

A Tale of Two Identities: Analyzing the Myth of One Country Two Systems in the Age of Social Media

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Abstract: Pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong since the summer of 2019 mark this semi-autonomous city's intensified relationship with China. After the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty in 1997, the Chinese government declared Hong Kong a Special Administrative Region and established the policy of One Country Two Systems; however, divergent education systems in history rooted fundamentally different core values in China and Hong Kong. Thus, the fear for an uncertain future following a 2047 full handover to China has led to a city-wide identity crisis. To explore the group attitudes of both sides toward the political controversy and to what extent One Country Two Systems has fallen apart in Hong Kong, this paper used Python programs to collect original data and conducted keyword frequency and sentiment analysis. Evidence shows that Hong Kong intellectuals play a crucial role in propagating nationalism-related ideologies as influencers on the internet, while the Chinese State media seeks to use the technology to channel public opinion, resulting in a widened gap between Hong Kong and China in the age of social media.

Introduction

In the second half of 2019, Hong Kong went through a period of political turmoil. Beginning with opposition to a bill introduced in June 2019 that would have allowed the extradition of fugitives from Hong Kong to mainland China, the protests grew to include broader demands in the context of greater democracy and equality. Violent confrontations between police and demonstrators generated further volatility in the once peaceful Asian city. A year later, the National Security Law enacted by Beijing intensified frustration among Hong Kong residents, leading to fear of an uncertain future as well as a city-wide identity crisis. Even though the Chinese government declared Hong Kong a Special Administrative Region after the handover of its sovereignty in 1997 and established the policy of *One Country Two Systems* for the semi-autonomous city, Hong Kong citizens' sense of belonging is ambiguous. With the development of new technologies, social media has become a battlefield for ideologies. The Communist Party of mainland China emphasizes patriotism in its school curriculum, releasing propaganda on State media to reinforce nationalism. In the post-handover era Hong Kong, intellectuals play a crucial role in promoting the search of identity. Hong Kong's independent education system means Hong Kong citizens have a distinct, oftentimes complex, view towards China and their identity. By rejecting the Chinese identity, Hong Kong pro-democracy activists, represented by intellectuals, have been calling for the creation of a national identity for Hong Kong citizens since the Umbrella Movement of 2014.¹ Some of Hong Kong's intellectuals were arrested outside the city and deported to Beijing with the passing of the National Security Law in May 2020. Since many of them

¹ Anthony Fung, "Postcolonial Hong Kong identity: Hybridising the local and the national," *Social Identities* 10, no. 3 (2004): 413.

are active influencers on social media platforms such as Twitter, and the Chinese State media has a strong voice on China's Twitter-like website Weibo, this paper analyzes original data derived from both Twitter and Weibo to explore the linkage between education, intellectuals and national identities in the age of social media. The relative frequency and sentiment analysis of key words in the data shows that Hong Kong's growing awareness of local identity and desire for independence contrasts with China's tough position on the *One Country Two Systems* principle, resulting in a widened gap between the identities of Hong Kong and China. Continual protests against Beijing indicate that turbulence in Hong Kong has not ended; it is not the only struggle facing a rising and more aggressive China. Exploring data from social media reveals a link between intellectuals and nationalism as well as group attitudes toward the political controversy with the developing technologies of this new era, and more importantly, brings a peaceable solution to Hong Kong's relationship with China a step closer.

I. Literature Review

Nationalism and roles of intellectuals

According to Anthony Smith, there are four paradigms of national identity and nationalism. The *modernist paradigm* and its nation-building model has been the standard orthodox theory since the 1960s, believing that the construction of a nation is a planned process of modernization. In contrast to modernism and the modernist paradigm, *ethno-symbolism* emphasizes long-term analysis on subjective factors that influence the formation of nationalism. *Primordialism*, supported by an older generation of historians, asserts the persistence in the history of nations and sees nationalism as part of a long cycle of ethnic identity. Lastly, *perennialism* is an organic version of theory regarding nations and nationalism.² Scholars such as Benedict Anderson and Ernest

Gellner adhered to the modernist paradigm yet have a different theoretical emphasis. Anderson took the view that technologies influence the worldview of people, leading to nationalism in society. Gellner saw nationalism as an idea organically arising from divisions in society. Hroch defined nationalism as ideas arising from the efforts of a group of intelligentsia, which then grows to eventually become a movement of the populace.

In the Enlightenment of the eighteenth-century, the invention of novels and modern newspapers were important for the birth of imagined communities of nations, providing the technological means for "representing" certain communities.³ This social transformation not only enriched one's emotional expression but influenced the apprehensions of time; consequently, the way people understood the world fundamentally changed. Examining the structures of eighteenth century novels and newspapers, Anderson points out that the emergence of our conception of *simultaneity* was important to the imagined communities of nations since "the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogy of the idea of a nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) in history."⁴ The convergence of capitalism and print technology, as well as the diversity of human language, basically set the stage for the modern nation.⁵

² Anthony Smith and Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and modernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 24.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

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Ernest Gellner holds a different perspective regarding nations and nationalism. He views nationalism as “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent,” and “a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state, a contingency already formally excluded by the principle in its general formulation, should not separate the power-holders from the rest.”⁶ Gellner disagrees with the Marxist notion that nationalism is a class ideology formed within capitalism and instead thinks of it as a product of the progress of industrialization and modernization. In an industrial society, occupational changes increased the mobility of the literate. Such changes are constant and continuous; therefore, nationalism is “rooted in a *certain kind* of division of labor, one which is complex and persistently, cumulatively changing.”⁷ Since such mobility requires people to be acceptable to their fellows, an educational machine which can provide “a wide range of training for the generic cultural base” is needed.⁸ However, this educational infrastructure would be too large and costly for intuitions other than the State to sustain. Therefore, only the state is strong enough to control such a crucial function. This explains why state and culture *must* now be linked in an unavoidable way, and hence why we live in the age of nationalism.

Intellectuals with western experiences are leading the force to create an image of national identity in Hong Kong. They embody Miroslav Hroch’s theory of the crucial role intelligentsia plays in the development of nations and nationalism. The development of nationalism often follows certain stages. During the initial period, which Hroch has called Phase A, “the energies of the activists were above all devoted to scholarly enquiry into and dissemination of an awareness of the linguistic, cultural, social, and sometimes historical attributes of the non-dominant group.”⁹ In other words, an original small circle of intellectuals rediscovers the national “culture” and formulates the idea of the “nation.” There follows the crucial Phase B of promulgating the idea of the nation by politicizing cultural nationalism in growing towns to “win over as many of their ethnic group as possible to the project of a future nation.”¹⁰ Finally, when a majority of the population adopts a special story around their shared national identity, Phase C is formed. The popular involvement in nationalism creates a mass movement. Hroch emphasizes that it is “only during this final stage that a full social structure could come into being.”¹¹

II. Methodology

This paper gathered data from social media platforms to explore the role student intellectuals play on developing national identities in the age of social media. For the Hong Kong section, the analyzed objects were online posts from four significant pro-democracy activist accounts on Twitter. However, Twitter is inaccessible in the mainland: political voices are dominated by State media due to strict censorship. Therefore, to gather information from China, the analyzed objects were public search results on Weibo, a Twitter-like Chinese social media platform said to have 486 million monthly active users in its latest second-quarter earnings report of 2019.¹² To examine the general attitude of common Chinese people towards the protests in Hong Kong since June 2019,

⁶ Ernest Gellner and John Breuilly, *Nations and nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press Ithaca, 1983), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹ Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation Building Process in Europe,” *New Left Review* 198, no. 3 (1993), 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² Weibo Corporation, 2019, *Weibo Reports Second Quarter 2019 Unaudited Financial Results*.

noting that news relating to Hong Kong was selectively reported and interpreted by the Chinese State media's account on Weibo, the author conducted relative frequency and sentiment analysis of keywords in trending headlines on the platform. According to a report from the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), 67.8% of internet users are between the ages of 10-39.¹³ Thus, the search results could reveal how the younger Chinese generation in particular views China's relationship with Hong Kong and ideologies about nationalism under the influence of propaganda on social media. On Weibo, people can use tags and discuss current news, the homepage provides the ranks of the top fifty trending headlines for every given moment. The author of this paper designed and wrote a web-scraping program and a keyword statistical analysis program in Python to generate and analyze data from the Chinese Twitter-like social media. Due to the availability of Weibo's search history results, data from May 9th, 2017 to October 28th, 2019 was collected by the Python programs and found 546 trending headlines in total related to Hong Kong. Data crawled from Weibo showed that Chinese people were apathetic towards news relating to Hong Kong before the protests began in June 2019. Once protests started, the opinion was generally negative, as based on news reports from the Chinese State media.

Corresponding to the data analysis of mainland China, similar Python programs were used to collect data from the homepage of the representative Hong Kong pro-democracy activist organization *Demosistō* on Twitter as well as its three founders. An open and developer-friendly system, Twitter is an informative source containing extensive collections of data. Therefore, the sentiment and relative frequency analysis of keywords in original tweets of those four ever since their accounts' registration show the significant role of Hong Kong pro-democracy activists, represented by intellectuals, in promoting ideas regarding nationalism using social media platforms.

III. Case Study

The Case of Hong Kong

According to Benedict Anderson, a "nation" is an imagined community, and "nationalism" is a human-made concept to consolidate nations.¹⁴ The uncertain future of Hong Kong in the post-handover era has led to a stronger willingness of residents to solve the identity crisis by creating a new national identity. Previously an English colony for more than 150 years, Hong Kong is deeply influenced by British culture; however, it still maintains traditional Chinese culture. Due to its geographical location, Hong Kong's culture is closely tied to and influenced by Cantonese culture. Guangdong province in China shares the same language with Hong Kong and celebrates the same Cantonese festivals. Thus, the culture of Hong Kong is not unique as a foundation for nationalism, but considering the trend of globalization, the definition of nationalism may be expanded. The combination of Eastern and Western cultures makes it possible for Hong Kong citizens to formulate an identity of a multicultural region.

Education is a major tool to promote a national character and identity.¹⁵ Traditional Chinese culture was rooted in Hong Kong education, even before the handover of its sovereignty. In the nineteenth century, the British believed investing tax revenue into education for the colony of Hong Kong was worthwhile. Since the schools in Hong Kong taught students to be more sympathetic towards the British compared to

¹³ China Internet Network Information Center, 2019, *The 43rd Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*.

¹⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

¹⁵ Morris, "Education and Politics: The Case of Hong Kong from an Historical Perspective," 249.

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other foreign powers in China, education could bring long term benefits to British trade and influence in Hong Kong once the Hong Kong-educated men became leaders of the modernization movement in China.¹⁶ The peak of British educational policy was the founding of Hong Kong University in 1911 through the cooperation of local multiracial elites, the British colonial government, and the Chinese provincial government of Guangdong.¹⁷ Traditional Chinese culture was emphasized in Hong Kong education to serve the British colonial rule at that time. Educational policy in Hong Kong often changed over time to accommodate particular political goals, meaning the link between China's identity and Chinese culture was unstable. Prior to 1982, the link "primarily involved the conscious pursuit of apoliticization as a counter to the intrusion of external political influences."¹⁸

Colonialism and the decolonization of Hong Kong have been major influences on the educational system generally, but specifically, on the curriculum.¹⁹ There are four main consequences and features of the political influence on school curriculum in Hong Kong. The first, and most apparent, is the population was unprepared for its future as a semi-autonomous region of the PRC after the political transition of 1997. Second, the emergence of local political leadership is a recent phenomenon. Thirdly, the school curriculum can also partially account for this feature of Hong Kong society, which can be viewed as having a lack of clarity between national and cultural identity. Lastly, Hong Kongers' "pursuit of self and family interests and a relative lack of concern for broader communal and national concerns" also influenced school curriculum in Hong Kong.²⁰

In the early colonial period, British administrators and Chinese educators in Hong Kong selectively employed Chinese cultural heritage and their own influences to cultivate the sense of "being at the periphery of both the Chinese and the Western worlds."²¹ However, although it is undoubted that the pre- and post-colonial politics of Hong Kong have had a crucial impact on syllabus drafting, textbook production, and teaching, it has seldom been the result of direct governmental interference. The civil war between the Nationalist government and the Communist revolutionaries brought an endless stream of refugees into Hong Kong.²² Most of them were educated and recognized themselves as Chinese, yet could not return to China. Indifferent to the local history of their new home, refugee teachers put their nostalgia into textbooks. However, in 1952, the committee of the Education Department of Hong Kong determined those textbooks propaganda of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and sought to educate students in a more neutral way.²³ Divergent education guidelines made Hong Kong different from mainland China.

Negligence vastly explains the growing willingness of a population towards independence. Despite the Chinese government declaring Hong Kong a Special Administrative Region, Hong Kong citizens were never recognized as Chinese in the same way as those on the mainland. Although the legitimacy of the authorities increased after

¹⁶ Luk, "Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum: Heritage and Colonialism," 656.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Morris, "Education and Politics: The Case of Hong Kong from an Historical Perspective," 250.

¹⁹ Paul Morris and Anthony Sweeting, "Education and Politics: The Case of Hong Kong from a Historical Perspective," *Oxford Review of Education* 17, no. 3 (1991): 249.

²⁰ Morris, "Education and Politics: The Case of Hong Kong from an Historical Perspective," 265.

²¹ Bernard Hung-Kay Luk, "Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum: Heritage and Colonialism," *Comparative Education Review* 35, no. 4 (1991): 650.

²² Luk, "Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum: Heritage and Colonialism," 661.

²³ Ibid., 667-68.

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the handover, Hong Kong citizens still harbored a feeling of distance from mainland political icons.²⁴

Since then, external influences have suppressed the local identity of Hong Kong, and official voices of Hong Kong have been perceivably subsumed into the national identity.²⁵ Various Hong Kong residents, especially the intelligentsia, believe that it is necessary to protect and reinforce their own identity. Usually, in Chinese social media, Hong Kong residents are called “Hong Kong citizens” to avoid ambiguous political meaning. However, for radical Hong Kong residents, a simple acknowledgement is not enough; their goal is to build the national identity of “Hong Kongers.” Increasing political activism has led to mass participation in protests such as the Umbrella Movement, pointed out by Edmund Cheng as “a particular manifestation of a new wave of bottom-up activism in post-colonial Hong Kong, where the hybrid regime is characterized by civil liberties, an independent judiciary, and evolving electoral politics, but also corporatist domination and a resourceful local government backed by an authoritarian sovereign.”²⁶ The intellectuals’ participation in the Umbrella Movement of 2014 was critical to promote local identity and appeared to follow the phases Hroch described.²⁷ Several activists, mainly college students who were not satisfied with Hong Kong’s condition under *One Country Two Systems*, sought the benefits of being recognized as a national community. Since the Umbrella Movement, many activist groups have created and spread their unique ideas of nationalism among the public. To politicize cultural nationalism, they underlined the cultural differences between Hong Kong residents and mainland Chinese, portraying the latter as the opposite of liberal ideas and values. Fearing the loss of democratic institutions and personal liberties, as well as uncertainties following a 2047 full handover to China, a strong sense of isolation and alienation grew among Hong Kong residents. Protesters then followed Phase B, using social media to spread their ideas to a wider audience and therefore increasing the awareness of nationalism and participation in political protests. The upheavals in Hong Kong since the summer of 2019 exemplifies Miroslav Hroch’s conclusion – the final stage of popular involvement in nationalism creates a mass movement.

Similar to the Umbrella Movement, intellectuals who were usually well educated by universities in Hong Kong and with overseas experiences are the leading forces of the protests that began from the summer of 2019. Regarding the mix of Chinese traditional Confucian ideologies and Western liberal ideas that they have been taught, the latter is more favorable to them. *Demosistō* is a young political party that advocated for the self-determination of Hong Kong. Its founding members were former leaders of student activist groups that played important roles during the 2014 Umbrella Movement. Joshua Wong, the secretary-general of *Demosistō*, and Agnes Chow, the deputy secretary, were core members of a student activist group called *Scholarism*, which was active in Hong Kong education and youth policies. Another founder of *Demosistō*, Nathan Law, was the former secretary-general of the *Hong Kong Federation of Students*, a student organization founded by student unions of the four universities in Hong Kong with more than sixty years of history. Activist organizations like *Demosistō* have significant influence on universities and social media, explaining why college students were a major force behind the 2019 protests.

²⁴ Anthony Fung, “Postcolonial Hong Kong identity: Hybridising the local and the national,” 413.

²⁵ Ibid., 412.

²⁶ Edmund Cheng, “Street politics in a hybrid regime: The diffusion of political activism in post-colonial Hong Kong,” *The China Quarterly* 226 (2016): 384.

²⁷ Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation Building Process in Europe,” *New Left Review* 198, no. 3 (1993), 5.

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Due to radically promoting the independence of Hong Kong, Joshua Wong was banned from the District Council election of Hong Kong by the Hong Kong government with the support of Beijing. The attacks over his potential Vietnamese background on social media revealed how ideas of nationalism were used to discredit him. Joshua Wong, a well-educated elite, along with the other leaders of activist organizations, studied at an Ivy League school and received awards and praise in the West. Behaving like an adroit politician, Wong successfully appeased the Hong Kong citizens, and many Hong Kong news reports, into speaking out against criticism from the mainland. Anthony Smith noted that “One should add that nationalists themselves, perhaps not unexpectedly, have wanted to have things both ways: seeing the nation as organic and rooted in history and territory, but at the same time as created and engineered by nationalist elites.”²⁸

The Case of Mainland China

2019, the 70th anniversary of its founding, was a remarkable year for China. It was also 30 years after the Tiananmen massacre. The memory of this tragedy has been wiped out entirely in mainland China since 1989: none of the history textbooks mention it at all. Therefore, for those born in the 1990s beyond, the Tiananmen massacre is unfamiliar. As a result, their interest in investigating the tragedy has disappeared. For instance, if one searches “Zhao Ziyang,” the ousted leader of the CPC imprisoned for believing in holding open talks with student demonstrators in 1989 on the Chinese internet, no relevant information would appear, significantly different from the extensive search results that would appear on Google.²⁹ The same thing would happen if one searched for “Tank Man,” the most iconic symbol of the Tiananmen massacre. The centralized political power under the current Chinese president Xi Jinping deliberately oppresses the intention of anyone learning the truth about the Tiananmen massacre. Glenn Tiffert argues that “By controlling the past, Xi is reclaiming the right to monopolize the meaning that Chinese attach to the present and the intentions that they form about the future.”³⁰

Xi believes “an open door to Western political and economic ideas will undermine the power of the Chinese state.” Thus, to consolidate power, Xi aims to silence alternative political voices, particularly on China’s internet.³¹ Under Xi, censorship in China is stricter than ever. Moreover, with the development of new technologies, the emerging paradigm of digital censorship enables authorities to edit historical records freely to suit past and present needs.³² In the process of unifying ideology, Xi has labeled western ideas that would challenge China’s political system as unpatriotic and dangerous. Hence, Beijing has banned academic research and teaching on seven topics: “universal values, civil society, citizens’ rights, freedom of the press, mistakes made by the Communist Party, the privileges of capitalism, and the independence of the judiciary.”³³ Xi also tightened patriotic education in schools, especially in colleges. Considering students’ roles in the Tiananmen protests, he intended to make them a “stronghold of Party leadership.”³⁴

²⁸ Smith, *Nationalism and modernism*, 23.

²⁹ Ziyang Zhao, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

³⁰³¹ Glenn Tiffert, “30 Years After Tiananmen: Memory in the Era of Xi Jinping,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 2 (2019): 46.

³¹³² Elizabeth C. Economy, “China’s imperial president Xi Jinping tightens his grip Citation metadata,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (2014): 4.

³²³³ Tiffert, “30 Years After Tiananmen: Memory in the Era of Xi Jinping,” 44.

³³ Economy, “China’s imperial president Xi Jinping tightens his grip Citation metadata,” 42.

³⁴ Tiffert, “30 Years After Tiananmen: Memory in the Era of Xi Jinping,” 42.

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Nationalism has been firmly intertwined with patriotism in China. According to Lagerkvist, Mao Zedong created anti-imperialist nationalism. His successors, like Deng Xiaoping, furthered his work into a new Chinese nationalism, emphasizing the importance of national-patriotic education to prevent China's youth from conducting similar movements ever again. "The people's resentment needed an outlet; the government deftly directed it outward, towards the rest of the world," Lagerkvist argued.³⁵ This is the tactic of Xi Jinping's government today. "Foreign forces" have been the scapegoat of the Chinese government regarding protests in Hong Kong since the summer of 2019. In a study of China's strategies on nationalism, Johan Lagerkvist and Tim Rühlig emphasized that "The aim of the Communist Party's new nationalist program was to sharpen the Chinese sense of humiliation at having been bullied and colonized by the West and Japan in the nineteenth century."³⁶ Thus, for young people in mainland China, it can be assumed the embarrassment and humiliation about China's modern history is having two effects: escapism combined with low-level political awareness and a strong sense of patriotism. Chinese authorities glorify individual success and economic growth to ensure any "suppressed energy" is directed towards the nascent market economy instead of seeking personal freedom and liberty within politics and society.³⁷

For young people in Hong Kong, the apathy and low political awareness their contemporaries display in the mainland has created a strong sense of alienation from China. There is a growing uneasiness regarding how the mainland government directs the views of its people. The so-called "legendary development" of China, especially after the *Reform and Opening-up* policy in 1979, is purely economic. Therefore, the "legendary development" is unconvincing to the younger generation of Hong Kong, who prioritize individual liberal rights. Residents of Hong Kong have traditionally enjoyed more political freedom than those on the mainland, and many who have called for democratic reform have watched Xi's moves with growing concern.³⁸ Since the summer of 2019, protests in Hong Kong have become more radical, widening the chasm of misunderstanding between Hong Kong and China.

A typical example of this gap is that in Chinese mass media Hong Kong police are regarded as 'defenders of the motherland' – the opposite of their portrayal in Hong Kong. The CPC picked out a policeman named "Liu Sir the baldhead" as a typical character for propaganda purposes, offering him nationwide praise and honor. Meanwhile, that same character was shown in Hong Kong's news as one who was ready to shoot citizens and threatens demonstrators. Consequently, he and his family received death threats from Hong Kong pro-democracy activists. The effects of the propaganda in China became clear when "Liu Sir the baldhead" and a few other police officers were invited to Beijing during the National Day holiday of China in October 2019. The data from that event shows that the trending headlines on Weibo all concern patriotism and nationalism, such as the group of invited Hong Kong police officers who climbed the Great Wall and waved the five-star red flag, symbolizing China. Nevertheless, the data also indicated that every detail of the Hong Kong police officers' journey to Beijing was thoroughly reported, revealing that the highlights of their trip had been carefully selected. Considering that headlines of "Liu Sir the baldhead" was trending in China since September 29th, two days before the National Day holiday, and a series of relevant news reports were released

³⁵ Johan Lagerkvist and Tim Rühlig, "The mobilization of memory and tradition: Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement and Beijing's 1989 Tiananmen Movement," *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal* 2, no.2 (2016): 737.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Economy, "China's imperial president Xi Jinping tightens his grip Citation metadata," 2.

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during the holiday, it is reasonable to discern that the Chinese mass media was posting required political propaganda. Because of the deep and pervasive censorship in China, “outspoken newspapers were assigned new editorial teams, a once-vigorous corps of investigative reporters have been hemmed in, and coverage now generally parrots the official line on topics of any significance.”³⁹

VI. Data Analysis

Hong Kong

Activist organizations in Hong Kong like *Demosistō* have been influential in the mass media, leading to participation through generating attitudinal support.⁴⁰ On the other hand, media exposure implies that Hong Kong’s newly-found identity is thus largely a “mediated construction, foregrounding the cultural differences between ‘Hong Kongers’ and the mainland Chinese.”⁴¹ Additionally, as part of the younger generation, these activists know the power of social media and have used it to promote nationalist ideas to wider potential audiences. Ideally, during this process of identity formation, the mass media would be neutral, serving as a “primary site of socialization, assimilation, social integration, and identity formation.” However, in reality, according to Fung, “mainland people were stigmatized as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘uneducated’ outsiders and intruders, and a ready-made cultural contrast against which modern, cosmopolitan Hong Kongers could define themselves.”⁴²

Figure 1 contains four different graphs of the relative frequency of keywords from the Twitter homepage of the representative Hong Kong pro-democracy activist group *Demosistō* and the three founders of it – Joshua Wong, Nathan Law, and Agnes Chow. This paper used an original Python web-scraping program written by the author to collect and analyze data from Twitter. The result showed that from the day of the account’s creation, the number of original tweets scraped from Joshua Wong is 2125, from Nathan Law is 1330, from Agnes Chow is 547, and from the group homepage of *Demosistō* is 784. The sentiment and relative frequency analyses show that the top six keywords in their tweets were mainly related to liberal ideas, such as “democracy,” “freedom,” and “legislation.” Another frequently mentioned word was “police” – 18.45% of Joshua Wong’s and 24.68% of Agnes Chow’s tweets were about the police. Specifically, they criticized the way Hong Kong police treated protestors. The tweets also focused on social and political issues in Hong Kong such as health care and public education. Social media has been used as an effective platform to promote progressive ideas for activist organizations like *Demosistō*. Frequently appeared keywords may reinforce concepts of liberty to the public, particularly college students. Creating a strong sense of something different from their impression of a typical Chinese national identity, the official website of *Demosistō* claims they “push for the city’s political and economic autonomy from the oppression of the CPC and capitalist hegemon.” They also assert that the organization uses nonviolent means to achieve goals, however, the reality of Hong Kong from June 2019 onwards shows quite the opposite. There has been a radical escalation of violence. The conflicts between police and protestors are tense, and the attitude of common Hong Kong citizens towards the protests is ambiguous. It is possible that citizens remain silent for their self-interest and would favor the winning side once tensions settle down.

³⁹ Tiffert, “30 Years After Tiananmen: Memory in the Era of Xi Jinping,” 41.

⁴⁰ Francis L.F. Lee, Hsuan-Ting Chen, and Michael Chan, “Social media use and university students’ participation in a large-scale protest campaign: The case of Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement,” *Telematics and Informatics* no.34 (2017): 458.

⁴¹ Fung, , “Postcolonial Hong Kong identity: Hybridising the local and the national,” 401.

⁴² Ibid.

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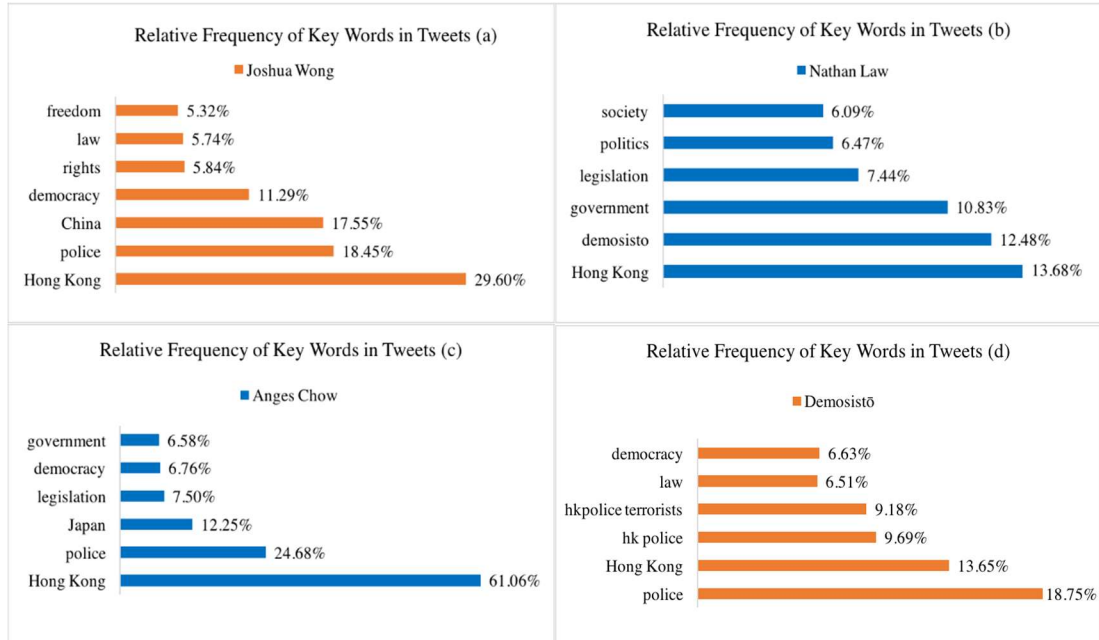


Figure 1. Relative Frequency of Keywords in Tweets

Mainland China

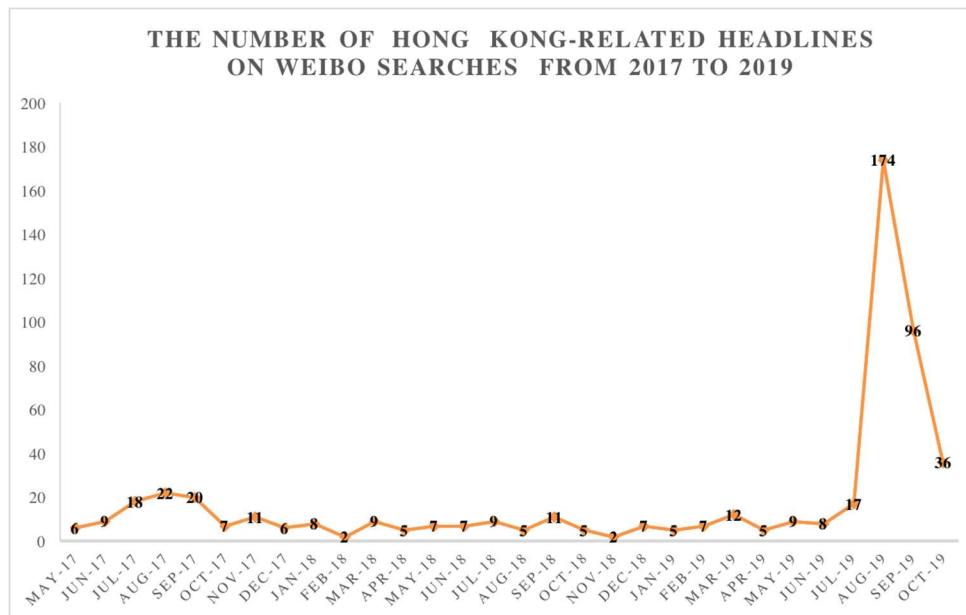


Figure 2. The Number of Hong Kong-Related Headlines on Weibo Searches

Although the Chinese government proclaimed Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region under the policy of *One Country Two Systems*, the island has been isolated from mainland China since the handover of sovereignty in 1997. Even with the rapid development of the Internet, it has been a challenge for young people from

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mainland China to understand their peers in Hong Kong in an unbiased way due to their inability to access uncensored information about Hong Kong. A significant increase in topics appeared in August, when the situation in Hong Kong was intense, and protests started to become more radical (Figure 2). Since online searching is a voluntary and subjective behavior, it is plausible to conclude that Chinese people were apathetic about the real life of Hong Kong citizens before this turbulent summer.

Analyzing the relative frequency of keywords in trending headlines related to Hong Kong, July 2019 was a tipping point (Figure 3). Before July 2019, shown in blue, the trending keywords were related to people's livelihood, like transportation or mobile payments. Nevertheless, since July 2019, as portrayed in orange (Figure 2), keywords containing clear political orientation began trending with higher frequency. State media controlled by the CPC portrayed the Hong Kong police as hero-like symbols to the public from the very beginning of the summer, yet described Hong Kongers who supported the demonstrators as "spoiled youth." Negative keywords like "mob," "violence," and "arrest" demonstrate how Chinese people's attitude towards this issue was channeled in a certain direction.

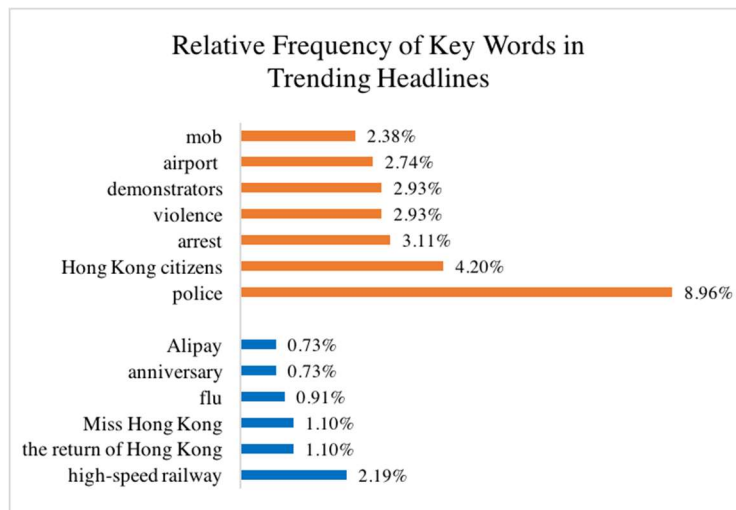


Figure 3. Relative Frequency of Key Words in Trending Headlines on Weibo

This result also shows how the political tactics of the Communist Party of China have changed. The Party learned from the bloody experience of the Tiananmen massacre and the Umbrella Movement of Hong Kong in 2014 that a direct violent crackdown may not effectively appease an angry crowd. Instead, the party used social media as a propaganda tool. During the summer of 2019, antagonism towards protesters in Hong Kong and their unpatriotic behaviors was increased by news media in mainland China that were substantially under the Party's control.

Since the information in social media that people are exposed to is filtered by those who users trust and relate to, it has the potential to be more effective than other informational venues.⁴³ In the case of China, the authority reinforces nationalism and patriotism through selective news reporting by State's media accounts on the social media platform Weibo, which spearheads Chinese people to view protesters in Hong Kong in a

⁴³ Gil de Zúñiga, Homero, Nakwon Jung, and Sebastián Valenzuela, "Social Media Use for News and Individuals' Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Political Participation," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17 no.3 (2012): 331.

negative way. By regarding Hong Kong citizens as ungrateful mobs, Chinese people have developed a strong sense of belonging and honor towards their national identity, peaking on October 1st, the National Day of China. The alleged mobs in Hong Kong have become an imagined common enemy, with the consequence that there is a greater divide between Hong Kong and China.

VII. Discussion

The political reality of China is that Xi's leadership and his rising centralized power have made Hong Kong citizens fear of losing democracy and freedom plausible. The way that the CPC deals with historical events like the Tiananmen massacre, both the direct crackdown of it in 1989 and the artificial disappearance of it in records, has increased Hong Kong citizens' anxiety regarding the uncertain future the city faces. Although not every activist advocates complete independence of Hong Kong, most pursue more democracy and freedom than under the CPC's tougher stance on the issues of the city.

Because social media has become more of a battlefield between ideologies, this paper analyzed the relative frequency and sentiment of Hong Kong-related keywords in both Hong Kong and mainland China's social media. The sentiment and relative frequency analysis of keywords reveal common mainland Chinese people's attitudes towards Hong Kong were profoundly affected by China's strict censorship and selective news reporting.

First, mainland Chinese people did not seem concerned about Hong Kong until the escalation of protests spread over the news, matching the significant increase in search results and trending headlines related to Hong Kong in August 2019. This implies that under the *One Country Two Systems* principle, the geographical and psychological isolation between mainland China and Hong Kong has given the latter room and willingness to grow an independent identity.

Second, political content, or propaganda, on social media widens the gap between Hong Kong and China by intentionally stigmatizing the other side. In Hong Kong, pro-democracy activists frequently mentioned keywords related to liberal ideas, reinforcing the difference in culture and beliefs between Hong Kong residents and those of mainland China and thus rationalizing their resistance to merging with Chinese patriotism and nationalism promoted by the CPC. This intentional opposition has led to an inevitable divergence between Hong Kong and China. Data from social media shows that Hong Kong pro-democracy activists, represented by intellectuals with experience studying overseas, have created a sense of superiority in being liberal, modern, and cosmopolitan to increase Hong Kong citizens' cohesion. Similarly, Hong Kong protestors have been portrayed as unruly mobs who carried out riots by Chinese State media to create antipathy among the mainland Chinese and create a stronger sense of patriotism.

Education and intellectuals are crucial factors in constructing nationalism and play different roles in mainland China and Hong Kong. State-controlled curriculums of the mainland have emphasized patriotism as the foundation of nationalism since the age of Mao, and the historical memory of the public has been strictly filtered by the Party. Hong Kong's educational policies have changed over regimes, yet retain the root of Chinese culture and Western ideologies. Intellectuals have also made notable contributions to the development of nationalism in Hong Kong. Most founders of Hong Kong pro-democracy activist originations have studied overseas and use modern means like social media to propagate ideas of self-determination and stress the inevitability of creating an independent identity against the politically correct one.

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At the 2019 commencement ceremony of Hong Kong University, the speaker Professor Liu Ningrong pointed out that until now, people could not see the truth of the predicament of Hong Kong since they only asked about positions instead of facts, sought freedom instead of order, talked about ideologies without any questions, accomplished goals without compromise, and held enmity instead of mercy.⁴⁴ The transcript of Liu's speech caused a sensation on the Chinese internet before being quickly banned by the Party. The future of the relationship between Hong Kong and China is not optimistic. After months of anti-government and pro-democracy protests in 2019 and 2020 that escalated violence within the city, the newly passed National Security Law of May 2020 further darkened the future of Hong Kong. The policy, which the Chinese government claims and insists upon, is the beginning of *One Country Two Systems* slowly becoming *One Country Two Nations*. In the age of social media, education is still an important tool to practice nationalism for both Hong Kong and China. As influencers on the internet, Hong Kong intellectuals play a crucial role in propagating nationalism-related ideologies, while the Chinese State media seeks to use the technology to channel public opinion. Social media has no doubt become the new battlefield of contradictory ideologies as well as creating socioeconomic globalization. A rising and aggressive China challenges the rest of the world – Hong Kong's struggle is not singular.

⁴⁴ Liu Ningrong. "Until today we still can't know the truth of Hong Kong's predicament." Speech, 2019 Fall Commencement of Institute for China Business at Hong Kong University, Hong Kong, September 16, 2019.

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