The Rejection of Mainlandization

How the efforts of integrating Hong Kong have led to the rise of anti-China sentiments and the rise of the Hongkonger identity

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Abstract: Hongkongers are increasingly rejecting their identity as Chinese, especially among young people where close to 80 percent see themselves as Hongkongers, and barely any identify as solely Chinese. This paper argues that the trend is caused by a rejection of the Mainlandization policies conducted by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's government with support from their national counterparts in Beijing. This paper also seeks alternative answers that the trend is caused by decreasing economic status or the desire of democracy but concludes that both arguments must be seen in the larger narrative of rejecting Mainlandization. Furthermore, this paper will look at what implications a rejection of Mainlandization entail and argue that the gap between the protesters opposing their government, the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese people are increasingly being seen as one coherent unit. This is a part of the identity formation in Hong Kong - Hongkongers are defining themselves upon not being Chinese, and therefore emphasizing their distinguishing characteristics to be opposing the Other, namely China.

Contents

Introduction

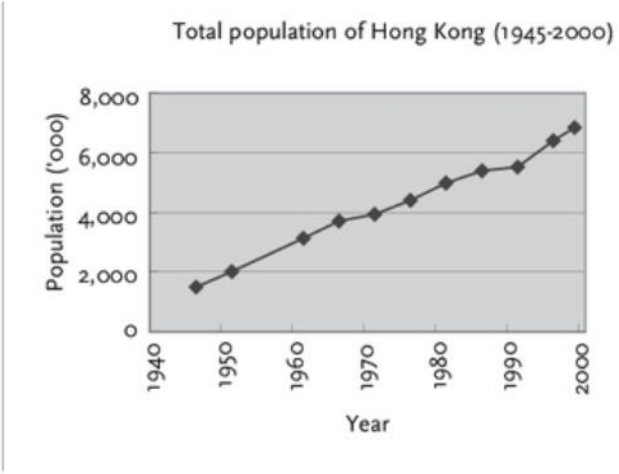
The proposed extradition bill, published at the end of March, aroused the largest protests in Hong Kong ever seen. The highest estimates suggest that two million Hongkongers took to the street, ranging from a wide diversity of people, all not giving the government the benefit of the doubt in its policymaking, demanding the bill to be withdrawn (R. Cheung & Cheung, 2019). Then after 20 weeks of protest, the bill was promised to be formally withdrawn, but still the protests commenced to the shock of outside observers, the protesters pressed on, demanding all of their five demands[1] to be satisfied (Yu & Kuo, 2019). What caused such an explosive reaction to the extradition bill, and why do the protests continue? I am arguing that this movement is deeper than just the five demands and the extradition bill and that the glue that brings the diverse sets of protesters together is a sense of resurgence their identity as Hongkongers – which have been perceived to be under threat ever since Hong Kong was handed over to China in 1997, and taken to new extremes by the younger generation.

Different imaginations China and Hong Kong

Hong Kong as an entity, is in a historical perspective a rather recent phenomenon, counting about 7,450 inhabitants (of whom around 2000 were boat people) when the British seized the Hong Kong island on January 26, 1841 (Swee-Hock & Kin, 1975, p. 124). The majority of Hong Kong's population today is an even more recent creation, counting an estimated 1.28 million arrivals of immigrants from the Mainland between 1945 and 1949, most of them being farmers and a minority being businessmen and Guomindang officials fleeing. Hong Kong saw more influxes of immigrants during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, and from 1976 to 1981 a wave of about 400,000 immigrants from the mainland entered Hong Kong, following another due to the one-way quota system taking effect in the 1980s (S. Wong, 2007, pp. 74-75).

[1] 1. Full withdrawal of the extradition bill, 2. A commission of inquiry into alleged police brutality, 3. Retracting the classification of protesters as "rioters", 4. Amnesty for arrested protesters, 5. Dual universal suffrage, meaning both the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive (T.-k. Wong, 2019)

Figure 1

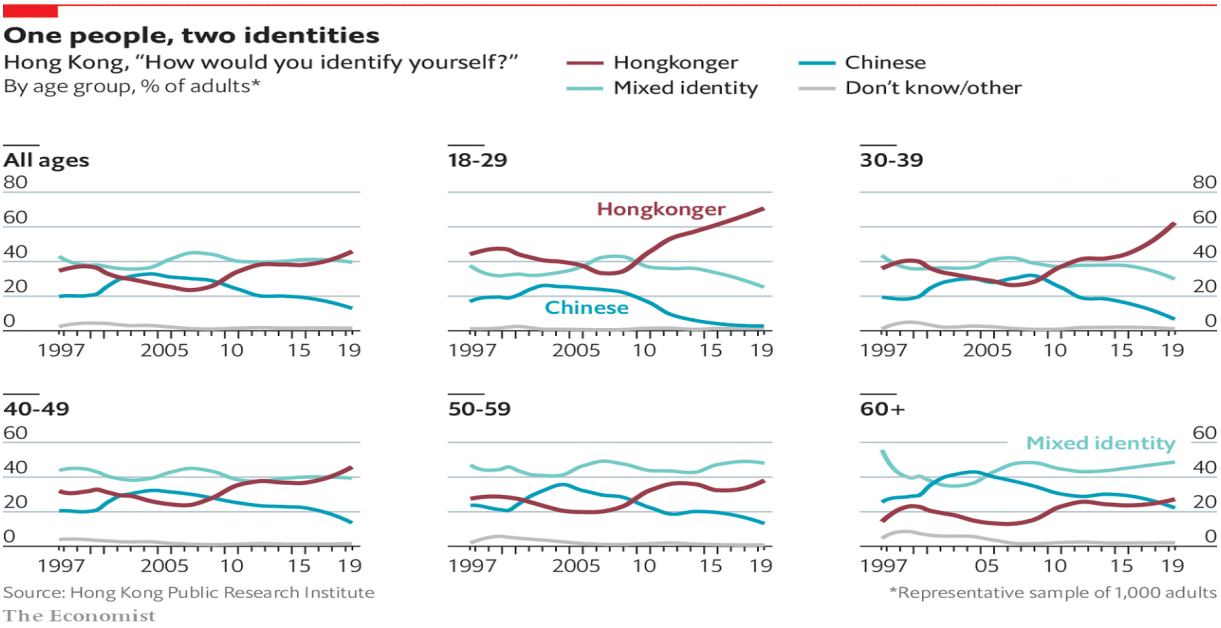


Source: Table showing Hong Kong's population from the mid-1940s and onwards, the figure does not take into account population decrease after Japanese occupation (S. Wong, 2007, p. 76)

Figure 1 tells the story of Hong Kong's rapid population growth, but it does not take into account the rapid decrease in population to 600,000 following the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945 and that by 1982 only 57 percent of the population was born in the territory (Hugh, 1983, p. 470). The fact that Hong Kong is a pretty recent creation by Chinese mainlanders immigrating does not however, seem to have any lasting power on what now is "Hongkongers" identifying as "Chinese".

Hongkongers ethnic origins and the increasing self-identification as Hongkongers and not Chinese shown in Figure 2, poses an interesting question on the longevity of Hongkongers being impacted by their ethnic origins and how quickly it can be forgotten. Figure 2 also suggests that Hongkongers self-identification also correlates with the waves of protests culminating in the Umbrella Movement of 2014 and the ongoing protests of today. The other interesting question is why such a large pool of Hongkongers does not identify themselves as Chinese – one could easily answer the question "what a Hongkonger is?" by answering "a Chinese probably originating from Guangdong in the last 70 years", but still we see the opposite trend. If a Hongkonger is "not a Chinese", then the following question should rightly be "what is a Hongkonger?". This essay will be centered around this puzzle and relating it to the protests.

Figure 2



Source: The Economist Published August 26th, 2019. Accessed November 22, 2019 from https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2019/08/26/almost-nobody-in-hong-kong-under-30-identifies-as-chinese

In order to answer the puzzle, this essay will ask the following question: *how can the rise of the Hongkonger identity broadly be explained?*

I am proposing one main hypothesis (H1) and two counter hypothesizes (H2 and H3) for the question.

H1 Hong Kong's emerging identity is based around a rejection of Mainlandization

H2 The emergence of the Hong Kong identity is based around a desire for democracy

H3 Decreasing economic status vis-à-vis China is causing fears leading to increased localism in Hong Kong

I conclude that H1 is the best explanation, and broaden on its implications in the last chapter.

What is a nation?

Under a seminar at the University of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong under British rule, was confronted with questions by students about Hong Kong's independence unto which he replied: "Hong Kong is a great society. It is not a nation state", and when pressed further explained his logic "But the Communist Party is at present ruling China. If you think in the next two to five years, you can overthrow the party and Hong Kong can become independent,

I just think you are deceiving yourself." (Kang-chung, 2016). The question about what constitutes a nation is rather something that Ernest Renan would debate, as he famously in a lecture in Sorbonne in 1882 claimed "The existence of a nation is an everyday plebiscite", highlighting his argument that the sources of national identity is civically constituted, rather than racially and ethnically determined (Roshwald, 2015, p. 443).

Benedict Anderson picks up on Renan's thread of not defining nations statically in his 1983 book, *Imagined Communities*, where he lays forth his theory of nationalism, in which he emphasizes a social creationist view on the nation. He proposed that a nation is an imagined political community that is both imagined to be sovereign and inherently limited. The reason he uses the word «imagined» is to point out that most citizens in a nation will never know, meet or hear of each other, and still the mind of each citizen lives the image of their fellowship to their co-citizens. Thus, the way to analyze communities are by the outline or style as to how they are imagined – instead of whether they are "false" or "real" – because as Anderson notes «all communities larger than primordial villages .... are imagined» (Anderson, [1983] 2006, p. 6). Even though its imagined does not make it less it real.

A nation is also imagined as *limited,* because of the existence of borders or boundaries to other nations. The nation does not imagine itself as adjoining with mankind – even the most messianic nationalists do not envision a day where all of humanity joins their nations. A nation is also imagined as *sovereign* because of Revolution and Enlightenment destroyed the hierarchical dynastic and divinely ordained system. The nation as an imagined community, which came to alive the period after the invention of the printing press 1453, was confronted with a plurality of religions which led to the universalists being confronted and stretched the faiths territorial boundaries. As Anderson notes «nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state» (Anderson, [1983] 2006, p. 7)

The nation is imagined as a *community* because even with the exploitations and inequalities occurring inside a nation, a nation is seen as a deep, horizontal fellowship. The imagined fellowship of a nation generates colossal sacrifices, as people have been willing to die for its nation over the past centuries (Anderson, [1983] 2006, p. 7).

The nation, according to Anderson, has four properties to it: it is imagined, imagined to be sovereign, imagined as limited and imagined as a community.

What made possible the emergence of the modern nation was a combination of the

printing press and the advent of capitalism, spreading a common printed language and in search of larger markets writing in an understandable language – instead of Latin, which a fraction of the population spoke (Anderson, [1983] 2006, p. 46). Even though Anderson defines its origins as an unselfconscious process, he emphasizes how these models of controlling the printed language would be consciously exploited in a Machiavellian spirit and languages lose their unity (Anderson, [1983] 2006, p. 45). This speaks for an elite-driven nationalism, given that elites control the media of printing, but as we will see this cannot be the only variable anymore with the growth of other forms of communicating one's language – for instance over the internet. I am arguing in this text that bottom-up nationalism or identity formation is not just possible, but that we are also seeing it in effect in Hong Kong.

Identity formation, othering, and Mainlandization

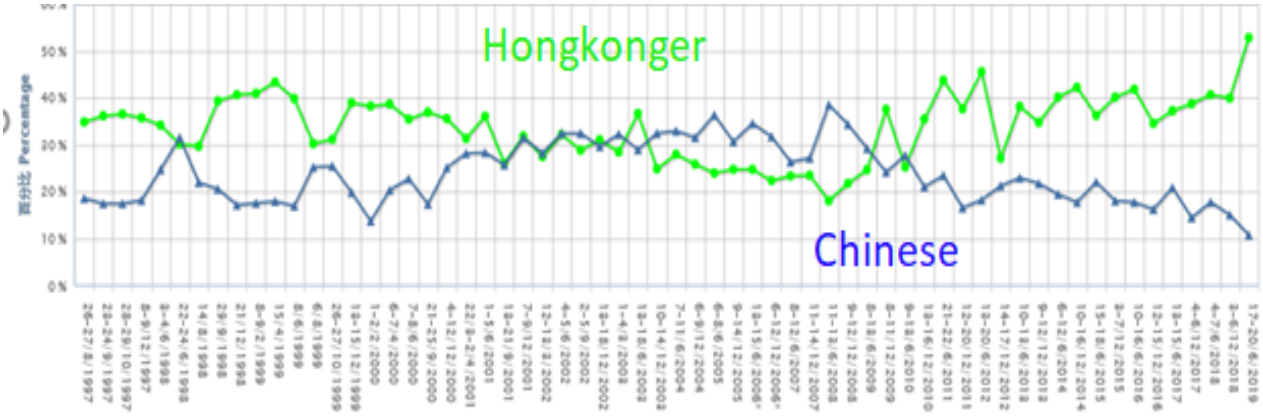
Identity is one of those concepts that are challenging to define properly – and there have been widespread disagreement among political scientist, psychologist, anthropologist, sociologist and so on as how to do it (Pożarlik, 2013, p. 77). Alexander Wendt (1994, p. 385) captures the vagueness of it, as he contributes what he calls social identity as having "both individual and social structural properties, being at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine 'who I am/we are' in a situation and in a social role structure of shared understanding and expectations". Adding even more vagueness to Wendt's description is to say that these individuals and structural properties are changeable and not just determined on the situation. I am arguing that Hongkongers are forming an identity based on not being a Mainlander, by focusing on their unique characteristics. So identity here will emphasize here "who we are not" in addition to "who we are", the first is based on othering and the second is based on identity formation. I use the concept "othering" here as a way of defining oneself on the basis of an imagined "other" – who the person is not, defines who he is. That's where we will turn next, on how the effects of the attempts of making Hong Kong more like mainland China.

Lastly, I use the concept of Mainlandization as all efforts instituted in Hong Kong in order to make Hong Kong more similar and integrated to the Mainland.

H1 Hong Kong's emerging identity is based around a rejection of Mainlandization

Renan's definition of a nation being an everyday plebiscite seems to attest to the Hongkongers fluctuating self-identification vis-à-vis their Chinese relatives since 1997. Post the British handover of Hong Kong to China, the Hongkonger identity stood stronger for a while, until the trend reversed in 2003 and reaching a peak with the Beijing Olympics in 2008, before it from 2009 yet again saw another reversal again favoring a Hongkonger identity. This reversal reached historic highs in 2012 before it saw another spike with the ongoing protests, which have caused the largest disparities between those who identify as a Hongkonger and Chinese (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Identity Trends in Hong Kong, 1997-2019



Source: Public Opinion Program, University of Hong Kong (HKU POP), "Categorical Ethnic Identity", accessed November 11, 2019, https://www.hkupop.hku.hk/english/popexpress/ethnic/eidentity/poll/eid_poll_chart.html

Tung Chee-hwa, Hong Kong's first Chief Executive, outlined his vision for Hong Kong to the Asia Society in 1997, in which he wanted Hongkongers to take "Pride in being Chinese" and would "be willing at all times to contribute to the well-being not just of Hong Kong but also the entire Chinese nation" (Mathews, Ma, & Lui, 2007, p. 83). Taking cues from his political idol Lee Kuan Yew, he went around preaching that Hong Kong was the bearer of the Chinese tradition and the civic education needed to reflect this (Beatty, 2003, pp. 44-45). Proposed curriculums reflecting the "one country, two systems" started popping up right from kindergarten, where a key lesson was that the kids is a member of the Hong Kong society, but that they were Chinese (Hughes & Stone, 1999, p. 482), and in 2004 kindergarteners were subjected to a "I love China" program with the aim of developing "a sense of belonging to the country, a respectful attitude to the national flag and national anthem" (Mathews et al., 2007, p.

83). The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government took Tung's advice to hearth in 2003 by sending the first Chinese astronaut, Yang Liwei, to Hong Kong, followed up performances and visits from the 2004 and 2008 Chinese Olympic Games medalists – where Hong Kong was actively chosen as their first stop ahead of the cities and provinces on the Mainland. Furthermore The Home Affairs Bureau of the HKSAR government started in cooperation with other organs to promote various activities outside of the regular civic education in order to promote national education – for example the television announcement series "Our Home Our Country" which were broadcasted from 2004 (P. T. Y. Cheung, 2012, pp. 337-338). Tung's vision also had great success in the schooling system with wider use of Putonghua (standard Mandarin) as the language of instruction, increasing displays of the national anthem and the national flag, and strengthened instruction in Chinese history (Tse, 2004, p. 56).

These Mainlandization practices faced from the get-go criticism – in 2004, Arthur Li, the Secretary of Education and Manpower commented that the "I love China" program would teach the kindergartner to be able to "distinguish between 'I love China' and 'I love the Communist Party of China'", unto which his negative response was criticized in the media (Mathews et al., 2007, p. 84). This captured the fact that love for China does not necessarily translate to love for the CCP among Hongkongers, but the notion of being "Chinese" was not fully repudiated. One debate in Hong Kong in 2004 about patriotism concluded that Hongkongers love toward China amounted to loving the classic culture, the long historical tradition, beautiful landscape and original people but not the regime. On the other hand Hong Kong had staunch nationalism towards the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands issue and showed deep concerns towards human rights and moral cases in China[2], which leans towards a dual loyalty to both China and the CCP (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, p. 1101).

From 2007 and onwards the HKSAR government began devoting a section in the Chief Executive's Policy Address on national education after being reminded by the previous leader of China, Hu Jintao. This was given more attention in 2008-09 in an attempt of instilling more national passion to the youth – this included upping the quota of students signing up in subsidized exchange programs and funding activities tied to national education (P. T. Y. Cheung,

[2] For example in 2010, when 18 workers at the Foxconn plant in Guangdong committed suicide due to extremely harsh working conditions, creating an uproar in Hong Kong, showing a distaste for China's emphasize on «development first» (Ma, 2011, p. 712)

2012, p. 339). In 2010, the then-Chief Executive Donald Tsang, pushed ahead in his policy address to build on the earlier proposals to strengthen the national education curriculum, activities and teaching timetables. These included encouraging students to support the national sports team, appreciate and understand Chinese culture (solidarity, filial piety etc.), attend flag-raising ceremonies, understanding the Basic Law and sing the national anthem. These proposals were met with resistance from headmasters, students, and teachers who were suspicious of taking part in "brainwashing" foisted upon them by the CCP. More fuel to the fire was added to the resistance when the culture chief of the central government's Liaison Office, Hao Tiechuan, called the national education a "necessary brainwashing", which suggested that the Hong Kong curriculum should promote the HKSAR government's thinking pattern (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, p. 1102). This culminated in the formation of the now known pro-democracy student activist group known as Scholarism, headed by Joshua Wong, who opposed the national education reform. The then-fourteen-year-old Wong recounts:

> *Secondary-school students didn't want this kind of brainwashing. But they also didn't want an additional subject of any kind, on top of their already heavy course loads, so even those who didn't care much about the content of Moral and National Education were against it, and came out in large numbers on the demonstrations we organized* (Chung & Wong, 2016, p. 868)

The Scholarism movement snowballed well beyond purely teachers and students. The movement mobilized the general public and created a unified group of activists opposing the HKSAR government's Mainlandization policies. Scholarism snowballed on to launching hunger strikes in 2014 and boycotts with the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) upon the August 31st, 2014 declaration (the so-called "8 31 decision") made by the National People's Congress[3] that a Hong Kong Chief Executive have to "love the country [China] and love Hong Kong", preventing candidates ideologically opposed from running (Ip, 2016, p. 90). They also actively attempted to engage in the process of selecting the Chief Executive in 2017, which included signature campaigns at the metro exit stations, publishing commentaries and forming coalitions with groups like the Neo Democrats, People Power and League of Social Democrats (Chung & Wong, 2016, p. 869). Both Scholarism and the HKFS gained reputation for leading the Umbrella Movement 2014 because of their active work in rallying and organizing before the out, and when

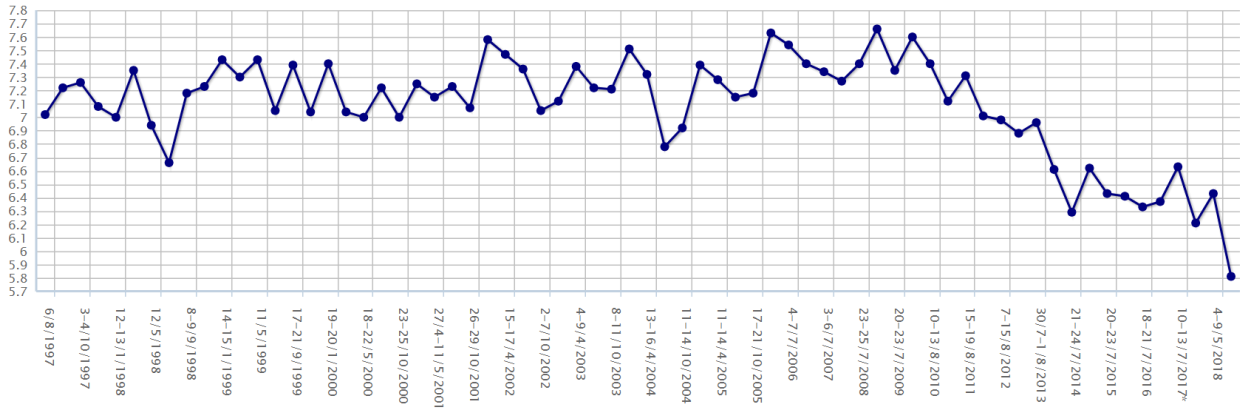
[3] The national legislative body of the People's Republic of China

it broke out these organizations were seen as the responsible parts in mobilizing large numbers and bargaining with the HKSAR government (Chung & Wong, 2016, p. 874). The key members[4] of the movement and Scholarism went to expand its platform and formed the political party Demosistō with the stated goal to "push for the city's political and economic autonomy from the oppression of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and capitalist hegemony." (Demosistō, 2019).

The rejection of the national education program can be seen in connection with a growing fear of Mainlandization, as it infringes on the autonomy of the "one country, two systems" policy of "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong". In 2004, 300 professionals issued in the press a goal to uphold the core values of human rights, democracy, rule of law and so on in the press, and they have seemingly had strong staying power, forcing the HKSAR government to enact countermeasures. For example, when the current Premier of China, Li Keqiang visited Hong Kong in August 2011, only a selected few of his activities were open to local reporters, and some reporters were blocked entry by unidentified security guards, and two students wearing T-shirts with June 4th slogans referring to Tiananmen were detained by the police at the university that Li was visiting. Reflecting his visit, the *Press Freedom Index 2011-2012* had Hong Kong falling 20 places down to number 54 (today it has fallen to number 73) (RWB, 2019), and according to Reporters Without Borders "Hong Kong (54th) saw a sharp deterioration in press freedom in 2011 and its ranking fell sharply. Arrests, assaults and harassment worsened working conditions for journalists to an extent not previously seen, a sign of a worrying change in government policy." (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, p. 1103). Also, as shown in figure 5., post the Li visit, appraisal of freedom of the press have not recovered and started a trend towards the lowest levels ever seen since the polling was started in 1997. This seems convincingly to speak for that the Hong Kong press appraisal is at odds with the HKSAR government and seem to push the press in the direction of assessing a way lower appraisal of their press freedom.

[4] Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow and Nathan Law

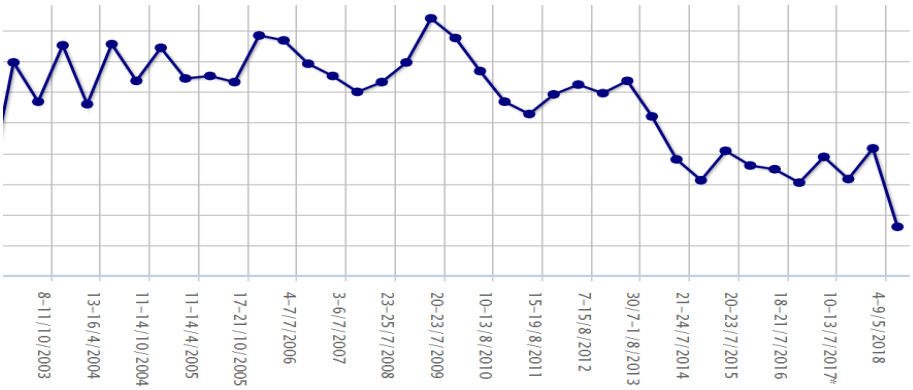
Figure 5 Appraisal of Freedom of Press



Source: Public Opinion Programme, University of Hong Kong, accessed 14. November 2019, https://www.hkupop.hku.hk/english/popexpress/freeind/freeq58/index.html

The police in Hong Kong started also setting more restrictions in 2011 regarding the Tiananmen candlelight memorial and the July first[5] protests. Furthermore, in October the same year when the Chief Executive gave his Policy Address, cameramen and reporters reported impolite behavior and blockings of taking pictures. This was the same year in November followed up by the government-owned Radio Television Hong Kong firing of several radio hosts, which again was seen as controversial (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, p. 1103). The appraisal of press freedom seems to follow the same trend as the appraisal of freedom of procession and demonstration (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Appraisal of Freedom of Procession and Demonstration 2003-2018



Source: Public Opinion Programme, University of Hong Kong, accessed 14. November 2019, https://www.hkupop.hku.hk/english/popexpress/freeind/freeq60/index.html

[5] July first protests is an annual protest held since the British handover in 1997. They have changed in substance, but since 2003 with the introduction of Article 23, it have mostly been a call for a variety of concerns, involving democracy, protection of freedom of speech and so on.

Finally, for the elections to the District Council in 2010, increasing fears rose due to vote rigging when dubious voter registrations after the election got uncovered by the media. Also, according to Peter Cheung there is evidence that the Liaison Office (LO) of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong played an active role the Legislative Council, Cheung notes "The LO [Liaison Office] was very active in influencing the 2008 Legislative Council election such as in coordinating different pro-government candidates behind the scene and nurturing more qualified candidates with pro-Beijing backgrounds" (P. T. Y. Cheung, 2012, p. 329). And as Ping & Kin-Ming (2014, p. 1104) notes that the same can be said for forming the outcomes of the Chief Executive elections between 2011 and 2012, the District Council, and the Legislative Council.

This is the background for the increasing fear of Mainlandization in Hong Kong and fueled the protests and increasing incidents that pent up from late 2011 and onwards to today. There are certainly strong forces inside Hong Kong that imagines its sovereignty and would fit Anderson's notion that "nations dream of being free … The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state" (Anderson, [1983] 2006, p. 7). In Hong Kong's sense, it would be free from Mainlandization.

H2 The emergence of the Hong Kong identity is based around a desire for democracy

The discourse surrounding post-war Hong Kong politics before the 1980s has been dominated by the "absence of politics" explanation, seeing no significant movements for democracy with the exceptions of riots in 1956, 1966 and 1967. One explanation for this would be the lack of a Hong Kong identity manifested by the fact that it was by this time largely a city constituted by migrants -1982 only 57 percent of the population were born in Hong Kong (Hugh, 1983, p. 470). The late 1970s however, saw the rise of pressure groups surrounding certain nationalist themes, like making Cantonese the main language of the colony, the movement over protecting the Diaoyu Islands, but also issues surrounding social problems like the Golden Jubilee Incident and the Yaumati Boat People incident, and this proved an important formation of pressure groups for the later movements (Ma, 2017, pp. 34-36). A democratic system was not a top priority either during Sino-British negotiations over Hong Kong's future in 1982-84, or the transition period of 1984-1997. The dominant narrative was fear of communism and losing their way of life, and

what won over the public debate and the opinion leaders was the propagation of "One Country, Two Systems" with the concepts of "50 years unchanged" and "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong". The theme for the democracy movement during period was "resisting communism by democratization (Ma, 2017, pp. 36-38). That theme got strengthen after the Tiananmen Square Incident of June 4th, 1989, where the Hong Kong Alliance took part in smuggling Tiananmen activists out of China through the "Operation Yellow Bird" campaign. June 4th has also become a yearly vigil in memory of the victims in Hong Kong, working as a symbol that Hong Kong is different from China (Cheng, 2009, p. 95). 1989 also served as a shock crushing the optimism in Hong Kong for a possible democratization.

For about twenty years following 1989, the democrats were struggling with their Chinese and Hong Kong identity, as they claimed their patriotism for being for repatriation with China in the 1980s but opposed the autocratic Communist regime. The democracy movement was chief in force of speaking out against Chinese intervention both before and after 1997, and their efforts to protect Hong Kong's values, political autonomy, rule of law, democracy, and human rights were seen as "anti-Chinese" by the Chinese government and Beijing press. This marked a large contradiction between the Hong Kong identity and their Chinese identity, as protecting these values were seen unpatriotic by the Chinese government. At the societal level, there was no clear support for a fully democratic Hong Kong as more and more Hongkongers were more prideful towards China's achievements and progress economically, it was more a pragmatic nationalism (Ma, 2017, pp. 38-39).

The turning point for the democracy movement came however on July 1st, 2003, when an estimated half a million Hongkongers took to the street protesting the impending legislation of the National Security Ordinance, which was seen as a direct threat to Hong Kong's lifestyle, civil liberties, and core values. This was a landmark protest as the bill got derailed and as it also sparked stronger support for democracy and political public, and a belief in political efficacy. The pan-democrats also were empowered as they had a strong showing in the elections from 2003-2004 and forced Chief Executive Tung in 2005 to step down before his term ended. This political shift also alarmed Beijing, which earlier was having a "hand-off" approach, and now stepped up its influence in intervening in governance and deepening the social and economic integration (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, pp. 1096-1097). Throughout history until 2003, it is clear that the democratic movement gained support when they were aligning with the protection of the

Hong Kong identity narrative, rather than pushing isolated for becoming a full-fledged democracy. It is the protection of the "high autonomy" part as promised in the Basic Law, that was the basic narrative of the protest in 2003, leading to it being a part of the rejection of the Mainlandizations policies.

In April 2004, the Beijing exercised its authority on constitutional reform of the Basic Law, by ruling that approval from the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress was necessary before any reforms towards full democracy could be initiated in Hong Kong. This worked in unison with the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO) in Hong Kong gradually extending its control over Hong Kong affairs, among the maneuvers were taking a very active role intervening in the elections. The CGLO was pulling massive material resources into pro-government groups, which made the pro-Beijing camp a formidable machine with its residential associations, parties, satellite organizations, unions and enterprises in mobilizing during elections. The Hong Kong people gradually became alerted about a potential loss of the promised "high autonomy" in the Basic Law, and gradually became more concerned about the increased intervention (Ma, 2017, p. 40). The democracy movement did oppose the increased intervention, but as Figure 4 shows 2003-2008 was the "golden years" for the Chinese identity vis-à-vis the Hongkonger identity, and the democracy movement first started getting steam correlating with the emergence of the Hongkonger identity in 2009-2010. The generation that was growing up felt alienated with their government, feeling that the whoever was the Chief Executive, only reflected a lapdog that would only take orders from Beijing (Law, 2017, p. 27). This is best reflected in the "de facto referendum" movement of 2010, proposed in 2009 by the League of Social Democrats, who proposed asking five serving legislators in the Legislative Council to resign in order to trigger off a new snap election. The idea was to show the true democratic spirit in Hong Kong, because if the serving legislators would resign then it would require all voters in Hong Kong to cast a vote in Hong Kong the same day – serving as a symbol for a referendum on democracy, pressuring Beijing to deliver full democracy given that the democrats won by a large margin. This was an important movement as it made evident the coming of a new political identity as it split into two factions, the old guard who meant the movement was unrealistic and favored proceeding from the "One Country, Two Systems" framework, and the younger generation who supported the "de facto referendum" as a movement about political identity and as a direct rejection of Beijing's political control. The older

generation found the "anti-China" sentiments of the younger generation difficult to fathom and began to lose touch the identity issue, and began in to lose support which gave rise of a new identity of the democracy movement which played out during the 2014 Umbrella Movement (Ma, 2017, pp. 43-45).

The Umbrella Movement of 2014, kick-started by Benny Tai's "Occupy Central" movement, was a civil disobedience movement demanding a genuine election in the 2017 Chief Executive election, based on genuine universal suffrage[6]. This movement was a landmark in the sense that the older generations of democracts were succeeded by the younger generation, and it had far-reaching implications for the formation of the Hongkonger identity (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, pp. 1110-1111). The theme of the movement was that Hongkongers needed to come out and "defend our city", and one of the big slogans were "Determining our fate", both in regards to choosing the Chief Executive and deciding their political fate independent of Beijing. But the rhetoric and imagery used and hanged around in Hong Kong during the protests represented a highly local culture, anti-China slogans like "Hong Kong is not a part of China", and much more, see (B. W.-K. Wong, 2017) work. The protesters adopted a rhetoric and different imagination as to what Hong Kong is, compared to the older generation of democrats (Ma, 2017, pp. 46-47). The Umbrella Movement however, did not succeed in its stated goal, but it marked a new emergence of the Hong Kong identity, one as proclaimed at the end of the Umbrella Movement (see picture 1), was here to stay – "we'll be back".

The party candidates for the 2016 election however, saw no candidates campaigning for outright independence, but there were however two major candidates who advocated "self-determination" in various forms, but not sovereignty as an independent state (Ma, 2017, p. 47). This is also the issue of separating the rejection of Mainlandization and the desire for democracy, as they are both tied together. But one can affirm, going through the history that democracy is a part that has been something that has aligned to the rise of the Hongkonger identity, in regard to rejecting Mainlandization. This does not disprove my initial thesis, but rather one can assert that a call for democracy on the local Hong Kong level, is a part of rejecting Mainlandization, as the perception is among the protesters is that the Chief Executive is not genuinely elected. Hong

[6] According to a decision by China's National People's Congress, a candidate running for Chief Executive needs to be endorsed by half of the members of a 1,200-person nominating committee, made up by mostly Beijing loyalists. This has made sure that a democrat or a non-approved candidates contest the election (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, pp. 1110-1111)

Kong have never had a genuine democracy, but the promised principle of "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong" have not been adhered to, and the type of democracy they have now have the problem of the Chief Executive serving two masters – the Hong Kong people and the CCP in China.

Picture 1 "We'll be back"

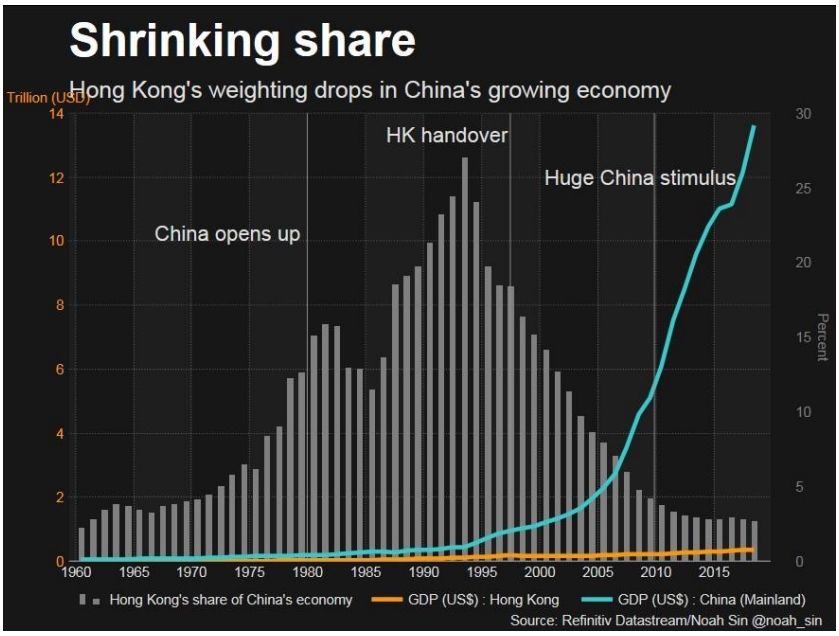
Source: Hong Kong Free Press, Accessed November 21, 2019, from: https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/09/27/hkfp-lens-well-be-back-as-hong-kongs-umbrella-movement-camp-site-was-cleared-protesters-promised-to-return/

The Chief Executive is also paralyzed with the current protests as the protesters goals conflict with the goals of national prioritizations – as Carrie Lam, the current Chief Executive said, "if I had a choice, the first thing is to quit having made a deep apology" (Roantree, Torode, & Pomfret, 2019). The democratic imagination of being independent is why democracy is so important in Hong Kong, and the consequences of not being able to influence politics at this level has led to a regime sleepwalking towards Mainlandization policies that were not wanted by large segments of the population. The desire for democracy is deeply tied with the Hongkonger identity, as I have shown infringements on it have caused so much uproar. So, the desire for democracy cannot be explained as an isolated factored causing the protests today or in 2014, it is a part of a larger narrative.

H3 Decreasing economic status vis-à-vis China is causing fears leading to increased localism in Hong Kong

Hong Kong's economy relative to China has since the mid-1990s ever been declining. At the time of the handover in 1997, Hong Kong's economy accounted for 18.4 percent of mainland China's economy, while today its equivalent is around 2.7 percentages (Sin, 2019). The reason for this shrinkage correlates with China's meteoric rise, amassing an average gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 10 percent from the late 1970s until the 2010s. Growing by such percentages means that the economy doubles every 7-8 year, which resulted in China becoming the second largest economy measured by GDP in the world – this growth can be reflected by a GDP per capita of barely $220 in 1979 being converted to $4.949 in 2011 (Christensen, 2015, p. 14). This notion of Hong Kong's losing its significance is also captured on the mainland, with Shenzhen (Hong Kong's bordering city) surpassing Hong Kong in total gross domestic product in 2018, and "Shenzhen's 2017 GDP already outperformed Hong Kong according to the real-exchange rate" and according to a researcher "estimated that Guangzhou would also catch up with Hong Kong soon" (Hua, 2019).

Figure 7 Hong Kong's economy relative to China



Source: Reuters, accessed 17. November 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-markets-explainer/explainer-how-important-is-hong-kong-to-the-rest-of-china-idUSKCN1VP35H

Notions like the ones aforementioned is not something new in the discussion surrounding Hong Kong, especially the discussion around "Shanghai replacing Hong Kong" with its larger stock exchange and explosive growth. Li Sheng (2018, pp. 186-187) however in his analysis of popular beliefs surrounding the theme "Hong Kong vs. Shanghai" debunks the claims, arguing that Hong Kong's GDP per capita or "as an only Chinese international finance hub". The only way for Shanghai to surpass Hong Kong is if "Hong Kong will be overtaken by Shanghai if it continues to ignore the education of its population or to be reluctant to cooperate with the mainland". Sheng's analysis proposes an interesting paradox, as I have argued Hongkongers are too a large degree opposed to the notion of being educated in a manner that reflects Mainlandization, and this is working against their economic interests. As a matter of fact, Hongkongers have for a long time expressed worries about their economic interests with regards to the Mainland, and if economic gain is at all of utmost importance.

Before the handover, Hongkongers talent for accumulating wealth strengthen their sense of superiority vis-à-vis their poor Mainland counterparts. For the local people in Hong Kong, the city was a safe haven that one could escape the hazardous Chinese politics and a place where through hard work one could make a decent living (Mathews et al., 2007, pp. 39-40). This was the backdrop of the "Hong Kong dream" – a dream of class mobility where one through working hard and a shed of luck could achieve great success. As shown in figure 7, Hong Kong had a great prospering during the 1980s and 1990s, with an annual growth of 6.5 percent which also was integral parts to Hongkongers perceived superiority over counterparts on the Mainland (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, p. 1097).

After the handover however, starting with the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, Hong Kong was hit hard in the subsequent years, with a decline in GDP of 5.1 percent over 1997 and 5.7 percent in 1998 – property prices fell as much by over 40 percentages in October 1997 (Yam, 1998, p. 3). Hong Kong was further hit by the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 and by the financial crisis in 2009. Managing these backlashes were however helped out by the Mainland through the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) of 2003 with the intention of furthering economic integration - from 2004-2007 Hong Kong's economy rebounded with a 7.3 percent growth rate. CEPA contributed greatly to China

becoming the leading investor in Hong Kong, increasing both China's share in Hong Kong's trade (from 36.3 percent in 1997 to 48.5 percent in 2011) and having a 36.7 percent of Hong Kong's total stock of inward direct investment by 2010 (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, pp. 1097-1098). This in combination with the increasing prominence in terms of wealth and education from the Mainland, and their positive economic contribution to Hong Kong, it must have come as a shock the CEPA planners that economic gain did not triumph over other values – although the government and many Hongkongers still cares about Hong Kong's economy relative to the Mainland.

The SARS epidemic of 2003 brought Hong Kong an increased value orientation shift towards post-materialism. The epidemic took 299 lives in Hong Kong, and while it did lead to economic and psychological distress, it also facilitated a stronger sense of community. A Social Indicators Survey (SIS)[7] of 2004 saw an increasing amount of respondents value non-materialist values such as community hygiene, personal health and the meaning of life, and fewer were concerned about work. By 2006 around 80 percentages of the government's budget on the environment. This value change brought forward environment and heritage protection movements, spurring more hatred towards the business-oriented government. The 2004 protest against the reclamation of Victoria Harbor, funneled nostalgic feelings in Hong Kong blaming developers for hurting the air quality, destroyed the skyscape and their relentless reclamation for development. Following this was movements against the demolition of the Star Ferry Pier in 2006 and the Queen's Pier in 2007 – the government faced here long drawn out sit-ins, that each time aroused public sympathy (Ma, 2011, pp. 706-708). These changes suggest a disagreement between the national and local identity where the local identity questions the government's emphasis on putting the economy first.

The movement against the HKSAR government's emphasis on putting the economy first was well express during the anti-high-speed rail construction of 2009-2010, where a small village was forced to relocate in order to make space for a high-speed railway to the Mainland. The government justified the railway for the economic gain enhanced integration with China would entail – and got support from the business sector in general. The activists argued that the

[7] The SISs were a long-term collaborative project by the Hong Kong scientist since 1988. Through biennial territory-wide surveys, the project focused on subjective indicators such as perceptions, values, beliefs, and sense of well-being, and explored their implications for the social development of Hong Kong (Ma, 2011, p. 688)

government for seeing the land only as a commodity, and not the communities that existed on the land. The protests starting in 2009 entailed successive Fridays with thousands of protesters gathering outside the Legislative Council building, with strong sentiments post-materialism and rediscovering the Hong Kong identity (Ma, 2011, pp. 709-710). These sentiments and the decision by the HKSAR government to go ahead with the railway turned into continuous resistance against further integration projects with the Mainland. The 2011 Action Plan for the Bay Area of the Pearl River Estuary, which was another integration project, was criticized as an act that would enable the Guangdong Province to "annex" Hong Kong, thus compromising Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy guaranteed by the Basic Law (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, p. 1099). The high-speed rail and the HK-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge were both completed in 2018, and have both been questioned by Hongkongers on the necessity (Cabestan & Florence, 2018, p. 3). The profitability of these projects are so far questionable, with the Bridge being called "the empty bride" as complications in Macau and the Mainland makes it difficult to drive over from Hong Kong, but the stated purpose of such projects were made clear by the 2019 Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Plan released by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, of furthering economic growth and integration (Xuequan, 2019). These kinds of moves helps building on the Mainlandization narrative, because in order to integrate more efficiently, hoping to build down the different legal and social systems in Macau and Hong Kong.

There have also been waves of dissent directed towards a government plan that would allow more Mainlanders to enter by driving their private car into Hong Kong. Again the business and local interests clashes, on the one hand Mainlanders are heavy spenders in the property and luxury marked, on the other hand they are accused of driving up rent prices, forcing out local and small businesses and thus destroying local communities built up over decades. During the outcry, debates and commentaries inside of Hong Kong started to challenge the narrative on Hong Kong being reliant upon China. In 2011 *Hong Kong as a City-State* a book laying out the ideology of localism became a bestseller. This renewed interest in post-materialist values of protecting and prioritizing local values, lifestyles, cultures, and interests, did also become a tool for political figures such as Gary Fan, Claudia Mo and the former Chief Executive, Leung Chung-ying in order to win support. One of Leung's suggestion during the 2012 election campaign were protective measures limiting Mainlanders to buy property – "Hong Kong Land for Hong

Kongers" (Ping & Kin-Ming, 2014, pp. 1099-1100). This theme of localism have stayed consistent, and even the much-hated Chief Executive Carrie Lam, ran on a slogan of taking local concerns into consideration (Lam & Cheung, 2017).

As I have demonstrated decreasing economic status vis-à-vis China is not the on-going theme throughout Hong Kong's dissent, but rather one of post-materialism, which ultimately speaks for economic concerns not being of utmost importance. Being integrated economically with the Mainland is not something that have fostered any betterment in terms of how Hongkongers view themselves in regard to the Mainland, rather it has fostered values of localism, identity, and post-materialism, all speaking in terms of Hong Kong's "uniqueness". The other side of this uniqueness is a rejection of the economic benefits brought on by closer economic ties with China, and not having the same "economy first" values as the HKSAR government. It seems that Hongkongers care more about their identity and rejecting Mainlandization than outcompeting Shanghai.

Conclusions and implications

The rise of the Hongkonger identity is caused by the rejection of the Mainlandization policies. The desire for democracy is highly intertwined with Mainlandization policies, as evident from the protests of 2003 the rejection of Article 23, the Umbrella movement of 2014 sparked by the "8 31" decision by the The Standing Committee of the National People's Committee and today's reactions to the extradition bill. There is definitively a desire for democracy in Hong Kong, but what is causing the outrage to have been what has been seen as attacks on the "high autonomy" and "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong" part of the basic law. So, the desire for democracy is just a part of the larger narrative of rejecting the Mainlandization policies and call for being distinct.

China's economic growth has not led the Hongkongers to fear for their previous economic superiority vis-à-vis China, quite the contrary as large parts of Hong Kong have embraced post-materialism. Again, what has been problematic with China's growth for Hong Kong is the increased Mainlandization policies they have entailed, trying to integrate Hongkongers more deeply. Hongkongers have rejected the "economy first" policy of the HKSAR government and been more inclined to slow it down and protect the environment, the uniqueness of Hong Kong and the local communities.

Hong Kong's call for remaining distinct under the Basic Law has been amplified by the Mainlandization policies, and the rise of the Hongkonger identity has been a direct cause. This has had the effects of Hongkongers emphasizing their uniqueness and the otherness of their Chinese counterparts. I will now show ways the Hongkonger identity have manifested itself, and how their community is being imagined.

The rejection of the Mainlandization policies have led to the buildup of a rejection, especially among young people, of their Chinese identity, the legitimacy of their government and police[8], and now not just the Chinese Communist Party, but increasingly so Mainlanders as a whole. It is also evident that the protests of today have taken a different form both in substance, as the older generation have yielded to a younger generation that had been in the making and manifesting itself in the Umbrella Movement of 2014. Today, symbolic acts as booing the Chinese national anthem under football matches, and the creation of Hong Kong's own national anthem (Glory to Hong Kong), captures a sense of where this rejection have been directed (Leung, 2019). Even though the protests have been called leaderless, they have spiritual leadership in the now jailed student Edward Leung, who coined the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" in 2016 when he was running for the by-elections – his slogan is also incorporated in the Hong Kong national anthem (McLaughlin, 2019).

It is also clear in light of today's protest that a lot of the rage is directed at China – both people and government. Protesters have actively targeted Chinese businesses and local chains that have criticized the protests (Low & Liu, 2019), and apologized when attacking what they presumed were Mainland-owned businesses like the Shanghai Commercial Bank (Hongkongese) or the bubble tea chain Yifang (Taiwanese) (Wai, 2019). Chinese students and workers in Hong Kong are also actively targeted, and Chinese students have offered shelters by the Shenzhen authorities (bordering city to Hong Kong located in the Mainland) (Mitchell & Liu, 2019). In order to know how to know how many of these Chinese people are identified by protesters it is

[8] Alleged involvement by triads (in this case men dressed in white shirts) who are suspected to be hired by "someone" attacked the protesters at Yuen Long MTR station in Hong Kong. There have always been extremists among the protesters turning to violence, but the police's late response to the attack became a symbol for the protesters that they had no choice but to turn to violence and became more generally accepted after that. Historically Hong Kong protesters have been using peaceful means (Bong-Kwan, 2019). The distrust in the police is caused by many incidents over time, and as causalities have been reported, this distrust has deepened.

necessary to look at the identity formation surrounding Cantonese.

Cantonese and Mandarin are two mutually unintelligible languages (or dialects as they are defined in China). This was not necessarily an issue, as most young Hongkongers are multilingual today, as figure 8 shows the language proficiency (older people are the ones less proficient in English and Mandarin).

Figure 8

Statistics on language use		
	1996	2016
English	38.1%	53.2%
Cantonese	95.2%	94.6%
Mandarin	25.3%	48.6%

Source: BBC poll on language proficiency, accessed November 20, 2019, from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-40406429

Hongkongers also the traditional Chinese characters, compared to the Mainlanders where they use simplified characters – for most Mainlanders the traditional characters can easily be learned, but it also works as a way of separating themselves from the mainlanders as shown in picture 2, made under the Umbrella Revolution. Hongkongers also differs from China by using the wade-giles system of romanization, compared to China which uses pinyin – making it easy to identify places, people and names in general coming from Hong Kong and China. The use of simplified characters in restaurants for commercial gain because Mainlanders easier understands them have angered many Hongkongers, as they emphasize the superiority of Cantonese with its 9 tones and "2000 years in history" rich in verbal expressions, compared to Putonghua's "300 years of history" and small number of tones (4 tones) (B. W.-K. Wong, 2017, pp. 142-144). This is a debatable subject, but it is the narrative being pushed in defense of Cantonese.

Picture 2

Source: (B. W.-K. Wong, 2017, p. 142)

The use of language first became a problem when it became politicized and being one of the main traits of being a Hongkonger – and worse seeing Putonghua as the "other". Even their binding through the standard characters have in recent years seen a backlash, where a growing number of people have started writing in colloquial Cantonese, using traditional characters rarely used in standard Chinese combined with occasional English letter (Ortmann, 2017, p. 125). This is very hard for other speakers of Chinese to understand – this is a better representation for spoken Cantonese, a as it spreads will continue to differentiate the written language that earlier was binding them together with the Mainland. One would have to see where this movement goes, but as with the Norwegian movement with Ivar Aasen in 1848, language building has closely tied to the creation of an imagined community (Anderson, [1983] 2006, pp. 74-75).

Speaking Mandarin in light of the ongoing protests has brought misfortunes, where a common advice is to "not to speak Mandarin when we're out in the street" (Huang, 2019), and proclaiming things like "we are all Chinese" in Mandarin led to a Chinese J.P. Morgan employee being attacked.[i] Being discriminated in relation to speaking Mandarin as a Mainlander is something that seems targeted, exemplified by a mob surrounding a Taiwanese reporter speaking Mandarin and scattered after he showed his Taiwanese identity card.[ii] Another incident happened

to a Chinese-American reporter[9] in September this year being accused of being a "commie agent" and a "yellow thug" upon speaking Mandarin, she was also interrogated and harassed by some protesters while covering the protests (Li, 2019). There are also discussions between Chinese netizens on the degree on politeness in Hong Kong, coming as a tourist, they ranked using English first, then Cantonese and finally Mandarin.[iii] This development is underreported in the media, but it is obviously a thing as one browses through discussion forums.[iv] The insistence of Cantonese is a direct action proclaiming the Hongkonger identity, but attacking Mandarin, which most of the young people are fluent in, is a direct rejection of their Chinese national identity.

The emphasis and symbolism surrounding the rise of the Hongkonger identity are today hypercharged by the internet, making Benedict Anderson's initial claim of nationalism being elite-driven less useful in the case of Hong Kong. Elites do have a role to play, but today we see examples of a Boston Emerson's College student, Francis Hui, making headlines and slogans for the protesters from her initial article in a student-run newspaper called "I am from Hong Kong, not China" (Hui, 2019). She captures the pride they have in their identity and the distaste for the other "Myself and many people from Hong Kong take pride in being somewhat politically separated from China, which is governed by the Chinese Communist Party that notoriously censors the internet and imprisons dissident people in China". On the other hand, this distaste is interesting because without meddling in the law-making, China has not intervened directly much in Hong Kong – the murky case of the kidnapping of a bookkeeper in Hong Kong (Hunt & Joseph, 2016), and the recent clean-up operation by the Chinese military stationed in Hong Kong (Hollingsworth & Lewis, 2019). So, the rise of the Hongkonger identity must be seen in relation to distrust of their own governing structures, but if an intervention by China ever were to happen then this text would predict, obviously, that the distaste for China at large would increase, no matter if it would be a "positive" intervention. For the protesters themselves, their efforts have been rewarded with opposition candidates winning in 17 out 18 in the recent district election, with a record voter turnout, which indicates that protests have made its mark (BBC, 2019).

I suspect there will be a Hong Kong, before and after the ongoing turmoil, and the efforts of making Hong Kong more like the Mainland will need a new approach.

[9] Name of the reporter is Jiayang Fan

Limits of this essay

This essay has many limitations in terms of explaining the full scope of the rise of the Hongkonger identity and its implications. Among these are tourism, immigration, hospital policy, housing policy, internet culture, Hongkongers abroad, China's response and perceptions of the protests, and symbolism used in Cantonese during protests.

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[i] Videoclip about a Chinese office worker responding to the protesters saying, “we are all Chinese!” (我们都是中国人) and then being attacked, accessed from YouTube, 10. November 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rfVlZrHx1c

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