Identity Formation in Taiwan and Hong Kong – How Much Difference, How Many Similarities?


Malte Philipp Kaeding

Over the past decades, Hong Kong and Taiwan have both developed a unique local or national identity. These have become a subject of great scholarly interest since the 1990s, coinciding with democratization in Taiwan and the handover of Hong Kong to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1997. These political changes have influenced the formation of identities in both areas. Although the individual identities remain strong, they are faced with the challenges of globalization and the consequences of interaction with a powerful China.

Hong Kong and Taiwan serve as excellent examples for a cross-case analysis of identity formation in the so-called Greater China area. Both entities share a similar socio-economic background and development, and an authoritarian past that de-emphasized political participation through a strong emphasis on traditional Chinese (political) culture. The issue of identity plays an important role in society and politics, although with different strengths and emphases. The democratic development of Hong Kong and Taiwan and their relations with China offer good opportunities for the comparison of national identity issues in both places.

This article will analyze the formation of the Hong Kong identity, the changes it has undergone and the challenges it faces. The study will reveal similarities to and differences from the development in Taiwan and show to what extent identities are constructed through and based on ethno-cultural and civic identity. Today, the Hong Kong identity has to assert itself against a variety of threats and changes, most notably, rapid integration with the Chinese mainland in economic and increasingly, in socio-political terms. This paper concludes that the civic part of the Hong Kong identity has remained the most resilient, despite the absence of full democracy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). The Hong Kong case does provide valuable insights for the Taiwan identity, in times of wide-ranging cooperation with China. Taiwan’s civic identity possesses the additional components of a successful democratic struggle and nationhood and thus will likely prevail in the foreseeable future.

The theoretical framework for this paper is provided by theories of national identity construction, followed by an examination of identity formation in the
ethno-cultural and civic realm in Hong Kong. Quantitative studies offer insights into changes in citizens’ identification after 1997. Finally, a comparison with Taiwan looks at the similarities and differences in identity formation in both places.

THEORIES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Today, the national identity of Hong Kong as a part of the PRC is unquestionable. However, the majority of the people still identify themselves as either Hong Kongers or Hong Kong Chinese and not as Chinese. The distinct identity that evolved in the city is more than a metropolitan identity, such as, the Shanghainese in China or the New Yorkers in the USA. For more than 150 years, Hong Kong was a separate political entity (Lau 2005). The Hong Kong identity connotes affluence, openness to the world, professionalism and pragmatism and in this it has remained distinct from and to some extent “opposed to Chinese identity with its attachment to a particular tradition, ethnicity, and nationality” (Mathews, Lui and Ma 2008: 11).

Research on national identity has produced numerous theoretical approaches to this subject. Regarding the definition of origin and nature of national identity, the debate is positioned between essentialist and constructivist approaches. The essential or primordial view of national identity assumes that certain group identities and attachments are given, based on blood, race, language and territory which possess a deep “coerciveness” (Geertz 1963: 259). On the other hand, the constructivist approach to the study of national identity views the nation as an “imagined political community,” stresses its invention and creation and refuses any primordialism (Anderson 1983: 6).

The influential dichotomy in the understanding of the national identity of civic identity versus ethnic or cultural identity is located along these lines. Anthony D. Smith argues that the civic model entails a historic territory, a legal-political community of equal members, articulated in a set of rights and duties and a common civic culture and ideology. On the other hand the ethnic concept emphasizes a community of birth and native culture including vernacular languages, customs and traditions (Smith 1991: 11-12). However, he also acknowledges that most states and nations contain both “civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms” (ibid. 13). Smith’s definition contains a dual notion of culture — native culture in the ethno-cultural realm and civic culture in the civic realm. Civic culture always includes an element of participation in the political sphere, while native culture can be understood as the experience of day to day life in the neighborhood or at grassroots level. Related to this, is the idea of lifestyles understood as “routines incorporated into habits of dress, eating, modes of acting and favorite milieux for encountering others”
Borders between the realms of civic and ethno-cultural identity are a matter of degree. When Western (political) values become entrenched in the lifestyle of the population, they can foster the desire to participate and help to develop a civic identity. Anthony Smith’s research on national identity is valuable in the context of this analysis which makes an argument for a unique civic and ethno-cultural identity of the Taiwan and Hong Kong people vis-à-vis the Chinese on the mainland.

**EVOLUTION OF HONG KONG IDENTITY**

In the first decades of the colony, there were few signs of a distinct local identity and one key feature of the Chinese living there prior to the Second World War was, in fact, their “sojourner mentality”: most of them were economic migrants or refugees who intended to return to China after they had made sufficient money for a more comfortable life back home (Tsang 2003: 222). This ended in 1950 when the border to China was effectively closed (Ku 2004: 335). Those born in Hong Kong after 1949 did not have any first-hand experiences of the PRC, until it opened up in the late 1970s. Separation from the Chinese mainland for the following decades allowed Hong Kong to develop a political culture and an identity of its own (Tsang 2003: 223).

**ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY**

**Economic Development**

One major structural development that provided a great impetus for the advance of a local identity was the transformation of Hong Kong’s economy from an entrepôt economy to a capitalist economy (Lau and Lee 1988: 24). An early attempt to describe an emerging distinct identity was the “Hong Kong Man”; Westernized but Chinese, yet different from British colonizers as well as mainland Chinese (Baker 1983: 478). The awareness of the vast socioeconomic differences between the crown colony and the Chinese mainland had developed in a sense of cultural distance or even superiority to the mainland Chinese. The Hong Kong identity has built upon this view of a sophisticated, affluent “us” and a poor, backward “other” (Ku 2002: 356).

**Popular Culture and Education**

The importance of the popular culture in the formation of a distinct cultural identity can be explained by the non-interventionist attitude of the colonial government: “In the absence of any hegemonic framework of high culture, national culture, and so forth, popular culture in Hong Kong must play the role – set the agenda – of ‘culture’ per se” (Chan 1994: 449). This culture was
transmitted through the popular media (Ma 1999: 23) which was discursively entrenched in Western values. It transformed the Chinese cultural characteristics particular to Hong Kong, articulated local experiences and concerns, crystallized images of a distinct “Hong Kong way of life” (Fung 2004: 401) and popularized the term, “Hong Kong person” (Ma 1999: 13). First and foremost, television and film contributed to the articulation of a separate Hong Kong identity where the cultural differences between Hong Kongers and mainland Chinese were particularly emphasized (Ma 2006). Only through this “othering” of the Mainlanders was a distinctive local identity made possible (Ma and Fung 1999: 500). Popular culture was the key force which socialized youngsters to become Hong Kongers, because the Anglicized education system provided little guidance in terms of identity. It taught a depoliticized, culturalist version of Chinese identity and was detached from the local context, with Hong Kong’s own history completely absent from the curriculum (Vickers and Kan 2003: 206). The meager civic education curriculum focused on descriptions of social services and other benefits provided by the colonial administration (Fairbrother 2003) and was largely depoliticized in order to dampen the political consciousness of young people who might otherwise question authority (Leung 1996: 291). The government endorsed the image of the crown colony as an economic city and downplayed the local, civic identity (Vickers 2003: 196).

**Western Values and the Market**

Studies by Eric Ma and Anthony Fung (2007) illustrated differences in political values between those who identified themselves as Hong Kongers and those who identified themselves as Chinese. Being “Westernized” was identified as a key means of differentiation from China, confirming “that the global or Western element in the Hong Kong identity is a major component that makes it stand out.” Other top values are press freedom and freedom of speech – Western concepts of institutional expression. Furthermore, privacy and equality are ideas concerned with basic individual rights and also cannot be regarded as indigenously Chinese (Fung 2008: 197). According to Anthony Fung, the Hong Kong identity is characterized by local economic values as well as the local consumer culture. Hence the global capitalist culture is a strong component of the local identity (ibid. 193). Global values and culture become a protector of local identity against national intervention from the mainland Chinese side (ibid. 200).

The importance of the market for identity construction has inspired the thesis of the “market mentality” of Hong Kong people with regard to their attitude toward national identity (Mathews, Lui and Ma 2008). Accordingly, the emerging local identity was influenced by the rapid socio-economic development of the time. The so-called Hong Kong dream – a bit of luck and hard work, and you can make it – created a “market mentality,” and thus many citizens did not subscribe to the idea
of “belonging to a nation” as the basis of their lives (ibid. 13). A market-based sense of national identity is characterized by individual choice, and by self-interest paralleling national interest. The “patriotism of the rational” is based on the “individual’s investment of loyalty to the country for his or her own benefit” (ibid. 161).

**Cultural Memory**

The 2003 respiratory disease SARS, and a mass demonstration against the government and the proposed national security law on 1 July, marked the appearance of a community spirit embodying greater civic awareness (Yeung 2007) as well as a new surge in social movements, organized not by political parties but by wide range of grassroots organizations. For the most part, the so-called third and fourth generation of Hong Kongers who were involved in these movements refrain from ideologically motivated actions (Lü 2007: 49, 66). The cultural critic, Chan Koon-chung, points to the visceral level at which “locals have an unmistakable sense of their identity and rooted common culture” (Chan 2007: 384). At this level, personal memories are connected to the space and sites of daily life. In Hong Kong, where the culture has been described as a “culture of disappearance” (Abbas 1997), identification with the material environment has always been difficult. In Ming K. Chan’s analysis, Hong Kong people were looking for anchors and places of belonging in the decade after 1997, when the local identity came under threat. When reconstructing and affirming their own past as an integral part of the Hong Kong community, this past was expressed through “collective memory construction.” Collective memory construction and movements are often linked to old artefacts, public sites and long existing structures, such as the Star Ferry in Central District (Chan 2008: 18). The heritage conservation movement was therefore tied to concerns about the erasure of a part of Hong Kong’s cultural identity, implying a common destiny and values that have to be preserved (Lo 2007: 436) The importance of heritage preservation for the local identity is further emphasized by the involvement of the late teenage and early twenties generation of Hong Kong youth, which is actively seeking local contexts for identity formation (Cartier 2008: 76). By comparing it to the 1960s movements An argues that the Star Ferry protests are a means for the Handover generation to establish an identity of its own, which is intrinsic to the Hong Kong identity (An 2007). Eric Ma echoes this view and sees a new city consciousness surfacing through the struggle over harbor protection, participation in the West Kowloon Cultural District project and the rebuilding of Wan Chai. This indicates an increasing desire for political participation as well as a strengthening of the development of social groups. To be a Hong Kong person means to be actively involved in Hong Kong affairs since a local identity can only be created through the continuous recreating of Hong Kong society (Ma and Liang 2005) With regard
to the basis of the Hong Kong identity, it indicates a paradigm shift in Hong Kong’s local culture. After 1997, the Hong Kong identity based on popular culture became weaker as sinicization and globalization exacted a heavy toll on the uniqueness of the popular culture industry. The new city consciousness might be able to provide a foundation to strengthen a distinctive cultural identity and to position the territory internationally, nationally, regionally and locally (Ma 2006).

CIVIC IDENTITY
Myth of Political Apathy
For a long time, Hong Kong’s political culture was portrayed as being dominated by political apathy and traditional Confucian culture (King 1981, Lau 1981). Identity in the colony was formed by a “fear of politics” (White and Li 1993: 18). Hong Kong was seen as a “lifeboat” offering relative stability, impartial justice, and economic opportunity in the cruel sea of China. Political activities would only create unnecessary conflict and dissent (Hoadley 1970: 211). The parochial and individualistic behavior as well as the political apathy of Hong Kongers were explained by so-called “utilitarianistic familism” – individuals putting their families’ interests and materialistic concerns before the interests of society (Lau 1981: 201). The perceived lack in the sense of community spirit, political involvement, and hence the non-existence of the Western notion of citizenship, justified the denial of democratic self-determination (Turner 1995: 36). Research since the late 1990s has adopted a broader definition for the political participation of Hong Kong people, thus the “myth of political apathy” (DeGolyer and Scott 1996) has largely been refuted. Important acts of political participation, such as strikes, participation in social movements and demonstrations were previously not considered (Lam 2004: 19) and individual political participation at grassroots level as well as the political awareness of Hong Kongers were not included in previous analyses (Lo 1999: 51).

Political Identity
Political events since the 1960s, however, have shown the increasing desire for political participation and articulation, and have contributed in several ways to the establishment of a strong civic Hong Kong identity. Protests in 1966 marked the emergence of a trend toward local issues being discussed more vigorously in the domestic political arena, put forward by the post-war generation of Hong Kongers (Turner 1995: 26; Mathews, Lui and Ma 2008: 32). The 1967 riots, sparked by the Cultural Revolution on the mainland, reinforced the existing Mainlander versus Hong Konger dichotomy, reaffirming Hong Kong’s culture, governing ideology and way of life (Thomas 1999: 85). In the 1970s, the government reacted to an increasingly vocal social movement (So 1999) by launching a broad program of social and administrative reforms (So 1999; Lam 2004). By the early 1980s, the
colonial government had transformed into a modern polity characterized by relative openness, responsiveness, freedom, the Anglo-Saxon concept of the rule of law, the protection of human rights and stability (Hayes 1996: 281). When the transfer of sovereignty was decided in the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984, this had an important consequence for Hong Kong’s identity as a fusion of Western and Chinese influences (Battacharyya 2005: 51). Hong Kongers hoped for democratization as a means of safeguarding their own way of life under the principle of “one country, two systems.” The call for more political participation was rooted in the promise of self-administration for Hong Kong after 1997 (Cheng 1997: 156) and was also a consequence of the social changes and demands of the 1970s (Yahuda 1996: 57). More than any other event in the modern history of Hong Kong, 1989 Tiananmen massacre forced the territory’s local community to form an opinion as to what constituted their identity (Thomas 1999: 87). The massive demonstrations in support of the students and workers in Beijing created a sense of unity among the Hong Kongers and showed that the people of Hong Kong would respond to a common cause (Yee 1989: 231). When substantial democratic reforms were implemented by the last governor, Christopher Patten, they served as a catalyst, improving the political consciousness and democratic aspirations of the Hong Kong people, and further strengthening their civic identity (Lo 2001: 50-53).

By the end of the colonial era, the Hong Kong people had developed a strong, distinct identity based on the differences between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland in economic, cultural and political terms (Chan 2007: 383). This Hong Kong identity could best be understood as “Chineseness plus,” since Hong Kongers are ethnically Chinese and in abstract cultural and historic terms, most of them feel that they are part of the Chinese nation (Mathews 1997: 9). Yet, at the same time, they are different. Their unique way of life, the value pertaining to freedom of expression, the rule of law, transparency, social mobility, responsible government and democracy were, in the last decades, guaranteed and provided by the British rulers. Hence, despite years of propaganda and with Chinese patriotism at a highpoint, only a slim majority stated that they were happy about the return to China (Mathews, Lui and Ma 2008: 49).

Civic Values
The analysis has shown that local identity is founded on economic and Western values, which became particularly noticeable after the handover. The severe economic downturn shattered the self-confidence of the Hong Kongers (Zhang 2009). Their feeling of superiority vis-à-vis the mainland, the “Hong Kongism,” was further tested by the failed policies of the Tung Chee-hwa administration. Anthony Cheung suggests that the prime supporter of Hong Kong’s values and its identity was the middle class which was seriously affected by post-handover
changes. The Hong Kong identity could, in civic terms, be understood as a set of core values that includes civil liberties, the rule of law, respect for human rights, accountable government, democratic institutions, and political pluralism (Cheung 2005: 58). Ensuring certain upward mobility and ever-expanding job and business opportunities are also part of this value package (ibid. 65). Government policies for integration with China were perceived as leading to the increasing dilution of the international character of the city (Cheung 2005). When the basis of the Hong Kong identity was threatened by assimilation through this increasing integration, the people resisted with frequent protests within all sectors of society (Cheung 2007: 89). Anthony Cheung argues for a linkage between the Hong Kong identity, the city’s core values and political participation (Zhang 2000: 38). The emergence of the Civic Party provides a prime example of this connection. And obviously, the mass demonstration on 1 July 2003 marked a turning point and politicized the middle class (Zhang 2003: 81).

**Political Rituals and Protests**

The discourse of social and political participation as the foundation of a new emerging Hong Kong identity is based on the idea that unified actions will create a sense of belonging and cultural identification with the city and its people. Popular imagination and the practice and memories of certain similar customs and rituals, such as, participation in replicated events, manifest the cultural identification of the individual with the community. The people’s collectively shared beliefs and faiths are the common substance of this community (Lo 2007: 435). The annual candle-light vigil in memory of the victims of the Tiananmen massacre is a “secular democratic ritual,” constituting a fundamental part of the political culture and political identity of Hong Kong. Participation is a way of showing the conviction that only democracy will maintain the Special Administrative Region (SAR) identity and way of life (Beja 2007: 7, Loh 2007: 40). 1989 was a key moment in the development of political awareness and in the formation of a new political culture. The discourse of June 4 highlights the differences between the Hong Kong identity with its core values and the official Chinese national identity, as the latter includes the refusal to acknowledge the Tiananmen massacre (Beja 2007: 7). In Hong Kong, large scale demonstrations with a couple of thousand or even one hundred thousand participants have always been related to political issues – more precisely, they are usually triggered by the perception that the Hong Kong way of life is under threat (ibid.) as, for example, in the case of the mass demonstration of 1 July 2003. The mismanagement of the SARS epidemic had led to weakened trust in the HKSAR government. The crisis demonstrated that the Hong Kong values of transparency, freedom of expression and information and freedom of the press, were crucial in the battling of the disease, but these were constantly undermined by the government (DeGolyer
When the bill for a national security law under Article 23 of the Basic Law was launched, the common perception was that the Tung Chee-hwa administration was about to destroy these cherished values. More than 500,000 people protested against the government and against Article 23. The demonstration marked a strong rejection of government attitudes that were associated with mainland Chinese politics and it also functioned as a reassurance of the Hong Kong identity for the participants. The demonstrations were a source of pride and thus a resource for the long-term cultivation of local identification (Chan and Chung 2003). Collectively, they were an expression of the fact that the Hong Kong people shared certain values and beliefs (Wu 2003). In 2004, the mass demonstration of 1 July was of similar size and asked for the introduction of universal suffrage in 2007/8 which had been rejected by the National People’s Congress in Beijing only months earlier. Hence this movement was a confirmation of the civic Hong Kong identity vis-à-vis the Chinese understanding of national identity (Li 2004). The 1 July demonstrations have, since then, become an annual event and part of the collective memory of Hong Kongers and the Hong Kong identity.

IDENTITY CHANGES

Several studies have traced the changes in the self-identification of the Hong Kong people. The data used in this article stems from the Hong Kong Transition Project (HKTP) at the Hong Kong Baptist University. The HKTP defines “Chinese” as a patriotic statement and “Hong Kong Chinese” as a regional identity, not stronger than Shanghainese or New Yorker. “Hong Kong person” or “Hong Konger,” however, connotes a separate identity from “Chinese” or “Hong Kong Chinese” (DeGolyer 1997, 15). The principal distinguishing features between the different identity categories are attitudes towards democracy and patriotism (Lau and Lee 1988, 184). To be a “Hong Konger” means to be the most liberal and the most supportive of democracy, and the least supportive of nationalistic values. It also means to put the interests of Hong Kong over those of China (Wong 1998, Lee and Chan 2005).

TABLE 1 HERE

In general, the survey data indicates a gradual increase in those holding a “Chinese” or “Hong Kong Chinese” identity. However, “Hong Konger” still remains the identity choice of the majority. More precisely, the HKTP has recorded a slight increase in the Chinese identity category from 20 per cent in 1993 to about 20 per cent throughout the late 2000s (23 per cent in May 2009). At the same time, the category “Hong Kong person,” has fallen from an average of
40 per cent plus in 2007 to 38 per cent in spring 2009. The self-description “Hong Kong Chinese,” as a weaker local identity, experienced a steady rise throughout the transition period from levels of around 30 per cent to up to 35 per cent in May 2009 (DeGolyer 2009). Reasons for these changes can be attributed to the policies of the HKSAR government, which launched a program to promote the patriotism of the citizens and also made accordant changes in the school curricula. Combined with steady immigration from China, an impact on the Hong Kong identity can therefore be assumed and a long-term trend towards a rise in the Chinese identity seems likely.

HONG KONG AND CHINESE IDENTITY

Hong Kong people identify strongly with a set of Western liberal-democratic core values and therefore with institutions that represent these values, such as the ICAC and the judiciary. Trust in the legislature is, however, low (Wong, Hsiao and Wan 2009) and satisfaction with the government and political parties fluctuates at levels similar to other pluralistic states in East Asia or in Western democracies (ibid., Cheung 2009). The low identification with the political institutions can largely be attributed to their lack of power and un-democratic nature. Surveys have indicated that Hong Kong people have a strong need for a responsive and democratic government and legislature (DeGolyer 2009), a fact which is further emphasized by the frequent mass protests for universal suffrage and by the pro-democracy forces always gaining about sixty per cent of the popular vote.

Although the local cultural identity of the Hong Kong people is strong, it coexists with an abstract identification with a historic and cultural vision of the Chinese nation and Chinese identity. The official perspective of the Beijing regime on national identity, however, sees identification with the Chinese nation as equal to identification with the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Chang 2001). The civic elements of Hong Kong identity stand in clear opposition to this notion of Chinese identity, as the Hong Kong people largely reject the idea of “loving” the CCP or the Communist state. This identity clash is further intensified by the fact that the PRC national identity’s strong ethnic and cultural undertones include xenophobic and anti-Western sentiments (Chang 2001: 137, Lo 2008: 174). In fact, Beijing’s understanding of national Chinese culture is a hybrid of Communist state culture and a perceived monolithic national culture (Chan 2007: 380).

The ethno-cultural identification of many Hong Kong people with mainland China is blended by the Beijing regime with political identification with the CCP to form a cultural-political Chinese identity (Lo 2008: 171). Accordingly, patriotism is defined through loyalty to the Communist party and the state. In 2004, Xiao
Weiyun, a legal expert from Beijing, explained the official definition of unpatriotic behavior: forging close links with (Western) foreign countries, aligning with groups deemed unacceptable to the CCP and questioning the territorial integrity of China (that is, supporting independence for Taiwan) (Xiao 2004). For many Hong Kong people, however, being part of a modern open society is part of their identity, and the pan-democrats promote a Hong Kong style patriotism, including democratic and participatory elements, such as, the fight for democracy and concrete patriotic actions (Situ 2004a: 174). Democrats reject the claim of the CCP to be the only patriotic force, because the party does in fact suppress China’s people, destroying Chinese culture and all those aspects which are cherished because they represent the idea of a Chinese nation (Situ 2004b: 66). They further argue that a liberal democratic expression of the nation is crucial and should be drawn from a sovereign people because the nation is composed of neither government nor party (Chen 2004: 81).

Identity Politics
The new emerging local culture and distinct civic identity of Hong Kong are however threatened by the forces of globalization (Choi 2007, Ma 2006), as well as by Chinese nationalism or sinicization. Nationalism is coming into the Hong Kong context on two levels: in the official discourse and policies of the HKSAR and Beijing governments, and also through integration and interaction at grassroots level. For the regime in Beijing, it is impossible to approve of the ideological cohesion of a Hong Kong cultural identity constituted against the mainland Chinese identity. Any manifestation of a separate, independent cultural identity is viewed as a political threat to the regime in Beijing (Lo 2007: 436). Immediately after the handover, the Hong Kong government launched several programs and initiated policies all aimed at bringing about an active change in the creation of a unified Chinese identity. The measures in the educational realm included, for example, changes in the school curriculum. The PRC began to be portrayed in a much more favorable light, with the focus on economic achievements and rising international status (Vickers and Kan 2003). The most controversial measure, however, was the introduction of mother-tongue language teaching at secondary schools. English is seen as a form of cultural and symbolic capital that distinguishes Hong Kong from the mainland and thus the government’s policy was taken as an attempt to alter the collective identity (Chan 2002: 283). The government further strengthened the subject “civic education” in schools (Vickers and Kan 2003) and the national song and national flag featured prominently at educational institutions. To boost the general public’s patriotism and identification with the mainland, the government has produced television announcements in the public interest (API) entitled “Our Home, Our Country” since 2004, and every day
before the evening news the Chinese national anthem together with a clip showcasing the achievements and beauty of China and Hong Kong are aired (Mathews, Lui and Ma 2008: 74).

**Government Identity Discourses**

John Flowerdew (2004) has shown how the administration of Tung Chee-hwa stressed the “Chineseness” of Hong Kong, downplayed democratic development and emphasized the sameness of the mainland and the SAR. The economic discourse predominated, displacing the discussion of democratic reform and constitutional development, and trying to depoliticize the city through a discourse on stability and promoting Hong Kong as an economic city (Morris P., Kan and Morris E. 2000). Hong Kong should also be more culturally integrated with China to prevent foreign political and cultural influence, including, most notably, ideas like democracy and human rights, from “subverting” the mainland (Loh and Lai 2007: 29). Tung’s old fashioned governing style, traditional Chinese values and ethnic definition of identity were, however, not in tune with the majority of Hong Kongers. When Donald Tsang took over the position of Chief Executive, he chose a more subtle approach, appearing more open to Hong Kong values and identity while maintaining the policies of fostering patriotism and integration with the mainland. The discourse on the so-called “New Hong Konger” demonstrates, however, that Tsang was carrying forward his predecessor’s political mission. In the 2007 policy address, he stated that after 1997, Hong Kongers had been unsure about their identity and the economic prospects vis-à-vis a rising China. According to his analysis, Hong Kong can only prosper as a fully integrated part of the PRC and the HKSAR’s citizens must look at the city’s development “from the perspective of our country’s future” (Policy Address 2007). Critics have argued that by using the slogan, “New Hong Konger,” Tsang was trying to evoke an association with the famous slogan, “New Taiwanese,” which was aimed at reconciling the sub-ethnic conflicts in Taiwan (An 2007). Yet they point out that the Chief Executive, in fact, attempts to downplay local identity, because, for Tsang, Chinese national identity should indeed be equivalent with the “New Hongkonger” identity (Zhang 2007).

**Grassroots Nationalism**

In addition to the policies and discourses of patriotism shaping and defining Hong Kong identity, rapid interaction with the mainland at grassroots level has created a form of “grassroots nationalism” (Ma 2007: 149). The bottom-up discourses on nationalism are re-shaping the national imagination of Hong Kong people by bringing the nation closer to the everyday experience of the general public. The Chinese nation is seen by those Hong Kong people who have frequent interactions on the mainland as “a great national territory, a collective of a great diversity of
people, an embodiment of familial networks and a huge consumer market.” These new ideas of the nation could result in the formation of a regional hybrid culture incorporating Hong Kong and Chinese components (ibid. 165). He does not, however, pursue this idea further to explain how this new cultural identity is positioned vis-à-vis the civic identity of Hong Kong.

EVOLUTION OF TAIWAN IDENTITY

The notion of a unique Taiwan identity is closely connected with the island’s history. Taiwan was ruled by the Dutch (1624-1661), became part of the Chinese Qing Empire (1683-1895) and eventually a Japanese colony (1895-1945), before the administration of the island was taken over by the Republic of China (ROC) (Cabestan 2005: 32). The “February 28 Incident” of 1947 marked the affirmation of a unique Taiwanese identity and created a demand for autonomy and democracy (Chu and Lin 2001: 123). In 1949, with the KMT forces’ to Taiwan, a sub-ethnic cleavage emerged between those who had newly arrived from the Chinese mainland and the Taiwanese – Han-Chinese who had been living in Taiwan for several centuries before 1945. For several decades, the Taiwanese were completely excluded from political participation and power in the higher levels of the institutions. The local culture and language were suppressed because the KMT was intent on propagating its official “great China” nationalism (Schubert 1999: 54). When cautious political liberalization began in the 1970s, the Taiwanese national identity arose and was expressed in native literature which, closely linked with the growing political opposition, called for democracy and participation (Hsiau 2000: 91). With democratization in the late 1980s, the idea of Taiwanization became increasingly prominent; among its aims were to achieve the political and cultural equality of the Taiwanese vis-à-vis the ruling Mainlanders and the KMT brand of Chinese nationalism. Policies under the presidencies of Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian have contributed to the sharp increase in Taiwan identity.14

Theoretically, the discussion on Taiwanese identity can be divided into three basic discourses (Schubert 1999). Taiwanese ethno-cultural nationalism states that the Taiwan identity is based on specific historical experiences and perceived cultural differences between the Taiwan people and the mainland Chinese; the focus is on the colonial past of the island and its long separation from the China (Schubert 1999: 55). In the multi-ethnic nationalism approach, the Taiwanese nation is conceptualized as a harmonious, democratic and tolerant nation of four ethnic groups, the Mainlanders, the Hoklo, the Hakka, and the aborigines (Zhang 2002). According to political or state nationalism, the foundation of a Taiwan nation is in line with the institutions of a liberal state. The rise of the Taiwan identity is seen as directly connected to its geographical and political separation from China and

**HONG KONG AND TAIWAN IDENTITIES**

If Smith’s framework of national identity based on ethno-cultural and civic components is applied to the cases of Hong Kong and Taiwan, a series of similarities and differences is revealed. For a long time, both identities were portrayed as rooted in an envisioned homogenous Chinese race and common ancestry. While in Hong Kong, this ethnic element of identity remains strong, in Taiwan, there have long been intense discussions on multiculturalism and ethnic diversity although the idea of an ethnic Taiwanese nationalism has prevailed in some circles of society. Although traditional Chinese culture with its festivals and folklore are dominant in both societies, Hong Kong and Taiwan have both developed cultural identities different to that on the CCP-ruled mainland. In the economic realm, decades of economic boom in Taiwan and Hong Kong, starting in the 1960s and lasting until the 1990s, created affluent societies and generated a sense of pride in these achievements. Hence differentiation through wealth and sophistication from the, at that time, backward PRC prevailed during the first encounters with the mainland in the 1970s and 1980s. Local culture and localism were regarded as cornerstones of an emerging exceptional culture, different not only from the present day mainland way of life, but also from traditional Chinese culture. Hong Kong’s cultural uniqueness was based on a newly developed popular culture and focus on local affairs using the Cantonese language. In Taiwan, the cultural identity also possesses links to modern popular culture, but the identity is dominated by native Taiwanese culture and language which were suppressed in the first decades of KMT rule. Ideas of multiculturalism are common in Taiwan, with its several Chinese sub-ethnicities and the aborigines. Interestingly, these ideas have never been given much attention in Hong Kong, despite its international city image, its strong Indian community and its global workforce. The reason for this is the perception that Hong Kong is a predominantly Chinese society, so that the idea of a distinct hybrid culture functions as “demarcation and territorialization and carves out a distinct subject position for Hong Kong local Chinese only” (Lo 2007: 436).15

 Scholars have argued that the pillar of the distinct identities in both cases is the civic realm of national identity (Mathews 1997, Schubert 2004). During the colonial era, the rule of law, civil liberties, human rights, a free and vibrant press and a responsive government were all things in which Hong Kong citizens felt immense pride. With regard to personal freedoms and institutional guarantees, the city was much more a part of the Western world than of China. Political participation and the desire for democratization became an increasingly important part of the Hong Kong identity after the 1980s. The political reforms of the last
governor, Chris Patten, responded to these demands with the result that Hong Kong core values became further entrenched in Hong Kong society. Hong Kong people, since then, have defended their civic identity against real and perceived threats from the government. Surveys have consistently indicated that although, generally, identification with the Chinese is slowly increasing, Hong Kong people still feel distant from China in political and civic terms. This is confirmed by the solid support given to political parties and organizations that stand for Hong Kong’s core values and further democratization, as well as by the high attendance in related political campaigns and rallies.

Within the civic identity of the Taiwanese, the desire for democracy and the equality of the Taiwanese vis-à-vis the Mainlanders are closely connected. In the authoritarian era of KMT rule, the opposition saw the practice of democracy and the democratization of institutions as the only way of achieving truly equal opportunities for all the citizens of Taiwan. The civic identity of the Taiwanese was formed through the struggle of the opposition movement for representation and the democratic transformation of the KMT government. The experience of a successful and peaceful democratic transition is a matter of great pride for the Taiwanese. Compared with Hong Kong, civil liberties and democratic values, as well as group mobilization and cohesion, are equally, if not more, entrenched in the civic identity of the Taiwanese. However, the exceptional status of the rule of law as established by the British and, arguably, the core of the local identity cannot be observed in Taiwan. On the other hand, the Taiwanese identity is partially linked to the vision of an independent state under a different name than the current Republic of China. This adds strong political or ideological layers to the civic identity and effectively splits the public along lines of pro-unification with China, pro-Taiwan independence and pro-status quo. This extra option of de-jure independence is significantly different from the Hong Kong situation, because the former colony never had any say in its future. Yet no matter whether aiming to establish an independent state under the name of Taiwan or defending the ROC’s sovereignty and de-facto independence, the Taiwanese have strong emotional ties to their nation. The existence of a de-facto independent state with its democratic institutions is crucial for the strength of the civic identity of Taiwan.Taiwan’s civic identity thus does not only include values related to democracy, freedom and political participation but also the experiences of successful democratic struggle and nationhood. These provide an additional tier to Taiwan’s national identity which Hong Kong does not have.

**CONCLUSION**

Since the late 1990s, Taiwan and Hong Kong have been facing the challenge of a rising China rapidly gaining economic and political influence. The Beijing
government regards the unique identities and democratic aspirations of the Hong Kong and Taiwan people as a danger to its idea of a uniform Chinese identity. China’s strategies of identity politics and economic penetration, in particular, pose a significant threat to Hong Kong and Taiwan identities (Wu 2007: 298).

A study of the formation of the Hong Kong identity reveals that the local identity developed in relation to an “opposite other,” the Chinese mainland. The concept of “Chineseness plus” as the Hong Kong identity has gradually emerged and this is based on ethno-cultural and civic identity components, demonstrating a superiority over or difference from China which is perceived in terms of economic achievements, cultural sophistication and democratic values. When Hong Kong’s edge over the PRC was weakened by government policies and rapid integration with the mainland, the citizens reacted in several ways. In the cultural sphere, a new city consciousness has been emerging, revitalizing a unique local cultural identity. When people felt that their core values were being undermined by the government, they reacted swiftly. Massive demonstrations and refreshed social and democratic movements have highlighted the strength of Hong Kong’s civic identity. It can be argued that the civic identity is the cornerstone of Hong Kong’s resilient identity. The values of a civic identity are firmly entrenched in the collective memory of the city and hence might be able to resist patriotic education, nationalistic propaganda and the potential “grassroots nationalism” resulting from interaction and integration with the mainland. The fact that on the 20th anniversary of the 4 June massacre, more than 150,000 people gathered for the annual candle-light vigil, among them great numbers of students and youngsters not born when the events took place, seems to support this argument (Leung and Wu 2009).

Taiwan, like Hong Kong, is faced with the option of further economic integration with the mainland. Since the Ma Ying-jeou administration took over in May 2008, cooperation with the PRC has taken off at an unprecedented speed and depth. While the majority of the Taiwanese support constructive cooperation, particularly in the economic sphere, this development has created fears that if Taiwan moves too fast towards the mainland, some of its sovereignty could be surrendered to China (Ho 2009). The feeling that the new government is threatening Taiwan’s identity, particularly its civic components of democracy and Taiwan sovereignty, has led to several mass demonstrations in late 2008 and 2009. These protests signify the continuing strength of Taiwanese identity and the resistance of a relevant part of society against its possible erosion. Nevertheless, up to now, there have not been any clear indications that any main political party does fundamentally question Taiwan’s civic identity and its core values, such as the island’s sovereignty. Differences among parties appear to be more at the ethno-cultural identity level, with the KMT still committed to some form of a pan-Chinese identity.
Comparing Hong Kong with Taiwan offers interesting insights into the development of the local identities under the concept “one country – two systems.” More than a decade after the handover, the unique Hong Kong identity is still strongly in existence. This means that, within the Chinese nation state, Chinese identity is fragmented. For Taiwan, however, these findings do not have any consequences because “one country – two systems” does not present either a viable option or an alternative to the status quo. Taiwan has not only a unique local identity but, as the Republic of China, it possesses a fully developed national identity and there seems to be very little likelihood that the Taiwanese will relinquish this in the near future.

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NOTES

1 Anthropologists understand culture as “a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action” tied to the “emotional and intellectual mainspring of that society” (Benedict 1934: 46).

2 It was only in 2006 that the border crossings between Hong Kong and the PRC were opened for 24 hours a day.

3 Abbas argues that disappearance is the key characteristic of Hong Kong’s culture. Dominated by the fluidity of a port-mentality and colonialism, Hong Kong did not realize until the late 1970s that it could have a culture of its own. Yet this culture was disappearing with colonialism.

4 Surveys show that Hong Kong people identify strongly with historic and cultural icons of the Chinese nation, like the Great Wall. Some 70 per cent to 80 per cent of respondents in a 2006 survey articulated pride for the Great Wall and 60 per cent to 70 per cent felt pride in the local cultural icon of the night view of Victoria Harbour (Ma and Fung 2007: 177). The former icon symbolizes the abstract historic Chinese nation while the latter signifies the collective achievements of Hong Kongers in the economic and cultural area.

5 Even in spring of 2007, a survey carried out by Radio Television Hong Kong
showed that thirty per cent of Hong Kongers would still prefer to be pre-1997 colonial citizens. “Sancheng Gangren ningdang zhimindi ren” [Thirty per cent of Hong Kong people prefer to be colonial subjects], Pingguo Ribao [Apple Daily], 13 April 2007: A06.

6 In 2004, a group of 300 intellectuals, lawyers, professionals and academics grouped together to publish a declaration of Hong Kong’s core values, which they asked the government to protect. These core values include: “liberty, democracy, human rights, rule of law, fairness, social justice, peace and compassion, integrity and transparency, plurality, respect for individuals, and upholding professionalism.” See, Hong Kong Core Values Declaration. (2006) “Hong Kong Core Values Declaration,” 6 June 2004. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.hkcorevalues.org.hk> (accessed 28 February 2007).

7 The Civic Party was founded in 2006 and participated in the elections of 2008. Their platform is strongly focused on the Hong Kong core values. The party made impressive electoral results and is viewed as one of the most respected among the Hong Kong parties (DeGolyer 2009).

8 The bill proposed to provide for the offences of treason, subversion, secession and sedition. Criticism was voiced particularly against the following two provisions: “the proscription of certain organizations if it is necessary in the interests of national security and is proportionate for such purpose” and “the power of entry, search, seizure, detention and removal by the police without warrant for the investigation of treason, subversion, secession, sedition and handling seditious publication.” See, Hong Kong SAR Government, “Views Sought on National Security (Legislative Provisions) Bill,” 16 April 2003. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200304/16/0416201.htm> (accessed 18 May 2009).

9 The daily quota for migrants from the Chinese mainland is 150 per day. An estimated 518,000 mainland Chinese became HKSAR citizens between 1997 and 2007 (Lau 2007). At the same time, more than 200,000 people left the city, although the annual emigration figure of Hong Kongers went down from about 20,000 a year shortly after the handover to close to 10,000 in the 2000s (HKSAR Immigration Department 2009).

10 Research confirmed the impact of education and immigration, because in socio-political terms, identity choices are influenced by age and birthplace. A 2004 study points out that being born in Hong Kong makes one more likely to identify oneself as a “Hong Kong person.” Youngsters aged eighteen and nineteen predominantly describe themselves as “Hong Kong Chinese.” People without any patriotic education in school (age 20-25) and those born after 1949 mainly state that they are “Hong Kongers,” while the elderly (age 70 and above) are largely self-proclaimed “Chinese” (DeGolyer 2004b: 12).


12 When a survey asked participants to measure their love for Hong Kong, the Chinese nation and the CCP on a scale of 0-10, Hong Kong received an average score of 7.52, the Chinese nation 6.49 and the CCP, a meager 2.91. 24 per cent of
the respondents felt uneasy about the CCP (Mathews, Lui and Ma 2008: 107).

In autumn 1997, the government announced that most secondary schools must use Chinese (spoken Cantonese and written traditional Chinese characters) as the medium of instruction.

According to data compiled by the Election Study Center of Taiwan’s National Cheng-chi University, the number of people identifying themselves as Taiwanese has risen from 17.3 per cent in 1992 to 52.4 per cent in 2010. While in 1992, 26.2 per cent of Taiwan’s people considered themselves to be Chinese, in 2010, it was a mere 3.8 per cent. The second most frequent identity category is a combined Taiwanese/Chinese identity, chosen by 40.4 per cent in 2008 (45.4 per cent in 1992). See, Election Study Center, National Cheng-Chi University Taiwan. Available HTTP: http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/english/modules/tinyd2/content/TaiwanChineseID.htm (accessed 29 September 2010).

Racism and ethnic discrimination continue to be a serious problem in Hong Kong society, although the HKSAR government portrays the city as “Asia’s World City” and a multicultural society (Loper 2001). The anti-racism bill of 2008 was widely criticized as being too weak and excluding the widespread discrimination against the mainland Chinese (Ewing 2008).

According to different surveys, the majority of the Taiwanese prefer the status quo with regard to the question of independence or unification with China. This has been a constant trend since 1992. In 2010, 36.6 per cent of respondents favored the status quo with a decision at some point later in the future, while 23 per cent wished the status quo to continue indefinitely. The second largest group supports independence for Taiwan, either immediately (6.3 per cent) or after maintaining the status quo first, in the future (17.0 per cent). The survey results also show that the number of people supporting unification with China has constantly fallen since 1992. In 1992, 4.4 per cent supported unification as soon as possible; in 2010 it was only a meager 1.1 per cent. In 2010, 10.0 per cent opted for the status quo and the movement towards unification in the future; in 1992, it was still 15.6 per cent. See, Election Study Center, National Cheng-Chi University Taiwan. Available HTTP: http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/english/modules/tinyd2/content/tonduID.htm (accessed 29 September 2010).
APPENDIX

TABLE 1

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Source: authors illustration based on data of the Hong Kong Transition Project 2009