy in China for Hong Kong. These perspectives clash with the utopian vision described earlier, which was that of Hong Kong in a federation of greater China. However, a federation is a long-term goal, whereas Hong Kong as a city state is a short to medium goal for Hong Kong.

Through the short to medium-term goal of the city state, Chin posits that the people can flourish once more, as he writes lyrically that:

> Once Hong Kong's righteous people have made up their minds, the autonomy movement will open a path of prosperity. The dragon and lion flag represents the Pearl of the Orient, and the dragon and lion are a testament to Hong Kong's status as the capital of the East and West and a symbol of courage and will. (…) If Hong Kong can reach this consensus, it will be much easier to solve many social problems. By reorganizing the political system by practicing autonomy, Hong Kong will prosper.[87] (p. 192)

Hong Kong presumably will prosper as an autonomous city state and reclaim its status as "Capital of the East and West". All that is ostensibly left to do is for the righteous people in Hong Kong to make up their mind. He advocates that this somewhat utopian city state that the future Hong Kong city state should remain humble and pursue an intermediary role, focusing on maintaining its autonomy and unique status as a (neutral) financial and political broker, which connects to his vision of the Switzerland model for the future Chinese federation. He posits that Hong Kong should keep OCTS under a "localist consciousness", which would be able to contend with the CCP. If the autonomy of the Hong Kong state is secured, Chin suggests that then the CCP can, to an extent, be controlled as a force outside the border. To illustrate this, he uses the metaphor of shrubbery, the city state of Hong Kong, holding back the desert, the PRC (p. 59).

Chin distinguishes seven objectives that autonomy in Hong Kong should achieve:

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[86] 共政權的過渡論，是它統戰華人的利器。

[87] 香港義人一旦決志，自治運動便開出康莊大道。龍獅旗的頭頂代表東方之珠，龍獅是印證香港為中西文流之都，亦是勇武意志之表(...) 若香港凝聚到此共識，要解決很多社會問題就容易得多，實踐自治重整政治制度，香港勢必繁盛。

1. Reorganize leadership, neutralize bureaucratic hegemony,
2. Promote public accountability, encourage public oversight,
3. Cultural autonomy,
4. Economic autonomy,
5. Guarantee local investment safety,
6. Create a complete economic structure,
7. Guarantee the livelihood of the lower classes (p. 230).

In his reading, autonomy is the pragmatic solution for Hong Kong, as independence is impossible. Autonomy, in Chin's eyes, is needed to maintain the dignity of the people of Hong Kong and protect their general, economic, and political way of life. He further contends that the post-handover governments, in collaboration with the CCP, are undermining the autonomy of the Hong Kong state by implementing policies that encourage crony capitalism and promote further integration with the Mainland. He encourages Hong Kongers to show their value to the Mainland, take back control, and put Hong Kong first. "We should not be afraid of chaos in Hong Kong", he writes, but "should be afraid that Hong Kong will not be chaotic enough" (p. 34).[88] How exactly this vision of autonomy differs from one of independence is difficult to grasp. Perhaps, like Jiang's idea of the continued practice of sovereignty, Chin's solution allows Hong Kong to be de facto-independent while being a part of China on paper. As Jiang suggests, a similar idea of 'name and practice' (meaning that it is part of the PRC in name but independent in practice) is now a solution rather than a problem. Chin, in fact, discusses Jiang directly several times. He writes about Jiang's and, by extension, the CCP's political vision that combines Chinese Marxism and Confucianism and Jiang's view of Hong Kong, which he dismisses by writing that "this nonsense highlights the CCP's idea of governing" (p. 142).[89]

Chin's disdain for Jiang's perspective on governance and the CCP's leadership style is evident, as he perceives it as a path leading to disaster. He anticipated a major crisis for a CCP-led PRC wherein the Hong Kong city state could help by providing cultural and institutional support through its expertise in the rule of law and other (liberal) constructions. As he states forthrightly "Survive with Hong Kong, or die with it" is the advice Chin writes in English that should be given to the CCP (p. 204).[90] He suggests that the Basic Law can serve as a starting point for a constitution, serving as a model document for a future state that combines the best of Chinese traditional (Confucian) traits and the liberal democratic values on which Hong Kong society is based. As is apparent, he has high praise for Hong Kong society and its people, which, according to him, has preserved the legacy of Imperial China and Republican China, and, together with the legacy of the British, is a treasure for China that can contribute significantly to China's development. Chin frames Hong Kongers as the future of Chinese people. In his reading, they are a more modern and advanced version of Chinese people that have already undergone a process of modernization in which China currently finds itself. Therefore,

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[88] 不怕香港亂，最怕香港不夠亂。

[89] 胡言亂語顯示中共的治國思想。

[90] 我們對於中共的忠告，一向如是 Survive with Hong Kong, or die with it.

Hong Kong is ostensibly set up to be a vanguard for China, helping it become a modern, liberal, civic nation-state, and perhaps even something more.

He argues that destroying the Hong Kong city state would lower the likelihood of revolution but would also prevent the party from futureproofing itself against the coming crisis (p. 148).[91] As discussed in the previous chapter, comparisons to imperial China are common. The CCP, for example, has the mode of an ancient imperial state, he claims (p. 93)[92] as he argues that if the CCP forcibly integrates Hong Kong society and state into the Mainland, the situation will be similar to the late Qing Empire, which resulted in upheaval and the death of the Empire. Chin sees historical parallels to the situation in Hong Kong under OCTS and warns that the CCP will be overthrown in the ensuing chaos. He suggests that maintaining Hong Kong's autonomy would supposedly allow the CCP to prolong its rule and learn from Hong Kong. Like Jiang wrote about OCTS, Chin considers imperial China's dominion over its numerous vassal states a possible model for Hong Kong's future relation to China.

Chin has grand ambitions for Hong Kong and China, considering the future as a kind of Chinese commonwealth with different autonomous semi-independent parts that would form the Chinese nation. As he proclaims near the end of the book:

> China is everything under heaven. It is not a country. It is the flow of benevolent rule. It is not an extension of blood and race. It is actually a combination of Oceanic China and Continental China, which forms the concept of greater China. Oceanic China is Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and the South Pacific Countries. Continental China is mainland China, which can be a federal system. Establishing the Federal Republic of China is a viable system that can be constructed, depending on the situation (p. 223-224).[93]

This grand vision is alluded to throughout his book. Like the dream of Greater East Asia, Hong Kong, together with Taiwan and the four separate ruling regimes (Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, the Mainland), could form something like a Chinese Federation or Chinese Association of Nations [中華國協; 中華邦聯]. A Federation that uses a Chinese dollar [華圓] and which would vote on issues such as foreign policy like the European Union while remaining comprised of independent polities. As a city state, Hong Kong would serve as a mediator (the Switzerland model). According to Chin, this would clear up the confusion between ethnic and civic definitions of China, becoming "not an extension of blood and race" but meaning a broadly defined East Asian Confucian World order (p. 223).

In his grand vision for the future of China as a cultural empire, his writing becomes most activist and extravagant, stating that Hong Kong people are righteous and must persist against the evil CCP. Drawing parallels with Martin Luther and the Roman Empire, amongst many others, he argues

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[91] 毀滅香港的城邦格局，可以為中共舒緩革命威脅，換來苟安的局面但也令中共無法鍛煉自己，無法抵擋種種山雨欲來的危機。

[92] 現在的中共就是古代的帝國主義狀態。

[93] 中華是天下,不是國家,是仁義禮法之流布，不是血緣種族之伸延。中華邦聯的構思，其實是海洋中華與大陸中華的結合，是個大中華的理念。海洋中華是香港、台灣、日本、韓國、南洋諸國。大陸中華就是中國本土，中國本土可行聯邦制度，建立中華聯邦共和國 (Federal Republic of China)，此為穩妥之道，但要視乎情勢。

that one must never stop hoping as all empires must fall eventually. His reference to Martin Luther, might presumably be due to his position as a righteous Christian figure who stood up against a seemingly indomitable empire. The CCP, in this reading, would therefore be wise to learn from the liberal Hong Kong society to survive for longer. However, he does not reconcile this portrayal of empires as evil with the concept of a greater Chinese Federation, which could be perceived as imperialistic in nature. The disconnect between Chin's critique of imperial governance and his advocacy for a broader Chinese (or possibly Confucian) Federation, possibly including Korea and Japan as well, remains unaddressed.

There are similarities in Jiang's state ideology in Chin's *Hong Kong as a City State.* But whereas Jiang envisions China as a great and ancient cultural empire/civilization under the CCP, Chin argues that this can only come to fruition after the destruction of the CCP. Furthermore, Chin leans heavily into what Jiang refers to as the "inapplicable Western values" and, rather than disparaging them, celebrates these civic and liberal values brought over by the British as a boon for Hong Kong and, eventually, China as Hong Kong can propel China into the future as an autonomous unit within a Greater China [華夏]. Like the Greek city states he admires, the would-be city state of Hong Kong would become part of a larger socio-political unit of Greater China but maintain its autonomy. Chin's assumptions rely on a future without the CCP, whereas the party is an unquestionable constant in Jiang's narrative of China and Hong Kong. This stark contrast underscores Chin's daring vision for Hong Kong society and even East Asia, where Confucian and liberal ideals come together in utopian harmony.

HKUSU: Fomenting the Possibility of a Hong Kong Nation

Unlike the other three works, *On Hong Kong as a Nation* does not offer a consistent vision of Hong Kong's future. Instead, it concerns itself with creating the space for the Hong Kong nation, creating a framework for a people, an identity, and history. One significant contribution that HKUSU has made to localism in Hong Kong is that they problematize existing categories, questioning who belongs to the Chinese nation and the assumption of a China and Hong Kong society's shared culture, history, and future. While it is easy to point towards independent nationhood as the only logical solution to the rhetoric in HKUSU, this does not have to be the case. As discussed previously, they, for example, draw consistent comparisons to other (would-be) nations, such as Scotland, Catalonia, and Tibet, as possible alternative solutions or potential dead ends.

Supposedly, continued autonomy under OCTS or something like a Scottish or Catalonian approach could also be a political aim for the Hong Kong nation. As they argue, a people and a nation do not necessarily translate into desires for autonomy and independence, writing in the preface that: "The degree of autonomy varies between nations, for example, if internal autonomy can fulfil

demands, or the price of sovereignty is too high, independence is not the only way out" (p. 3).[94] The final phrase, "independence is not the only way out", is noteworthy when compared to the protest phrase "Hong Kong independence, the only way out", which gained traction at the 2019 protests,[95] reflecting the hardening attitudes of protesters.

Considering the general perspective of HKSU of Hong Kong society after the handover being one of repression and approaching tyranny, it seems hard to argue that the same system should be continued. While an outright call for independence might be too radical at the time of publication, just before major social movements upended the localist playing field, they do prepare the groundwork for such a call.

Yu: Independence or Death

As its name implies, Yu Jie's Hong Kong Independence has no problem advocating for independence. *W*ritten six years after the publication of HKUSU, the book shows the changed discourse of some aspects of Hong Kong localism. "One country" has overwhelmed "two systems", Yu writes, and "one country" will claim Hong Kong for itself, leading to its demise. Hong Kong people and society must resist and become independent or perish. As he vividly illustrates in his appraisal of OCTS:

> 1997 was not a glorious 'handover' but a tragic 'fall'. From 1997 onwards, Hong Kong was degraded daily by the 'parallel traders' grabbing milk powder and Chinese women giving birth in Hong Kong, degraded by the syndicates in politics and business who sold out Hong Kong, degraded by the Chief Executive of the covert party, degraded by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government, and degraded by the wanton tyranny of Beijing. Hong Kong is becoming nothing like the homeland, of which there can only be one. Instead of returning to the motherland, we have fallen to tyranny (…) One Country, Two Systems, rather than being a guarantee for eternal peace, is a sugar-coated poison (p. 134 & p. 316).[96]

Like Jiang and Chin, Yu discusses the problem of OCTS in separating the residents of Hong Kong from China. If the sovereignty of Hong Kong lies with the 1.4 billion Chinese people, Yu asks, then why does Hong Kong not enjoy the same rights as the Mainland? This contradiction mirrors the same "name and practice" issue brought up by Jiang and Chin. Like Jiang, Yu posits that despite being a part of China, Hong Kong people do not enjoy any of the rights of the Chinese people. It seems, Yu writes, that "it is not Hong Kong people who manufacture Hong Kong independence but Beijing, in whose eyes Hong Kong exists outside the borders" (p. 136).[97] By positioning the desire for

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[94] 但各民族對自決之追求程度不一，例如當自治已能滿足內部須求，或爭取主權的代價過高時，獨立就非唯一出路。

[95] From 獨立就非唯一出路 to 香港獨立唯一出路。

[96]一九九七年對於香港來說，並非榮耀的「回歸」，而是悲劇性的「淪陷」。九七之後，香港一天天地淪陷於搶購奶粉的「水客」和赴香港生子的中國孕婦，淪陷於政商賣港集團，淪陷於地下黨特首，淪陷於太上皇中聯辦，淪陷於北京如臂使指的暴政。香港正在變得跟我們回不去的家鄉毫無二致。不是回歸於祖國，而是淪陷於暴政 (...)『一國兩制』不是永保安寧的定海神針，更是糖衣毒藥。

[97] 看來，製造「港獨」的不是香港人，而是北京當局—在他們眼中，香港就是「境外」。

independence as a result of OCTS, Yu flips the script and contends that rather than integrating the people into their supposed ancestral homeland, OCTS has catalysed feelings of difference between the two.

Despite this side-effect of OCTS, he contends that continuing OCTS would mean that Hong Kong society will lose its uniqueness and freedom and perish. Yu states that there is "no hope for anyone tied to China" as Hong Kong people need to "try to break free from the ugly label of 'China' to grasp their own free and bright future" (p. 358).[98] Hong Kong must, therefore, pursue de-Chinafication, which according to him, is the only realistic path for the future.

In this context, Yu coins the "Hong Kong Dream" [香港夢], independent from the China Dream promoted by Xi Jin Ping's administration, which he describes as imperial and fascist. For Yu, the Hong Kong Dream is an independent Hong Kong where the core values (the rule of law, human rights, integrity, honesty, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly) are upheld and taught to every citizen. As there can be no communication between the "enslaver" (CCP) and "enslaved" (Chinese), Yu encourages total separation of Hong Kong and China (p. 394) which in his view means that Hong Kong society must stop being a slave and forge its own path, oppose the idea of Chinese unification or greater China (as advocated by Jiang and Chin, for example), and align itself with the West. As he writes near the end of the book: "The day Hong Kong becomes independent, the Pearl of the Orient will no longer be dirty, and "Do You Hear the People Sing?"[99] in Cantonese will become the national anthem of Hong Kong, resonating through the clouds and inspiring people. (p. 429)[100]

The stakes are high as he dramatically states in one of the final essays Hong Kong society has entered a new stage of combat with evil:

> Who are the enemies of Hong Kong? It is not enough to oppose the Communist Party, but we must also deconstruct the triple "collective unconscious" of "China", "Chinese culture", and "Chinese people", which are essentially evil. Without recognizing that the terms "China", "Chinese culture", and "Chinese people" are synonymous with evil, and without wiping China, an upgraded version of the Nazi empire, from the face of the earth, there is no future for Hong Kong and Taiwan, or the 1.4 billion 'low-end people' in this great concentration camp, unprecedented in human history. I have devoted my life to the intellectual and spiritual deconstruction of China, Chinese people, and Chinese culture (p. 353).[101]

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[98] 中國也沒有未來，任何人跟中國捆綁在一起都沒有希望；反之，努力掙脫「中國」這個醜陋的標籤和沉重的鐐銬的香港人，必定擁有自由而美好的未來。

[99] A popular song from the musical Les Misérables and an unofficial protest anthems of Hong Kong's social movement in 2014 and 2019.

[100] 等到香港獨立的那一天，東方之珠不再蒙塵，而粵語的《Do You Hear the People Sing? 》將成為香港的國歌，響徹雲霄，激勵人心。

[101] 目前，香港已經進入與邪惡短兵相接、貼身肉搏的階段。香港的敵人是誰？僅僅反共是不夠的，還必須解構本質上就是邪惡的「中國」、「中國文化」和「中國人」這三重根深蒂固的「集體無意識」。不認識到「中國」、「中國文化」和「中國人」這三個名詞就是邪惡的代稱，不將中國這個升級版的納粹帝國從地球上抹去，香港和臺灣以及在這座人類歷史上亙古未有的大集中營中的十四億「低端人口」，都沒有未來。我一生都將致力於從思想和精神層面上解構中國、中國人和中國文化。

Clearly, Yu's program is militant, advocating for the total annihilation of the CCP and the PRC and the deconstruction of Chineseness. Yu's comparison of the CCP to the Nazis is not an isolated occurrence, as we saw in Chin's comparison of the popularity of the CCP. During the 2019 protests, comparing the CCP and China to the Nazis was a common rhetorical strategy. Posters featuring the label "Chinazi" could be found online and were shared through social media (see Figure 5). The image below shows a typical example, with the stars of the PRC flag re-arranged into a swastika.

Figure 5 A Chinazi poster from the 2019 protests, source: telegram

Independence, for Yu, is a natural right of the Hong Kong people. In this regard, he proposes that the PRC must be broken up, as the people's wishes for independence must be respected, listing Hong Kong, amongst other would-be nation-states inside claimed PRC territories such as Taiwan, Manchuria, Tibet, and Turkmenistan, and urging the readers not to assume such independence would be impossible. If the reader believes in his vision of China's future, then it is possible that someday an independent Hong Kong can exist, as he writes that all empires must fall. Therefore, Hong Kongers need to prepare for the historical moment when people can presumably seize independence. To presumably motivate people, Yu frequently references the fall of the Soviet Union and the fate of the Baltic states, which faced the Soviet 'emperor' to gain independence. Just as the people of the Baltics won against an empire, so presumably can Hong Kongers.

However, Yu contradicts himself occasionally by arguing that Hong Kong society has no strength to fight China. However, whereas this leads Chin to profess realpolitik and advocate for autonomy within China, Yu argues that independence is the only possible solution. While Chin believes that Hong Kong's territory is still crucial to the Mainland due to its financial power, Yu believes that the territory of Hong Kong has lost its economic value, comparing the Hong Kong economy to a squeezed-out lemon. According to Yu, the region of Hong Kong has lost its value to

China, leading to the CCP turning Hong Kong into an "ordinary Chinese city"[102] and people who love Beijing, not Hong Kong, have infiltrated the government (a similar argument Chin makes). He warns that Hong Kong society is on the road to enslavement, which is why he argues that Hong Kong must separate from China and Chineseness entirely.

Despite the doom and gloom narrative so far, he does see hope in the growing unrest in Hong Kong, e.g., the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2016 Fishball Riots (which refers to the spontaneous and localized street protests in Hong Kong triggered by the government's attempt to restrict street food vendors, particularly those selling fishballs, sparking wider discontent over perceived encroachments on local culture and freedoms), and the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill movement. These he considers as signs of that the Hong Kong people are waking up to China's strategy.

After the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the 2016 'Fishball Revolution' [魚蛋革命] or Fishball Riots is another critical event that changed Hong Kong overnight, according to Yu. He compares the 2016 'Fishball Revolution' to the Mainland's June Fourth Tiananmen Protests or Taiwan's February 28th massacre, each a catalyst for social and political change. Yu claims that Hong Kong changed overnight in the Fishball Riots. "Who would imagine, in 1997", he writes, describing the reasons for the 2016 riots, "that milk powder, pregnant Mainland women, and the China-Hong Kong visa scheme would be the main points of conflicts between Hong Kong and China?" (p. 145), arguing that localist consciousness has entered the mainstream from this moment onward.

He predicts that in the wake of 2016, de-Chinafication will become the mainstream ideology of the Hong Kong people, and traditional oppositional politics in Hong Kong (which led nowhere, according to him) will be replaced with contentious politics. He further argues that the 2019 protests prove that Hong Kong can only be free through de-Chinafication. 2019 showed how different Hong Kong generations could stand shoulder-to-shoulder against China to "take hold of their destiny and fight for freedom" (p. 133). Yu warns the people of Hong Kong of the CCP's capacity and supposed willingness to use force against Hong Kong society. He believes they should prepare for the day when most Hong Kong people are unwilling to be enslaved, and independence becomes a realisable vision, writing fiercely that

> Only by opposing 'China', 'Chinese people', and 'Chinese culture' at the same time can Hong Kong 'gain freedom through resistance' and be elevated from the 'Pearl of the Orient' to the 'Pearl of the West.' (p. 352). [103]

His vision of Hong Kong and China leaves little room for negotiation. Hong Kong will persevere through resistance, or it will perish. He asserts that Hong Kong (and perhaps Taiwan and the Mainland) have entered an era of courageous movements[104] where youths no longer accept the status quo (p. 118), and this gives hope for the future.

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[102] 成為「中國內地」的一個普通城市 (p. 51) .
[103] 反對「中國」、「中國人」和「中國文化」(…)香港方能「因反對，得自由」，方能從「東方之珠」昇華為「西方之珠」。
[104] 在香港，「勇武社運」的時代已到來。

Yu's rhetoric is undeniably radical, as he repeatedly suggests that peaceful solutions might not be viable and that more drastic measures might be necessary to ensure Hong Kong's future. He presents two paths for Hong Kong, either free from China like Taiwan or Singapore, or a colony of China under OCTS (p. 116). He contends that the destiny of the would-be Hong Kong state must be to join the British Commonwealth and become something like Scotland and Quebec, a nation within a nation under the British. Of course, how this arrangement would make up true "independence" as he envisions it, is another matter altogether. Throughout *Hong Kong Independence,* Yu presents a belief in the people and their righteousness, perhaps partly from his Christian, conservative background. In his perspective, the people's will is indomitable, and if only the majority of Hong Kongers could realize their potential, then the people could achieve freedom. This is freedom in nationalist terms, as the people (and individuals) can only reach their full potential through self-determination. In this regard, Yu is a true believer in the doctrine of nationalism.

5.5 The Future of Hong Kong as a (Dying) Homeland

The discussion of the future of Hong Kong society, especially the somewhat utopian visions conjured up by Chin and Yu, presume that there is a Hong Kong society in the first place that can get there. In this section, I conclude the chapter by discussing the phrase "Hong Kong is dying", which has made its appearance occasionally throughout the work. Like the discussion of the keychains in the previous chapter, I use this phrase to discuss matters relating to the chapter, in this case identify formation, nationalism, the growing diaspora and the idea of the homeland, and the future of Hong Kong society and their relation to the physical territory.

In many of my interviews, a characteristic that often emerges, reminiscent of a refugee identity, is the apparent ease with which they, in essence, leave their homeland or give it for dead. I encountered phrases such as "Hong Kong is dying", or "Hong Kong is already dead" [香港死緊; 香港已死], frequently in Hong Kong society from 2019 to 2022, laying bare the complex relation the people of Hong Kong have to the place of Hong Kong. When I asked my interviewees what it is that is dying exactly, many find it hard to answer. Most answers resolve around the sense that Hong Kong (society) is no longer Hong Kong, that something has changed; that there is less freedom, or Hong Kong will "become like China". Answers generally involve Hong Kong's core values, lack of freedoms, and the rule of law. In the interviewees, comparisons to Xinjiang and Tibet are frequent as these two territories are considered examples of the direction Hong Kong society is heading, with fears that local customs will be suppressed. These comparisons stem from shared apprehensions about the erosion of cultural autonomy, the suppression of local customs, and human rights issues, particularly in relation to the treatment of ethnic minorities by the Chinese government. These territories underline the fear that Hong Kong will lose its uniqueness; the future generation brainwashed by increasing government control, with some even worrying about the Cantonese language in the future (perhaps not entirely without reason as Jiang's proposal of Mandarin as the

language of instruction). The fears amongst my interviewees range from the destruction of what makes Hong Kong 'unique' to thinking the calls of Hong Kong dying are overstated and that Hong Kong (society or people) is more resilient than is often thought.

Nonetheless, despite some hopeful interviews there was remarkable consensus as most interviewees agreed with the statement that Hong Kong is dying or already dead. "It is a fact that Hong Kong is dead" as I-11 stated matter-of- factly while I-16 described Hong Kong more poetically as "struggling at death's door" [苟延殘喘], adding that "How can such a great city, so proud to be a Hong Konger, die so easily?" Hong Kong, as I-16 and I-11 amongst others believed, has passed, and China can impose its version of Hong Kong, transforming it into "just another Chinese city".

Ip (2020), analysing the discourse of the supposed death of Hong Kong, argues that the Hong Kong protest movement lacked an idea of intermediate time, seeing only the current chaotic present and the far away future where democracy has been won. The in-between stage, between the distant future and the present, lacks meaning. Political goals or alternatives, therefore, seem like an impossible dream, especially when perceiving an all too present constant threat from China. Interestingly, Chin in an offhand comment in the introduction writes something similar, noting how "Hong Kong's bitter situation is that only has the present, no past, and no future" (p.10).[105]

This brings me to the opening of Ip's same work *Hong Kong New Identity Politics,* wherein he questions a radical protesters motivation:

> Lu, a Hong Kong pro-nativist critic, explained why people engaged in the Mong Kok riot in 2016. He portrayed the rioters as fighters in the name of Hong Kong against the rule of China. The remarks above help paint a picture of an angry young man hurling bricks to police on the street of Mong Kok. But Lu admitted that it is a struggle doomed to failure. My question is: Why was he so keen to do something in vain or self-defeating? (2020, p. 1)

I believe this analysis of what Ip describes as vain protest actions tell a great deal about the discourse around the death of Hong Kong. In the rational evaluation of the situation, Ip overlooks the affective dimension of his interviewee. He needs to recognize the emotional appeals of the nation, the call of the homeland, and the illogical, contradictory sacrifice for the (potential) nation for which people might sacrifice their lives. Dying for the nation is meant to be self-defeating as the self is offered to the larger ideal of the (would-be) nation. Every nation, every territory, is full of contradictions and clashing stories. The success of the nation-state lies in presenting a holistic story to its people, which becomes accepted as the natural truth, the state of things, a logical outcome of a historical process. Sacrifices made for a potential goal will always seem strange to many; only when the objective has been reached can the lost be co-opted into a story of heroic sacrifice and the dead work for the future. If the movement fails, however, the dead will remain buried without anyone singing their praises. Only the history books might mention them as a warning to all future citizens, a failed revolution for reasons that only later became obvious. To come back to the discourse of a dying Hong Kong, in the

[105] 香港的苦況，就是只有現在，沒有過去，也沒有將來。

nationalist sense, the nation can never die if the people are there to fight for it. The nation cannot die as it would in essence be the self that dies along with it, being tied to the territory, which even if not in reach, can be transmitted in the form of national myths and stories. This leads back to an earlier question posed in chapter three: how strong are the ties of the people in Hong Kong to the territory as a vital part of their identity? In other words, is Hong Kong, a homeland for its people?

One of the background questions driving Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* was to explain out why people are willing to die for their nation, their country, a relatively recent invention that has been steeped in more blood and torment than any other political form of organization (although this argument must be read with the increase in killing technologies in mind). To quote "These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central question posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices" (1983, p. 7). As of yet, Hong Kong does not seem to have any martyrs. There have been suspicious deaths and suicides (Hollingworth et al., 2019), but the high-profile death of the martyr, representing the (budding) nation's most treasured values, does not seem to be present. Instead, it seems that it is the identity that Hong Kongers treasure rather than the land worth dying for that makes up Hong Kong.

If Hong Kong is dead, and its people will, over the coming years, disperse worldwide, how will the idea of Hong Kong be transmitted to future generations? One frequently reported fear amongst my interviews and mentioned earlier in this section and several times in the localist works is that Hong Kong will become "just another Chinese city". Is Hong Kong so easily changeable that a few decades of Chinese rule will change the city to such an extent? Most in Hong Kong do not attempt to frame their identity or history in terms of a primordial attachment to Hong Kong. However, there are attempts to do otherwise, as I have shown. Most Hong Kongers know that their family only came here recently, and, despite an attachment to the place, it appears easy to give up Hong Kong to a certain extent. For example, moving overseas and continuing the Hong Kong identity somewhere else, rather than staying on what has become home soil. Is the concept of Hong Kong, to adopt the wording of one interviewee, strong enough to overcome what appears to be many Hong Kongers postmodern awareness of their own arbitrary identity? Is it indeed the case, to paraphrase Dou the protestor during a trial who was quoted in the previous chapter, that many like their Hong Kong identity more than the place itself?

Hong Kong's diaspora has seen significant growth, particularly in the aftermath of the 2019 protest movement, while the local government shows little inclination to change its current political trajectory. Under these circumstances, the idea of a Hong Kong homeland gains in signifiance to keep the diaspora community together and transmit the Hong Kong identity to future generations. The development of the Hong Kong diaspora, as separated from a larger pan-Chinese diaspora, is a recent phenomenon as Fong (2022) observes how the 2019 protests can be considered as a watershed moment in building a distinctive Hong Kong diaspora, distinct from the Chinese diaspora. The Hong Kong diaspora is still an 'incipient diaspora' (Fong, 2022, citing Sheffer, 2003) or a diaspora in the

making. Crucial for this emerging diaspora is the role of intellectuals in order to keep the roots of the homeland alive. As Sheffer (2003): “The younger leaders, intellectuals, and other activists will be intensively involved in reviving their nation’s past, and if necessary, re-imagining and re-inventing it.” (p. 153)—an evident trend in Hong Kong society and diaspora where younger younger leaders, intellectuals, and activists are actively engaged in preserving and reshaping their homeland's identity.

Abbas (1997), in a classic work on Hong Kong society, describes it as a transient place, one that is living on borrowed time (paraphrasing Hughes 1976). Hong Kong is a territory (city) that knew its exact time of death: 1997 following the handover to China, and subsequently 2047, the end of the fifty-year period of an ‘unchanged Hong Kong’. The due date 1997 was a source of anxiety for many in Hong Kong in the decades leading up to it. The negotiations between the UK and China, in which Hong Kong had no say apart from an advisory role to Britain, proposed democratization reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, which were cause for tension between Hong Kong and China, each of which saw it as a British conspiracy to gain influence over the colony after the handover (Tsang, 2004). Hong Kong society exists in a perpetual state of waiting.

But is Hong Kong a place of transience? Transient means something is either coming into and out of existence or, when used for people, refers to a visitor that stays only briefly. If this were the case, Hong Kong’s population would not have exploded since its foundation. Hong Kong would serve as a passing place, a station towards other destinations. Nevertheless, Hong Kong, for many, *was* or *became* the destination, and many stayed. All human communities are transient to a degree. Abbas acknowledging this fact nevertheless insists that “much of the population was made up of refugees or expatriates who thought of Hong Kong as a temporary stop, no matter how long they stayed. The sense of the temporary is very strong, even if it can be entirely counterfactual. The city is not so much a place as a space of transit” (1997, p. 4).

Perhaps the phrase "Hong Kong is dying" echoes the refugee mindset, which reframes Hong Kong as a temporary stop, a “space of transit” when things do not work out. In this regard it is similar to the phrase “Hong Kong is people” discussed in the previous chapter, a coping mechanism for the growing diaspora who feel they need to justify their migration. But even in the early twentieth century, just after the birth of the colony of Hong Kong, there was talk of a shared destiny of those living in Hong Kong (Hughes, 1976). Hong Kong was ostensibly a place of manifest destiny, where through hard work, anything is possible. A place of shared experiences, a refugee mentality; and the subsequent lion rock spirit; followed by the emergence of the idea of *Heung Gong Jahn* [香港人], or Hong Konger (Mathews, 1997; Turner, 2003).

Since the handover, the Hong Kong government has launched numerous advertising campaigns in Hong Kong with aims such as to “inject positive energy into society and foster a strong community spirit” (2013). Striking are the campaigns that frame Hong Kong as “our home” [我們的家]. Police force recruiting advertisement read “Protect Hong Kong, our home”, and other advertisements following the 2019 protests implore the reader to “Cherish Hong Kong”. The region referred to as China today is the ancestral homeland for many, but how relevant the concept still is,

remains a different question. For many today, Hong Kong is a home, but it is not *the* home. This can be framed as the refugee identity, cosmopolitanism or as the pragmatic identity or nationalism, as some have done, but gives too much credit to conscious efforts of identity-making at the hands of Hong Kongers. Identity is as much made as it is a (by)product of accident, birth, upbringing, and social acceptance over which one has little control. Many choose to say they are Hong Kongers, over being Chinese or Mainlanders. Yet what it means to be a Hong Konger is still under negotiation, as society in Hong Kong is undergoing a period of reflection. As I-8 said, “What we really need is time to think about what Hong Kong is."