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Social Construction of National Reality: Chinese Consciousness versus Hong Kong Consciousness

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Abstract

The struggle to break away from the parent state and claim for independence often results in political unrest, terrorist activities and even ethnic cleansing. In East Asia, the hostilities between people from Hong Kong and mainland China also intensify rapidly in recent years. The late 2000s and early 2010s witness a surge in anti-Mainlander sentiment in Hong Kong and a call for self-determination, resulting in a series of political upheavals. In literatures, irredentist and secessionist advocates generally defend themselves in terms of common blood, race and culture. None of them regards the issue from human agency theory. This paper has two objectives. Firstly, based largely on the works of Max Weber, W.I. Thomas, Alfred Schutz and Peter Berger, this paper constructs a theoretical framework, namely, the social construction of national reality, which allows us to explain the origin of national identity

and the reason for people to call for autonomy or secession. It will argue that collective consciousness originates from everyday life experience taken for granted during socialization. Individuals make sense of the external world. Experiences taken for granted become the actor's stock of knowledge. A common scheme of knowledge shared by the community serves to differentiate in-group (nationals) and out-group (foreigners). Collective consciousness thus defines national identity and hence a nation. Unless people (both in-group and out-group) interact with and learn from each other, different stocks of knowledge taken for granted will create conflict. This theory is applied to explain growing Sinophobia in Hong Kong. The confrontation between traditional Chinese consciousness and emerging Hong Kong consciousness undermines the peaceful coexistence among Hongkongers and Mainlanders, unless both parties redefine their stock of knowledge via dynamic learning. The paper concludes that in order to reduce the conflicts in the regions, understanding the origins of collective consciousness and national identity can help formulate an appropriate policy to resolve growing tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China.

Keywords: *social construction of reality, mainland China, Hong Kong, national identity, collective consciousness, secessionist movement, autonomy*

1. Introduction

In Hong Kong, recent opinion polls show that Hong Kong identity has been surging while Chinese identity has been fading among Hong Kong residents, particularly among the youth¹. Tensions between people from Hong Kong and mainland China develop rapidly in recent years since

the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China in 1997. Growing anti-Mainlander sentiment surges since the late 2000s and early 2010s. In particular, on 5 February 2011, mainland tourists were verbally abused by a Hong Kong tour guide. There were attacks on parallel traders in border communities such as Sheung Shui (上水) and Tuen Mun (屯門) since 2012. The supporters of the Hong Kong soccer team jeered when the Chinese national anthem was playing in the matches between Hong Kong and Bhutan, Hong Kong and the Maldives respectively.

We would ask why some people in Hong Kong want to detach themselves from mainland China and call for an autonomous territory, and why Sinophobia² is growing rapidly in Hong Kong. These issues are extremely important. Understanding the nature of the issues does not only help us avoid conflict and violence, but also can maintain global peace. Unfortunately, the nature of the issues has not been properly addressed. This paper has two objectives. It first constructs a theory, namely, the social construction of national reality, which allows us to explain the origin of national identity and the reason for people to struggle for independence. It then applies the theory to growing Sinophobia in Hong Kong. This paper starts with a review of various arguments against secessionist movements (Section 2), followed by a theory of social construction of national reality (Section 3). The theory will be applied to the tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China (Sections 4-5). This paper argues that upheavals in Hong Kong are originated in the conflict of two kinds of identity, namely traditional Chinese consciousness and emerging Hong Kong consciousness. Summary will be presented in Section 6.

2. A Review of Arguments against Secessionist Movements

In this section, we review some arguments commonly used by unificationists to reject autonomy and secessionist movements. In particular, many arguments adopted by unificationists in the debates are rather weak.

2.1. Historical Determinism

One argument against autonomous or secessionist movement is historical determinism (Rigger, 1997). According to this argument, “what was once part of a nation, however briefly, is always part of that nation”.³ Hence, secessionist campaign leading to a breakup of a country should be condemned. This argument builds on the premise that the past is always right and the world will never change. This history-as-destiny perspective obviously cannot stand on its own. By this argument, perhaps Germany should be part of Austria or Hungary, and Yugoslavia part of Turkey.⁴ A well-known Chinese saying is illuminating on this issue: “the empire will fall apart if staying together for too long; and it will re-unite once again if it separates for too long”.

2.2. Common Blood, Race and Ancestry

Irredentist advocates argue that people with common blood, ancestry and race should stay together as one nation and not be separated. Hence, by this primordial argument, those diaspora descendants who are temporarily settling away from their motherland should be reunified with the homeland once again in future. This argument occupies a significant place in China. Being proud to be “the descendants of the dragon”, Chinese people are told not to let their nation down. It is a betrayal of their ancestors if Chinese people forget their origin and do something disgraceful to their ancestries. Sentiment is one thing.

However, using common blood, race and ancestry as a base for preventing a nation to break up is another. We find that a nation can be composed of people with different bloodlines, races and ancestries. On the contrary, people with the same bloodline, race and ancestry can belong to different nationalities. Before 1776, both the Americans and the British were regarded as Anglo-Saxon. Yet, the American colonists of the 18th century successfully broke away from the British Empire where many of them had originated (Rigger, 1997: 307-318).

2.3. Common Culture and Religion

This argument is very similar to the previous one just mentioned. People are conscious of what have been in common in cultural environment. Those with same cultural identity form a nation. Primordial ties such as kinship and religion are bonds that join and differentiate population groups (Geertz, 1963; Connor, 1978, 1993). Primordial identity is a non-rational, emotional and imagined phenomenon. If it is shared in a community, the concept of a nation will be germinated (Gellner, 1983: 55). We do not reject the significance of culture and religion in putting people together as one nation. However, we argue that common culture and religion are only a necessary but not sufficient condition to keep people together as one nation. For example, Singapore, Japan and Korea have their cultures rooted in China but they are now individual nations.

2.4. National Sentiments

Interestingly enough, one argument put forward by many Chinese irredentists is that any secessionist activity will “hurt the feelings of the people”. The logic of this argument is straightforward. The land has to be ours because we want it so badly.⁵ Any movement attempting to break up the territory is unacceptable. This national sentiment is

exceptionally strong among Chinese people. While this argument seems ridiculous, it does have its phenomenological foundation. We shall argue that if people take something for granted, and if such thing is taken away, then it will have a devastating result. The longer the history of a nation is, the stronger is the national sentiment.

Admittedly, some factors mentioned above may be partially justified in opposing secessionist movement on one hand or in explaining the birth of a new nation on the other hand. Yet, none of them views the issue from human agency theory, in particular, Weber-Thomas-Berger's social construction theory. We shall argue that a new nation is constructed largely on collective consciousness developed in people's minds. Common culture, religion, race and ancestry help cultivate such consciousness. In other words, the community defines its national identity according to social reality derived from their everyday life experiences. This national identity, originating in collective consciousness, defines a nation.

3. Towards a Theory of Social Construction of National Reality⁶

This paper formulates a theory of social construction of national reality based largely on the contributions from Max Weber, Alfred Schutz, William I. Thomas and Peter Berger. This theory is used to explain the origin of national consciousness and identity, hence the rise of a nation. We shall argue that national identity, the product of a mind construct, comes from knowledge taken for granted which is accumulated from everyday life experience during socialization.

Starting from the contributions of Max Weber (1946) and Alfred Schutz (1976), it is argued that each human action has a meaning attached to it (Weick, 1969, 1995). Furthermore, actors do not live alone but experience with the existence of other people. In other words, they

make sense out of the social world (Weick, 1969). Sensemaking implies interpretation (Weber, 1964; Goffman, 1969). In Weigert's words (1981: 74), "interpretation is a process of perceiving the other and his or her interaction within symbolic frameworks so that we can make some sense out of what the other is doing ... If we cannot make any sense out of the other's interaction, it may be that there is no sense in it, or worse, it may be that there is no sense in me". Simply put, action is intersubjective. Human agents identify similarities and distinguish themselves by the presence of the "significant others". There is no "I" without the existence of "you". Walker (1993: 174) rightly points out that "knowing the other outside, it is possible to affirm identities inside. Knowing identities inside, it is possible to imagine the absences outside". "I" is then expanded into a "we" relationship in a common environment (Schutz, 1976: 32). Human agents categorize "we" as in-group and "they" as out-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This is the foundation of collective consciousness, the origin of national identity.

People act, experience and learn in their everyday lives. Everyday life experiences accumulate into a stock of knowledge for people to interpret the outside world. The stock of knowledge is gained during a process of socialization. At the beginning, a child interprets and experiences from family members. Primary social world implies familial identity. Children accept their parents without question. They take what their parents have told them and learnt from their parents. As children grow up and go to school, they learn and interact with schoolmates and teachers. They gradually experience and accept the outside world. Hence, "secondary socialization" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) occurs. School life is not as intimate as familial relationship but more complicated and influential. After finishing school, adults enter the workforce. They spend most of their time at work. Working people socialize with their colleagues. In general, as people grow up in the same

environment, they socialize and share a common pool of knowledge. Their actions and interpretations are then socially constructed.⁷

Furthermore, the world of daily life is given to people in a “taken-for-granted way” (Schutz and Luckmann, 1989: 2). In other words, “the reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 37). It does not require verification. It is simply there, as self-evident and compelling fact⁸. This is the theory of social construction of reality first given by William I. Thomas and later extended by Thomas Luckmann, Peter Berger and Brigitte Berger. As early as 1928, Thomas (1923: 571-572) gave a motto on human action: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”. What people “know” and believe to be true or false is always related to their social situations. Knowledge has social effects which may have little to do with whether that knowledge is “true” or “false” in any absolute sense. Knowing the world is just like “knowing” yourself by your image in a mirror. Thus, “things are what the acting people think they are” (Kirkzner, 1979: 137).

Human society is “an association of consciously purposive individuals” (Knight 1956: 124-125). Put it differently, collective consciousness is the community’s “coherent sense of common self” (Wheelis, 1958: 19). It is the origin of national identity. In other words, national identity is the perception of the difference between “we” (in-group) and “they” (out-group). A nation is the consequence of people’s subjective construction of reality. It arises out of a unified identity perceived by its people. Experience taken for granted collectively as reality is thus the fundamental source of legitimacy and power. A nation arises because people in the community share a common stock of knowledge. They accept other “they” in the community as “we”. National identity is a foundation of an independent state. In line with the concept of sovereign state given by Biersteker and Weber (1996: 11),

this paper argues that a nation is socially constructed, reproduced, reconstructed, and deconstructed. A nation, as an identity or institution, constantly undergoes change and transformation.

People within a nation share a common stock of knowledge which has its own origin and meaning. To be sure, the stock of knowledge is neither static nor homogeneous. Rather, it is “incoherent, only partially clear and not free from contradiction” (Schutz, 1976: 80). It is continuously constructed and transformed. If people of same culture, race, religion and ancestry live in two separate regions, then each group of settlers will adapt and enact to the new environments. Hence, new interpretation, experience and stock of knowledge will come into being in these two regions. Over time, a divergent pool of knowledge (or heterogeneous knowledge) will emerge in the two regions. In other words, in-group and out-group differentiation will arise. The two groups with different stocks of knowledge, when confronted, can result in conflict.⁹

Conflicting knowledge leads to either discrimination or cooperation. In case of discrimination, unless mutual interaction is constructive, people will be biased by favoring in-group toward themselves and keeping out out-group. The gap between “us” and “them” is widened. Conflicting schemes of knowledge intensify misunderstanding and prejudice (Nye, 1987). Aggressive strategies such as intervention and military action are likely adopted.

National identity is socially constructed. In the following, we shall apply the theory of social construction of identity to understand Hong Kong-mainland conflict. In order to do this, we need to understand the origins of two types of social consciousness or identity, namely Chinese consciousness and Hong Kong consciousness.

4. Hong Kong versus Mainland China

4.1. China: The Great Han Mentality and Chinese Consciousness

Chinese consciousness exhibits the Great Han mentality which evolved from history and civilization over 5,000 years ago. Ever since Qin Shi-Huang (秦始皇) became the first emperor of unified China in 221 BC, Chinese people have been educated since birth as “the descendants of the dragon” or “the children of Yellow River”. Chinese identity means searching glorious past and striving for international status (Zhang, 2004).

It is argued that Chinese consciousness and the Great Han mentality originate in Confucianism which emphasizes on elements such as humaneness (*ren* / 仁), righteousness (*yi* / 義), loyalty (*zhong* / 忠) and filial piety (*xiao* / 孝). Confucianism was given sole respect by Emperor Han Wu-Ti (漢武帝) in the Han Dynasty. Confucianism preaches five interpersonal relationships, namely “sovereign and minister”, “father and son”, “husband and wife”, “the old and the young” and, last but not least, between friends. The latter one is subordinate to the former one (superior). The violation of the five relationships is a sin as well as capital crime. Amongst the five relationships, the relationship between sovereign and minister comes the first. Chinese people have been taught to be loyal to their emperor. The ultimate loyalty can be seen in the statement that “if the emperor wants his servant to die, the servant has to die, even though the servant involves no wrongdoing”. In Chinese legends, national heroes such as Qu Yuan (屈原), Wen Tianxiang (文天祥) and Yue Fei (岳飛),¹⁰ are praised as righteous, noble, loyal and patriotic. These legends are mentioned in Chinese literature and history courses in school curriculum.

As a result of socialization, Chinese people are taught to protect the homeland when it is invaded. It is a responsibility for each Chinese to preserve China's territorial integrity and unite the nation under one empire. This spirit is taken for granted as right for a good Chinese citizen. If a nation collapses, each individual has the responsibility. It is a shame if one betrays one's motherland. Traitors are described as a disgrace and shame in history. Ever since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), China has taken its national pride¹¹. Nationalism has been widely accepted in the society due to humiliation experienced during late Ch'ing Dynasty. During the Cultural Revolution, nationalism was pushed to the peak. Chinese leaders are expected to preserve territorial integrity. If they do not defend "the sacred territory", their reputations will be tarnished in history. The mainland government insists that Taiwan, Tibet and Diaoyu Islands are integral and inseparable parts of China. It condemns any secessionist movements in the regions.

4.2. Hong Kong: From Chinese Consciousness to Hong Kong Consciousness

Hong Kong was ceded to Britain in 1842. After more than 150 years of British colonial rule, Hong Kong was handed over to the Chinese sovereignty in 1997. During the colonial period, people in Hong Kong lived in a pluralistic society. Hong Kong identity was said to be cultivated in a hybrid, complex and even ambivalent way (e.g. Wang, 1996; Lau, 1997; Mathews, 1997; Ma and Fung, 2007; Mak and Chan, 2013; Law, 2015a). This paper classifies the dynamic change in consciousness and identity of Hong Kong Chinese since 1949 into (1) the changing national identity in Hong Kong, and (2) the emergence of localism and Hong Kong consciousness.

4.2.1. *The changing national identity among Hong Kong Chinese: From the Republic of China to the People's Republic of China*

A. Republic of China (ROC) as national identity and anti-communism mentality

Hong Kong in the Ch'ing Dynasty was a fishing village, with the inhabitants of Chinese origin. Hence, Hong Kong was traditionally a community with Chinese consciousness. When Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石)'s Kuomintang (國民黨, KMT) lost the Civil War and retreated to Taiwan, the KMT government continued to claim that the Republic of China (ROC) was the only legitimate government in China. After Mao's Communist Party (CCP) took over China in 1949, many Chinese in mainland China were afraid of communist rule and fled to Hong Kong. Migrants from China sojourned in Hong Kong as transient settlers. Hong Kong was regarded as a "borrowed place, borrowed time" (Hughes, 1968). Most Chinese settlers in Hong Kong at that time still hanged on to the ROC and took the KMT as their government, though they regarded their birthplace in mainland China as their hometown, with strong familial and social ties there. They supported the ROC and KMT's *Three Principles of the People* (三民主義). At that time, to most Hong Kong Chinese, Mao Zedong's communist government was illegitimate and they foresaw that the KMT would recover its sovereignty over mainland China one day. Under the influences of their parents, Hong Kong postwar baby boomers in the 1950s (Lui, 2007) continued to take the ROC as their nation. Thus, national identity of most Chinese people in Hong Kong in that period was associated with the ROC in Taiwan. National identity associated with the ROC was evidently seen in the Double Ten Festival (雙十節) in Hong Kong, the National Day of the ROC and KMT. It is reported that during the 1950s

and 1960s, many residents living in Hong Kong low-cost government housing estate, especially the Shek Kip Mei (石硤尾) area, hung the ROC flags outside their building corridors on the National Day of the ROC (Weng, 1997: 68; see also <http://weshare.hk/oceandeeep3000/articles/756889> for pictures). Under the influences of the ROC and Shanghai immigrants¹², culture and entertainments in Hong Kong at that time took Mandarin as mainstream. Mandarin movies and popular songs were most welcomed in Hong Kong while Cantonese movies and songs were regarded as inferior and vulgar by Hong Kong people.

B. People's Republic of China (PRC) as national identity and anti-imperialism/anti-colonialism

The baby boomers born in Hong Kong after 1949 became the young generation in the 1970s. These teenagers, at rebellious age, searched for their self-identity. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, China struggled with the USSR to be the hegemon in the communist world and gained popularity in world affairs. In particular, Mao's ideology of "serving the people" appealed to Chinese teenagers in Hong Kong. Many young Chinese in Hong Kong grew up with senses of Marxist anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. They accepted Marxist ideology. They regarded American imperialism as exploitation and British colonial rule as injustice. They turned to communist China as their role model. These young people called for a movement of "knowing our motherland". Many university students in Hong Kong visited mainland China to learn communist ideology and its style of living.

Furthermore, after communist China's first nuclear weapons test was successfully launched in 1964, Chinese worldwide were full of national pride. Moreover, in 1971, the PRC replaced the ROC as a charter member in the United Nations. Richard Nixon, the President of the United States, visited Beijing in 1972 and recognized the PRC as the

only legitimate government in China. Since then, the ROC was isolated from the international community and many people in Taiwan, led by the Democratic Progressive Party, attempted to break away from mainland China. For people in Taiwan, Hong Kong had nothing related to Taiwan. As a result, the ROC moved further away from Hong Kong while Hong Kong people moved closer to mainland China. National identity of Hong Kong Chinese gradually turned away from the ROC toward the PRC. Taking the PRC as their national identity, many Chinese in Hong Kong participated in *Baodiao* Movement, i.e. “Defending the Diaoyu Islands Movement” (保衛釣魚台運動). Apart from *Baodiao* Movement, Chinese consciousness was also seen in another social movement, namely “the campaign for Chinese to be an official language in Hong Kong”.

C. The Campaign for Chinese To Be an Official Language

In Hong Kong, more than 90 per cent of residents were Chinese. However, English was the only official language. Chinese language was discriminated. A group of university students in Hong Kong organized a campaign to fight for Chinese to be an official language (1968-1971). The Campaign was said to be the first peaceful social movement in post-war Hong Kong (Law, 2015b). The Hong Kong Government announced Chinese as the official language in 1974. This campaign has three implications. Firstly, it is a reflection of Chinese consciousness and identity. Secondly, it is a form of anti-colonialism, and thirdly, it is a social movement to fight for equality and justice in the society.

In summary, in the early 1970s, the ROC’s influence on Hong Kong Chinese national identity diminished while the PRC Chinese consciousness continued to gain ground.

4.2.2. The evolution of Hong Kong core values, localism, and the emergence of Hong Kong consciousness

In this section, we shall introduce the development of Hong Kong core values, localism and the rise of Hong Kong consciousness. We roughly classify the development into two stages, the 1950s-1960s and 1970s-1980s.

Stage 1: Collective common fate in the 1950-60s

Accepting the ROC as national identity in the early days, Chinese in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s, be they native or migrants from the mainland, slowly settled in the colony, though life was harsh for them. They adapted to British rule and accepted Western capitalism. Many of them lived as squatters by the hillside and made families in Hong Kong. Furthermore, postwar baby boomers in Hong Kong began to feel the city as their home. Political science scholars such as Bauer (1906/1996) and Anderson (1991) argue that national identity arises out of people sharing common life experiences. During 1949-1971, Chinese in Hong Kong went through very difficult time including Shek Kip Mei fire (1953), Typhoon Mary (1960), Typhoon Wanda (1962), riots (1956, 1966 and 1967), cholera outbreak (1961), severe drought (1963 and 1967), and Sau Mau Ping (秀茂坪) landslide (1972). Going through the same difficult time, these people regarded themselves as the same group. They began to be aware that they would join together to fight against social injustice brought about by British rule. This can be evidenced in the social protest in 1966, the first case of self-initiative social movement in Hong Kong. On 4 April 1966, So Sau-Chung (蘇守忠), a 27-year-old young man, began a one-man hunger strike at the Star Ferry Terminal in Central District (中環天星碼頭) to protest against the ferry company's

raising the fare of the ride by 10 cents. His slogan, “Join hunger strike to block fare increase” (「絕食反加價」) quickly drew a crowd of supporters. His arrest on the following day prompted thousands to take to the streets in Kowloon in violent protest. It sparked one of the biggest disturbances in Hong Kong history. Before So’s case, protests against social injustice were unheard of in Hong Kong. The incident led to the death of one person and 26 injured. Fifty years later, So Sau-Chung remarked that his actions had awakened many young people in Hong Kong and to some extent, inspired social movements in the 1970s (Cheung, 3rd April 2016). In summary, Hong Kong, the borrowed place, became a permanent place for Chinese in Hong Kong. Collective everyday life experience had profound influence on them in terms of local consciousness.

Stage 2: The making of unique Hong Kong in the “miracle age” (1970s-1980s)

The making of Hong Kong’s uniqueness can be said to be due to three main factors: The Lion Rock spirit, the rise of the popularity of Hong Kong pop culture and entertainment industries and the birth of Hong Kong core values.

A. The Lion Rock Spirit in 1970s:

Hong Kong rose as the Asian powerhouse in 1970s and 1980s. Hong Kong economic success was often regarded as a result of so-called “Lion Rock Spirit” (獅子山下精神), which meant that Hong Kong people could overcome hardship by endurance and solidarity. Hong Kong people were proud of “Lion Rock Spirit” that they could make decent living through hardworking.¹³ In the 1970s, Hong Kong was an *entrepôt* by *laissez-faire* policy whereas China was a closed centrally-planned

economy. Hong Kong adopted Western capitalism as a contrast to communism in China. As a result, Hong Kong became a safe haven from the political instabilities in China. The gap between Hong Kong and mainland China widened in economic, political, social and cultural dimensions (Mathews, 1997; Ma, 1999). It was especially apparent in the 1980s when Hong Kong was praised as East Asian “Miracle” and China was an underdeveloped country. Hong Kong people felt a sense of pride in their achievement with “superior Hong Kong mentality”. They felt that they were different from mainland Chinese. Hong Kong and China began to be perceived as belonging to different worlds (Mathews *et al.*, 2008: 33).

B. The rise of the popularity of Hong Kong Kung Fu fictions, movies and Cantopop (1970s-1980s):

The 1970s-1980s saw a rising popularity of Hong-Kong-made action movies, Kung Fu fictions, Cantopop, TV drama, among the Chinese community and, to some extent Westerners, around the globe. In particular, Kung Fu fictions written by Jin Yong (金庸) and Gu Long (古龍) and others had been translated into many languages and gained international fame. Their stories were adapted as television dramas and movies over and over in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. In Hong Kong pop music industry, as mentioned, in the 1950s, Cantopop was regarded as inferior and vulgar. However, this attitude changed in the 1970s. The first popular Cantopop, namely *The Yuanfen of a Wedding that Cries and Laughs* (“啼笑姻緣”), was launched with huge success in 1974 and became a classic, followed by Sam Hui (許冠傑), the Wynners (溫拿) and others. Cantopop, reflecting everyday life hardship of Hong Kong people, became “the voice of Hong Kong” (McIntyre *et al.*, 2002). Cantopop attained popularity even in mainland China and Taiwan, where Cantonese was not used as mother tongue. In

Hong Kong movie industry, local producers and directors produced a series of action movies, Kung Fu movies, gang movies and avant garde films.¹⁴ These films were so unique and successful that they were welcome in the international market.

As a whole, Chinese artists in Hong Kong were influenced by Western technology and used vernacular Cantonese to show common everyday lives of Hong Kong people. They imagined a society in “a process of crystallisation of a distinctly Hong Kong life-style and identity in popular cultural products” (Choi, 1990: 172).

C. The birth of Hong Kong core values: social justice, anti-corruption and the rule of law:

Through a number of social movements, Hong Kong people gradually consolidated their social values and identity which were later known as “Hong Kong core values”. In particular, anti-corruption campaign and fighting for social justice were highlighted in the “Arrest Godber” event in 1973. The Tiananmen Square Incident of 1989 in China served as a catalyst of the rise of localism in Hong Kong.

“Arrest Godber”: In 1973, Peter Fitzroy Godber, the Chief Superintendent of the Royal Hong Kong Police, accused of corruption, succeeded in sneaking out of Hong Kong, heading home to Britain. The news about his escape caused uproar among the public. People in Hong Kong took to the streets, chanting slogans of “Fight against corruption, arrest Godber”. To ease the unrest, the Government formed an independent commission to look into Godber’s escape and reviewed anti-corruption work at that time. Consequently, Godber was arrested in England on 29 April 1974 and extradited to Hong Kong on 7 January 1975. He was convicted of corruption and sentenced to four years in prison plus confiscation of HK\$25,000. His conviction and other

corruption activities in Hong Kong in the 1970s led to the creation of the Independent Commission Against Corruption in 1974 (ICAC, 1974-75). More importantly, the Godber case showed that the British government respected the rule of law and that Hong Kong people cherished a corruption-free society.

The Tiananmen Square Incident of 1989: From April-June 1989, people from across mainland China gathered in Beijing's Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of the liberal Communist Party leader Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦) and share their frustrations about the slow pace of promised reform. The gathering turned into peaceful protests which spread across the provinces of China as demonstrators, mainly students, began to call for an end to official corruption and for political and economic reforms. The students demanded democracy, greater accountability, freedom of the press, and freedom of speech. It was estimated that one million people joined the protests in Beijing to express their support for the students on hunger strike and to demand reform. The protest ended up in brutal suppression by the government army. The death toll is still unknown (Amnesty International UK, 3 June 2015).

The Tiananmen incident served as a turning point to Hong Kong people's perception of mainland China. Facing the brutal suppression by the one-party dictatorship, Hong Kong people demanded democracy, being corruption-free, social justice and liberty for their society. For those older generation in Hong Kong with Chinese consciousness, they called for ending one-party dictatorship, building democratic China and releasing dissidents. The commemoration marked "not a rejection of the Chinese nation but an embrace of the nation: their emotions were fuelled by their desire for an alternative, better Chinese nation than that proffered by the Chinese state" (Mathews *et al.*, 2008: 47). However, the

younger generation in Hong Kong distrusted the Beijing government. They looked for a more radical alternative, namely, separating themselves from the mainland. In other words, they looked for autonomy and self-determination. For them, the Tiananmen incident was an internal affair of mainland China.

Hong Kong people gradually distinguished themselves from mainland Chinese. They felt the urge to desinicize themselves. Norms associated with pro-PRC consciousness were rejected. Though traditional Chinese style of living was maintained, local values overrode the greater Chinese mentality. Hence, Hong Kong consciousness was regarded by Matthews (1997) as “Chineseness plus”. In summary, from the 1970s-1990s, Chinese in Hong Kong fought for social justice, against corruption, and were concern about social equality. This laid the foundation of what we called the core values of Hong Kong – the base for Hong Kong consciousness.

5. Conflict of Knowledge: Mainlandization versus Localization after 1997

China has become the world’s second largest economy. Pro-Beijing Chinese praised the omnipotent one-party state on economic, cultural and scientific development. They urged that China would be as powerful as imperial China in the past. The Beijing government had the responsibility to revive Chinese consciousness, maintain national unity and territorial integrity at all costs. Hong Kong was considered as a lost grandchild. China was the grandfather of the same family and welcomed Hong Kong’s kids for reunion. The central government attempted to embrace Hong Kong Chinese kids into the big Chinese family by mainlandization. For the Beijing government, China was the motherland

of Hong Kong people. The reunification of Hong Kong with China was a matter of national unity. According to the Confucian value of filial piety, grandchildren should respect and obey the senior members of the family. Hongkongers should be grateful for what the Chinese leadership offered to Hong Kong. Hong Kong was a Chinese “family business” which extended to a “national business” and brought it home with “our business” (Flowerdew and Leong, 2007: 281). Pro-Beijing Chinese expected Hongkongers to follow the Chinese leadership unquestionably. Those who sought Western values or foreign pledge to help were regarded as unpatriotic and should be condemned.

The Chinese government worked with the Hong Kong government “to mold itself in the mainland’s image” (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2016).¹⁵ It attempted to mainlandize Hong Kong by all means, including relaxing visa requirement for Mainlanders to visit Hong Kong, implicitly encouraging Putonghua (普通話) and simplified Chinese characters, and introducing Chinese history and patriotism in schools.

As the younger generation of Hong Kong built up their local consciousness from their everyday life experiences, they identified themselves as “we” and mainland Chinese as “they”. They rejected mainlandization and took Hong Kong identity as granted. When the Hong Kong government proposed national education in 2012, localists criticized it as pro-Beijing resinicization with “brainwashing” nationalistic education. They believed that mainlandization eroded the core values of Hong Kong, including freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and the rule of law. If they did not defend Hong Kong’s autonomy, Hong Kong would eventually become a “Chinese” city. Hong Kong-Guangzhou High-speed Rail symbolized the integration of Hong Kong and China. Hence, localists strove to protect the Hong Kong border and protested against its construction. As Hong Kong was an international city, localists accepted and shared common global values.

When the communist regimes collapsed in many countries in 1989, Hongkongers began to relearn universal values and adopt them into Hong Kong consciousness. Margaret Ng (吴靄儀), a renowned Hong Kong barrister, notes: “We are Chinese without being only Chinese. We can accept western civilisation without identifying with the west. We observe universal values without losing our own cultural identity”.¹⁶ (*The Guardian*, 23 March 2012). In 2014, a new “Lion Rock Spirit”¹⁷ emerged. In contrast with dictatorship in China, localists fought for democracy, liberty and human rights and endured universal values. The confrontation between mainlandization and localism was unavoidable, ending up in a street protest called “Umbrella Movement 2014” for around two months.

6. Summary

Based on the contributions of Max Weber, W.I. Thomas, Alfred Schutz and Peter Berger, this paper has constructed a theoretical framework, namely, the social construction of national reality, which allows us to explain the origin of national identity and the reason for people to call for autonomy or secession. This paper has argued that collective consciousness originates from everyday life experience taken for granted during socialization. Individuals make sense of the external world. Experiences taken for granted become the actor’s stock of knowledge. A common scheme of knowledge shared by the community serves to differentiate in-group (nationals) and out-group (foreigners). Collective consciousness thus defines national identity and hence the rise of a nation. Unless people (both in-group and out-group) interact with and learn from each other, different stocks of knowledge taken for granted will create conflict. We have applied this new theory to explain the growing Sinophobia and the call for autonomy in Hong Kong. This

paper has argued that the confrontation between traditional Chinese consciousness and emerging Hong Kong consciousness undermines the peaceful coexistence between Hongkongers and Mainlanders, unless both parties redefine their stocks of knowledge via dynamic learning. The paper concludes that in order to reduce the conflicts in the regions, understanding the origins of collective consciousness and national identity can help formulate an appropriate policy to resolve growing tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China.

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1. Public Opinion Programme, HKU. <<https://www.hkupop.hku.hk/english/popexpress/ethnic/>>, retrieved on 16 November 2016.
2. The term Sinophobia (or Chinophobia) refers to anti-Mainlander sentiment.
3. Of course, it has to be clarified on what foundation we define a territory as “part of a nation in history”. A territory in historical sense can be defined by geography, dynasty, race or an entity encompassing politics, culture and economics.
4. See Chris Wen-Chao Li’s reaction to BBC’s *Talking Point*: “Election 2000: What future for Taiwan”, 24 March 2000.
5. Badly enough, in its extreme emotionalism, Chris Li argues that “negotiating with these people will be difficult because it is like negotiating with a psychotic who does not have basic human values and who does not share your view of what is reasonable and what is not” (See

note 4 for reference).

6. This section is adopted from Yu and Kwan (2008).
7. As will be argued below, individuals' actions, if socially constructed under the same environment, will give rise to collective consciousness.
8. According to Overgaard and Zahavi (2009: 97), "the life-world is the world we ordinarily take for granted, the pre-scientific, experientially given world that we are familiar with and never call into question".
9. Other approaches argue that power, interests and resources are the sources of conflict.
10. For the Chinese legends in details, see Yu and Kwan (2008: 48).
11. Chairman Mao Zedong (毛澤東) addressed to the people at the Tiananmen Square that "the Chinese people have stood up!" during the establishment of the People's Republic of China on September 21, 1949.
12. Wong (1988) argues that Shanghai immigrants contributed to Hong Kong's post-war economic growth.
13. Lion Rock is a famous mountain in Hong Kong. It is a landmark in Hong Kong. "Lion Rock Spirit" came from a government-made television dramas called *Below the Lion Rock* (「獅子山下」) which was released in 1973. The story described Hong Kong people living under the same roof of Lion Rock during the 1970s.
14. Movie stars such as Bruce Lee (李小龍), Jackie Chan (成龍), Chow Yun Fat (周潤發), Joey Wong (王祖賢) and Donnie Yen Chi Tan (甄子丹) were representative figures, to name a few.
15. "An era in Hong Kong is ending, thanks to China's tight embrace" (by Ned Levin and Chester Yung), *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 September 2016. <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/an-era-in-hong-kong-is-ending-thanks-to-chinas-tight-embrace-1474647072>> (retrieved on 26 September 2016).
16. "Hong Kong suffers identity crisis as China's influence grows: Residents fear for cultural values, with mainlanders bringing different outlook on freedom, the rule of law – and spitting" (by Vaudine England), *The*

Guardian (UK), 23 March 2012. <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/23/china-hong-kong-identity-crisis>> (retrieved on 8 September 2016).

17. The old Lion Rock Spirit describes how people in Hong Kong in the 1970s worked hard for themselves and the common good. The new Lion Rock Spirit demands more than just a better life. It looks for democracy, liberty, social justice and equality.

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