

The divided nation of China

A national identity crisis is looming as tension continues to mount between Hong Kong and the mainland, reflecting stark differences in culture and society

IF you are asked where you are from, what would you say? For many, the answer has been ‘Hong Kong’ instead of ‘China’. A growing number of people from the SAR feel offended being called ‘Chinese’, expressing negative views of the racial term they have come to understand by cultural – rather than political – definition. Hong Kong’s identity crisis has come to the attention of Qiao Xiao-yang (喬曉陽), Deputy Secretary-General of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC), as he witnessed countless **radical** actions from Hong Kong protestors.

He will not forget colonial flags being waved at protests, accompanied with faces of **rage** yelling “Get your Chinese behinds back to the mainland!” and the uproar over the proposed National Education curriculum for Hong Kong students. He attributed such oppositions to young people’s lack of understanding of the state of the nation. But did he mean that by understanding more about their mother nation, young people in the SAR would be ‘**faithful**’ to their national identity and have a stronger sense of belonging? How does China define ‘state of the nation’, anyway? Is it inclusive or selective?

Not so 'Chinese'

A SURVEY titled *The 5th Generation – Post-90's Say* was conducted by Hong Kong Ideas Centre (香港集思會) last year through phone interviews with 1,000 youths from the post-90s generation, now aged between 14 and 23, with 117 of them chosen for face-to-face interviews. Below are some of the results:



Result 1	86 percent of the interviewees consider themselves Chinese. Some of them said they would sometimes emphasise that they are 'Hong Kong Chinese', and that it is especially important when they are doing cultural exchange programmes in the UK.
Result 2	39 percent of the interviewees are 'against' or 'strongly against' the idea of HK-mainland cultural integration.
Results 3	41 percent of the interviewees 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the idea of HK-mainland cultural integration.

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 This article enables students to:

1. apply critical thinking skills and adopt multiple perspectives in making decisions and judgments regarding social issues and problems;
2. reflect on and develop their multiple identities, responsibilities and commitments as citizens in their community, country and the world



A way forward

RETURNING to Qiao Xiao-yang's comment on how people should understand the state of the nation, are exchange programmes to the mainland a good solution? If you have participated in one of those programmes, have you found yourself **clinging** to a different sense of identity after gaining a better understanding of China?

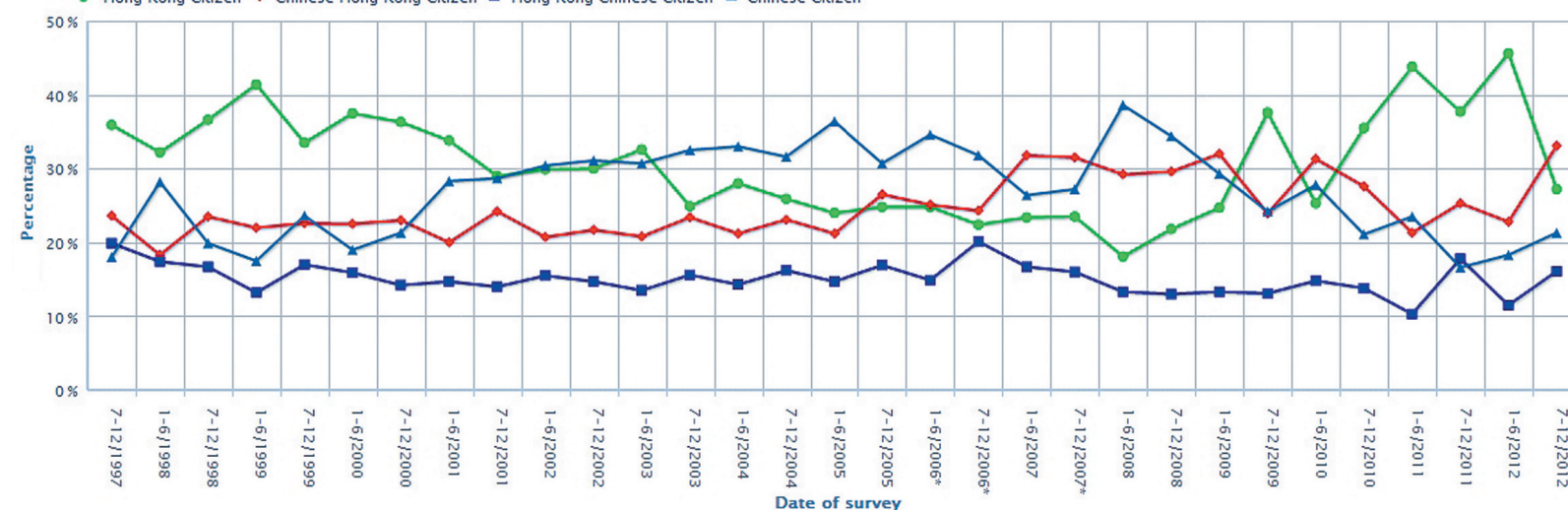
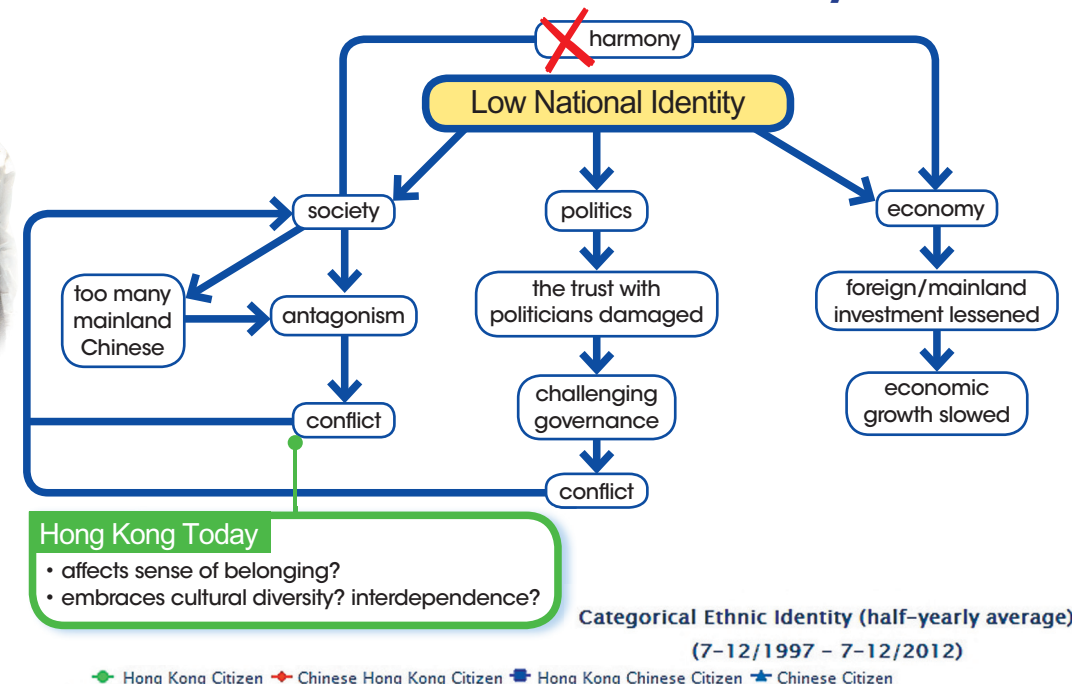
Understanding your mother nation is still a necessity, even if your answer is 'no'. It just means that the 'state of the nation' might not be as relevant to national identity as Qiao Xiao-yang thought it was.

Yip Kin-yuen (葉建源), Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union (PTU), said it is beneficial for students to do exchange programmes in the mainland to learn about political, economic and cultural developments in China. But Yip added it is inappropriate for primary or junior secondary students to visit revolutionary sites or learn about the history behind Communism. Principal Cheung Yung-pong (張勇邦)

of SKH St. James' Primary School (聖公會聖雅各小學) would also not stop sending students to mainland exchange activities. "It would be self-censoring if we stop certain exchange programmes because they have been controversial. The school should decide upon its own judgment and direction. I think if we are sceptical of the nature of such activities, we should definitely pay a visit to the actual place and see if they are brainwashing activities," said the school's principal, who firmly believes that the focus of mainland exchange activities is to develop students' observational and analytical skills.

Did it ever occur to Qiao that, perhaps, it is exactly when we Hongkongers know more about our mother nation that we cannot live with the facts? Is he **ignorant** of our cultural differences or too confident with mainland culture? We may try to understand how the many unwanted habits and values of mainland China had come about, but it is wrong to expect **recognition** from Hong Kong if the 'Chinese' are not going to change any time soon. 🍎

The influence of low national identity on HK



Key ideas

Hong Kong holds on to its own identity, as it generally prefers economic rather than cultural integration with the mainland. This can hardly be resolved by putting Hong Kong children under national education programmes, though some agree they need an unbiased understanding of their mother nation.

Did you know?

According to the results (released in December last year) of a survey on HK people's ethnic identity conducted by the Public Opinion Programme, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong people feel strongest as 'Hong Kong citizens', followed by 'members of the Chinese race', then 'Asians', 'Chinese citizens', 'global citizens', and finally 'citizens of the PRC'. Being labelled 'citizens of the PRC' is the weakest among all identities tested.

Critical questions

1. Will you specify your racial identity as Hong Kong Chinese? Why?
2. What elements are lacking in Hong Kong's national identity?

References

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