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# Gordon Matthews, Eric Kit-wai Ma, Tai-lok Lui, Hong Kong, China: Learning to Belong to a Nation

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- 1 This book focuses on transformations of identity in Hong Kong, as well as how and the extent to which the people of Hong Kong have learned to belong to a nation. All three authors are scholars: anthropologist Matthews, who is the primary author of chapters 1, 5, 7, and 9, communications specialist Ma, the primary author of chapters 4, 6, and 8, and sociologist Lui, primary author of chapters 2 and 3.
- 2 Chapter one stresses the unique features of the Hong Kong situation, in which residents have never really belonged to their country. It contends that the people of Hong Kong have shaped their identity through loyalty to the global market rather than to any state. The market mentality of many Hongkongers is characterised by their materialism, consumerism, and pragmatism. Chapters Two and Three adopt a historical perspective to trace the evolution of identity in Hong Kong, emphasising the emergence of a refugee mentality in the post-World War II era, its metamorphosis into social activism in the 1970s and 1980s, and the dialectical development of emigration in the 1990s, as well as the rise of political activism from the late 1990s to the 2000s. Chapter Four focuses on the role of mass media in the transformation of identity in Hong Kong. It uses television series such as “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly” as well as “Great Times” to analyse the changing attitudes of Hong Kong people toward mainland Chinese. The findings of several focus group interviews are summed up in this chapter.
- 3 The role of Hong Kong schools, teachers, and students in the transformation of identity is discussed thoroughly in Chapter Five. It reveals that while the examination system has deprived schools of the opportunity to educate young people on the question of identity, the teachers themselves have varying attitudes toward the desirability and pedagogy of imparting to their students not only the meanings of identity but also the political conditions of mainland China. Chapter Six employs survey results to reflect how the people of Hong Kong view their motherland, including the Chinese people, the

Chinese nation, the Chinese government, the Chinese market, and the Chinese Communist Party. It finds that a majority of respondents feel pride and affections in being part of the Chinese people. This pride and affection tends to decline markedly, however, when respondents are asked their views of the Chinese government and especially the Communist Party. Chapter Seven compares American university students with their Hong Kong counterparts in their understanding of “belonging to a nation.” Chapter Eight traces recent interactions between Hong Kong people and mainland Chinese. It argues that such interactions produce a hybrid of market-driven but also politically critical attitudes toward the Chinese state among Hong Kong travellers. Chapter Nine concludes the findings and arguments of this book, stressing that the process of learning to be a nation is problematic, that Hong Kong people who love the Chinese nation are actually driven by market considerations, and that loving the Chinese nation does not mean loving the Chinese state.

- 4 The book has obvious strengths and weaknesses. The major strength lies in the contention that the increasing love many Hong Kong people feel for the Chinese nation is not tantamount to love for the Chinese state. The fact that many of Hong Kong’s people make this distinction demonstrates the complex factors involved, such as their historical experience, socialisation in schools and among the peers, and the degree of penetration by patriotic education into the hearts and minds of Hongkongers. The three chapters on media analysis, survey findings, and the role of schools and teachers are likewise not only very well-written but also skilfully researched and insightful.
- 5 Nevertheless, there are a number of weaknesses. The two historical chapters on the evolution of identity from the colonial era to the present appear to be detached from the central concepts — state and nation — and major argument of the book. Nor does the Introduction provide a forceful state-nation framework that lays the groundwork for the following chapters. The Introduction defines the concept of state briefly, but it surprisingly leaves out the most important feature of the state, namely its coercive ability to apply sanctions on citizens who disobey and violate laws. If the theoretical concepts of state and nation and their interconnectedness were more thoroughly discussed in the Introduction, the entire book would provide a much stronger analytical framework for helping readers better understand the evolution of identity in Hong Kong.
- 6 The chapter on survey findings is empirically rich and useful, but its arguments could be more convincing by comparing its data with many other research surveys conducted by local universities such as the University of Hong Kong, Lingnan University, and the Baptist University-based Hong Kong Transition Project. The chapter on interactions between Hongkongers and mainlanders leaves out one central research question: to what extent do mainlanders who visit Hong Kong actually absorb Hong Kong values and thus undergo a silent process of “Hongkongisation.” Above all, as more mainlanders stay in Hong Kong, apply for residency in the territory, and become new Hongkongers, the change in their values will provide an indispensable indicator of the overall identity transformations in Hong Kong in the years to come.
- 7 Despite these weaknesses, some of which are related to the question of research design, this book is undoubtedly one of the most important works on the dynamics of identity change in Hong Kong. Students, teachers, and researchers will find it very useful, insightful, and valuable.