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## Post-handover identity: contested cultural bonding between China and Hong Kong

Anthony Y. H. Fung<sup>a\*</sup> and Chi Kit Chan<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*School of Journalism and Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong;* <sup>b</sup>*School of Communication, Hang Seng Management College, Hong Kong, Hong Kong*

This study examines the formation of Hong Kong identity and its cultural articulation in Chinese identity in the post-handover years. Surveys of Hong Kong identity conducted between 1996 and 2016 demonstrate a set of interlinked yet contradictory findings: (i) the coexistence of both cultural pride in and resistance to cultural icons that represent the Chinese state; (ii) weakening correlations between China and Hong Kong regarding cultural affiliation; and (iii) the growing significance of cultural resistance to China by people who love Hong Kong. The survey results indicate the prevalence of an ambivalent identity in post-handover Hong Kong with regard to the coexistence of opposing attitudes toward Chinese identity. These results provide evidence of the complex cultural bonding between China and Hong Kong in the development of the China–Hong Kong relationship since the handover in 1997.

**Keywords:** identity ambivalence; Hong Kong identity; Chinese identity; China–Hong Kong relationship

### Introduction

This study explores the structural changes in the identity formation of Hong Kong during the past 20 years since it was returned to Chinese sovereignty and renamed the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong (HKSAR). The study focuses on the coexistence of cultural pride in and resistance to Chinese identity throughout the formation of Hong Kong identity in the post-handover years. Previous studies have demonstrated that sophisticated dynamics exist in the relationship between the Hong Kong and Chinese identities. In brief, before Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997, Chinese identity was described as “backward” during the long colonial period of the socioeconomic boom (Mathews, Lui, & Ma, 2008). After 1997, an enduring China–Hong Kong conflict over constitutional reform began, and the pace of democratization has prolonged the stigmatization of China’s image by Hong Kong citizens (N. Ma, 2007). However, paradoxically, the Hong Kong public has distinguished the political regime of China from the abstract and the cultural sense of the Chinese nation (E. K. W. Ma & Fung, 1999). Although they are hesitant to accept the rule of the Communist party, Hong Kong citizens have also demonstrated cultural affiliation with Chinese nationhood and its ethnic roots (Sinn, 1995; Vickers & Kan, 2003). Therefore, the Chinese identity of Hong Kong citizens has complicated the development of their Hong Kong identity. When Hong Kong citizens have mapped their cultural positioning, China has been viewed as both a negative cultural other and a positive cultural self, making the so-called Hong Kong identity both ambivalent and ambiguous. Drawing upon data collected in identity surveys conducted between 1996 and 2016, this study analyzes the

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\*Corresponding author. Present address: School of Art and Communication, Beijing Normal University, China. Email: [anthonyfung@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:anthonyfung@cuhk.edu.hk).

changing interactions between Chinese and Hong Kong identities in the first two decades since the handover. The analysis yields complex findings. Specifically, although the majority of respondents cling to a mixed identity, claiming that they are both Chinese and Hong Kong, the findings show that the correlation between the cultural affiliation of Chinese and Hong Kong citizens has weakened in recent years. The shrinking connection between the Chinese and Hong Kong identities is further complicated by the prevailing coexistence of cultural pride and resistance to cultural icons that represent various aspects of China in the post-handover years. These findings raise two questions. To what extent have Chinese and Hong Kong identities been hybridized in the 20 years since the handover? What factors could account for the emergent cultural divergence between Chinese and Hong Kong identities despite the fostering of political, economic, and social ties between them throughout these two decades?

In addition, empirical data are analyzed with reference to the ambiguous relationship between China and Hong Kong in the post-handover years. The study elaborates on various indicators of Hong Kong identity by discussing the significant transition of the China–Hong Kong relationship. To avoid dwelling on various political issues that might distract from the present discussion of Hong Kong identity, the politico-economic background is summarized first, after which an overview of the change in Hong Kong identity in relation to the changing Hong Kong–China relationship is provided. Before 1997, because China was perceived as culturally backward in relation to Hong Kong, the “modernized” Hong Kong has demanded a faster pace of political reform and a higher degree of democratization than the People’s Republic of China (PRC). However, in the early years after the handover in 1997, the strengthening socioeconomic ties between China and Hong Kong ironically drew Hong Kong and China closer, which inevitably resulted in a mixed and even blurred identity of Chinese and Hong Kong citizens (E. K. W. Ma & Fung, 2007). The China–Hong Kong relationship reached a crisis point in 2003 when there was an unprecedented, massive, and self-mobilized social movement against the enactment of national security laws and poor governance in Hong Kong (F. L. F. Lee & Chan, 2011), which the citizens claimed was the result of the non-democratic HKSAR government. Since then, China has altered its Hong Kong policy from a non-interventionist approach to Chinese identity to one of proactive and preemptive manipulation in an attempt to safeguard its constitutional rights under the governance framework of “one country, two systems” (Cheng, 2009). The PRC’s revised national policy on Hong Kong, combined with its economic boom and the de facto economic integration of Hong Kong and China, has resulted in Hong Kong’s increased cultural affiliation with Chinese identity (E. K. W. Ma, Fung, & Lam, 2011). In the period from 2003 to 2010, the presence of Chinese astronauts in Hong Kong, Beijing’s 2008 Olympics, and other events fostered the stable growth of the Chinese component of Hong Kong identity. However, the smooth integration of Hong Kong identity with Chinese national identity did not last long. In recent years, the social conflicts between China and Hong Kong have exacerbated the cultural divergence between Chinese and Hong Kong identities (Chan, 2014). The merging of the Hong Kong and Chinese identities was further problematized by the Umbrella Movement in 2014, which was followed by enduring political and social antagonism between China and Hong Kong, as well as various political factions in the Hong Kong community. Overall, the paradigm shift in Hong Kong identity that is evidenced in the findings of the analysis conducted in the present study represents the changing China–Hong Kong relationship in the post-handover years. The following discussion considers the implications of these contested identities for the social formation of Hong Kong.

### Revisiting the local–national dichotomy

Previous studies of Hong Kong identity have positioned Chinese identity as dichotomous (Lau, 1997, 2000; E. K. W. Ma & Fung, 1999). The formation of Hong Kong identity has been characterized by the “cultural decoupling” of Hong Kong and China. When it was still under British colonial rule, Hong Kong was modernized and formed a distinct cultural identity despite its longstanding historical, cultural, and ethnic ties with China. Consequently, Hong Kong citizens regard Chinese identity as culturally acceptable but politically controversial (E. K. W. Ma & Fung, 2007; Mathews et al., 2008; Sinn, 1995). Hence, Hong Kong identity embodies and manifests both cultural affiliation with and resistance to Chinese identity. This ambivalence was further complicated in the transition period from the 1990s to the early years after the handover because of the increasing socio-economic integration of China and Hong Kong, as well as the cross-border experience of Hong Kong citizens living in Mainland China. Eric Ma (2006) argues that this social transformation resulted in the formation of “bottom-up nationalism,” in which Hong Kong citizens developed cultural familiarity with China through the mundane and routinized practices in their everyday lives. Thus, the Chinese and Hong Kong identities form a dual structure in which the cultural imaginations overlap (i.e., positive regard for Chinese identity while maintaining Hong Kong identity) while distinguishing between the two entities (i.e., distancing Hong Kong identity from Chinese identity on an optimal scale; Brewer, 1999). This dual identity structure extended to the local–national dichotomy in the early post-handover years, when Hong Kong’s identity was an advantage in the cultural resistance of Chinese influence (Fung, 2001). Nonetheless, the socioeconomic integration of China and Hong Kong in the post-handover years simultaneously hybridized Hong Kong identity and Chinese identity, and local–national differences, although unresolved, were temporarily laid aside (Fung, 2004).

In the present study, the results of identity surveys conducted in Hong Kong between 1996 and 2016 are examined to determine the cultural formation of the dual identity in post-handover Hong Kong. These terrestrial track surveys were conducted via computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATIs) in order to monitor the formation of Hong Kong identity, Chinese identity, and other indicators that reflect the identity politics of Hong Kong citizens. This study focuses on Hong Kong citizens’ perceptions of the cultural icons that signify Chinese culture and national and local icons that represent Hong Kong in order to examine the formation of Chinese identity and its dynamics in the local Hong Kong identity. By analyzing the results of these surveys, the study aims to determine the perceptions of Hong Kong citizens regarding cultural pride in and resistance to Chinese identity in forming their local cultural affiliations. Data were collected from identity surveys administered by the Center for Communication and Public Opinion Survey of the Chinese University of Hong Kong between 1996 and 2016. The surveys were conducted annually from 1996 to 1999, then the next survey was in 2002, and then they were conducted biannually from 2006 to 2016. Overall, 11 surveys were conducted between 1996 and 2016. In these CATI surveys, the respondents comprised Cantonese-speaking residents of Hong Kong aged 18 and above. The respondents were selected using a random sampling of Hong Kong household telephone numbers, and the “next birthday rule” was applied if more than one household member was eligible to be interviewed.

A systematic review and analysis of the survey data has revealed the formative process of Chinese identity and its contestation with local identity in post-handover Hong Kong. In the following section, the survey data are analyzed with reference to the formation of post-handover Hong Kong identity, its interaction with Chinese identity, and the back-

ground of the changing China–Hong Kong relationship. Table 1 provides a summary of the post-handover hybridization of Chinese and Hong Kong identities.

The data analysis focuses on the self-declared identity of the respondents when they were given choices regarding their affiliation with the following: *Hong Kong citizen* (i.e., pledged to their Hong Kong identity); *Hong Kong citizen but also Chinese* (i.e., pledged to their Hong Kong identity but accepting of their Chinese identity); *Chinese but also Hong Kong citizen* (i.e., pledged to their Chinese identity but accepting of their Hong Kong identity) and *Chinese* (i.e., pledged to their Chinese identity). The dichotomy between Chinese and Hong Kong identity indicates the cultural “othering” of Mainland Chinese citizens in the process of Hong Kong identity formation. The aim of this analysis is to understand the extent to which Chinese identity has mixed with Hong Kong identity, which is shown in the two categories of mixed identities in post-handover Hong Kong. The higher the percentage of people that claim a mixed identity, the stronger the tendency of the hybridization of Chinese and Hong Kong identities and vice versa. As shown in Table 1, the survey data reveal that the majority of the Hong Kong respondents displayed a mixed identity. The percentage of these respondents increased from below 50% in 1998 to 66% in 2010 and then decreased slightly to 63% in 2016. This finding is consistent with findings in the previous literature showing a trend toward the hybridization of Chinese and Hong Kong identities because of the *de jure* return of Hong Kong to China, the slow migration of Chinese to Hong Kong, and the interactions between Chinese and Hong Kong people in tourism, work, and study (E. K. W. Ma, 2006; E. K. W. Ma & Fung, 2007).

However, a closer examination of the survey data reveals a striking decrease in the cultural affiliation with China through the hybridization process. The number of respondents who pledged their cultural affiliation as *Chinese* began to decline from its peak in 1997 (32.1%, the year of the handover) to its lowest ebb in 2014 (only 8.9%). Around one quarter of respondents chose *Hong Kong citizen* throughout the 20 years after the handover, although this figure tumbled in the years from 2006 to 2010. Moreover, even though the majority selected a mixed identity, the data indicate that they tended to identify as *Hong*

Table 1. Self-perceptions of China–Hong Kong identity.

Year	Hong Kong citizen, %	Hong Kong citizen, but also Chinese, %	Chinese, but also Hong Kong citizen, %	Chinese, %	Other, %	Total*, n
1996	25.2	32.9	14.7	25.7	1.5	769
1997	23.2	31.8	11.6	32.1	1.3	302
1998	28.8	30.0	15.6	24.5	1.2	527
1999	22.8	35.8	17.0	23.5	0.9	533
2002	24.8	36.0	14.5	23.6	1.1	500
2006	21.5	38.1	21.2	18.6	0.5	1007
2008	16.8	40.0	25.0	17.8	0.4	1009
2010	17.3	44.1	21.9	16.5	0.2	937
2012	23.4	41.8	22.1	12.6	0.2	816
2014	26.8	42.0	22.3	8.9	0.0	797
2016	24.2	43.1	20.1	12.3	0.4	797

Note: Scores before 2006 were not weighted against the population statistics of Hong Kong for that year.

\*Excluding those who answered *Don't know* or *No answer*.

*Kong citizen* before *Chinese* (30.0% to 44.1% chose *Hong Kong citizen but also Chinese*) rather than vice versa. In the study period, only one quarter of respondents identified as *Chinese but also Hong Kong citizen*. Since 2012, while approximately three quarters of the respondents accepted their Chinese identity while adhering to the cultural label of being Hong Kong citizens, over 50% prioritized their Hong Kong identity over their Chinese identity. If Chinese and Hong Kong identities are indeed hybridized, the local is not overwhelmed by the national. In other words, despite China's sovereignty and the rising political and economic influence of China in the post-handover years, the analysis of the survey results finds that in general the local identity of Hong Kong citizens has not been subsumed into their Chinese national identity.

The timing of the hybridization of Chinese and Hong Kong identities is also significant. The number of people who chose the single identity of either *Chinese* or *Hong Kong citizen* decreased from 2002 to 2010, whereas the number who selected a mixed identity increased in the same period. This finding indicates a possible "honeymoon" phase in the China–Hong Kong relationship, during which Hong Kong citizens tended not to perceive Chinese as the cultural other in relation to their local subjectivity. Coincidentally, China's policy in Hong Kong experienced a paradigm shift in 2003. According to a Mainland Chinese scholar, China adopted a *laissez-faire* policy in Hong Kong for the first five post-handover years and stayed at arm's length from the internal affairs of the city (Cheng, 2009). The turning point probably occurred in July 2005, when over three million people protested against the HKSAR, indirectly censuring the Chinese authorities that endorsed its governance. In July 2013, a number of conflicting interests – including the popular demand for universal suffrage and the direct election of the chief executive of Hong Kong, and the subsequent legislative opposition to Beijing's attempt to procrastinate the constitutional democratization of Hong Kong – exacerbated tensions between China and Hong Kong. China then moved to safeguard its sovereignty over Hong Kong by emphasizing "one country" rather than "two systems" (Cheng, 2009). In addition to taking a proactive stance in the political development of Hong Kong, China introduced a series of socioeconomic policies in the region. The most notable initiatives include the free trade deal of the Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which was intended to accelerate the operation of Hong Kong's business in China, hence strengthening economic ties, and the Individual Visit Scheme, which has boosted the number of Mainland Chinese visitors to Hong Kong since 2013. Because Hong Kong was recovering from the turmoil of a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic and its catastrophic impact on their economy, these two policies were received with little opposition. Furthermore, the effects of the socioeconomic integration of China and Hong Kong incorporate the reconfiguration of the cultural othering of Chinese identity in Hong Kong: how could Hong Kong citizens reap the benefits offered by China and still feel that they are superior to the Mainland Chinese citizens across the border? The data analysis finds that although the priority of the local Hong Kong identity throughout the post-handover years has remained unchanged, Hong Kong citizens gradually acquired a stronger mix of Chinese and Hong Kong identities from 2002 to 2010 because of the strengthened sociocultural ties between China and Hong Kong. When China offered the Individual Visit Scheme and the CEPA to Hong Kong in August and September 2003, respectively, the proportion of Hong Kong people who trusted the central government rose from around 40% to 50% in the second half of 2003. Furthermore, the popularity ratings of Chinese leaders were even higher than those of the local Hong Kong officials and lawmakers.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, the number of people who displayed a mixed cultural identity began to decrease in 2010, especially in terms of those who selected *Chinese but also Hong Kong*

*citizen*. Table 1 shows the increasing percentage of respondents who chose *Hong Kong citizen* and the decreasing percentage of those who identified as Chinese from 2006 to 2014. This finding indicates that the “honeymoon” phase in the China–Hong Kong relationship did not continue. To analyze the China–Hong Kong relationship in terms of identity formation, two indicators of the identity surveys were cross-tabulated: “How much do you love China?” and “How much do you love Hong Kong?” These two questions were asked in order to probe the extent to which respondents pledged allegiance to either the national or the local identity. The responses were given on a scale from 1 to 10 and the higher the score, the more prominent the cultural affiliation.

Table 2 shows the correlations between “loving China” and “loving Hong Kong” as well as the related mean scores of the survey data collected from 2006 to 2016. In general, the respondents’ scores are higher for “loving Hong Kong” than for “loving China,” which is consistent with the findings shown in Table 1. However, the gap between the scores for “loving China” and “loving Hong Kong” widens after 2010. The increasing cultural affiliation with Hong Kong is consistent with a decline in fondness for China. However, the standard deviation for “loving China” also increases after 2010, which indicates a diversion from the patriotic preference for China. This finding aligns with the rising number of political, economic, and sociocultural conflicts between China and Hong Kong in recent years, which have occurred in local conflicts with Chinese tourists in Hong Kong and in major electoral conflicts between the pro-China camp and the pro-local and pro-democratic camps. The popular demand for constitutional reform and an acceleration of the pace of democratization in Hong Kong are in direct opposition to China’s tightening reign over the governance of the city.

The increasing tension between China and Hong Kong eventually erupted with the formation of the Umbrella Movement in late 2014. On 31 August 2014, the lawmaking body of China, the National People’s Congress (NPC), announced a new procedure for electing the chief executive of Hong Kong in the scheduled direct election in 2017. It stipulated that candidates must secure more than half of the members of a selection committee before running for the position. This requirement was perceived as effectively barring the democratic camp and candidates – who were not trusted by the Beijing authorities – from joining the election. The grievances and opposition in Hong Kong civil society were eventually transformed into a territory-wide social movement after serious clashes between the police and protesters on 28 September 2014, in which crowds of citizens occupied various urban sites and blocked the main traffic flow in the central business district (CBD) of Hong Kong Island and part of the Kowloon Peninsula (for details about the Umbrella Movement, see F. L. F. Lee, 2015).

Table 2. Correlations between “loving China” and “loving Hong Kong.”

	Loving China, <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Loving Hong Kong, <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Pearson correlation
2006	6.49 (2.55)	7.52 (1.99)	.472**
2008	6.87 (2.50)	7.79 (2.05)	.483**
2010	6.82 (2.53)	7.73 (1.99)	.457**
2012	6.25 (2.68)	7.87 (1.94)	.425**
2014	6.09 (2.89)	8.23 (1.86)	.311**
2016	6.00 (3.05)	8.15 (1.85)	.312**

Note: The maximum score is 10, which indicates the strongest possible agreement.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ .

In addition to enduring the mounting division between China and Hong Kong regarding constitutional democratization, China's image in the city suffered from social conflict and cultural hatred on the street level. Since the implementation of the Individual Visit Scheme, there has been an upsurge in the number of visitors from Mainland China to Hong Kong. In 2004, 4.26 million Mainland Chinese citizens visited Hong Kong under this scheme. The figure then increased drastically each year, reaching 23.14 million in 2012 (Government of HKSAR, 2013). The increase in tourism from Mainland China has benefited some of Hong Kong's industries, but it has also resulted in a tremendous disturbance in the daily lives of citizens – particularly with regard to culture shock. Specifically, Hong Kong citizens have attributed various social problems, such as congested public spaces and traffic, deteriorating urban hygiene, and shortages of daily supplies to the huge market demand from the influx of Mainland Chinese tourists (Chan, 2014). Furthermore, anti-China sentiment was the core theme in the campaign strategies of pro-democratic camps and the political appeal of localist camps in the election of the legislative council in 2012 (N. Ma, 2015). In brief, the rising tensions between China and Hong Kong regarding democratization and population flow have strained the affiliation with Chinese identity.

### Multiple layers in the China–Hong Kong relationship

Despite the negative effects of the increasing influence and presence of China in Hong Kong, the findings reported in Table 2 show an overall positive and significant correlation between “loving China” and “loving Hong Kong” in the past decade. This finding points to the need for prudence in drawing conclusions about the China–Hong Kong relationship. Moreover, the finding is another indicator of the ambivalence of Hong Kong citizens' self-identity. Generally, Hong Kong citizens still do not perceive a contradiction between “loving China” and “loving Hong Kong.” In fact, these findings could be supported by some common political ideologies in Hong Kong. In the pro-China camp and those who do not support the democrats, “loving China” certainly would be consistent with “loving Hong Kong,” because they perceive that no conflict exists between the two entities. Moreover, most democrats perceive that fighting for democracy in Hong Kong does not necessarily imply entirely dismissing Chinese national identity and complete segregation from China. Cultural identification differs among the various social imaginaries of China: for the pro-China camp and its supporters, “China” usually refers to the communist party state of the PRC. However, democrats and other locals attribute a broad sense of ethnic enthusiasm to the Chinese nation instead of specific political allegiance to the Chinese communist regime.

The results of these surveys indicate that in post-handover Hong Kong, the formation of Chinese identity and its dynamics in Hong Kong identity extend beyond the survey-based empirical measurement of the cultural labels outlined above. Therefore, in this study, a data analysis was conducted to determine Hong Kong citizens' pride in and resistance to a set of emotive icons that represent China and Hong Kong in terms of their political, social, and cultural articulations. Emotive icons are symbols that carry significant cultural meaning in relation to China, ranging from the political regime to the cultural and ethnic sense of belonging, such as the national flag of the PRC and the Great Wall of China. The responses of people to emotive icons provide data that enrich the quantifiable measurement of the sense of belonging to China or to other cultural entities. In this study, the responses include people's pride in and resistance to the Chinese state as represented by emotive icons such as the PRC's national flag, the national anthem, the People's Liberation Army, and the Great Wall. Also considered are attitudes to languages such as Putonghua, or Mandarin,

which is China's official national language. The responses of Hong Kong citizens to such emotive icons indicate their perceptions of the ethnographic symbols that they encounter in everyday life, which are interpreted as indicating the strength of their Chinese and Hong Kong identities. The results are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 shows the percentage of people whose responses show pride in the emotive icons of China. People were asked to score their pride in various Chinese emotive icons on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (no pride) to 5 (strongest pride), and respondents who assigned scores of 4 or 5 are counted as showing pride. Throughout the post-hand-over years, Hong Kong citizens' pride in Chinese emotive icons has both increased and decreased. Pride in icons of the Chinese state – the PRC flag and the national anthem – was highest during the handover period (1996 and 1997) and between 2006 and 2010. This result could be attributed to the nationalistic mood prevalent in the city when Hong Kong formally ended the British colonial era by embracing the resumption of Chinese sovereignty. On the eve of 1997, China and its media framed the British colonial rule of

Table 3. Percentage of respondents who were proud of emotive icons of China (scoring four or five points out of five).

<b>Emotive icon</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2016</b>
National flag	30.6	30.1	24.9	29.9	31.1	47.6	53.4	52.7	37.6	29.5	36.9
National anthem	39.1	40.1	28.3	36.0	38.1	48.2	53.0	54.8	36.4	31.8	36.1
People's Liberation Army	10.0	13.6	13.7	16.5	18.9	28.8	29.6	33.5	21.5	17.4	22.8
Putunghua	18.6	21.3	19.9	28.0	25.2	34.0	30.4	28.5	22.4	16.7	17.8
Great Wall	77.9	78.8	74.0	78.5	79.3	73.3	74.2	71.3	60.4	50.9	54.5

Note: All data are percentages. Scores before 2006 were not weighted against the population statistics of Hong Kong for that year. The People's Liberation Army is the Chinese army and Putunghua is the national Chinese language.

Table 4. Percentage of respondents who resisted emotive icons of China (scoring four or five points out of five).

<b>Emotive icon</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2016</b>
National flag	6.6	4.7	4.6	2.8	4.4	3.8	3.7	3.8	8.5	13.7	14.1
National anthem	4.4	3.6	4.6	3.0	4.0	5.3	5.0	5.8	8.9	13.9	13.0
People's Liberation Army	30.3	10.9	9.3	8.5	10.9	7.5	8.8	10.1	18.0	26.7	24.9
Putunghua	3.4	2.6	2.8	1.7	3.6	1.8	3.3	7.3	11.8	16.2	17.7
Great Wall	1.3	0.3	1.3	1.7	1.2	1.6	2.0	2.4	3.5	5.4	4.2

Note: All data are percentages. Scores before 2006 were not weighted against the population statistics of Hong Kong for that year. The People's Liberation Army is the Chinese army and Putunghua is the national Chinese language.

Hong Kong as a bleak chapter in the history of Hong Kong. In contrast, Hong Kong media demonstrated nostalgia and gratitude for the British legacy of the rule of law, a society devoid of corruption, and prosperous economic development. However, as the transition proceeded, nationalistic sentiment in Hong Kong became overt (C. C. Lee, Chan, Pan, & So, 2002). A possible explanation is the series of significant Chinese achievements that took place during the period, especially the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and China's solidarity in the face of the devastating earthquake in Sichuan province in the same year, both of which boosted citizens' pride in their Chinese identity (E. K. W. Ma et al., 2011). However, after 2010, the number of proud responses to the emotive icons of China decreases notably to a level similar to the time of the handover. This decrease could be explained in two ways. First, even if Hong Kong Chinese shared in the joy of China's achievements in global events such as the 2008 Olympics, the steady flow of news about social ills, corruption, and breaches of human rights in Mainland China eventually negatively affected China's cultural appeal for many people (E. K. W. Ma et al., 2011). Second, and more importantly, the influx of Chinese visitors to Hong Kong since the introduction of the Individual Visit Scheme in 2003 has resulted in unpleasant and disruptive experiences, such as congested traffic, minor social disorder, fluctuating prices of daily necessities due to trans-border demands, and discrepancies in everyday cultural practices (Chan, 2014). The negative responses of Hong Kong people to the influx of Mainland Chinese visitors could also have led to decreasing cultural pride in speaking Putonghua, China's official language.

The responses to the emotive icon of the Great Wall provide data regarding the cultural ties of Hong Kong citizens. In the survey data, although the responses to other Chinese emotive icons rise and fall, responses to the icon of the Great Wall exhibit a steady, high level of pride throughout the 20 years since the handover. From the handover until 2010, the support is consistently more than 70%, and sometimes almost 80%. This finding indicates that the emotive icon of the Great Wall embodies the ethnocultural greatness of Chinese nationhood because it was central in defending the Middle Kingdom from foreign invasion for over 2,000 years. The positive sentiments about the Great Wall clearly indicate Hong Kong citizens' cultural and ethnic affiliation with China. However, the findings also show that pride in the Great Wall slumped significantly in 2012 and 2014. Although it remains at a relatively high level compared to the responses to other Chinese emotive icons, as shown in Table 4, this pattern prompts the question of whether or not Hong Kong citizens are reconsidering their ethnic and cultural nationhood vis-à-vis China.

Table 4 shows resistance to the same set of emotive icons listed in Table 3. The respondents were asked to score their responses on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (no resistance) to 5 (greatest resistance), and those who assigned scores of 4 or 5 are regarded as demonstrating resistance. The results in Table 4 differ from those in Table 3. With the exception of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the responses to all emotive icons show a very low level of resistance from the handover until 2008. However, resistance to the Putonghua language starts to increase in 2010. Furthermore, resistance to other emotive icons representing the Chinese state (i.e., the national flag and the national anthem) begins to increase in 2010 and by 2014 surpasses the level of resistance on the eve of the handover. Resistance to the PLA is relatively high in 1996 but drops drastically in 1997 when the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned to China, and remains at a stable level until 2010. However, resistance to the PLA increases significantly in 2012 and by 2014 has returned to a level similar to that of 1996. The findings shown in Table 4 clearly demonstrate the rising cultural resistance of Hong Kong citizens to the Chinese state and its official language since the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China in 1997. The findings showing cultural resistance to

Chinese emotive icons are similar to the findings regarding the pride felt by Hong Kong citizens since 2010. Combined, these findings suggest that Hong Kong citizens' affiliation with China has declined in response to various social conflicts. This trend is also consistent with the large-scale social mobilization in defiance of the Chinese intervention in Hong Kong's autonomy in recent years, particularly the anti-national education campaign in 2012 and the Umbrella Movement in 2014, two events that symbolize the resistance to and disappointment in China's high-handed manipulation of Hong Kong.

However, it is too early to draw the conclusion that cultural pride is dissipating and cultural resistance to Chinese emotive icons is growing. Table 3 shows a "rebound" in 2016 in cultural pride in the national flag and anthem, as well as in the PLA and the Great Wall, while Table 4 indicates that cultural resistance to Chinese statist emotive icons (i.e., the national flag and the national anthem) remains similar to that of 2014. Resistance to the emotive icons of the Great Wall and the PLA is slightly reduced. An interesting finding is that both cultural pride in and resistance to the Putonghua language has increased. In general, Hong Kong citizens demonstrate greater cultural pride in the national flag, the national anthem, and the ethnic icon of the Great Wall. However, the respondents show similar levels of pride in and resistance to the PLA and the Putonghua language. The PLA could represent the statist military force and its coercive image in the collective memory of Hong Kong, particularly the massacre on 4 June 1989. The Putonghua language possibly suggests the stereotype of Mainland Chinese citizens widely held by Hong Kong citizens. Moreover, the cultural conflicts between Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong citizens are the subject of much controversy in the city.

### **Reconfiguration of Hong Kong identity**

A regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the degree to which the respondents express affiliation with Hong Kong and their cultural pride in and resistance to Chinese emotive icons. The dependent variable is the question "How much do you love Hong Kong?" An interval scale of 1 to 10 was used to quantify the respondents' adherence to their Hong Kong identity. Three clusters of independent variables were identified. The first cluster is comprised of demographics that include gender, educational level, family income, and age. The second cluster is comprised of the five emotive icons that convey citizens' cultural pride in China shown in Table 3. The third cluster is comprised of the five emotive icons shown in Table 4 that indicate citizens' cultural resistance to China. A yearly comparison was conducted from 2006 to 2016 that shows the extent to which cultural pride in and resistance to China constitute the formation of Hong Kong identity.

Table 5 shows the findings on Chinese cultural pride and resistance to cultural affiliation with their Hong Kong identity after controlling for the various demographics. The findings demonstrate a consistent influence on Hong Kong identity throughout the last decade: the higher the educational level and family income of the respondents, the higher the score for "loving Hong Kong." Female citizens and senior citizens also gave high scores for "loving Hong Kong." However, the most significant finding is the changing pattern of responses to Chinese emotive icons throughout the past 10 years. Cultural pride in Chinese icons contributes significantly to the dependent variable from 2006 to 2016. However, after 2010, this cluster becomes less significant in the regression models. The findings show a decrease in  $R^2$  from 2006 (.153) to 2016 (.044). In contrast, the variance ( $R^2$  change) in cultural resistance to Chinese emotive icons (cluster 3) increases from .006 in 2006 to .046 in 2016. In 2006, the variance in cultural pride is significantly greater than the variance in cultural resistance in the regression model. This gap in the variance

Table 5. Regression analysis of “loving Hong Kong” and Chinese emotive icons.

	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
<b>Cluster 1: demographics</b>						
Gender	0.219**	0.147**	0.256**	0.063**	0.060	0.094**
Education	0.114**	0.152**	-0.003	0.104**	0.105**	0.079**
Family income	0.101**	-0.002	0.151**	0.078**	0.083**	0.077**
Age	0.351**	0.498**	0.416**	0.323**	0.329**	0.371**
<b>R<sup>2</sup> change</b>	0.295**	0.416**	0.304**	0.224**	0.192**	0.183**
<b>Cluster 2: cultural pride in Chinese icons</b>						
Chinese army	0.149**	-0.059	0.032	0.032	0.071	0.140**
National flag	0.264**	0.187**	0.082	0.204**	-0.075	0.265**
National anthem	-0.118**	0.233**	0.000	0.126	0.092	-0.136
Putunghua	-0.003	-0.076**	0.124**	-0.068	0.059	0.034
Great Wall	0.151**	0.097**	0.203**	0.141**	0.214**	0.072
<b>R<sup>2</sup> change</b>	0.153**	0.099**	0.108**	0.085**	0.043**	0.044**
<b>Cluster 3: cultural resistance of Chinese icons</b>						
Chinese army	0.029	0.053	0.013	0.116**	0.196**	0.098**
National flag	-0.093**	0.057	-0.009	0.105**	0.122**	0.080
National anthem	0.012	0.116**	0.116**	0.052	-0.054	0.146**
Putunghua	0.067**	-0.080**	0.139**	0.086**	0.033	-0.089
Great Wall	0.008	0.007	-0.143**	-0.006	-0.023	0.050
<b>R<sup>2</sup> change</b>	0.006	0.023**	0.029**	0.069**	0.050**	0.046**
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.446**	.532**	.433**	.368**	.273**	.261**
<b>n</b>	1013	1014	941	819	810	803

Note: Missing data were replaced by means. Putunghua is the national Chinese language. Loving Hong Kong is the dependent variable.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ .

decreases until 2016, when the variance of both clusters is similar. Although the decrease in the adjusted  $R^2$  of the regression models partially explains the shrinking variance in cultural pride in the responses to the emotive icons, the increase in the variance of cultural resistance shows unequivocally that the cultural othering of Chinese identity has increased in the formation of Hong Kong identity.

On the other hand, cultural pride in the Great Wall is the most stable and significant variable in the regression models. This finding is consistent with the findings shown in Tables 3 and 4, which indicate high scores for cultural pride in the Great Wall and signify cultural and ethnic identification with Chinese nationhood. The variable of cultural pride in the Chinese national flag also remains statistically significant in the regression analyses. Although it denotes the communist state of the PRC, the national flag may also suggest

Chinese nationhood because it has represented the Chinese people since the middle of the last century. Cultural pride in other Chinese emotive icons is relatively less stable in the regression models because of either directional fluctuation (showing positive and negative variances in the dependent variable in some periods) or insignificant coefficients throughout the 10 years from 2006 to 2016. However, the findings also show an increasingly significant level of cultural resistance to Chinese identity in the formation of Hong Kong identity. Overall, the findings of the regression analyses show that cultural resistance to the PLA and the Chinese national flag have remained stable since 2012. Despite the statistical significance in the regression models, cultural resistance to the Putonghua language shows a fluctuating direction of positive and negative variances, whereas cultural resistance to the Great Wall does not affect the results of the analyses. Hence, the findings indicate that the respondents focused on “statist China” instead of “cultural China” when expressing their resistance.

Based on these findings, it is arguable that in recent decades the formation of Hong Kong identity has been characterized by the weakening articulation of Chinese cultural pride and the strengthening of cultural resistance to Chinese identity. Although it is too early to conclude that Chinese cultural pride is currently diminishing among Hong Kong people, these findings raise the following question: to what extent does Hong Kong identity diverge from Chinese identity? If cultural resistance to China becomes more prominent in the formation of Hong Kong identity, would the Chinese and Hong Kong hybridized identity then separate into independent identities? The present findings do not offer definite answers to this question. However, another set of indicators was collected from the identity surveys conducted from 2010 to 2016 in order to explore the perceptions of Hong Kong citizens regarding their cultural distance from Mainland Chinese citizens. In these surveys, the respondents were asked to rate the qualities or features of Hong Kong citizens and Mainland Chinese citizens. As shown in Table 6, a score of 1 represents the lowest regard for such qualities or features, and a score of 5 represents the highest regard. The scores of the Mainland Chinese citizens were subtracted from those of Hong Kong citizens and the difference illustrates the cultural distance perceived by Hong Kong citizens regarding Mainland Chinese citizens. Positive differences refer to the extent to which Hong Kong citizens regard themselves as superior to Mainland Chinese citizens, and vice versa. The larger the difference, the more significant the perceived cultural distance.

The findings on perceived cultural distance from 2010 to 2016 (see Table 6) indicate that Hong Kong citizens perceived a widening cultural distance throughout these years. The increased overall positive mean score indicates a widening gap between their impressions of themselves and their mainland counterparts. The quality of favoring civil liberties exhibits a relatively large cultural distance, especially the indicators of *emphasis on press freedom*, *emphasis on freedom of speech*, and *emphasis on equal opportunities*, all of which have demonstrated widening divergences since 2010. The findings also show that the respondents perceived that Hong Kong citizens were better in terms of civil qualities such as being *self-disciplined*, *compassionate*, and *socially caring*. Conversely, the indicators of cultural distance suggest some features of competitiveness; for example, the indicators *progressive*, *optimistic*, and *pragmatic* show a narrower cultural gap than the other indicators. These findings suggest that, since 2010, Hong Kong citizens have perceived a widening cultural cleavage between themselves and Mainland Chinese citizens, especially with regard to civil liberties and other qualities. However, despite the perceived cultural distance, the respondents also acknowledged the increasing competitiveness of their mainland counterparts. In contrast to the earlier perception of China as the “cultural other,”

Table 6. China–Hong Kong cultural distance perceived by respondents.

	2016	2014	2012	2010
<b>Civil liberties</b>				
Emphasis on press freedom	1.97	2.14	1.90	1.77
Emphasis on freedom of speech	1.88	2.06	1.83	1.72
Emphasis on equal opportunities	1.61	1.81	1.76	1.62
Emphasis on privacy	1.55	1.61	1.63	1.48
Outspoken and vocal	1.41	1.77	1.55	1.39
Average	1.69	1.88	1.74	1.60
Cronbach's alpha	0.83	0.83	0.79	0.79
<b>Civil qualities</b>				
Self-disciplined	1.62	1.84	1.86	1.67
Compassionate	1.39	1.67	1.66	1.39
Independent thinker	1.07	1.22	1.17	0.88
Socially conscientious	0.98	1.32	1.01	0.85
Open-minded	0.85	1.10	1.02	0.89
Interested in public affairs	0.83	1.07	0.86	0.66
Average	1.12	1.37	1.26	1.06
Cronbach's alpha	0.84	0.82	0.79	0.78
<b>Competitiveness</b>				
Adaptable to environment	0.72	0.79	0.80	0.70
Enduring	0.64	0.73	0.62	0.43
Smart	0.56	0.63	0.62	0.59
Pragmatic	0.40	0.34	0.40	0.52
Progressive	0.07	0.29	0.32	0.32
Optimistic	-0.15	0.28	0.17	0.13
Average	0.37	0.51	0.49	0.45
Cronbach's alpha	0.74	0.73	0.66	0.73

in recent years, the “cultural othering” process has been driven largely by the negative evaluation by Hong Kong citizens regarding the lack of civil liberties and socially negative qualities of Mainland Chinese citizens, rather than viewing the latter as less modernized and non-competitive “country bumpkins.” The increasing gap in cultural distance in the perceptions of Hong Kong citizens may at least partially account for the rising resistance to Chinese identity in recent years.

However, the findings of the most recent survey, which was conducted in 2016, suggest that Hong Kong citizens perceive less cultural distance from their counterparts in Mainland China compared than they did two years previously. In terms of civil liberties and qualities, the perceived cultural distance remains significant. However, regarding competitiveness, the findings indicate that the respondents perceived Mainland Chinese citizens to be as *progressive* as Hong Kong citizens (with a marginal difference of 0.07 in 2016). They even perceived that Mainland Chinese citizens were more optimistic than Hong Kong citizens (-0.15 in 2016). This finding is in line with the rising socioeconomic influence of China in

the world, including in Hong Kong. In 1997, Hong Kong's gross domestic product (GDP) was 18.5% of China's national output, but this percentage had slumped drastically to 2.9% by 2015 (Levin & Yung, 2016). Similarly, in 1997 Hong Kong-based corporations occupied four of the five top listed companies in the stock market. However, by 2016, these companies had been replaced by Chinese enterprises (Levin & Yung, 2016). This evidence of China's economic influence could explain the dwindling cultural distance in competitiveness perceived by Hong Kong locals (Table 6). Nonetheless, Hong Kong citizens retain the perceived cultural distance between themselves and Mainland Chinese citizens with regard to civil liberties and social qualities.

### **Discussion: the coexistence of cultural pride and resistance**

The identity surveys conducted from 1996 to 2016 provide a set of quantifiable indicators of the changing formation and structure of Hong Kong identity in the post-handover years. This study focuses on examining the relationship between Chinese and Hong Kong identity in order to determine how the former has affected the cultural subjectivity of the latter. The findings showed the coexistence of both cultural pride in and resistance to China in the formation of Hong Kong identity. Table 4 displays the findings on the emergent cultural resistance to emotive icons that represent the statist and cultural aspects of China. The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that the responses of Hong Kong people to the same set of emotive icons have persisted. The findings presented in Table 5 indicate a perplexing scenario in which the fading yet still significant cultural pride in China is accompanied by rising cultural resistance to Chinese identity. Nonetheless, the majority of responses indicate that Hong Kong people perceived themselves as having a mixed or hybrid identity, given that the total percentage of the mixed categories, that is, "Hong Kong people, but also Chinese" and "Chinese, but also Hong Kong people," as illustrated in table 1m are still the majority. Thus, in spite of fading affiliation to Chinese, Table 5 also indicates that Chinese, so far, is an element in the construction of HK identity. Outright rejection of Chinese identity is therefore still not the tendency. Nonetheless, the findings indicate a potentially diminishing cultural linkage between Mainland China and Hong Kong. The findings show weakening positive correlations between the scores for "loving China" and "loving Hong Kong" in the past decade, as well as a decreasing mean score for "loving China" in recent years. The findings presented in Tables 4 and 5 showed a rising trend in the cultural resistance to China. The findings in Table 6 show a widening cultural gap, especially in regard to the civil liberties and social qualities perceived by Hong Kong citizens vis-à-vis their counterparts in Mainland China. Such emergent cultural resistance to and alienation from Chinese identity (Table 5) has played a significant role in the formation of Hong Kong identity in the post-handover years. The paradoxical coexistence of both cultural pride in and resistance to China raises the following question about Hong Kong identity and the China–Hong Kong relationship: will Hong Kong identity be characterized by the cultural othering of and resistance to China in the future? If so, will Hong Kong identity eventually become separate from Mainland Chinese identity?

The answers to these questions are premised on whether or not the cultural and ethnic bonding of Chinese nationhood will remain an effective connection between the people of Mainland China and the people of Hong Kong. The present findings delineate a certain kind of cultural bonding with China in the perceptions of Hong Kong citizens; despite the weakening correlation between "loving China" and "loving Hong Kong," the relationship between the two responses is significantly positive. The findings from the surveys also suggest a persistent (although shrinking) effect of cultural pride in Chinese icons on the construction of

Hong Kong identity. These findings indicate that the ethnic ties to Chinese nationhood endure among Hong Kong citizens despite their conflicts with China regarding constitutional democratization, the cultural uneasiness regarding the living style and habits of Mainland Chinese citizens, and the anxiety about the economic ascent of China in the city. However controversial the communist Chinese regime and its political allies in Hong Kong are, it would be difficult if not impossible to eradicate the cultural bond and abstract affiliation with Chinese nationhood because of the multiple layers of Chinese tradition and cultural practices that are a fundamental part of life in Hong Kong. Instead, the issue concerns the tenacity of the ethnic imaginary of China in withstanding the conflicts in the China–Hong Kong relationship.

The tenacity of the ethnic and cultural bonding between China and Hong Kong depends on the cultural distance perceived by Hong Kong citizens vis-à-vis their counterparts in Mainland China. The wider the cultural gap perceived by Hong Kong citizens, the less tenacious the cultural bonding of Chinese nationhood becomes. Table 6 provides two findings that are relevant to this discussion. First, civil liberties and social qualities – particularly the former – are at the core of the cultural gap perceived by Hong Kong citizens when they compare themselves with Mainland Chinese citizens. The indicators of civil liberties address several treasured core values and common beliefs in Hong Kong: freedom of the press, freedom of speech, equal opportunities instead of *guanxi* (favors based on interpersonal networking), and a social environment that encourages the vocal expression of opinions and the protection of privacy. In strengthening the socioeconomic ties between Mainland China and Hong Kong, a deepening understanding of China has triggered Hong Kong citizens' concern about the social ills and problems on the mainland (Chan, 2014; E. K. W. Ma & Fung, 2007). The respondents to the surveys examined in this study express a strong adherence to these core values when they compare themselves to Mainland Chinese citizens, indicating a defensive attitude toward the rising influence and presence of China in Hong Kong. Without demonstrating that it upholds the values of freedom, human rights, and the rule of law, China cannot narrow the gap in civil liberties perceived by Hong Kong citizens. This cultural gap negatively affects the China–Hong Kong relationship and jeopardizes the ethnic cultural connection between the two societies because of the uncertainty and dread in Hong Kong's social imaginary with regard to Chinese sovereignty.

Nonetheless, the findings shown in Table 6 are a striking indicator that the cultural gap in competitiveness is narrowing. Hong Kong citizens no longer regard themselves as more competitive than Mainland Chinese citizens in terms of economic activities and social mobility. This finding has implications for an instrumental aspect of the China–Hong Kong relationship in the post-handover years. As its presence in the world market has increased, China has provided opportunities for various business sectors in Hong Kong. Typical examples include the free trade deal of the CEPA and the Individual Visit Scheme, which have boosted trading activities, tourism, and related industries in Hong Kong. Such opportunities have been instrumental in leading Hong Kong citizens to accept their Chinese identity by adhering to the economic benefits of the Chinese market (E. K. W. Ma & Fung, 2007). Such rationalization of Chinese identity, however, is problematized by the findings presented in this article. First, the perceived weak competitiveness of Hong Kong citizens compared with Mainland Chinese citizens has possibly reduced the belief in reaping the benefits of having business interests in China. Second, the rising cultural resistance to China, as shown in Tables 4 and 5, explains the hesitation of some Hong Kong citizens to engage in business opportunities in China. The perceived cultural gap in civil liberties shown in Table 6 suggests another reason for the negative stance toward the China market, especially by Hong Kong citizens who maintain the core values of a free market and equal opportunities in business practices. Such cultural differences problematize the acceptance

of Chinese identity based on market opportunities, and they have contributed to the unstable cultural connection between China and Hong Kong in the post-handover years.

Another significant question raised by the findings reported in this article concerns the emergent cultural divergence in the comprehension of Hong Kong identity. The findings presented in Tables 3 and 4 show a concurrent rise in both cultural pride in and resistance to Chinese emotive icons from 2014 to 2016. However, although the findings shown in Table 5 demonstrate the increasing cultural resistance to China, they also show that cultural pride and resistance have similar variance (the changes in  $R^2$  in clusters 2 and 3) in the regression model of the data from the survey conducted in 2016. These results shed light on the divergence, if not polarization, within the cultural formation of Hong Kong identity. A possible interpretation of these findings is that citizens who adhere to the Hong Kong identity are both friends and foes of Chinese identity. This interpretation has manifested in the recent social tension that fostered antagonism across different camps of Hong Kong citizens, notably the so-called “yellow ribbon camp” (those who support the Umbrella Movement and constitutional democratization, and are critical of both China and the Hong Kong government), the “blue ribbon camp” (those who oppose the Umbrella Movement, are pro-China, and support the Hong Kong government), and “localists” (those who are anti-China and have pursued the independence of Hong Kong, especially in recent years). These camps all claim that they love Hong Kong and wish to maintain their Hong Kong identity, yet they are in frequent conflict. This ideological rivalry has resulted in an ambiguous response to Chinese identity in the construction of Hong Kong identity. The simultaneous increases in both cultural pride in and resistance to China from 2014 to 2016 (Tables 3 and 4) and their similar variances in “loving Hong Kong” in 2016 (Table 5) could have been caused by cultural and political differences in the construction of Hong Kong identity.

### **Conclusion: Hong Kong identity and China’s cultural positioning**

Overall, the findings of this article reveal the contested articulation of Hong Kong identity in relation to China in the post-handover period. The unresolved issues that jeopardize the China–Hong Kong relationship – such as the discursive struggle over constitutional democratization after the Umbrella Movement, the long-lasting ramifications of the unprecedented flow of population across China and Hong Kong, and the enduring social call for safeguarding the core values of Hong Kong – have all contributed to the ideological conflicts among various social groups and stakeholders in Hong Kong. The formation of Hong Kong identity in the post-handover years has inevitably involved the question of Hong Kong citizens’ cultural positioning in regard to China. A further paradox is that because of its political, economic, and social influence in the world, China itself is the most uncertain variable in the formation of Hong Kong identity. The post-handover story of Hong Kong reveals that the identity formation of its citizens is vulnerable to both the intended and unintended consequences of China’s development. The handover and the policy initiatives of the CEPA and Individual Visit Scheme are examples of China’s attempts to exert its influence on the hearts and minds of Hong Kong citizens. The social conflicts and cultural hostility toward Mainland Chinese citizens stem from their unprecedented influx as visitors in Hong Kong, which indicates that the Chinese government may not be able to control the effects of its policy on the perceptions and attitudes of Hong Kong citizens. China is an unequivocal variable in the formation of Hong Kong identity. Moreover, the positioning of China serves to foster the enduring conflict within the community of Hong Kong, which could exacerbate its ambivalent identity with the culture and language of Mainland China.

## Epilogue

The Hong Kong–China relationship, its ramifications, and the intensity of the conflict are constantly changing, all of which affect the Hong Kong identity. Based on the results of the present analysis of Hong Kong identity in the responses to emotive Chinese icons such as the national flag and the national anthem, it is clear that these cultural symbols have been viewed as significant over the past 20 years, and other icons and imaginaries remain to be identified in the future. In theory, these icons could also be said to represent one of the dimensions of Hong Kong identity. Other dimensions – cognitive and attitudinal – will emerge, which will require further investigation to understand the complexity of Hong Kong identity. Although this article focuses on emotive icons of the Chinese state and the cultural distance from Mainland Chinese citizens perceived by Hong Kong citizens, it is anticipated that the dynamics in the China–Hong Kong relationship will have varying forms of representation in the consumption market, cultural artifacts, interpersonal intimacy in the private domain, and other social realms both now and in the future. The evidence provided by future studies will enrich academic scrutiny of the China factor in the ongoing reconfiguration of Hong Kong identity.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Note

1. Polling data in this paragraph were observed in the Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong (<http://www.hkpop.hku.hk>).

## Notes on contributors

**Anthony Y. H. Fung** is Professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is also Professor in the School of Art and Communication under the Recruitment Program of Global Experts at Beijing Normal University, China. His research and teaching focus on popular culture and cultural studies, popular music, gender and youth identity, cultural industries and policy, and new media studies. He has published widely in international journals, and he has authored and edited more than 10 books in Chinese and English. His recent books are *Youth Cultures in China* (Polity Press, 2016), which he coauthored with Jeroen de Kloet, *Global Game Industries and Cultural Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), and *Hong Kong Game Industry, Cultural Policy and East Asian Rivalry* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

**Chi Kit Chan** is Assistant Professor at the School of Communication, Hang Seng Management College, Hong Kong, China. His research interests include journalism, media sociology, risk communication and cultural identity.

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