



## **A Case Study of Recent Social Movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan: Convergence of Counter-Identities amid China's Rise**



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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Shifts of Identity in Taiwan and Hong Kong .....	8
China’s Political Stances on Taiwan and Hong Kong.....	9
Social Movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong: A Comparative Perspective.....	14
The Hong Kong-US-Taiwan Triangle.....	20
Conclusion.....	21

## Executive Summary

In recent years, three major protests took place along mainland China's immediate periphery: most recently the Hong Kong anti-extradition bill protests in 2019, as well as the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong and the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan, both in 2014. Slogans such as "Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan" (今日香港, 明日台灣) and "Hong Kong and Taiwan, we are together" (香港台灣, 我們在一起) were frequently heard among activists in these movements and were widely reported on in the media. They became common reference points in the broader political discourse about the future of China's relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan and Taiwan-Hong Kong ties.

This report offers a brief comparative and contemporary analysis of the role that social movements play in the Taiwan-Hong Kong-China triangle. Based on academic survey results, news articles, and public statements, this study offers a preliminary argument for explaining how identity narratives in Taiwan and Hong Kong emerged and converged in recent years. Furthermore, it examines the demonstration effects in Taiwan and Hong Kong on one another in terms of political mobilization and narrative framing strategy. Additionally, it contends that the convergence of political discourse in Taiwan and Hong Kong is significantly challenging the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) legitimacy. It concludes by outlining the implications of these movements for US, Taiwan, and Chinese foreign policy in Asia and beyond.

“... it is the CCP itself, rather than foreign influence or manipulation, that has incentivized active citizens in Hong Kong and Taiwan to learn from one another

## Introduction

In the summer of 2019, local Taiwanese and Hong Kong students set up Lennon Walls throughout Taipei to show support for Hong Kong's civil protest against the extradition bill.<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong people marched on the streets of the special administrative region (SAR) to oppose the bill—now shelved—that would have permitted the extradition of people from Hong Kong to China with very little oversight. These protests re-ignited a political movement that began as peaceful demonstrations. However, the situation soon escalated when police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at Hong Kong's citizens.<sup>2</sup> Protesters soon occupied the Hong Kong City University campus while riot police were deployed during the violent confrontations.<sup>3</sup> The intense protests presented a sharp contrast to 2014 when Hong Kong students and activists organized a movement to “occupy Central with Love and Peace” to express their political demands.

“Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan” (今日香港, 明日台灣) was a popular slogan during the 2019 protests that attracted significant media attention. The association between Taiwan and Hong Kong, facing an increasingly aggressive China, has been a heatedly de-

bated issue among public intellectuals from both sides (see Graph 1). While the recent slogans attracted popular attention, similar references to the connection between Hong Kong and Taiwan can be traced back to previous social movements that took place in 2014.

In March 2014, 300 college students occupied the legislature in Taipei, while thousands of others demonstrated in the streets outside. These actions represented the climax of the Sunflower Movement, a forceful response to the expedited review of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA, 海峽兩岸服務貿易協議), a trade

pact and set of regulations designed to deepen economic integration between Taiwan and China. During the Sunflower Movement, the young protesters made frequent references to Hong Kong in their political discourse. Banners bearing slogans such as “Today Hong Kong, tomorrow Taiwan” (今日香

港, 明日台灣) and “Taiwan doesn't want HongKongization” (台灣不要香港化) were frequently spotted at the scene of the protests.<sup>4</sup>

Only a few months later, in September 2014, over 50 thousand people joined the student-led Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, protesting Beijing's failure to fulfill its promise to allow free elections for the SAR's chief executive in 2017. The protesters staged an occupation of Hong Kong's financial district, attracting worldwide media attention.

Activists involved in the movements in Taipei and Hong Kong visited their counterparts and organized local rallies in support of one another.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, the

“In defending their core values in the face of a powerful and increasingly nationalistic China, Hong Kong and Taiwan have developed a sense of shared identity that arguably only began to coalesce in 2014.”

1 Teng Pei-ju, “Anti-China Extradition Lennon Wall Appears in Taipei,” *Taiwan News*, July 27, 2019, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3753303>.

2 John Ruwitch and Jessie Pang, “Hong Kong Police Fire Tear Gas in Running Battles after Protesters Trash Legislature,” *Reuters*, June 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hong-kong-extradition/hong-kong-police-fire-tear-gas-in-running-battles-with-protesters-after-legislature-trashed-idUSKCN1TV0YE>.

3 Jessie Pang and Josh Smith, “Hong Kong Universities Become ‘battlefields’ as Citywide Violence Spreads,” *Reuters*, November 11, 2019, [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-idUSKBN1XM00X?utm\\_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm\\_medium=trueAnthem&utm\\_source=twitter](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-idUSKBN1XM00X?utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter).

4 Grace Tsoi, “‘Today’s Hong Kong, Tomorrow’s Taiwan,’” *Foreign Policy*, August 19, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/19/todays-hong-kong-tomorrows-taiwan/>.

5 For earlier and recent examples, see Patrick Boehler and Lawrence Chung, “‘Blacklisted’ Taiwanese Activist Vows to Attend Hong Kong’s July 1 Rally,” *South China Morning Post*, June



slogan “Hong Kong and Taiwan, we are together” (香港台灣, 我們在一起) was picked up by the media and featured in the subsequent political discourse in the two places. Why did the social movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong use each other as reference points against China? One possible explanation is that for members of the younger generation in both areas, commitments to democracy and the

“People in Taiwan and China share similar cultural traditions, and “the Taiwan lesson”—a peaceful transition from an authoritarian regime to a mature democracy with a vibrant civil society—could provide insight into what an open and liberal China might look like.

rule of law are an essential part of their identity.<sup>6</sup> The convergence of their movements’ political discourses as well as active engagement in protesting against erosion of their democratic rights has profoundly affected the political landscapes in both Taiwan and Hong Kong. More specifically, China’s policy measures toward Taiwan and Hong Kong—implemented to some extent with the acquiescence of ruling elites—have contributed to a growing sense that they are inadequately respected, thus increasing tensions in China-Hong Kong and China-Taiwan relations and causing a convergence of discourse against China.

In defending their core values in the face of a powerful and increasingly nationalistic China, Hong Kong and Taiwan have developed a sense of shared identity that arguably only began to coalesce in 2014. The anti-extradition bill protests as well as the Sunflower and

Umbrella Movements provided ample opportunities for establishing connections and exchanges of ideas between the activists in Taiwan and Hong Kong, resulting in the convergence of their respective political discourses as they set about defending liberal values. The effect of Taiwan’s social movement on Hong Kong has been quite salient, beginning in 2014. Even though the substance of Taiwan’s and Hong Kong’s political identities might be different, slogans such as “love Taiwan” and “safeguard Hong Kong” have proven impactful in political mobilization during elections in both areas.

25, 2014 and Matthew Strong, “Hong Kong Democracy Activists Visit Taiwan’s Political Parties,” *Taiwan News*, September 9, 2019.

6 Gerrit van der Wees, “‘Today’s Taiwan, Tomorrow’s Hong Kong’: Linkages Between Hong Kong’s Protests and Taiwan’s Democracy,” *Taiwan Insight*, September 20, 2019, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2019/09/20/todays-taiwan-tomorrows-hong-kong-linkages-between-hong-kongs-protests-and-taiwans-democracy/>. And “Activist Joshua Wong urges Taiwanese to show support for Hong Kong,” *The Straits Times*, Sept 3, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/hong-kongs-joshua-wong-visits-taiwan-to-meet-with-ruling-party>.

## Shifts of Identity in Taiwan and Hong Kong

Since 2000s, an increasingly strong sense of local identity has been observed in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, and recent survey data suggests that the trend will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. Syaru Lin, the Compton Visiting Professor in World Politics at the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia, has provided a sociological perspective that examines the evolution of political identities, which may provide a good explanation of the change in perception toward a more powerful China.<sup>7</sup> With this in mind, a closer look at identity factors in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the framing strategies of the social movements, and Beijing's responses to the movements' claims may provide a better understanding of the convergence of political discourse between Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Despite Beijing's insistence on "patriotic education" in Hong Kong since the handover in 1997, an increasing number of young people identify as "Hong Kongers" rather than Chinese.<sup>8</sup> For example, in a survey conducted by the University of Hong Kong, 68 percent of respondents said they considered themselves to have a primarily Hong Kong identity, a significant increase from 60 percent in 1997.<sup>9</sup> The formation of a Hong Kong identity as distinct from a Chinese one indicates a setback in Beijing's policy and the limits of its re-sinicization strategy.

Similarly, a recent survey conducted in 2019 showed that 58.5 percent of Taiwanese respondents consider themselves as "exclusive[ly] Taiwanese," a record

high in the survey's history.<sup>10</sup> With regard to the political settlement between China and Taiwan, only 34 percent of respondents in a survey conducted by National Chengchi University in Taiwan said they would support unification even if political and economic differences between Taiwan and China were to narrow significantly. As many as 73 percent of respondents would oppose unification with China if the differences between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait remained the same.<sup>11</sup> Taiwan's transition to, and subsequent consolidation of democracy from the late 1990s to the 2000s may have caused the emergence of a distinct political identity on the island that is paving the way for "Taiwan nationalism."<sup>12</sup> Understanding the essential components

of this Taiwanese identity will be key to navigating China-Taiwan relations in the 21st century.

The emergence of Taiwanese and Hong Kong identities distinct from a Chinese one

has occurred at the same time as exchanges between China and both Taiwan and Hong Kong—in terms of trade, tourism, and student exchange programs—were increasing. A closer examination of why people in Taiwan and Hong Kong have become worried about closer integration with China provides a comparative perspective on Beijing's policies toward both entities. In a major way, the anti-extradition bill protests and the Sunflower and Umbrella Movements were the culmination of the younger generation's growing doubts about economic and political engagement with China.

**“The more China explicitly denies their most cherished values, the more people in both Hong Kong and Taiwan strive to preserve their political identities.”**

7 Syaru Shirley Lin, *Taiwan's China Dilemma: Contested Identities and Multiple Interests in Taiwan's Cross-Strait Economic Policy*. Stanford University Press, 2016, p.10-12.

8 Victoria Tin-bor Hui, "The Protests and Beyond." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 2 (2015): 111-21.

9 Public Opinion Program (POP), The University of Hong Kong (POP), "People's Ethnic Identity," December 2015 and August 1997.

10 "Distribution Trends of Important Political Attitudes 1992-2020," Election Study Center, National Chengchi University.

11 "2011 Taiwan National Security Survey," Election Study Center, National Chengchi University.

12 Shelly Rigger, "Taiwan's Rising Rationalism: Generations, Politics, and Taiwanese Nationalism." *Policy Studies*, no. 26 (2006)



## China's Political Stances on Taiwan and Hong Kong

The conventional understanding of China's policy approach toward Taiwan and Hong Kong is rooted in a power-based perspective. That is, China has gained more leverage as its economic and political capabilities have grown, allowing it to adopt a tougher stance. However, this argument fails to explain how the two entities have responded to China's growing assertiveness. It does not address how Taiwan and Hong Kong, when faced with China's denial of their identities, have asserted their determination to preserve the essential values of democracy and the rule of law.

The more China explicitly denies their most cherished values, the more people in both Hong Kong and Taiwan strive to preserve their political identities. To be sure, Beijing's "democracy with Chinese characteristics" or the "Chinese model of governance" contrast sharply with Taiwan's democratic traditions and Hong Kong's adherence to the rule of law, respectively.

### *China-Taiwan Relations*

Institutional differences between China and Taiwan came to the fore between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, when Taiwan was consolidating its democracy. Given that the prospects for democratization and political reform in China remain uncertain, Beijing's negative attitude toward Taiwan's democracy is quite worrying for the general public in Taiwan.

For example, when Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) ran for president in 2015, the PRC's Chairman of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS, 海峽兩岸關係協會), Chen Deming (陳德銘), likened Tsai's high approval rate to Adolf Hitler. He argued that "A politician with strong support ratings causes disaster [...]. The German people elected Hitler as their leader with

a big majority, which in the end caused a tragedy that was mourned by the whole world. Germany was the victim, and the German people suffered tremendous woes."<sup>13</sup> This highly controversial remark immediately attracted media attention and sparked controversy during Chen's official visit to Taiwan. Tsai

responded by urging him to be "discreet in his behavior and words" and gain a better understanding of Taiwan's democracy, especially during an election campaign.<sup>14</sup> Official statements like the one made by Chen evince explicit denial by China of Taiwan's most cherished values.

China's dismissal of democracy in Taiwan may be understood as a reflection of its long-standing suspicion of the West's ambition to incite "color revolutions" or promote democracy as a universal value for all human beings.

Indeed, Taiwan's peaceful transition from authoritarian rule to democracy in the 1990s has been considered an important precedent for political and social reform in China by those in Taiwan and the West alike.<sup>15</sup> However, in response to liberal arguments such as that "Taiwan's experience can help China's future transformation," Beijing has insisted that only the Chinese government

**“Taiwan’s transition to, and subsequent consolidation of democracy from the late 1990s to the 2000s may have caused the emergence of a distinct political identity on the island that is paving the way for “Taiwan nationalism.”**

13 Alison Hsiao, "Tsai Urges Discretion after Hitler Talk," *Taipei Times*, December 5, 2015, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2015/12/05/2003634046>.

14 "China envoy makes Hitler analogy," *The Taiwan Insider*, Vol. 2, No. 49, 2015, <http://thinking-taiwan.com/thinking-taiwan.com/taiwan-insider-vol-2-no-49/index.html>.

15 Taiwan offers alternatives to the CCP authoritarian rule, as it serves as an inspiration for the Chinese democracy within the PRC. See "Soft Power in Hard Times: Minister Lung's DC speech emphasizes Taiwan's civil culture and right of international participation," *Press Release, Ministry of Culture*, August 29, 2012. Phillip C Saunders and Scott L Kastner, "Bridge over Troubled Water? Envisioning a China-Taiwan Peace Agreement." *International Security* 33, no. 4 (2009): 106. Edward Friedman, "A comparative politics of democratization in China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 12, no. 34 (2003): 103-123.

has the right to speak on its domestic affairs.<sup>16</sup> Such remarks undermine the potential for Taiwan's democratic practice to contribute to China's peaceful development, thus denying Taiwan a direct role in shaping China's future landscape.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Taiwan's former President Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) accurately captured the dynamics of China's denial of Taiwan's democracy and its adherence to China's model of governance. Lee claimed that "Taiwan is not your (China's) enemy, not now and not in the future. Your greatest enemy is true democracy and true freedom."<sup>18</sup> People in Taiwan and China share similar cultural traditions, and "the Taiwan lesson"—a peaceful transition from an authoritarian regime to a mature democracy with a vibrant civil society—could provide insight into what an open and liberal China might look like.

China continues to threaten the use of force against Taiwan should the island declare *de jure* independence. A prevailing sense of commitment to democracy among the younger generation of Taiwanese has inspired a strong determination to defend Taiwan against China. In a survey conducted in January 2018, 71 percent of respondents in Taiwan aged between 20 and 39 said they would be prepared to fight for Taiwan if China attempted to achieve reunification through

“ .. if the Chinese government wants an optimal outcome in Hong Kong, it should consider relaxing its tough stance, respecting the rule of law, and giving Hong Kong more autonomy.

### *Taiwan's Civic Identity Formed by Social Movements*

Taiwan's student-led movement in 2014 benefited greatly from previous experiences of political activists dur-

ing Taiwan's transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> As the DPP won more elections and gained seats in the Legislative Yuan, political liberalization in Taiwan from the top-down combined with a bottom-up push created more space for grassroots movements and contributed to the formation of a Taiwan-centric identity.<sup>21</sup> For example, 1990's "Wild Lily" Movement (supporting democratic governance) and 2008's "Wild Strawberry" Movement (advocating for a stronger Taiwanese identity) during President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration both indicated the rise of civil society and paved the way for

China's reluctance to embrace Western-style democracy implies a denial of recognition of Taiwan's democracy. The notion that defending Taiwan against China's coercive force amounts to defending democracy has gained resonance among young people in Taiwan. China's denial of Taiwan's democracy will likely continue to have a negative effect on Taiwan's perceptions of China and China-Taiwan relations.

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16 Philip Wen, Ben Blanchard, and Nick Macfie, "China Hits Back at Taiwan Leader's Offer of Help on Democracy," *Reuters*, June 4, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-taiwan/china-hits-back-at-taiwan-leaders-offer-of-help-on-democracy-idUSKBN18W0A9>.

17 In fact, China might need to implement political reforms to secure its economic growth. See Robert Rajczyk, "Taiwan—the Only Chinese Democracy," *The Warsaw Institute Review*, July 6, 2019. Seth Cropsey, "China's Worst Fears, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other democracy," *The Hill*, August 11, 2019. Jiwei Ci, "Without Democracy, China Will Rise No Farther," *Foreign Affairs*, October 4, 2019.

18 "Democracy is Beijing's worst enemy, Lee says," *Taipei Times*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/06/26/2003695562>.

19 This survey was conducted by the Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, January 12-19, 2018. For newspaper coverage, see Hsiu-chuan Shih, "Taiwanese People Willing to Fight for Democracy: Surveys," *Focus Taiwan*, April 19, 2018, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/201804190036>.

20 Brian Hioe, "Beyond the Sunflower Movement: Present Issues for Future Taiwanese Activism," *Thinking Taiwan*, May 16, 2014, <http://thinking-taiwan.com/thinking-taiwan.com/beyond-the-sunflower-movement/index.html>.

21 June Teufel Dreyer, "The Evolution of Language Policies and National Identity in Taiwan." *Fighting words: Language policy and ethnic relations in Asia* (2003): 385-409.

the Sunflower Movement. Taiwan's democratization in the 1990s fostered a political identity centered on democratic governance, political freedoms, and liberal values.<sup>22</sup> It also helped to shape a new generation of Taiwanese citizens with strong civic awareness.

The mutual support between student organizations and civil society was quite successful in the 2014 movement. Specifically, student activists expressed concrete political demands, while local organizations provided resources for networking and mobilization. When 100,000 people protested near Taiwan's presidential office in March 2014, urging the implementation of a mechanism to oversee future negotiations with China, the event attracted great media attention throughout the world and demonstrated the active participation of civil society.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the political demands from the young activists can be traced to the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) debated in 2010, when the DPP and KMT proposed divergent policies toward China.<sup>24</sup> Both DPP members and university students asked for a cautious approach when dealing with a stronger China.

At the height of the 2014 Sunflower Movement, DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen expressed her support for civic identity, claiming that "Taiwan's democratic system and the rule of law is the only way to unite people when facing serious challenges from China."<sup>25</sup> In addition, Tsai made a similar statement in supporting the Umbrella Movement, saying: "We give our support to Hong Kong. [...] Human rights, democracy, and freedom are universal values. [...] Hong Kong government

and Beijing should respect Hong Kong people's wish for democracy."<sup>26</sup> Taiwan's support for Hong Kong reflected the role of "civic identity" in its political discourse. Due to Taiwanese citizens' appreciation for their democratic cultural and liberal values, they closely observed the political situation in Hong Kong.

### *China-Hong Kong Relations*

The Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the pro-democracy protests in 2019 both point to the fundamental dilemma of the "one country, two systems" approach, which Beijing aims to apply to Taiwan in the near future. China's heavy-handed approach in implementing this framework has resulted in eroding any meaningful distinctions between the two systems and replaced what the Hong Kong people enjoyed with tightening and authoritarian control. China's denial of universal suffrage and support for the extradition bill show clearly that Beijing has the final say over Hong Kong's autonomy, which seriously limits the room for the existence of two systems and the rule of law.<sup>27</sup>

Hong Kong's quest for electoral reform and its efforts to preserve its autonomy were limited during the first decade following the handover to China.<sup>28</sup> Beijing co-opted political leaders, business elites, and real estate developers into a strong patronage network in Hong Kong.<sup>29</sup> The interests of these corporate and financial

22 Dafydd J. Fell, "Taiwan's Democracy: Towards a Liberal Democracy or Authoritarianism?" *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2010): p.193-194.

23 Michael Gold and James Pomfret, "Over 100,000 Protest in Taiwan over China Trade Deal," *Reuters*, March 30, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-protests/over-100000-protest-in-taiwan-over-china-trade-deal-idUSBREA2T07H20140330>

24 Christina Lai, "Dancing with the Wolf: Securitizing China-Taiwan Trade in the ECFA Debate and Beyond." *Asian Security* 15, no. 2 (2019): 140-58.

25 想想論壇, "法國世界報專訪 蔡英文:太陽花學運對兩岸關係未必負面," *Thinking Taiwan*, April 8, 2014, <https://www.thinkingtaiwan.com/content/1932>.

26 Shannon Tiezzi, "How Hong Kong's Protests Will Shape Taiwanese Politics," *The Diplomat*, October 1, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/how-hong-kongs-protests-will-shape-taiwanese-politics/>.

Eric Cheung, "Taiwanese Presidential Candidate Tsai Ing-Wen on the Cover of Time Magazine," *Hong Kong Free Press*, June 19, 2015, <https://hongkongfp.com/2015/06/19/taiwanese-presidential-candidate-tsai-ing-wen-appears-on-front-page-of-time-magazine/>.

27 Brendan Clift, "Hong Kong: The Canary in the coal mine," *University of Melbourne*, August 20, 2019.

28 Ming K Chan, "Transforming China's Hong Kong: Toward 2047 Merger-Convergence?" *China's Hong Kong Transformed: Retrospect and Prospects Beyond the First Decade* (2008): 1-42. Ma, Ngok. *Political Development in Hong Kong: State, Political Society, and Civil Society*. Vol. 1: Hong Kong University Press, 2007.

29 Brian CH Fong, "The Partnership between



groups are aligned with those of a rising China which embraces global capitalism and economic development.<sup>30</sup> These pro-establishment communities generally share Beijing's preference for maintaining the status quo in Hong Kong, which enables them to benefit from greater economic integration with China.<sup>31</sup>

According to Hong Kong's Basic Law, Hong Kong residents should eventually be able to elect the chief executive through a democratic system of "universal suffrage."<sup>32</sup> However, tensions increased rapidly in Hong Kong as people began to sense that Beijing's interference was eroding their autonomy. For instance, during the 2017 election for the chief executive, Beijing stipulated that all candidates had to be "patriotic."<sup>33</sup> This screening of candidates was seen as going against the Hong Kong Basic Law and denying the people's aspirations for a fair election. Frustration over not being recognized as a truly autonomous entity and China's denial of the rule of law had already sparked a series of political protests in Hong Kong prior to this controversy. At that time, Beijing showed no sign of backing down to opposition to electoral reform, a position which was

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the immediate cause of the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

China's reluctance to grant Hong Kong democratic elections under a system of universal suffrage can be attributed to associating sovereignty with centralized control. China is concerned that if it accedes to Hong Kong's demands, then Tibet, Xinjiang, and other parts of China might ask for increased autonomy as well.<sup>34</sup> This linkage has left Beijing with no room for flexibility in its Hong Kong policy, causing it to violate the letter and spirit of "one country, two systems."

China's plan appeared to be to postpone electoral and political reforms in Hong Kong indefinitely while it consolidated support for the pro-establishment party in the Legislative Council.<sup>35</sup> However, Beijing's tightened control did nothing to address the grievances of the younger generation who demanded the preservation of the rule of law.

Ultimately, this failure could undermine the legitimacy of the CCP's rule over Hong Kong. For example, there was a surge in the number of people participating in the legislative election of 2016, as many young members of the pro-democracy camp decided to run for office in the wake of the Umbrella Movement. The activists, whose political platforms focused on preserving Hong Kong's autonomy and local identity, won six of the 36 seats. However, Beijing made a rare intervention with a new interpretation of the Basic Law, demanding that the newly-elected members take an oath of loyalty to

the Chinese Government and Hong Kong's Capitalist Class: Implications for Hksar Governance, 1997–2012." *The China Quarterly* 217 (2014): 195-220.

30 Arif Dirlik, "The Mouse That Roared: The Democratic Movement in Hong Kong." *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations*, no. 2 (2016).

31 Benjamin Haas, "How China Changed Hong Kong: Views from the City," *The Guardian*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/28/how-china-changed-hong-kong-views-city-handover-1997-uk-residents>.

32 Article 45, Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, [https://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter\\_4.html](https://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_4.html).

33 Richard C Bush, "China's Decision on Universal Suffrage in Hong Kong." *Brookings*, September 2, 2014.

Ngok Ma, "Protracted Transition in a Liberal Democracy," in Cheng, T., and Y. Chu. *Routledge Handbook of Democratization in East Asia*. Taylor & Francis, 2017.

34 Kang Lim, Benjamin, and Ben Blanchard, "China Won't Cede to HK Protests, Army Used Only as Last Resort-Sources," *Reuters*, October 14, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-china-beijing/china-wont-cede-to-hk-protests-army-used-only-as-last-resort-sources-idUSKCN0I315G20141014>.

35 Yuen, Jeanette Ka-ye. "The myth of greater china? Hong Kong as a prototype of Taiwan for Unification." *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective* 5.1 (2014): 134-152.

the CCP.<sup>36</sup> This controversial measure led to the disqualification of two pro-independence lawmakers and triggered heated debates over the prospects for elections in Hong Kong and the role of the Legislative Council.

This kind of assertiveness did nothing to improve Beijing's standing among locals. Nevertheless, it has become clear that the CCP has no intention of altering its stance any time soon. In suppressing Hong Kong's request for gradual reform and autonomy as a SAR, Beijing risked losing the support of moderates in Hong Kong, prompting them to become more radically opposed to the Chinese rule. In this way, the CCP might achieve its political ends, but in so doing it will likely threaten the long-term stability of the SAR.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, if the Chinese government wants an optimal outcome in Hong Kong, it should consider relaxing its tough stance, respecting the rule of law, and giving Hong Kong more autonomy.

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36 Eleanor Albert and Lindsay Maizland, "Democracy in Hong Kong," *Council of Foreign Relations*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/background/democracy-hong-kong>

37 Michael Chugani, "Why Hong Kong independence activist talk at FCC must go on, even if the ideas don't warrant a megaphone," *South China Morning Post*, August 8, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/hong-kong/article/2158748/why-hong-kong-independence-activist-talk-fcc-must>



## Social Movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong: A Comparative Perspective

Since the early 2000s, Taiwan and Hong Kong have experienced transitions within their respective political systems.<sup>38</sup>

Taiwan has undergone a smooth party turnover and further consolidated its democracy, while Hong Kong has contended for greater autonomy and democracy under Beijing's control. Concurrently, the younger generations in both Taiwan and Hong Kong have developed increasingly localized identities and become concerned that a stronger Chinese presence in terms of economic dependence and political influence might compromise their liberal institutions and identities.

The social movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong led to different responses from their respective governments. While the Taiwanese government yielded to the students' demand to carefully review the trade and service agreement, Beijing and the Hong Kong administration refused to implement universal suffrage for the election of the chief executive. The convergence of discourse between the two areas also created sharper comparisons between local activists and political leaders of their respective systems.

Indeed, although the goal of the "one country, two systems" aims at incorporating Hong Kong—and Taiwan in the long run—under PRC rule, the political subjugation of these two places from China could likely reinforce their distinctive identity. The Chinese government's policies have only served to emphasize the contrast between Taiwan's strongly held democratic values and Hong Kong's identity based on the rule of law, on the one hand, and China's authoritarian system on the other.

#### *Taiwan's Sunflower Movement*

Following the election in 2008 of the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) candidate, Ma Ying-jeou, as president of Taiwan, Taipei and Beijing began to make signifi-

cant progress in economic integration and cooperation.<sup>39</sup> Prior to the CSSTA controversy, which triggered the Sunflower Movement, there were already concerns that the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA, 兩岸經濟合作架構協議) with China in 2010 risked Taiwan following the path of Hong Kong post-1997. "HongKongization" was already a reference point in political protests over economic integration with China.<sup>40</sup>

For example, in 2010, the DPP released a campaign video in Cantonese emphasizing Hong Kong's sharp income disparities. The implication was that greater economic integration with China would only benefit the wealthy.<sup>41</sup> The Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA, 內地與香港關於建立更緊密經貿關係的安排) that Hong Kong had signed with China set a negative precedent for debates in Taiwan over the ECFA. Taiwan media frequently referred to the resulting erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy, the rising level of income disparity, and frustration over China's increasing influence, warning that what was happening in Hong Kong would likely become Taiwan's future.

Even though the Sunflower Movement was a domestically focused political protest against the way the CSSTA was rushed through Taiwan's legislature, the movement's subtext was, in fact, broader dissatisfaction with and warning about integration with China, an authoritarian regime fundamentally opposed to democratic values. When the movement was at its height, the students demanded that the Legislative Yuan set aside all agreements with China until a regulatory oversight mechanism could be established. This request for a systematic reevaluation of bilateral negotiations with Chi-

38 Richard C. Bush, *Hong Kong in the Shadow of China: Living with the Leviathan*. Brookings Institution Press, 2016, p.173-176.

39 Richard C. Bush, "Taiwan and East Asian Security." *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (2011): 274-89.

40 Philipp Malte Kaeding, "Challenging Hongkongisation: The Role of Taiwan's Social Movements and Perceptions of Post-Handover Hong Kong." *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective* 5 (2014): 120-33.

41 Dppsng, "Who is benefiting from ECFA?" ("ECFA dui shui you li?"), YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xn\\_UMtw3sSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xn_UMtw3sSA).

na was a direct response to China's Taiwan policy: if Beijing denied Taiwan's core values and threatened to use force in the event of a declaration of independence, then the Taiwan government ought to stand firm in support of its interests. When Taiwan's largest student movement successfully opposed the trade and service pacts with China, a political consensus—which later led to the DPP's electoral success in 2016—seemed to emerge from the general public.<sup>42</sup> Namely, many people

came to believe that economic overdependence on China would be risky or even detrimental to Taiwan, potentially threatening its ability to maintain its democratic system, the rule of law, and freedom of speech.

“The dichotomy between China's values and Western values enables China's party-led media to portray Hong Kong's political activists as “traitors” colluding with the West and undermining the legitimacy of the CCP.

This discourse was later echoed by the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in the same year as young people in Hong Kong experienced similar frustrations with Beijing. Indeed, many Hong Kong activists were inspired by the Sunflower Movement and many Taiwanese offered support to the Umbrella Movement protesters.<sup>43</sup> The sense of shared identity reinforced the deterioration of both Taiwan's and Hong Kong's relations with China and also helped forge a sense of community between young people of the two social movements.

For the pro-democracy groups in Hong Kong, the Sunflower Movement and Taiwan's democratic legacy provide a great example of how democracy and political autonomy can be implemented successfully in a Chinese-speaking society. For example, prominent activist Joshua Wong said that “we [activists in Hong

Kong] would seek more collaboration with them [Sunflower Movement activists].” Alex Chow, the leader of the Hong Kong Federation of Students, also expressed a similar view. He stated: “Taiwan should begin to see Hong Kong as its partner since it is the only Chinese society with shared values.”<sup>44</sup> In this sense, Taiwan was both a friend and an inspiration for Hong Kong activists.

### *Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Bill Protest and Umbrella Movement*

One of the most notable slogans used by participants in the Umbrella Movement during the demonstrations in Hong Kong's financial district was “Occupy Central with peace and love.”<sup>45</sup>

The Hong Kong police attracted a great deal of media attention and generated heated debates when, despite this peaceful message from the protesters, they used tear gas and enlisted the help of triad gangsters against demonstrators.<sup>46</sup>

Political protests and unrest in Hong Kong have been rooted in existential anxieties since China's re-absorp-

42 Paul Mozur, “For Taiwan, a dilemma over identity, economy, and China,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/world/asia/china-taiwan-shirley-lin.html>.

43 Shannon Tiezzi, “How Hong Kong's Protests Will Shape Taiwanese Politics,” *The Diplomat*, October 1, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/how-hong-kongs-protests-will-shape-taiwanese-politics/>.

44 Tony Cheung, “The Sunflower and the Umbrella: Hong Kong activists travel to Taiwan, call for closer ties, new politics from incoming government,” *South China Morning Post*, January 17, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/1901985/sunflower-and-umbrella-hong-kong-activists-travel-taiwan>

45 Jonathan Kaiman, “Hong Kong's Unofficial pro-Democracy Referendum Irks Beijing,” *The Guardian*, June 25, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/25/hong-kong-unofficial-pro-democracy-referendum-beijing>.

46 Tania Branigan, and David Batty, “Hong Kong Legislator Says Government Using Triads against Protesters,” *The Guardian*, October 4, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/04/hong-kong-legislator-accuses-government-triads-against-protesters>.

Curran, Enda. “Hong Kong Police Use of Tear Gas on Pro-Democracy Protesters Is Questioned.” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kong-police-use-of-tear-gas-on-pro-democracy-protesters-is-questioned-1411991105>.

tion of the area, and the emergence of a distinct Hong Kong identity that has become a driving force of these social movements.<sup>47</sup>

Hong Kong's struggle for greater autonomy and democracy, which started in the 2000s and carried on until today, has proven that the political dilemma is unlikely to be resolved soon. One activist nicely captured the feeling of the social movements in 2014, stating: "It is unlikely that the Chinese leaders will respond to our demands. [...] We are not going to give up, and we will continue to fight on."<sup>48</sup>

The veteran political commentator Sunny Lo has pointed out that policy analysts and politicians frequently use the term "mainlandization" to describe China's heavy-handed interference in freedom of speech, civil liberties, and the media in Hong Kong.<sup>49</sup> Though Lo does not attribute any negative connotations to that term, the fact that Hong Kong is increasingly economically dependent on China and subject to Beijing's interpretation of the Basic Law is indeed troubling where Hong Kong's quest for autonomy and

**"... the tactics Beijing employs to resolve the political and social tensions in Hong Kong are increasingly likely to significantly affect both China-Taiwan relations and Taiwan's domestic politics."**

a rule-based society is concerned.<sup>50</sup>

Liberal theorists of international relations tend to be optimistic about the future political development of China, believing that rapid economic growth will likely lead to democratization. However, current dynamics in Taiwan-Hong Kong-China relationships indicate that the trends are developing in the opposite direction. While Taiwan is striving to avoid "HongKongization" and to preserve its sovereignty, Hong Kong civil society is resisting "mainlandization." Moreover, as China's

power has grown significantly over the last few decades, the CCP has become more confident in drawing a distinction between a "democracy with Chinese characteristics" and a "Western-style democracy." The dichotomy

between China's values and Western values enables China's party-led media to portray Hong Kong's political activists as "traitors" colluding with the West and undermining the legitimacy of the CCP.<sup>51</sup>

China's dismissive attitude towards Hong Kong's demands for electoral reform and respect for the rule of law was salient in its framing strategy regarding the Umbrella Movement, which it portrayed as illegal, chaotic, and potentially separatist. For example, China interpreted the movement not as a spontaneous demand for autonomy, but as the result of vicious interference by foreign countries.<sup>52</sup> This depiction undermined the

47 Sebastian Veg, "Legalistic and Utopian: Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement." *New Left Review*, No. 92, March-April (2015): 55-73. Ming-sho Ho, *Challenging Beijing's Mandate of Heaven: Taiwan's Sunflower Movement and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement*. Temple University Press, 2019.

48 Austin Ramzy and Keith Bradsher, "Hong Kong Leader Refuses to Resign, but Deputy to Meet with Protesters." *The New York Times*, October 2, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/03/world/asia/hong-kong-protests.html>.

49 Beijing's interference with freedom of speech frequently results in self-censorship by the Hong Kong media. See Gerry Mullaney, "Hong Kong Editor Whose Ouster Stirred Protests Is Slashed." *The New York Times*, February 26, 2014. <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/25/hong-kong-editor-whose-ouster-stirred-protests-is-reported-stabbed/> and Tom Phillips, "Mysterious Confession Fuels Fears of Beijing's Influence on Hong Kong's Top Newspaper." *The Guardian*, July 25, 2016. [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/25/south-china-morning-post-china-influence-hong-kong-newspaper-confession?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/25/south-china-morning-post-china-influence-hong-kong-newspaper-confession?CMP=share_btn_fb).

50 Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, *The Dynamics of Beijing-Hong Kong Relations: A Model for Taiwan?* Vol. 1: Hong Kong University Press, 2008.

51 Guoguang Wu, "Identity, Sovereignty, and Economic Penetration: Beijing's Responses to Offshore Chinese Democracies." *Journal of Contemporary China* 16, No. 51 (2007): 295-313.

52 Anne Applebaum, "China's Explanation for the Hong Kong Protests? Blame America." *The Washington Post*, October 3, 2014. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/anne-applebaum-chinas-familiar-bogeyman-for-the-hong-kong-protests/2014/10/03/d883ac5e-4b3a-11e4-891d-713f052086a0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/anne-applebaum-chinas-familiar-bogeyman-for-the-hong-kong-protests/2014/10/03/d883ac5e-4b3a-11e4-891d-713f052086a0_story.html).

agency of Hong Kong's people and implied that the activists were troublemakers backed by the West. The Chinese government also accused the Umbrella Movement of copying the tactics of Taiwan's Sunflower Movement. As a result, Chen Wei-ting (陳為廷), a Sunflower Movement activist, was denied entry to Hong Kong when he tried to participate in the pro-democracy movement there.<sup>53</sup> Links like this, as well as the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment in both places alarmed China. Hong Kong's political parties, activist groups, and social movements have all been inspired in part by Taiwan's experience with democratization.<sup>54</sup> It is the CCP itself, rather than foreign influence or manipulation, that has incentivized active citizens in Hong Kong and Taiwan to learn from one another. Young people in both democracies have begun to pay more attention to politics and participate in election campaigns.

### *Binding Taiwan and Hong Kong Together*

The counter-narrative encapsulated by popular slogans like “Taiwan will not accept HongKongization,” “Today Hong Kong, tomorrow Taiwan,” or “Taiwan and Hong Kong are one,” is reflective of a deeper undercurrent that illustrates how both Taiwan and Hong Kong perceive China's assertiveness and refusal to recognize their identities. Taiwan was particularly concerned

Hua Yiwen. “Why Is the US so Keen on ‘Color Revolutions’?” *People's Daily Online*, October 11, 2014. <http://en.people.cn/n/2014/1011/c98649-8793283.html>.

53 Loa Lok-sin, “Chen Wei-Ting Tries to Join HK Rallies, Denied Entry,” *Taipei Times*, June 29, 2014. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2014/06/30/2003593991>.

54 Philipp Malte Kaeding, “Challenging Hongkongisation: The Role of Taiwan's Social Movements and Perceptions of Post-Handover Hong Kong.” *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective 5* (2014): p.129-130.

about developments in Hong Kong, as China is also determined to unite with Taiwan under the same “one country, two systems” framework.<sup>55</sup> For example, when Taiwan's former president, Ma Ying-jeou, expressed support for the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, he stated that “Taiwan fully understands and supports Hong Kong residents' demand for universal suffrage. [...] We urge mainland authorities to listen to the voices of the people of Hong Kong and deal with the matter in a peaceful and cautious manner.”<sup>56</sup>

“... although the goal of the “one country, two systems” aims at incorporating Hong Kong—and Taiwan in the long run—under PRC rule, the political subjugation of these two places from China could likely reinforce their distinctive identity.

Moreover, solidarity between Taiwan and Hong Kong was demonstrated at a soccer match between the two sides in November 2014.<sup>57</sup> When Taiwan and Hong Kong met in an East Asian Cup qualifier, several hundred Taiwanese fans brought along yellow umbrellas, the symbol of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement. One Hong Kong reporter expressed surprise

to see such strong support from Taiwanese people at

55 “Taiwan Urges China to Let Hong Kong 'Go Democratic',” *The Guardian*, October 10, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/10/taiwan-ma-ying-jeou-china-hong-kong-democratic-first>.

56 Kelven Huang and Y.F. Low, “Ma Urges Beijing to Listen to Hong Kongers' Voices.” *Taiwan News*, September 29, 2014. <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/2582111>.

57 Some Hong Kong protesters are seeking refuge in Taiwan, as the young people are afraid of political oppression and prosecution afterward. The Taiwanese government to strongly support the Hong Kong people's aspirations for freedom and democracy and handle the asylum applications for protesters on a case-by-case basis. See Huang Tai-lin, “INTERVIEW: Refugee Law Urged to Give HK Protesters a Way Out.” *Taipei Times*, June 28, 2019. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/06/29/2003717803>.

“Enact Refugee Law to Help Hong Kong, Taiwan Presidential Hopeful Says.” *Reuters*, December 12, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-taiwan-idUSKBN1YG15K>.



an international event.<sup>58</sup> Aside from networking and exchanges among political activists, this was the first time that the general public in Hong Kong and Taiwan had expressed such strong mutual support and exhibited a true sense of community.

Simply put, there were demonstration effects from Taiwan to Hong Kong in terms of mobilization and framing strategy.<sup>59</sup> Young activists in the Umbrella Movement drew a great deal of inspiration from the Sunflower Movement.

Notably, according to Ian Rowen's first-hand observations in the Sunflower Movement, many Hong Kong activists expressed strong support for Taiwanese students prior to the Umbrella Movement.<sup>60</sup> Since 2014, the two social movements have brought the activist communities closer, as they expressed solidarity and supported one another in their fight against the CCP. For example, Lau Ka-yee, a women's rights activist from Hong Kong, claimed that "Taiwanese often say that today's Hong Kong will be tomorrow's Taiwan. However, I think: Today's Hong Kong is today's Taiwan is closer to the truth. People need to gain a sense of urgency."<sup>61</sup> Her progressive

statement moved beyond the "Today Hong Kong, Tomorrow Taiwan" analogy and stressed the similarity between the two: the youth in both Taiwan and Hong Kong are concerned about the risks associated with greater political and economic integration with China. The unfulfilled demands from the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the subsequent anti-extradition bill protests in 2019 also provide sober implications for Taiwan. By observing how Beijing handles the Hong Kong protests, Taiwanese citizens now know what to expect from political unification with China.

**“The counter-narrative encapsulated by popular slogans like “Taiwan will not accept HongKongization,” “Today Hong Kong, tomorrow Taiwan,” or “Taiwan and Hong Kong are one,” is reflective of a deeper undercurrent that illustrates how both Taiwan and Hong Kong perceive China’s assertiveness and refusal to recognize their identities.**

political unification with China.

Political discourse in the Sunflower Movement, the Umbrella Movement, and the anti-extradition bill protests voiced anti-China sentiments and expressed frustration with China's negative attitude toward Taiwanese and Hong Kong identities.

Concerns over economic integration with China were only a symptom of the fundamental differences between Taiwan and Hong Kong, on one side, and China on the other. The deeper roots of these movements lay in differences over political values such as democracy and the rule of law.

#### *How the 2019 Hong Kong Protests Impacted the 2020 Taiwan Election*

The 2019 social unrest in Hong Kong played an important role in Taiwan's 2020 election, which led to President Tsai's landslide re-election.<sup>62</sup> Specifically, young voters in Taiwan "imagined" the future of the island democracy by observing what has been hap-

58 Jason Pan, "Taiwan Fans Defy Officials to Back HK Protests at Game." *Taipei Times*, November 17, 2014. <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2014/11/18/2003604721>.

59 "The 'Taiwanization' of Hong Kong Politics," *South China Morning Post*, March 25, 2015.

60 Ian Rowen, "Inside Taiwan's Sunflower Movement: Twenty-Four Days in a Student-Occupied Parliament, and the Future of the Region." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, No. 1 (2015): p.18-19.

61 Wen Lii, "Protesters Storm HK Office in Taipei in a Display of Solidarity." *Taipei Times*, September 30, 2014. <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2014/09/30/2003600906>.

62 Rachel Bernstein, "The Impact of the Hong Kong Protests on the Election in Taiwan." The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), January 23, 2020. <https://www.nbr.org/publication/the-impact-of-the-hong-kong-protests-on-the-election-in-taiwan/>.



pening in Hong Kong since the early 2000s. Beijing’s offer of “one country, two systems” lost all credibility among the Taiwanese people as they carefully observed the erosion of freedom and autonomy in Hong Kong. Therefore, the tactics Beijing employs to resolve the political and social tensions in Hong Kong are increasingly likely to significantly affect both China-Taiwan relations and Taiwan’s domestic politics. Indeed, the events unfolding in Hong Kong have turned “one country, two systems” from an abstract concept to something very real and very disquieting.

The younger generations in Hong Kong and Taiwan have shown that they possess different visions for their respective communities than their older generations, emphasizing more progressive and locally focused values. The active participation of the younger generations has been even more salient in 2019-2020. High school and university students have been the main participants in the protests against the Hong Kong anti-extradition bill, while young voters in Taiwan (under 40) reached a record high in terms of voter turnout in the 2020 presidential election.

A comparison of the two Chinese-speaking democracies reveals that political activists in Hong Kong see Taiwan as a role model, while the younger generations in Taiwan view the current situation in Hong Kong as a cautionary tale.<sup>63</sup> The mutual support demonstrated between civil organizations in Hong Kong and Taiwan at the Sunflower Movement, the Umbrella Movement, and the anti-extradition bill protests shows that these activists do learn from one another and cooperate to exert substantial change in politics. These social movements fostered a deeper sense of community between Taiwan and Hong Kong and resulted in a convergence of political discourse between the Sunflower and Umbrella movements (see Figure 1).

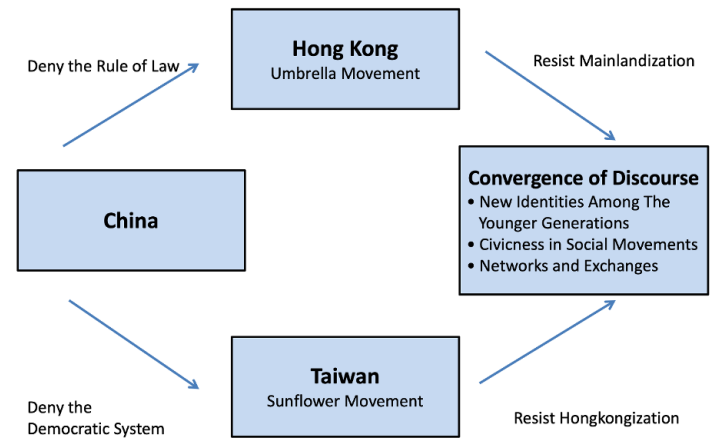


Figure 1

63 Shannon Tiezzi, “How Hong Kong’s Protests Will Shape Taiwanese Politics.” *The Diplomat*, October 1, 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/10/how-hong-kongs-protests-will-shape-taiwanese-politics/>.

## The Hong Kong-US-Taiwan Triangle

The three major movements that took place in Hong Kong and Taiwan have drawn the attention of the US government, which has shifted its focus from treating both of them as trading partners to assuming the role of defenders against China's authoritarian encroachment. For example, US President Donald Trump signed into law the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which would impose sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for human rights abuses in Hong Kong. This tough measure gained bipartisan congressional support, and the US expressed support for the pro-democracy movement in the city. Subsequently, the Trump administration passed the Taiwan Travel Act. This bill and other legislative initiatives serve to demonstrate the commitment of the US legislative and executive branches to supporting Taiwan's democracy and international presence.<sup>64</sup>

In response to Beijing's erosion of Hong Kong's freedoms, the US government has decided to de-certify the territory's autonomous status. For example, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called upon Congress to review Hong Kong's special trading status, as she questioned whether the extradition bill would undermine the rule of law in Hong Kong. The United States needs to seriously reassess whether Hong Kong is "autonomous" under the "one county, two systems" framework that guides Hong Kong-China relations, Speaker Pelosi argued.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, the US Congress' decision to review the autonomous city's special status and concerns over Beijing's coercion of Taiwan has brought about re-evaluations of US-Taiwan and US-Hong Kong relations. That is,

while maintaining political cooperation and trade activities, the US government ought to consider how to prioritize its policy objectives in order to best safeguard liberal and progressive values in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>66</sup> Congress' recent legal maneuvers sent strong messages to China that the United States stands with Hong Kong and Taiwan, two bastions of democracy and the rule of law facing an assertive China. The US government has already pursued concrete measures to strengthen its ties with the two democracies.

64 Jonathan Chin and Yi-hsuan Lu. "Taiwan Thanks US over Defense Act." *Taipei Times*, December 14, 2017. <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2017/12/14/2003683936>; House Armed Services. Bill, National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2018: conference report to accompany H.R. 2810 § (2017).

65 Jodi Schneider, "Hong Kong Extradition Bill: Pelosi Vows to Review Trade Ties." *Bloomberg.com*, June 12, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-12/pelosi-vows-to-review-hong-kong-trade-ties-over-extradition-bill>.

66 Alvin Lum, "US 'Pursues Trade Cooperation' with Hong Kong despite Report Urging Rethink." *South China Morning Post*, March 22, 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/2173719/united-states-pursue-cooperation-hong-kong-trade-despite>.

## Conclusion

In November 2019, voters in Hong Kong delivered an unprecedented landslide victory for pro-democracy candidates in the SAR's local election. More importantly, voter registration surged to a record increase of 12.3 percent among voters between the ages of 18 and 35.<sup>67</sup> The active participation of young adults can also be observed in Taiwan, as opinion polls showed that 60 percent of the younger generation between 20 and 40 would vote for a pro-Taiwan presidential candidate.<sup>68</sup> President Tsai gained majority support in the 2020 election, showing strong support for a distinct Taiwanese identity. Meanwhile, the increasing voter register among members of the younger generations also points to the discursive shift of treating “Chineseness,” or “China-centered” identity as “otherness” in comparison to Taiwan's and Hong Kong's identities, respectively.

From President Lee Teng-hui in 1996 to President Tsai in 2016, all Taiwanese presidents have frequently mentioned Taiwan's democracy and human rights achievements as essential parts of Taiwan's political status. Such repeated invocations not only present a stark contrast with China's authoritarian governance, but also point to China's denial of Taiwan's establishment.

67 Jeffie Lam, “Hong Kong Voter Registration Skyrockets, Driven by Extradition Bill Anger.” *South China Morning Post*, August 2, 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3021034/hong-kong-voter-registration-skyrockets-biggest-gain-least>.

68 Mark Wenyi Lai, “Youth Votes and Youth Vision in Taiwan's 2020 Presidential Election.” *Taiwan Insight*, January 16, 2020. <https://taiwaninsight.org/2020/01/16/youth-votes-and-youth-vision-in-taiwans-2020-presidential-election/>.

Hong Kong has seen an increasing number of street protests in recent years. These protests reflect the emergence of local identities and the weakening of the SAR's former Chinese identity. Beijing has firmly rejected proposals for electoral reform, and its growing presence in Hong Kong and attempts at rapid integration of the territory have fomented discontent and frustration among the younger generation. Examination of the rhetorical strategies of the protest movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong from a comparative perspective provides a better understanding of the three student-led movements and the sense of shared identity that has developed between the two areas.

The Sunflower Movement in Taiwan, the Umbrella Movement in 2014, and the demonstrations against the anti-extradition bill in 2019 in Hong Kong were major political protests in terms of the numbers of participants, and all three have had a substantial impact on China's image among Taiwan citizens and China's image internationally. While the three movements differed in some details, all represented explicit rejections of China's strategy of integration. The media coverage of these social movements, the international relevance of Taiwan and Hong Kong, and China's efforts to tighten control over them are all foci of debate. Furthermore, each have provided useful insights into how Beijing manages its international image, as well as China's stances toward social movements in Asia and beyond.

This report focuses on a structured examination of four relationships: China-Taiwan, China-Hong Kong, Taiwan-Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong-US-Taiwan triangle. This framework offers an alternative way of conceptualizing political recognition and identity contestation. When China explicitly their

“As Beijing aggressively attempts to incorporate Hong Kong into China, as evidenced by the rapid passage of the National Security Law, it is up to Taiwan, the United States, and Hong Kong citizens to demonstrate their commitment to maintaining Hong Kong's role as a vibrant city for financial, cultural, and social exchanges in East Asia.”

most cherished values—the rule of law and democracy—the people of Taiwan and Hong Kong demonstrated significant changes in identity and their respective political discourses experienced increasing convergence.<sup>69</sup> People in both places became more confident in asserting local identities distinctive from a Chinese one, and they became more determined to preserve democracy and the rule of law. This led to a convergence of their counter-identities.

The findings of this study suggest that China—or another state—can influence Taiwan’s and Hong Kong’s sense of identity by either endorsing or denying recognition of certain political values that both democracies hold dear. There are clear constraints to the willingness and capacity for the CCP to embrace democracy in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Yet, the future of the China-Taiwan-Hong Kong triangle, and the convergence or contestation of identity hinges on how these three entities perceive each other and the world.

#### *Implications for Chinese Foreign Policy*

The cases of Hong Kong and Taiwan indicate that China’s soft power policy has only yielded limited results and has lagged far behind the soft power of the United States. A sense of local identity is on the rise among the younger generations in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the formation of an identity distinct from a Chinese one reflects deep dissatisfaction with integration with China.

Even though China has invested massively in enhancing its image overseas, the results have been mixed so far.<sup>70</sup> For example, Taiwan has been vulnerable to China’s frequent use of economic leverage in order to influence its elections. Such coercive measures are likely to undermine Taiwan’s democracy over the long-term and,

concurrently, worsen the public perception of China.<sup>71</sup> President Tsai has called for the international community to stand alongside Taiwan in reaffirming the values of democracy and freedom in order to constrain China’s hegemonic influences.<sup>72</sup> Specifically, Taiwan is on the frontlines of the battle against China’s “sharp power.” In 2018, President Tsai urged like-minded countries to take collective action to defend democracy.<sup>73</sup> Taiwan and Hong Kong are particularly vulnerable to the damage that China’s “sharp power” could bring to their political systems.

China’s negative attitude toward democracy and the rule of law, frequent use of economic coercion toward its neighbors, and increasing efforts to project influence have alarmed countries, both in Asia and the West. How Asian countries perceive China’s rising capabilities and how they understand the way China handles its relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan will greatly influence China’s foreign policy behavior in the future. Most Asian countries face difficult choices between China and the United States, especially as their power struggle has become more intense over time.<sup>74</sup> Beijing should recalibrate both its rhetoric and its policies toward Taiwan and Hong Kong if it wants to achieve a leadership role in Asia.

#### *Policy Implications for Taiwan*

The networks of activists in Taiwan and Hong Kong will likely grow more interconnected over time, as the framing strategies they have adopted in their social movements are centered on solidarity and empathy among the general public. Recently, more and more

69 For the change of identities in Hong Kong and Taiwan, see Syaru Lin, “Analyzing the Relationship between Identity and Democratization in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the Shadow of China,” *The Asan Forum*, December 10, 2018.

70 “China Is Spending Billions to Make the World Love It.” *The Economist*, March 23, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/china/2017/03/23/china-is-spending-billions-to-make-the-world-love-it>.

71 Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Edoardo Saravalle, “China’s Use of Coercive Economic Measures.” Center for a New American Security, June 11, 2018.

72 “Taiwan Raps China for Military Activity, Saying It Should Fight Virus Instead.” *The Japan Times*, Inc., June 23, 2020. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/23/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/taiwan-china-military-corona-virus/>.

73 “Tsai Urges Unity to Defend Democracy.” *Taipei Times*, June 26, 2018. <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/06/26/2003695561>.

74 Evan S Medeiros, Keith Crane, Eric Heginbotham, and Norman D Levin. *Pacific Currents: The Responses of Us Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*. Rand Corporation, 2008.

people in Hong Kong have started to pay more attention to Taiwan's politics, and many have even considered emigrating to Taiwan.

As Beijing aggressively attempts to incorporate Hong Kong into China, as evidenced by the rapid passage of the National Security Law, it is up to Taiwan, the United States, and Hong Kong citizens to demonstrate their commitment to maintaining Hong Kong's role as a vibrant city for financial, cultural, and social exchanges in East Asia. The Taiwan government should take the plight of Hong Kong seriously, as the fates of Taiwan and Hong Kong have become intertwined in the eyes of Beijing.

President Tsai and the DPP legislators should proactively facilitate the asylum applications for Hong Kong protesters. Taiwan could also enhance its international image as a beacon of liberal democracy and political rights by strengthening the existing laws that deal with political asylum from China.<sup>75</sup> Social activists and political leaders in Taiwan and Hong Kong also need to consider the long-term consequences of changing perceptions toward China and each other, and how their framing strategies might impact the China-Taiwan-Hong Kong triangle.

#### *Policy Implication for the United States*

Since Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997, the city has undergone significant political, social, and economic upheavals. The United States has a substantial stake in the future of Hong Kong. Moreover, Hong Kong actively supports US efforts to gather intelligence in its fight against terrorism, money-laundering, and intellectual property theft.<sup>76</sup> While the Trump administration has already imposed sanctions against Chinese officials involved in the oppression of Hong Kong's social movements, it can more effectively employ other policy

measures by cooperating with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.<sup>77</sup>

Most importantly, stronger US support for Hong Kong and Taiwan not only contributes to the future stability and prosperity of East Asia, but also sends clear messages of its commitment to democratic allies in Asia facing an increasingly assertive China.

In the next few years, US-Hong Kong relations will likely call for more multifaceted and sustained support by the US government in order to uphold its national interests and universal values. Its policy stances toward Hong Kong will be frequently and closely reviewed by the US Congress and think tanks.

75 Rachel Bernstein, "The Impact of the Hong Kong Protests on the Election in Taiwan." The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), January 23, 2020. <https://www.nbr.org/publication/the-impact-of-the-hong-kong-protests-on-the-election-in-taiwan/>.

76 Bates Gill and James Tang, "U.S.-Hong Kong Relations: Prospects for a Unique Partnership." Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 1, 2007. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-hong-kong-relations-prospects-unique-partnership>.

77 Michael Green and Evan Medeiros, "Is Taiwan the Next Hong Kong?" *Foreign Affairs*, July 8, 2020. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-asia/2020-07-08/taiwan-next-hong-kong>.