The Construction of "Difference": a Contextualization of *Heunggongyahn* Identification in the 1970s

Alvis Ka-I Sio | ORCID: 0000-0002-8827-4772
PhD Researcher, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, Durham
University, Durham, UK
ka.i.sio@durham.ac.uk

Abstract

Taking the Hongkonger identity as an example of an overseas Chinese identity, this paper reviews the studies of "Hongkonger" identification. The idea of a "hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity," raised by media scholar Anthony Fung, is critically examined. I criticize this idea for disregarding the sociocultural context in which it was constructed, specifically the role and political aim of the colonizer, and for overemphasizing the "Other" role of the Chinese. This paper thereby contextualizes the emergence of the Hongkonger identity in the 1970s in the colonial context, examining how the role and political agenda of the colonizer related to the changing consciousness of Hongkongers and the emergence of the Hongkonger identity. In more concrete terms, this paper focuses on how the so-called "MacLehose reform" encouraged the consciousness of the "Hongkonger" as a separate category from that of the "Chinese" by "civilizing" the people of Hong Kong.

Keywords

Chinese – Hong Kong – Hongkonger – identity – postcolonialism

On 1 February 2012, a full-page print advertisement in the *Apple Daily*, the largest pro-democracy newspaper in Hong Kong, caused controversy. Labeling the mainland Chinese tourists "locusts," the advertisement was funded by a web-based group to rail against a Chinese "invasion." This dehumanizing rhetoric about mainland Chinese reflects Hong Kong people's hatred of the mainland

Chinese in the post-handover period, especially after 2008. At the time of the appearance of the advertisement, an indigenous *Heunggongyahn* 香港人 ("Hongkonger") identity, which strongly rejected the "Chinese" identity, was becoming increasingly prevalent among the Chinese population in the city. Sayings such as "I am Hongkonger, not Chinese" and "Hong Kong is not China" appeared in political slogans, publicity, and even newspaper headlines.

While this indigenous identity wave has emerged only in recent decades, studies of the Hongkonger identity have long been a popular topic in the field of overseas Chinese identity studies. Though these studies have come from different disciplines and adopted dissimilar methodologies, they share some common ideas: that the Hongkonger identity emerged in the 1970s and that Hongkongers are different from mainland Chinese. That is, instead of simply declining a "Chinese" identity, Hong Kong people were more inclined to adopt an ambiguous approach and to embrace a "hybridized" identity—considering themselves both "Chinese" and, simultaneously, different from the "Chinese" in mainland China. This "hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity" has been uncritically adopted as a framework for polls and in various research methodologies. However, this "hybridized" approach declined after the handover in 1997. In the last decade, a "Hongkonger—Chinese" dichotomy has been formed and amplified by the intense conflicts between Hong Kong and mainland China. The aforementioned advertisement also appeared during this period. While this rise of the indigenous identity is notable, little attention has been paid to how the dichotomy was established and why.

Inspired by the seminal work of John Comaroff on ethnicity, I examine in this paper the formation of the Hongkonger identity.[1] By contextualizing this identification against the sociopolitical background of the city and examining how the political agenda of the colonizer contributed to the emergence of the Hongkonger identity by altering people's consciousness, this paper argues that the Hongkonger identity emerged in a particular socioeconomic-political context. In more concrete terms, this paper argues that the Hongkonger identity consciousness was socially constructed in the 1970s via the establishment of "civilization differences." The paper focuses on the ways in which the so-called "MacLehose reforms," by "civilizing" the people of Hong Kong, nurtured a sense among them of being a category separate from the "Chinese." The contextualizing discussion in this paper also considers Hongkongers' resistance to mainland Chinese people in the past decade.

---

1   John L. Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice and the Signs of Inequality." *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 52:3–4 (1987), 301–323.

1   How Has the Hong Kong Identity Been Studied?

Hong Kong identity has been a popular topic among scholars since the end of the colonial period; and for most of these scholars, "Hongkonger" is an identity that differs from "Chinese." As Hugh Baker observes, Hong Kong Man "wears western clothes, speaks English or expects his children to do so, drinks western alcohol."[2] But to Baker, this "Hong Kong man" is "not British or western," nor "Chinese in the same way that the citizens of the People's Republic of China are Chinese [PRC]."[3] Here, the difference between "Hong Kong man" and the Chinese person (a citizen of the PRC) is emphasized. Baker is not the only scholar to take this stance. Various scholars have adopted similar perspectives to frame the "Hongkonger—Chinese" relationship.[4]

Media scholar Anthony Fung is representative of the intellectuals who have made many contributions to the study of Hongkonger identity. Fung's idea of a "hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity" has played a significant role in the methodologies and conceptual frameworks of related research.[5] This paper closely reviews Fung's publications on Hongkonger identity, especially related to this "hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity" idea, to identify the problems. Doing so would offer a theoretical discussion of the formation of the hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity and unveil the sociopolitical context in which it was constructed.

The idea of a hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity can be found in many of Fung's publications. E.g., Fung conducted a multi-year study (1996–1998) to capture the changing trends in the self-claimed identities of local people before and after the handover and to explore the "hybridizing" of the local identity.[6] In that study, the respondents were asked to choose the label

---

2   Hugh D. R. Baker, "Life in the Cities: The Emergence of Hong Kong Man." *The China Quarterly* 95 (1983), 469–479.

3   Baker, "Life in the Cities."

4   John M. Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007); Po-king Choi, 1990. "Cong 'nuhua jiaoyu' yu 'wenhua shamo' dao bentu wenhua de taitou: Xianggang wenhua de fazhan yu Zhongguo jindai geming de zhuanshe" 從「奴化教育」與「文化沙漠」到本土文化的抬頭：香港文化的發展與中國近代革命的轉折 [From 'servile education' and 'cultural wilderness' to the emergence of an indigenous culture: Cultural development of Hong Kong and the changing course of China's revolution]. *Education Journal* 18-2 (1990), 153–164; Gordon Mathews, "Hèunggóngyàhn: On the Past, Present, and Future of Hong Kong Identity." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29:3 (1997), 3–13.

5   Anthony Y. H. Fung, "Postcolonial Hong Kong Identity: Hybridising the Local and the National." *Social Identities* 10:3 (2004), 399–414.

6   Anthony Y. H. Fung, "What Makes the Local? A Brief Consideration of the Rejuvenation of Hong Kong Identity." *Cultural Studies* 15:3–4 (2001), 591–601.

(from a set of five) that best described their own national identity—namely, "Hong Kong people," "Hong Kong people but also Chinese," "Chinese but also Hong Kong people," "Chinese," or "Other." They were also given a list of various "transitional icons"—such as the Great Wall, the national flag of China, and the People's Liberation Army—and asked to review how these served as "anchors as well as indicators of cultural identification."[7] This self-labeling approach was also adopted in Fung's other research to "trace the process and differentiate sets of multiple identities in the post-transitional and post-colonial context of Hong Kong" and to "[conceptualize] Hong Kong identity as the cultural affect of the local from the national—a spatial distance between 'us' and 'others.'"[8] Fung also pays attention to the relationship between the consumption of cultural products and local cultural identification. Using the local comic *Teddy Boy* as material, Fung and Pun argue that the representations of Ho-nam Chan, the main character, echo local Hong Kong identity: mixing traditional core Confucian Chinese values of morality and righteousness with values of freedom and fairness that are shared in Western democratic settings.[9] They also consider that "the hybridized colonial culture," such as reflected in the *Tong Lau and Cha Chan Tang* restaurants, can be perceived as a strong core value of the hybridized local identity; and "the preservation of such non-Chinese values and cultural artefacts in comics is a call for the continued existence of the Hong Kong identity." The consumption of the comic, they argue, has an impact on local identity formation.

This idea of a hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity was also used as the framework of a poll designed to examine Hong Kong people's self-identification. In the tracking research "The Identity and National Identification of Hong Kong people," led by Eric Ma and Anthony Fung since 1996, respondents were asked to identify themselves by choosing their preferred answer from five options: namely, "Hongkongese," "Hongkongese but also Chinese," "Chinese but also Hongkongese," "Chinese," and "Other/No answer/Refuse to answer."[10] This framework was followed by other researchers, for instance, the public research project conducted since 1997 by the Public Opinion Programme [POP] at the University of Hong Kong. Its respondents were asked to indicate their ethnic identities by choosing from options such as "Chinese," "Hongkonger,"

---

7   Fung, "What Makes the Local?" 597.

8   Fung, "Postcolonial Hong Kong Identity," 411.

9   Anthony Y. H. Fung, and Boris L. F. Pun, "Discourse and Identity in the Hong Kong Comic Magazine *Teddy Boy*." *Global Media China* 1:4 (2016), 422–434.

10   Under the supervision of Ma and Fung, this tracking research was conducted by the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey, a research unit under the School of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

"Chinese in Hong Kong," "Hongkonger in China," "Chinese in [a] broad sense," "Hongkonger in [a] broad sense," "Mixed identity," and so on. The design of these options represents the academics' view that the Hongkonger identity is defined as an identity that differs from mainland Chinese. Furthermore, the options "guide" the respondents in ways of defining their Hongkonger and Chinese identities and understanding the relationship between them. Provided with these options, respondents are given access to identity concepts that they might not have considered before taking the poll and are thereby encouraged to fit themselves into the provided definitions.

Undoubtedly, the idea of a hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity contributes to our understanding of the Hongkonger identity. However, some problems with this are evident. First, the "self-labeling" approach is insufficient to reflect people's identity. The results of these multi-year studies reflect only the interviewees' opinions at the time at which they were interviewed. Their views might have changed over time. For instance, in the findings of "The Identity and National Identification of Hong Kong People," the number of respondents choosing the "Chinese but also Hongkongese" option recorded a historical high in 2008 (24.9%), while the "Hongkongese" decreased to 16.7%. These results differed significantly from those of the 1997 poll (14.7% for "Chinese but also Hongkongese" and 25.2% for "Hongkongese"). The 2008 results are perceived as a reflection of the Hong Kong people's patriotic fervor and sense of pride, triggered by the Beijing Olympics Games. Interestingly, 2008 was also a watershed, as the figure for "Chinese but also Hongkongese" began to decrease. This drop is assumed as a reflection of Hong Kong people's negative impressions of the "milk scandal", and the "Tofu-dreg project" in the Sichuan earthquake incident.[11] These self-reporting changes are especially significant if the dynamic relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China is considered. The continuous decline of the "Chinese" options in the POP results since 2014 exemplifies this point. In that year, the Umbrella Movement occurred and the mainland China—Hong Kong relationship began to sour; concomitantly, the proportion selecting the "Chinese" option started to decrease.

---

11   Wo-tang. Lai, "2008 gaibian Zhongguo ——Zhe nian weihe chengwei Zhonggang guanxi de fenshuiling" 2008 改變中國——這年為何成為中港關係的分水嶺 [Why 2008 becomes the watershed of the mainland China-Hong Kong relationship?]. 2018, accessed 2 March 2022, https://www.hkcnews.com/article/17228/%E4%B8%AD%E6%B8%AF%E9%97%9C%E4%BF%82–2008%E5%B9%B4-%E6%B8%AF%E7%8D%A8-17262/2008%E6%94%B9%E8%AE%8A%E4%B8%AD%E5%9C%8B%E2%94%80%E2%94%80%E9%80%99%E5%B9%B4%E7%82%BA%E4%BD%95%E6%88%90%E7%82%BA%E4%B8%AD%E6%B8%AF%E9%97%9C%E4%BF%82%E7%9A%84%E5%88%86%E6%B0%B4%E5%B6%BA.

The second problem, and the most serious one, is the decontextualized approach. Borrowing Hall's idea that identity is "being" as well as "becoming",[12] I consider identification to be an ongoing process. For Hall, the history, language, and culture of a society are resources used by its people to support this "becoming" process. In other words, one's sociocultural background plays a part in how one's identity is constructed. Fung's idea answers the question of "what" has been established (a hybridized identity), but it leaves unanswered the questions of "why" and "how" the hybridized identity was constructed in that specific social context. Without a thorough investigation of these questions, Hong Kong—Chinese hybridization is no more than a hypothesis, based on Hong Kong's role as a Western colony and its Chinese cultural background. This decontextualized approach also limits the analyses of the discursive representation to the surface level and leaves untouched the foundation of the identification.

2   The Formation of Identity: Primordial or Socially Constructed?

The idea put forward by John Comaroff offers a clearer picture of the aforementioned two problems.[13] Drawing on samples from Africa, Comaroff investigates the formation of ethnicity. He begins his argument with the long-standing question of whether ethnicity identity is "primordial" or constructed. The rationale for the "primordial" approach lies in the original "fact" of human cultural difference and ascribed-status group affiliations, but the counter thesis suggests that expressions of ethnicity do not arise in any community, save as a reaction to threats against the integrity and self-determination of group members' ethnicity.[14] For Comaroff both definitions are simultaneously correct and incomplete, and the focus should be on the process of marking "differences":

> In as much as collective social identity always entails some form of communal self-definition, it is invariably founded on a marked opposition between "we" and "other/s"; identity, that is, is a relation inscribed in culture. Patently, the social and material boundaries involved in any such relations—not to mention their content—are historically wrought; they change in the course of economic and political processes. Still, whatever

---

12   Stuart, Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?". In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 1st ed, edited by S. Hall and P. Du Gay, (London: Sage, 1996), 1–17.

13   Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity."

14   Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity," 303.

the substance of particular relations between groupings, the irreducible fact of identity implies the cultural structuring of the social universe. All this merely echoes the anthropological truism, after Durkheim and Mauss (1963), that classification, the meaningful construction of the world, is a necessary condition of social existence. But, I stress, it is the marking of relations—of identities in opposition to one another—that is "primordial," not the substance of those identities.[15]

Comaroff's idea highlights two crucial elements of identity formation. The first one is "other/s." Identity and ethnic consciousness involve an opposition between "we" and "other/s," with a dichotomy established to differentiate "Self" from "Other(s)." The second element is a particular context, as "the irreducible fact of identity implies the cultural structuring of the social universe." The sociocultural context, thus, decides the way the "self-other" relationship is formed and the forms of the identity. Comaroff then discusses the forces that produce ethnicity and the experiential and practical salience of the ethnic identity for people who bear it. He argues that ethnicity has its origins in the asymmetric incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings into a single political economy:

> The emergence of ethnic groups and the awakening of ethnic consciousness are, by contrast, the product of historical processes which structure relations of inequality between discrete social entities. They are, in other words, the social and cultural correlates of a specific mode of articulation between groupings, in which one extends its dominance over another by some form of coercion, violent or otherwise; situates the latter as a bounded unit in a dependent and unique position within an inclusive division of labor; and, by removing from it final control over the means of production and/or reproduction, regulates the terms upon which value may be extracted from it.[16]

Attention should be paid to the notion of "structur[ing] relations of inequality between discrete social entities," as this implies that ethnic consciousness is only triggered in a specific historical context. Using the Tswana vernacular for "whites" as an example, Comaroff shows that identity entails both the assertion of a collective self and the negation of collective Others. It may even "call into question shared humanity; and its substance is likely to reflect the

---

15   Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity," 303.
16   Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity," 308.

tensions embodied in relations of inequality."[17] That is to say, inequality provokes ethnic consciousness, and once that is established, the negation of the collective Other is adopted to signify and symbolize the asymmetrical "we—them" relationship. More interestingly, ethnic identity, once formed, becomes an "independent variable" that "shapes careers and biographies." It becomes an essential feature of the "natural" order of things, the given character of the world, with regard to which people must conduct their lives.[18] Identity is therefore about how people perceive the relationship between self and other; and once formed, it becomes the principle that underpins the individual's behavior and determines how they conduct their lives.

Comaroff thereby exposes the problems of Fung's notion of a hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity. Because the "self-labeling" approach could only capture the respondents' presentations of themselves at the period they were interviewed, the results it gained are thus indefinite. But in Comaroff's work, identity is about consciousness of the differentiation between the self and the "Other" and is the "independent variable" in a person's behavior. The major difference between the "independent variable" and the presentation of the self is that while the former could explain a person's behavior, the latter is only a sharing of opinion at a specific time. However, identity is not just a way of self-representing but a specific way of thinking, which is closely connected to behavior. Thus, the "self-labeling" approach could hardly serve as evidence of identity, as it could not provide any explanation for behaviors. The second problem with Fung's idea is the decontextualized approach. Weighing the significance of a particular socioeconomic-political context for the emergence of the consciousness of self and "other," Comaroff argues that the classification is decided by the material and cultural exigencies of history, and a specific condition (inequality within a single political economy) is essential for the emergence of the identity. Fung's decontextualized approach is therefore insufficient to support the notion of hybridized identity, as it cannot explain why consciousness of the Hongkonger identity was triggered, nor why Hong Kong people would consider themselves different from mainland Chinese.

Providing a conceptual framework, Comaroff's idea of ethnic identity enriches the discussion of the hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity and provides a theoretical perspective from which to interpret Hong Kong people's rejection toward mainland Chinese in the past decade. Inspired by Comaroff's seminal work, this paper examines the formation of the Hongkonger identity and the rationale Hongkongers adopted to support the "hybridized" identity.

---

17   Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity," 305–306.
18   Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity," 311–312.

It traces the sociopolitical context of the 1970s, the period in which the consciousness of the Hongkonger identity was established. The policies imposed by the colonial government will be examined to investigate their relationship with the Hongkonger identity. To do so, I will first examine the "Chineseness" of the Hongkonger identity and argue that the Hongkonger identity was not developed upon a biological basis, but was socially constructed. This will be followed by an investigation of the MacLehose reforms and the way that they changed the consciousness of the local population. An example of a TV serial will be provided to illustrate how the consciousness of Hong Kong people and their perceptions of mainland Chinese were altered in the 1970s.

3   The "Chineseness" of Hongkonger Identity

As an overseas-Chinese identity, the Hongkonger identity is inseparable from the Chinese identity. There are three primary reasons for this: namely, the city's historical connection with the mainland, its predominantly Chinese population, and the cultural interaction between the people in Hong Kong and those in mainland China. Regarding the historical connection, Hong Kong has been deeply connected with China since the Qin dynasty (210 BC) and was governed by the northern regimes.[19] Although this status changed in 1842 and the city was ceded to Britain as a colony, this deep-rooted connection continued to influence the people in the colony. The frequent interactions between the residents of Hong Kong and of Guangdong also played a role in nurturing Hong Kong people's "Chineseness." Chinese people could freely cross the border to trade goods and would return to the mainland when they had earned enough money. Though an attempt to regulate immigration was made by the Hong Kong government after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, it had little practical impact on Chinese people's barrier-free entry into and residence in Hong Kong.[20] In 1951, the "Frontier Closed Area" policy was launched, and a Sino-British border was established to "maintain the integrity of the boundary between Hong Kong and the Mainland and to combat illegal immigration and other cross-boundary criminal activities." Even during the Cold War (1947–1991), the city continued to serve the Chinese government as an "observatory"

---

19   Yi-zheng Lian, "Is Hong Kong Really Part of China?" *The New York Times* (2018), January, 2.
20   Albert H. Y. Chen, "The Development of Immigration Law and Policy: The Hong Kong Experience." *McGill Law Journal* 33–4 (1988), 634–675.

or a "window" onto the outside world. In the post-war period, the unique status of Hong Kong required "delicate balancing" between Beijing and Washington.[21]

The Chinese majority in the population is another pivotal reason for the "Chineseness" of Hong Kong identity. Most Hong Kong inhabitants are either Chinese emigrants or the offspring of Chinese people. According to the census report (see table 1), the number of Hong Kong residents born in Hong Kong first exceeded the number of those born in China in 1961, and the Hong Kong-born accounted for more than half of the population by 1971. These statistics illustrate the link between the Chinese populations in Hong Kong and in mainland China. Furthermore, despite being born outside of China, the residents demonstrated their Chinese nationalist passion in the 1970s by engaging in long-lasting protests against the Japanese "occupation" of the Diaoyu Islands (disputed territory between China and Japan) and urging the colonial government to recognize Chinese as an official language.[22]

TABLE 1   Percentage distribution of population by place of birth in 1911, 1921, 1931, 1961, and 1971[23]

	Hong Kong	China	Elsewhere	Total
1911	31.51	61.3	7.19	100
1921	26.73	69.09	4.18	100
1931	32.53	62.48	4.99	100
1961	47.7	45.55	6.75	100
1971	56.4	41.6	2	100

---

21   Chi-kwan Mark, "Hong Kong as an International Tourism Space: The Politics of American Tourism in the 1960s." In *Hong Kong in the Cold War*, edited by Priscilla Roberts and John M. Carroll, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 160–182.

22   Chi-kit Chan, "China as 'Other': Resistance to and Ambivalence toward National Identity in Hong Kong." *China Perspectives* 2014/1 (2014), 25–34; Mei-yin Chan and Chung-win Yeng, "The Construction of Hongkonger Identity: From a Hong Kong Local Culture Perspective." Paper presented at the Conference of Hong Kong Studies (1994).

23   Census and Statistics Department, *Hong Kong 1961 Census Report—Volume II* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1982), 37; *Hong Kong 1981 Census Main Report—Volume 1 Analysis* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1982), 122.

The situation began to change in the 1970s. According to the Hong Kong immigration ordinance (chapter 115) that came into effect on 1 April 1972, illegal entry or illegal overstaying prior to that date would count as "ordinary residence," and a Chinese alien who had had seven years of continuous "ordinary residence" in Hong Kong prior to that date would be considered a "Chinese resident" of the city and could enjoy the privileges and benefits of permanent residence. I argue the change was not led entirely by this confirmation of residential status. The changing mentality of the Chinese population—who had come to believe that they were Hongkongers and different from mainland Chinese—is another vital component to investigate. One should also note that the aforementioned "Chineseness" had existed in Hong Kong for a long time and the emergence of the Hongkonger identity disproves the ascriptive approach. Because people in Hong Kong and mainland China have the same biological origin, the Hongkonger identity, both in terms of considering mainland Chinese different or a significant "Other," would not emerge if the ascriptive approach is valid.

A "primordial" definition of identity, therefore, does not work, and the social-construction approach should instead be considered to interpret this. Attention should be paid to the specific context that nurtured this consciousness: the 1970s and the events that unfolded that emerged in this decade. For Comaroff, the experiences of Hong Kong's people in the 1970s thus provide the particular sociocultural-political-economic context that gave rise to this identity. Considering this, the following sections will trace this process back to the 1970s to unveil how the mentality was established and the context in which it emerged.

4   1970s: A Significant Decade for Twofold Reasons

Seen with the benefit of hindsight regarding Hong Kong's development, the significance of the 1970s was twofold. First, it was some years after the disturbances of the 1960s, and second, it was a decade before the Sino-British Joint Declaration would be signed by the United Kingdom (UK) and China. These two factors jointly influenced the city's development, and it is in this context that the MacLehose reforms were made, and Hong Kong was transformed into a modern city.

4.1 *The Impact of the Disturbances in the 1960s*

The chaos in the 1960s alarmed the colonial government, revealing China's potential for influence. Before the disturbances in 1966 and 1967, the "pro-Taiwan/ROC (Republic of China) camp" (also called the "rightists") and the "pro-Beijing/PRC camp" (the "leftists") were the two dominant powers in the city. According to Lui, these camps each owned their own "ecosystems," which covered education, employment, culture, recreation, and so on.[24] The two ecosystems allowed people to live their lives according to their own political orientations, isolated from the mainstream social system. The disturbances in 1966 and 1967 changed this. Frightened by the radicalism of the protests, people strove to maintain a distance from both camps.

The "anti-colonial riot" was triggered by an industrial dispute in May 1967. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervened in the dispute on the fifteenth of that month, and anti-British demonstrations were held in Beijing and Guangzhou. The demonstrations in the mainland were considered a communist endorsement of the local communists' actions in the colony, and a committee named "All Circles Anti-Persecution Struggle Committee in Hong Kong" (香港各界同胞反英抗暴鬥爭委員會) was formed. Hong Kong was swamped by violence, demonstrations, strikes, and bombings, and there were military confrontations at the border.[25] Radical tactics such as indiscriminate "bombings" and other violent and incendiary attacks were adopted by the radical leftists during the riots. These actions turned public opinion against the leftists, as people considered this violent approach to be damaging to the city's economy and social order.[26] The Chinese population in Hong Kong turned away from fanaticism in politics, and leftist institutions began to withdraw from social affairs after the disturbances.[27] At the same time, publicity campaigns were launched by the colonial government to criticize the leftists for their activities.[28] As a result, the leftists began to isolate themselves from the public.

---

24   Tai-lok Lui, *Na siceng xiangshi de qishi nian dai* 那似曾相識的七十年代 [The story of Hong Kong in the 1970s retold] (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Books, 2012).

25   Ray Yep, "The 1967 riots in Hong Kong: the diplomatic and domestic fronts of the colonial governor." *The China Quarterly* 193 (2008), 122.

26   Gary Ka-wai Cheung, *Hong Kong's Watershed: The 1967 Riots* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 90.

27   Cheung, *Hong Kong's Watershed*.

28   Sung-tak Hui, "'Liuqi baodong' yu 'Xianggang ren' shenfen yishi de mengsheng" 「六七暴動」與「香港人」身份意識的萌生 [1967 riots and the emergence of the identity of 'Hongkonger']. *Twenty-First Century* 二十一世紀 169 (2018), 78–80.

The colonial government's depiction of the riots might offer some hints regarding its stance. In the *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1967*, the riots are closely linked with the communists and their goals:

> Since May 1967, communist organizations in Hong Kong have sought to impose their will on the government and the people by intimidating workers, fomenting work stoppages, by demonstrations and rioting, and by indiscriminate violence. It has been a testing time for the people of Hong Kong ... The origin of confrontation stems directly from the cultural revolution in China, which has inculcated among its adherents a fervent patriotism and an intense adulation of Chairman Mao Tse Tung and his teachings.[29]

In this official publication, the colonial government emphasizes its own efficient work and the support it has received from the majority of the people:

> The communist-initiated confrontation, between themselves and the Hong Kong Government is in no sense a popular movement; indeed it does not have the support of any significant section of the people, much less of the people as a whole. Those who have taken part represent a very small fraction of the population, and they have had no success in their attempts, either by persuasion or by intimidation, to gain support for their cause. The overwhelming majority of the people have shown clearly that they support the government and the maintenance of law and order. Moreover, despite the claims made by the communist press, and despite the impression that might have been given by the world wide press coverage given to the disturbances, the ordinary life of the Colony has not been disrupted. The rioting that has taken place has been limited in area and in scope and has been contained. The stoppages that were called have had little effect on the Colony's economy.[30]

However, the version recorded in the yearbook is not entirely truthful. Quoting the data of John Cooper, Wong argues that there were three key battlefields that the leftists used to defeat the colonial government: economic warfare,

---

29   Information Services Department, *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1967* (Hong Kong: Government Press, 1968), 1.

30   *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1967*, 1.

propaganda, and violent struggle.[31] The leftists did see some "achievements" in the economic warfare, as there was a notable decrease in visitor numbers, the stock market twice ceased operations, and a deficit of thirty-seven million HK dollars was recorded in that financial year. This "sugar-coating" by the colonial government is more evident in the final paragraph of the article in the yearbook:

> With this spirit and with the firm support that has been given by Her Majesty's Government, the people of Hong Kong will continue to overcome whatever new threats they may have to face and, with their inimitable energy, will drive Hong Kong on to new peaks of prosperity and progress.[32]

The expression "new peaks of prosperity and progress" provides a clue to the chief focus of the colonial government after the riots: economic revival. Its representation of the relationship with China is also noteworthy. While depicting the confrontation as "stem[ming] directly from the cultural revolution in China," the text states that the colonial government had no negative feelings toward either China or the communists. It is assumed that this was intended to maintain a good relationship with the mainland:

> Hong Kong has no quarrel with China, nor indeed with the communists as such. It is not an offence to be a communist (or to belong to any other political party) nor to practise the doctrines and beliefs of communism although it is an offence to translate these beliefs into action that conflicts with the law. The government has taken action against the supporters of confrontation, not because of their political beliefs, as the communist press has asserted, but simply because they have broken the law. (19)

The information above reveals that the 1960s riots had placed the colonial government in a challenging situation. Having learned the lesson of the 1967 riots, the British recognized the leftists as political fanatics and identified the threat that they posed to the city. However, they also had a strong desire to maintain a good relationship with China. In other words, the British Hong Kong government needed to engage in a political balancing act: eliminating the threat

---

31   Chun-yu Wong, "Disantiao zhanxian: 'liuqi baodong' zhong de 'jingjì zhan'" 第三條戰
      線：「六七暴動」中的「經濟戰」[The third front: Economic warfare in the 1967
      riots in Hong Kong]. *Twenty-First Century* 二十一世紀 161 (2017), 62.
32   *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1967*, 19.

of the leftists without angering the Chinese government. Facing this political dilemma, they needed to begin negotiations with China regarding Hong Kong's future.

4.2   *The Planning before the Lease Expired*

According to the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory, signed by Qing China and the UK on 9 June 1898, the lease of the "New Territories" would expire on 30 June 1997.[33] Though the negotiations between the UK and China on the future of Hong Kong began in 1979—and the Sino-British Joint Declaration, confirming Hong Kong was to be transferred to China after 1 July 1997, was signed in 1984—the UK had acknowledged the issue years before the negotiations began. In fact, before he took office on 19 November 1971, MacLehose had raised the idea of developing Hong Kong into a city that was "superior in every way to those in China," transforming it into "a special administrative district to be managed in a way that would facilitate the continued residence of foreigners."[34] In a letter written on 5 May 1972, MacLehose mentions the future of the city and states that the development of Hong Kong is associated with the possibility of maintaining the "colonial" governing:

> This is to tackle the domestic problems of the Colony so vigorously during the next 10 years that they would be eliminated to a point at which by Western standards there was nothing to be ashamed of anywhere, and by Chinese standards much to spur civic pride and a sense of achievement everywhere.
>
> They might see merit in some continuing arrangement for Hong Kong whereby a special regime was established that nominally removed the colonial stigma, but preserved for China some of the economic and other material and political benefits of the present status, *saved them from having to absorb a population with such different standards of living and attitudes of mind, and on the other hand preserved for foreigners a tolerable trading base*, some security for investment and acceptable living conditions while concentrating them in a single area where they did not affect life in the rest of China. It could perform the service which Shanghai might have done if the CPG [Central People's Government] in the early

---

33   The convention states that the territories north of Boundary Street (界限街) and south of the Sham Chun River (深圳河), as well as the surrounding islands—now known as the "New Territories"—were leased to the UK for ninety-nine years, rent-free, expiring on 30 June 1997. The handover day of Hong Kong was thus set for 1 July 1997.

34   Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 40/239: "Guideline for Governor Designate of Hong Kong," 18 October 1971.

days of their power had not squeezed the foreigners out, and it could avoid the problems the CPG experienced in absorbing that cosmopolitan and volatile population. [*my emphasis*]
I believe that the more undeveloped and discontented Hong Kong is the less likelihood there would be of this or a similar concept being adopted, and conversely the more evolved the colony the more attractive such a half-way house might appear to the Chinese leadership, assuming it was prepared to compromise at all.[35]

MacLehose planned to widen the distance between the living standards of the Hong Kong people and those of the mainland Chinese. If this were achieved, the city would then meet Western standards (though these were not clearly defined) and the Chinese authority would encounter difficulties when attempting to absorb it. MacLehose's suggestion was endorsed. In "The Future of Hong Kong," a memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, representatives from London commented on the issue:

> The gist of the matter in 1972/73 is that China does not want us to give up Hong Kong or to negotiate now about its future, that the population continue to want us to stay, and that the materials and moral balance of advantage to us is to continue to maintain the status quo.
> A difficulty which will increase with time, however, will be to avoid public discussion. Hong Kong's prosperity depends on confidence. This relates not only to business confidence, but also to the willingness of the Chinese population to work for the British. The new Governor has made a good start in developing Hong Kong into a place where people wish to live and work. But as 1997 approaches they will inevitably begin to question their future. In the UK, the immigration lobby is already worried about the unreal immigration possibility of an influx from Hong Kong while members of the Tribune Group are considering an attack on a policy which they claim lulls the Chinese population of Hong Kong into a sense of false security in the interests of big business.
> Our current line is that there is no question of a change in the status of Hong Kong in the foreseeable future. With 25 years in hand this is still realistic.[36]

---

35   FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) 40/239: "Hong Kong in the New Sino/British Dialogue Summary," Hong Kong, 5 May 1972, 2, 3.
36   FCO 40/159: "Future of Hong Kong". Hong Kong, 01 January 1968–31 December 1969, 5, 6.

Thus, the city's future depended on "confidence." However, this confidence could only be established by maintaining "the status quo," which included both the colonial governance and the social environment covered by the British political and legal systems. Hong Kong needed to be developed into a place where "people wish[ed] to live and work" to promote the confidence that would encourage "the willingness of the Chinese population to work for the British." Particular attention should be paid to the expression "work for," as this implies a subordinate relationship between the British and the Chinese population of the city. This should be interpreted as the Chinese population maintaining the "collaborative colonial relationship" (Law 2009) with the colonial government, with a focus on the interest they could potentially gain through the collaboration. London was satisfied with MacLehose's performance in the first months of his governorship and praised it as a "good start" to the planning for the coming 25 years.

China's impact on the city is also worthy of notice. In this discussion of the strategy for allowing Hong Kong to "grow and prosper in confidence" and "become as hard for China to absorb as possible," two potentates in China, Mao Zedong and Zhou (Chou) Enlai, were mentioned. These figures were considered non-ideal partners with whom to negotiate, and the governor suggested that negotiations should not begin for another ten to fifteen years, when a "post Mao/Chou China [could] emerge and show its credentials as a negotiating partner." Moreover, the British were vigilant about the potential influence of the Central People's Government (CPG). The refusal to establish an official Chinese representative serves as an example:

> Of course if the Chinese Representative were to conduct himself like any other representative here, keep out of local affairs, refrain from manipulating the levers of CPG influence and from directly or indirectly challenging the position of the Hong Kong Government, he would be a positive asset in many practical and political ways. But I don't see how he possibly could. So long as the official position of the CPG is that Hong Kong is Chinese territory and its Chinese residents are "compatriots" in whom they have a special interest, there would be virtually no limit to the field in which a representative could claim competence, or in which he could refuse to respond to appeals for help.[37]

---

37   FCO 21/1023 "Hong Kong in the new Sino/British dialogue Summary" in Future of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 5 May 1972, 9, 10.

These discussions between the governors and London reveal that, in the 1970s, the British was mindful of the forthcoming Sino-British negotiations, and its primary goal was to accumulate the bargaining chips needed to negotiate for the city's future—that is, to secure its continued colonial governance of the city. To achieve this goal, the colonizer aimed to establish confidence among the people of Hong Kong and to minimize the influence of the mainland. Various measures were implemented to turn the city into a place "where people wish[ed] to live and work," with a "cosmopolitan and volatile population." Therefore, they strove to achieve dual outcomes: giving the people of Hong Kong criteria for what should be considered "good" and isolating them from China, giving them the self-confidence to believe that they were superior to the people of the mainland. The first of these outcomes was designed to make it more difficult for the Chinese government to absorb the city and its "population with such different standards of living and attitudes of mind." The second goal involved persuading the local populations—quite a number of whom were immigrants or offspring of those who had fled mainland China to escape the political turmoil and economic hardship—that the city was a place in which they could stay and establish a living.

5   The MacLehose Reforms and the Making of the Civilized Hongkonger

The historical context described above offers a new perspective from which to review the MacLehose reforms, which were long considered the foundation of modern Hong Kong. In the following sections, I will explore MacLehose's major policy achievements in the areas of public housing, education, medical and health services, and social welfare, unveiling how these four "pillars" altered Hongkongers' consciousness and gave rise to the identity.[38]

Undoubtedly, these reform items were tangible and materialistic. However, attention should be paid to both the tangible influence they had and the changes in consciousness of the Hong Kong people. Material is not neutral, as it is never possible to simply "prize apart the cultural from the material."[39] (Examining the colonization of South Africa, Comaroff traces how a particular way of seeing and being was imposed upon the natives by "reconstructing his

---

38   Ray Yep and Tai-lok Lui, "Revisiting the Golden Era of MacLehose and the Dynamics of Social Reforms." *China Information* 24 (2010), 249–272.

39   John L. Comaroff, "The Colonization of Consciousness in South Africa." *Economy and Society* 18:3 (1989), 267.

habit and his habitus": "re-defining" the native's natural resources, techniques of production, and language so as to "civilize" them.[40] Borrowing Comaroff's idea, the implementation of reform items in 1970s Hong Kong can also be perceived as a process of imposing a way of seeing and being. These items, thus, establish a standard of how a modern living should be, and Hongkongers' consciousness changed subtly to accommodate this new standard.

5.1   *Public Housing*

The ten-year housing program announced in 1972 made significant changes to public-housing provision. Promising to replace all unsatisfactory housing accommodation with self-contained units for 1.8 million people between 1973 and 1982, the ambitious program included the planning, administration, and construction of the new estates. To handle these tasks, the housing authority was established in 1973. Under the ten-year program, the development of new towns such as Tsuen Wan, Sha Tin, and Tuen Mun—including their infrastructure and ancillary facilities was accelerated.

The efforts made by the colonial government were evident. Nevertheless, this raises the question of why, among all the concerns of Hong Kong's people, public housing was chosen as the focus. MacLehose's speech to the legislative council on 18 October 1972 might reveal the political purpose of this program:

> It is my conclusion that the inadequacy and scarcity of housing and all that this implies, and the harsh situations that result from it, is one of the major and most constant sources of friction and unhappiness between the Government and the population ... It [the inadequacy and scarcity of housing] offends alike our humanity, our civic pride and our political good sense.[41]

MacLehose's speech discloses that the housing program was not driven solely by public desires, but was also seen as a tool to ease the conflict between the government and its people. The quotation above reflects that the colonial government, or at least MacLehose, had accurately assessed the mind of the Chinese population. Defining accommodation as a major driver of quality of life, the housing program was hugely significant for the Chinese residents of the city.[42] Besides its provision of necessary dwellings, the housing program

---

40   Comaroff, "The Colonization of Consciousness in South Africa," 270.

41   Hong Kong Legal Council, *The Legislative Council Debates Official Report*. Hong Kong, 18 October 1972, 4.

42   The Chinese idiom "*Yi shi zhu hang*" (衣食住行), which literally means "clothing, food, housing, and transportation," summarizes the importance of these four components to

was significant for the standards that it established. In the same speech, MacLehose pinpoints three essential elements required to make this program successful and to ensure that it was accepted, and the second of these points needs specific attention:

> Secondly, the housing in the new towns must be accompanied by a full ration of what is essential to modern life: medical, and secondary as well as primary educational facilities, parks and playgrounds, police stations, markets, fire and ambulance stations, community centres and much else.[43]

The term "modern life" and the examples given here reveal the governor's intention to establish a standard of "modern living." By offering these facilities, the colonial government did not simply offer decent housing to its people but re-defined the concept of "housing." For instance, the medical facilities, police stations, and fire and ambulance stations implied that the residents' personal safety was secured, while the parks and playgrounds reflected the importance of recreation in living. In this new definition, housing is not simply a daily necessity but rather linked with concepts of "humanity," "civic pride," and "political good sense." In other words, housing is not only shelter and a place to stay but a space that provides people with a "civic" consciousness.

5.2   *Education*

The reforms also included the provision of nine years of universal education, with tertiary education a focal point. The government was to provide nine years of free, mandatory, subsidized education for every child, comprising six years in primary school and three years in secondary school. This arrangement was put into effect in September 1978, with appropriate prohibitions on the employment of children during those years. This tackled the issues of illiteracy and child labor, two critical social problems.[44] Ultimately, primary and junior secondary education was just half of the battle. To eliminate the issues entirely, efforts were also needed to popularize post-secondary education. *The Green Paper on the Development of Senior Secondary and Tertiary Education,* submitted to the legislative council for enactment in October 1978, described significant changes to post-secondary education. These included financial

---

Chinese people. Considering these four items the basic necessities, Chinese people see the fulfillment of these four items as the benchmark of an ideal lifestyle.

43   Hong Kong Legal Council, *The Legislative Council Debates Official Report*, 5.

44   Sun-pao Ting, "From Crisis to Chance: Hong Kong in the 1950s to 1970s," 2020, accessed 1 March 2022, www.hkchronicles.org.hk.

support for universities and post-secondary colleges to provide more degree programs, establish technical institutes, extend grants and loans to students on the two-year post-Form VI courses, provide degree courses for part-time and mature students, and more. In short, the green paper proposed the expansion and qualitative improvement of all stages of the nine years of compulsory and universal education.

By implementing compulsory education, the government took control of the activities of teenagers by taking their attendance in school into the ambit of the law.[45] The colonial government "controlled" the teenagers at the physical level, but it also controlled the knowledge imposed through its intervention in the textbook content. E.g., the report published by the Chinese Studies Committee in 1953 shows how schooling was used by the colonial government to isolate Hong Kong's people from the politics in China.[46] In this sense, colonial education can be seen as a tool for imposing certain value standards:

> History textbooks published in China usually contain anti-foreign allusions, comments and propaganda, and are, therefore, not quite suitable for Hong Kong ... Hong Kong is contiguous to China. It is not only the show-window of World democracy in the East, but also the meeting-place and melting-pot of Eastern and World cultures. Here, Chinese pupils cannot only retain and cherish what is best in their culture. In these textbooks, the emphasis should be on Social and Cultural History rather than Political History.[47]

The significance of this reform lay in two facets: first, the depoliticalization of education. As stated in the report quoted above, the textbooks emphasized social and cultural history but not political history. This not only isolated the Hong Kong people from the politics in the Mainland, it also created a vacuum into which to impose new concepts. This then brought about the second facet: the concepts of civilization that the colonial government imposed to be taught in school. These textbooks presented the city as the "show-window of World democracy." In this sense, Chinese political concepts were eliminated

---

45   According to the education ordinance (Cap. 279, Section 73, 74, and 78), the enforcement of the attendance order (入學令) was as follows: any parent who, without reasonable excuse, failed to comply with an attendance order shall be guilty of an offence.

46   *Report of the Chinese Studies Committee*. Hong Kong: Education Department, 1953, mimeographed, 31.

47   *Report of the Chinese Studies Committee*, 31.

and democracy was presented as a crucial and imposed via education. By so doing, the colonial government turned the Chinese population in Hong Kong into "educated" citizens, thus elevating their knowledge level above that of their compatriots in mainland China and creating a distance between the two populations.

5.3   *Social Welfare*

Although Yep and Lui argue that the social welfare reform implemented by MacLehose was due to pressure from London and not entirely produced by MacLehose himself, one cannot deny the changes that these reform items brought to the city.[48] These changes can be placed roughly into three categories. First, the amount of assistance was increased. In April 1970, the government's public assistance scheme primarily took the form of dry rations. However, the new scheme, which came into effect on 1 January 1971, introduced cash assistance. There was also an increase in the rate of assistance: for instance, a 29% increase in June 1971 meant that a single adult would receive $450 a month (up from $350 under the old scheme), and a family of four would receive $1,125 (up from $965). Second, the period of assistance was extended. For instance, before the introduction of the new scheme, only those residents in Hong Kong for five years or more and earning less than $33 per month were entitled to assistance; but under the new scheme, families or individuals who had been living in the city for one year or more were eligible for assistance, as were single adults living alone and earning a net income below a certain amount, as well as unemployed, able-bodied people. In addition, social welfare coverage to the needy was improved by the disabled and old age allowance scheme, the launch of Child Care Centre in 1974–75, and the program plan for rehabilitation services in 1976–77. Third, the accessibility of social welfare was enhanced. The social welfare department was reorganized on a regional basis, with day-to-day operations decentralized to eleven district offices. The colonial government expanded its social welfare services to cover a broader range of people in need, raising its expenditure from $12 million in 1970–71 to an estimated $300 million in 1982–83.

---

48   Yep and Lui, "Revisiting the Golden Era of MacLehose." Yep and Lui argue that the social welfare reform was due to pressure from the *Hong Kong Planning Paper* published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office when the Labour Party was in power in the 1970s. To respond to the increasing pressure from the British trade unions, the Labour government was forced to introduce measures to reform Hong Kong.

The significance of these social welfare policies is best understood in the context of certain features of the population and employment in Hong Kong. In the 1960s, most of the population of the city had been born in Mainland China, and most were emigrants who had fled from China to "remake lives disrputed by war, revolution and political change."[49] The "trauma of relocation" was a central memory shared by this population (Jonathan 2001). In the 1970s, people came to realize that there were limited opportunities to return to the mainland, and many began to move away from the "refugee mentality" that had viewed Hong Kong as only a refuge.[50] At the same time, the children of this "refugee" generation came to maturity in the 1970s. Unlike their seniors, this younger generation carried no emotional bonds to the mainland Chinese, and had a sense of identity with Hong Kong. The colonial government in the 1970s, therefore, was catering to the needs of the "refugee generation" and the younger generation who considered themselves Hongkongers.

These social welfare policies were significant both in terms of the assistance they offered, and the new role they set for the government in supporting its residents and offering comprehensive assistance that would equip people to strive for better lives. The provision of assistance established a standard of social security and an intangible bond between the government and the residents of Hong Kong. Social welfare, thus, delineated how a government should behave in a civilized society. More importantly, like the housing program, it set a standard of "modern life" by re-defining social welfare. That is, it said that a citizen's basic living should be secured by the authorities. This concept would alter Hong Kong people's perceptions toward social welfare and become the reference of the "civilization differences."

5.4   *Political Reforms*

The political reforms involved both internal restructuring and the involvement of external parties. For the internal aspects, MacLehose abandoned the normal practice in the colonial context—which was to appoint a high-level commission of senior or recently retired civil servants and distinguished citizens in Hong Kong or to ask London to appoint a royal commission. Instead, he employed a modern firm of management consultants, McKinsey & Company. This provided a professional rationale for the reform and thus depoliticized it. By adopting the approaches suggested in the McKinsey Report—namely,

---

49   Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong, *Hong Kong Statistics, 1947–67* (Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department, 1969), 22.

50   Wan -tai Zheng and Siu-lun Wong鄭宏泰、黃紹倫, "Xianggang huaren de shenfen renting: jiuqi qianhou de zhuanbian" 香港華人的身份認同：九七前後的轉變 [The

"strengthen[ing] the existing machinery," "introduc[ing] new machinery," and "improv[ing] personnel management" MacLehose aimed to modernize the colonial administration to "improve governance and its [the colonial administration's] capacity to support his vision of social development."[51] In fact, the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 1973 should also be considered an "internal" reform. Aiming to eliminate corruption, the prevention of bribery ordinance was formulated during the tenure of MacLehose's predecessor, David Trench, but these actions were not successful.[52] Due to this poor track record, the ICAC gained little public support in its initial stages. It was not until the case of Peter Godber emerged that people began to notice the determination of the government to combat the roots of corruption.[53] The triumph of the ICAC restored the government's reputation and illustrated a professional, credible, and disciplined image of a government on which people could rely. It was in this context that MacLehose's ambition to reform the "inefficient government, a corrupt police force and an overstaffed, bureaucratic civil service system" was acknowledged by the people of Hong Kong.[54] The restoration of public faith thus became feasible.

The "external" facets consisted primarily of the district administration and its "absorption" into different decision-making bodies. The district administration scheme, implemented in 1982, saw the foundation of the district councils (formerly known as "district boards"), with district management committees established in each of the eighteen districts in Hong Kong. The establishment of these platforms was intended to provide an effective forum for public consultation and participation in administration at the district level and to improve

---

identity of Hong Kong Chinese: Before and after 1997]. *Twenty-First Century* 二十一世紀 73 (2002), 71–84.

51 Steve Tsang曾銳生, "Guanzhi Xianggang: zhengwuguan yu lianghao guanzhi de jianli" 管治香港 政務官與良好管治的建立 [Governing Hong Kong: administrative officers from the nineteenth century to the handover to China, 1862–1997] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007); All these approaches were raised in their observations. In their report, McKinsey & Company wrote, "We found a variety of problems, all of their symptoms of one underlying problem—the Hong Kong Government's fundamental difficulty of trying to expand services in the face of a continuing decline in numbers of skilled and experienced staff, and the resulting dilution of their efforts."

52 Ray Yep, "The Crusade against Corruption in Hong Kong in the 1970s: Governor MacLehose as a Zealous Reformer or Reluctant Hero?" *China Information* 27-2 (2013):197–221; Andrew C. K Yu, "Was Governor MacLehose a Great Architect of Modern Hong Kong?" *Asian Affairs* 51:3 (2020), 485–509

53 Lui, "*Na siceng xiangshi de qishi nian dai.*"

54 Yu, "Was Governor MacLehose a Great Architect of Modern Hong Kong?"

government representativeness at the local level.[55] With the phrase "community building," which MacLehose coined in his policy speech to the legislative council in 1976, the government indicated its determination to strengthen its communication with Hong Kong's citizens and involve the public in building a "society … in which there is mutual care and responsibility."[56]

The intention of this measure came into question. The "community building" idea was criticized as a top-down policy, decided by government elites and implemented by the lower level. Lam argues that the government was "neither aiming to promote the spirit of democratic political participation among the people nor viewing community building as a process by which people are encouraged to decide on and to work for their needs."[57] In addition, the operation between the people and the government was only "a means to achieve the desired objectives set by the government." However, by appointing legislative council members from the lower classes and increasing the seats held by Chinese members, MacLehose changed the landscape of the legislative council that had long been dominated by the British and Chinese elites.[58] Meanwhile, the government began to adopt an approach of "administrative absorption of politics" to absorb the territory's political forces into different decision-making bodies, which included committees, the urban council, the legislative council, and even the executive council.[59]

Both aspects of the political reforms were shaping a positive image of the government. The government was seen to value people's opinions, inviting the people to participate in public affairs and, more importantly, inviting them to co-operate with the government.[60] This reform, undoubtedly, was eliminating powers opposed to the colonial government.[61] Moreover, it empowered

---

55   Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*.

56   Address by H. E. the Governor Sir Murray MacLehose at the opening session of the legislative council on 6 October 1976, 13.

57   Siu-ling Lam, *The role of government in community building: management of community centres and community halls* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Hong Kong], 1993, 35, accessed 15 March 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.5353/th_b3196451.

58   Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*.

59   Yeo-chi King, *"Zhongguo zhengzhi yu wenhua"* 中國政治與文化 [Chinese politics and culture] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997).

60   "Community building" was a key concept in the scheme. As MacLehose discloses in the policy address of 1976, the community and the assistance from the government department were equally important for overcoming the cited difficulties: "the special difficulty of how strangers can be brought together to live in densely populated high-rise buildings … can best be overcome by well-run and active Mutual Aid Committees selected by the residents themselves and with means of easy contact with the Government departments that can advise and assist them."

61   Yu, "Was Governor MacLehose a Great Architect of Modern Hong Kong?"

the residents by granting them opportunities to participate in public affairs, though the extent of this participation was well-controlled and would not facilitate the development of a political consciousness.[62] The concepts of "contributing to society" and "social responsibility," thus, were imposed through the political participation.

By making these reforms, the colonial government promoted three key ideas among the people of Hong Kong: 1) the people were consulted when policies were being formulated and their community was being established, which was achieved by "community building" and inclusion in decision-making bodies; 2) they were supported when they were in need and provided with financial, recreational, and cultural resources; and 3) they had opportunities to improve their social status. These three ideas, despite their different focuses and dimensions, concentrated on the re-definition of standards and an imposition of a Western, modern, and "civilized" way of thinking and seeing. These standards "reconstructed" people's habits and habitués and, eventually, altered their consciousness. The nature of colonialism is thus duality, as it changed people both in material and ideological ways. Although the outcomes and intentions of these three ideas were criticized, they were nonetheless the crucial components of the confidence-building project.

These ideas became the Hongkongers' rationale for differentiating themselves from mainland Chinese, whom they considered people of less value to the government. Taking into consideration the values mentioned above such as modern living, civic pride, world democracy, and so on, the MacLehose reforms were not implemented solely to improve the living standards of Hong Kong's people; rather, they were also actions taken by the governor to impose Western values on the people of Hong Kong. This imposition established a different mindset among the people of Hong Kong and became their rationale for differentiating themselves from mainland Chinese. It was through this civilization process that Hong Kong people considered themselves different from mainland Chinese, and that a Hongkonger identity that hybridized "Hongkonger" and "Chinese" was established. The MacLehose reforms, thus, widened the developmental distance between Hong Kong and China by bringing modern infrastructure to the colony. At the same time, the reforms widened the "civilization gap" between Hongkongers and mainland Chinese by leading the Chinese population in the city to consider themselves civilized Chinese.

---

62   Lui, "*Na siceng xiangshi de qishi nian dai*," 123.

6   How Was the Consciousness of the Hong Kong People Changed?

Popular cultural products capture the changes to Hongkongers' consciousness. The 1979 TV serial *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (網中人) is a significant example. One of the main characters, Ah Chian (阿燦), is an illegal immigrant from the mainland who strives to adopt the modern lifestyle in Hong Kong. In this way, the show sets up a dichotomy between Hong Kong Chinese and mainland Chinese. Ma argues that Ah Chian symbolizes the "dirty outsiders" that violated "the sense of good taste among the established Hongkongers."[63] Using Ah Chian as example, Ma further summarizes four stages in the construction of identity to unveil how the different ways of life were solidified through cultural production and became prominent public identities. In other words, the representation of Ah Chian reflects Hong Kong people's perception of themselves as different from mainland Chinese in the late 1970s, due to their different ways of life. Here, I am not saying Hong Kong people did not resist the concept-imposition process, nor that the reforms of the 1970s were the sole reason for the construction of Hongkonger identity.[64] Identification, as previously mentioned, is an ongoing process, and it is only in the sociopolitical context of the 1970s that one might understand why the concept of "Hong Kong Chinese" (as distinct from the Chinese on the mainland and elsewhere) was embraced by people in the territory.

7   Conclusion

Adopting John Comaroff's idea of ethnic identity, this paper has examined the relationship between the policies imposed by the colonial government in the 1970s and the Hongkonger identity. The Hongkonger identity, being socially constructed, is closely related to the MacLehose reforms. With the aim of accumulating bargaining chips for the negotiations, the reforms led to two major achievements: providing the infrastructure for Hong Kong's development into a modern city, and imposing a concept of civilization on Hong Kong's people by introducing new models of education, political participation, and social welfare. A specific way of seeing and thinking was thus imposed through these

---

63   Eric Kit Wai Ma, *Culture, Politics and Television in Hong Kong* (London: Routledge, 1999), 66–68.

64   In the 1970s, there were many protests. Among them, student activism was either pro-Beijing or anti-colonialism, as seen in the "Chinese as Official Language Movement" and the "Baodiao movement."

reforms. As a result, the consciousness of Hong Kong's people was changed, and they found the grounds and confidence to identify themselves as civilized Chinese and as superior to their compatriots in mainland China. After the handover in 1997, Mainland China, as an authority with absolute political power and a state experiencing rapid economic growth, outweighed Hong Kong in terms of both political and economic power. This inequality then triggered the ethnic consciousness of the people in Hong Kong, and the civilizational differences planted in the 1970s eventually become the grounds for Hong Kong people to differentiate themselves from the mainland Chinese—that is, in Comaroff's term, giving rise to the "negation of collective others [mainland Chinese]." It is in this context that the indigenous Hongkonger identity emerged and was embraced.

Taking the idea of a hybridized Hong Kong—Chinese identity raised by Anthony Fung as a major reference, this paper has two key implications. First, it responds to the questions left unanswered in previous studies. Adopting the conclusions of Comaroff, this paper argues that the Hongkonger identity is not ascriptive but is rather socially constructed, and it unveils the specific context that nurtured the Hongkonger identity in the 1970s. The analysis of the MacLehose reforms reveals how a consciousness-changing process was undertaken: Western values were imposed upon people in Hong Kong through the introduction of material and tangible reforms. In consequence, a new way of thinking was formed; and on this, Hong Kong's people built a perception of themselves as "civilized Chinese." This contextualization of Hongkonger identity supplements the existing research and knowledge production. The second contribution of this paper is its implications for the study of overseas-Chinese identities. The findings demonstrate that this notion of hybridization did not naturally emerge but was established. This, in turn, opens up new questions: why were the Chinese positioned as Other? What means were adopted to change the minds, to impose the civilization concept, of the Chinese population, and why was this done? The findings also remind the researcher about the importance of paying attention to stakeholders and the reasons for their identification.