

## **Political Challenges in Hong Kong: Identity Politics, Legitimacy Crisis, and Cultural Clash**

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### **Abstract**

With its trade potential and rich cultural tradition, Hong Kong is now facing significant political challenges resulting from polarization in Hong Kong society, where localists are looking for their political identity. Drawn from contextual and textual analysis of the documentary analyses of periodicals, policy papers, official statistics, and relevant readings and empirical evidence, this paper aims to explore and analyze historical discourses delimited to the political identity, legitimacy crisis, and bursting cultural clash in HKSAR to address the political development in Hong Kong. The issue in Hong Kong is not to assess who is a loser or gainer as a result of the shift in authority from British to China and change in the policy arena endeavored to be sustainable but rather what is required, how policies are framed, and what are the consequences as a result of adopting different approaches. Hong Kong exhibits both political and cultural forms of localism. Political localism carries the idea that supports deliberative democracies in Hong Kong,

while cultural localists distinguish themselves from mainlanders and reject the yoke of Chinese identity in its current form. Nevertheless, localist has been able to express a pluralist and alternate vision against globalism and neo-liberalist implications. Thus far, the future of Hong Kong has seen localists transitioning in their stances – initially advocating for Hong Kong nationalism and independence, and now seeking a distinct local identity through reforms within the region. This shift has ushered in a new era of identity politics, transcending the postcolonial handover phase.

**Keywords:** *localism, mainlanders, identity politics, legitimacy crisis, culture, China, Hong Kong*

## 1. Introduction

The rise of localism is a significant event in the history of Hong Kong (HK). The emergence of localism in Hong Kong is mainly attributed to historic conflicts between Mainland and Hong Kong further highlighted through elections 2015-2016, added to localists' struggle to safeguard the identity and values of Hong Kong alongside taking anti-Sino positions in the process of democratization. Subsequently, the National People's Congress (NPC) imposed the National Security Laws on Hong Kong in 2020, raising widespread concerns in Hong Kong and the international society. The high-handed treatment extended to protestors creates a more polarized division amid a hybrid regime and political movement of localism (Veg, 2017).

The political movement, which Wing-sang Law (2013) regards as one that targets changing the political culture in Hong Kong, indirectly supporting the rise of localism, was constituted by multiple groups that had different goals, started with demanding greater autonomy for Hong

Kong, but mostly got sentiments of acquiring local identity and resentment against mainlanders for political interference in the political and socio-economic affairs of Hong Kong (Kwong, 2016). Veg (2017) asserted that the rise of new localisms in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) polity raised the issue of national identity that was acceptable to Beijing. When the localists felt that they were confronting the legitimacy crisis, it was a failure of the government administration. Furthermore, the incapacity of the HKSAR added fuel to the fire, and its outburst of dependence on Beijing hurt the democratization of Hong Kong (Lo, 2001).

Historically, Hong Kong has been a “Golden Bird” due to its immaculate trade potential and rich cultural tradition and heritage, but it faced significant political challenges that widened polarization in Hong Kong society (Lam, 2020). Twenty-five years later, since 1 July 1997, Hong Kong still lacks political homogeneity; it may not have a political identity on a collective basis; instead, it has local identities in thousands sharing common political and economic aspirations. By creating the large based on the small, localists and mainlanders are yet to learn from this indigenous psychology in Hong Kong.

One piece of evidence states that the previous order showed dominance under the pretext of modernization. This position got strength in the aftermath of visible moves to maintain environmental well-being along with social justice in the advanced age, while the sustainability engine does not work to drive it. Here, twinkles of hope still survive amid the political deliberations, ground realities, and immense turbulence. The element of exploration is equally essential to incorporate the fortune of experience.

This research conceives the premise that political development is hampered by political alienation in Hong Kong that causes mistrust among localists; further creating a legitimacy crisis over the

incompetence of handling issues in Hong Kong that invoked legal disaster in the polity of HKSAR; moreover, cultural clash burst in society as a result of polarization between localist and mainlanders. This paper does not intend to offer a moral judgment on either the localism movement or the choices made by the Chinese central government. Rather, this paper aims to explore and analyze historical discourses delimited to the political identity, legitimacy crisis, and bursting cultural clash in HKSAR to address the political development in Hong Kong.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Identity Politics, Legitimacy Crisis, and Cultural Clash**

This section critically reviews the issues regarding identity politics, legitimacy crisis and cultural clash. In the wake of their interrelationships, it is argued that the localists in Hong Kong are experiencing an identity crisis due to the advent of identity politics, legitimacy crisis and cultural clash.

### ***2.1. Identity Politics***

Identity politics gets strength from the social as well as cultural perspectives of the subaltern populations that were kept away socially, politically, and geographically from the mainstream hierarchy of power in an imperial set-up (Heyes, 2002). The imperial setup takes on to maintain natural harmony among different races of humans since everybody has a definite cultural identity, a social stand-up, and an economically assigned role thereby colored people need moral and intellectual reformation. Hence, the excluded segment of society poses a cultural resistance that complicates the process of establishing a postcolonial society. In this critical discourse of identity, the society of Hongkongers is facing confusion amid contradictions amidst the

hybridity of culture and social disorder along with transitional stages of liminalities (Bernstein, 2005). Hence, the decolonized world passes through a stage of cultural recognition; this study used postcolonial theory to get theoretical specificity and analyze the intellectual space in the context of the post-colonial era. The rise of localism in Hong Kong should be seen from the perspective of multi-cultural awareness reaffirming its dogmas and ideological beliefs (Araeen, 2000).

Hongkongers lived a life as both international citizens and the colonized before 1997, making their identity a complicated mix. Some scholars suggested that Hong Kong had actually enjoyed substantial autonomy from London when it was a colony of the United Kingdom (Hung, 2014). The trance of identity becomes even more distinct under the backlash of the transition from the United Kingdom to China. In the preceding decade, a new discourse has swept across Hong Kong society in a quest of local identity. A recent rise of localists provides ample evidence of their vocal presence. The localists are building a claim to seeking self-determination (Demosistō), by the Hong Kong Indigenous Party and the Hong Kong National Party. At the same time, a new localism emerged from the womb of conventional “Hong Kong identity”.

The current political struggle in Hong Kong for political identity is dominated by the China factor fueled by the cultural clash of locals with mainlanders. It resorts to distinguishing amid groups advocating civic identification. Following the eruption of months-long protests mainly attributed to the outreach of Beijing’s side-by-side feelings of seismic changes of identity in Hong Kong, some Hong Kong citizens felt that they were besieged by the authoritarianism of mainland Chinese. Economic turmoil and the heave of immigration further aggravated the traditional identity crisis among Hongkongers. Consequently,

identity took them to different discourses, many of which became narrower, and some became argumentative and confrontational. The divide is widening between Hongkongers and the people living in Mainland China. Many people on both sides show non-acceptance of the other, and the expression of hate has become routine on social media, e.g., Weibo, Zhihu, Facebook, Hong Kong Discuss Forum, and Golden Forum. Looking back, Hong Kong holds the status of a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), operating under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework, as stipulated by the Sino-British Joint Declaration—a treaty signed by China and the United Kingdom in 1984. This doctrine explicitly dictates that the PRC would refrain from implementing its socialist system within the confines of Hong Kong, allowing the former British territory to maintain a semblance of political and economic autonomy for a subsequent period of 50 years till 2047 following the sovereignty transfer. Consequently, Hong Kong preserves its democratic ethos and capitalist orientation, evident in its distinct currency (Hong Kong dollar / HKD) and independent executive, legislative, and judiciary branches that oversee all domains with the exceptions of military defense and foreign affairs. Moreover, both English and Chinese are recognized and maintained as the region's official languages.

## ***2.2. Legitimacy Crisis and Articulation of Cultural Clash***

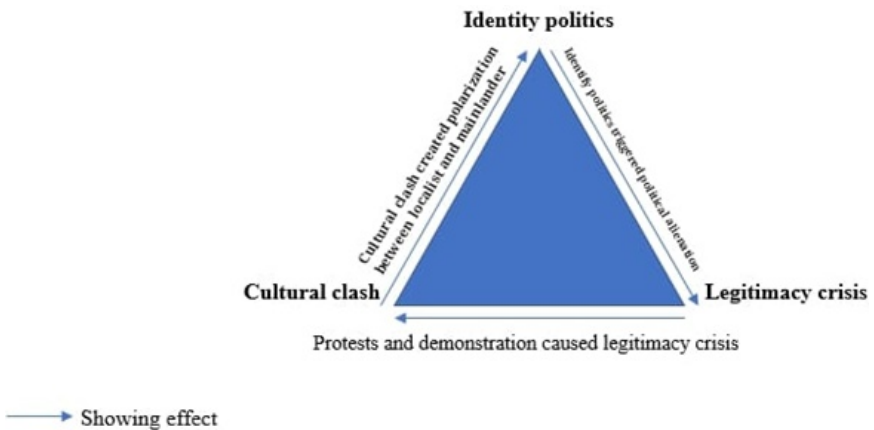
The Basic Law, as enacted, stipulates that the residents of Hong Kong will possess the right to vote for their Chief Executive. However, there has been consistent contention from the pan-democratic faction which alleges that the Chief Executive is, in practice, an appointee of the Beijing government rather than a choice of the election committee. This contention is rooted in the perceived lack of universal suffrage in the

Chief Executive's election process. The first Chief Executive was elected by the 400-member Selection Committee, and all Chief Executives since then were elected by the Election Committee. The number of members of the Election Committee expanded to 800 in 1998, and from 800 to 1200 in 2010. Nevertheless, it is still criticized as a "small-circle" election, especially considering that most of the committee members were from the pro-Beijing camp, which makes it possible for the Beijing government to choose a "trustworthy" Chief Executive, who will never oppose the policies decided by Beijing.

Identity politics has a close relationship with regime legitimacy, and any deficiency in this regard causes legitimacy crises within a polity. The discussion illuminated above accentuates the existence of causal relationships amid identity politics, regime legitimacy, and subsequently the legitimacy crisis. It is, therefore, vital to comprehend the idea of "legitimacy" and its allied crises. Legitimacy provides the foundation for a government to rule a state, as well as a reflection of public opinion, and its attitude towards the government. Certainly, a government if proves deficient in obtaining general support, the regime loses its legitimacy and authority, which will create a crisis on an enduring basis. According to Beetham (1991), legitimacy denotes a government's capacity to get adequate support, command or authority to rule a state. Diamond (2008) asserted that legitimacy points to the moral title possessed by the state to rule. To sum up, a legitimacy crisis refers to an issue that indicates a tussle between the government and the masses as a result of the inability of a regime to get desired public support. It was argued by Pye (1971) that the demonstration of a legitimacy crisis indicates an open conflict between the government and the public. In other words, the government is deficient in governance in the capacity of a regime. By advancing his arguments, Pye (1971) established that a

legitimacy crisis occurs due to ideological differences, and rivalry between different political parties or pressure groups that force political instability. Przeworski (1986) vetted the major arguments given by Pye about legitimacy, that losses regarding legitimacy are caused by mass unrest as well as mass non-conformity. Huntington (1991) raised an alternative perception and argued that identity politics and subsequent legitimacy crises might cause democratic declines thereby weakening the democratic values as well as political institutions. The trans-border movement of the mainlander population of China and Hong Kong within the first decade of the handover gave rise to a conflict of identity and cultural clash between Hong Kong's locals and mainlanders from China. The locals (six million) were outnumbered by Chinese visitors who “damaged” public facilities as well as the welfare system, and affected daily necessities negatively (Chan, 2014).

**Figure 1** The Relationship between Identity Politics, Legitimacy Crisis and Cultural Clash





### ***2.3. Hongkongers – Aftermath of Handover***

Among the ethnic Chinese residents of Hong Kong who settled prior to 1949, a majority identified with their Chinese heritage. Their migration to Hong Kong was often driven by factors such as wartime displacements or political persecution in mainland China. For them, Hong Kong is not a homeland but a temporary living land. “They had little loyalty to Hong Kong,” said Alexander Grantham (2012), a British colonial administrator who governed Hong Kong. However, many of the Hong Kong people born after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China have a weak sense of identity as Chinese. Their parents might be dissidents, or citizens of the Republic of China, who might not be in favor of the People’s Republic of China ruled by the Communist Party. Also, only 94% of the Hong Kong people are ethnically Chinese. Many people from other countries also have the permanent identity of Hong Kong, which means they have the right to vote, and they are legally Hongkongers (Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR, 2012).

*Below the Lion Rock* (獅子山下) stands as an emblematic television series in Hong Kong’s broadcasting history, premiering in 1972 with five subsequent broadcasts. The series not only depicted the tribulations of Hong Kong’s working class but also popularized the term “Lion Rock Spirit”. This ethos, which emphasizes perseverance, collaboration, and communal authorship of the “Hong Kong Story”, has been assimilated into the core values of many Hong Kong residents. Despite their technical designation as citizens of the United Kingdom, this shared cultural narrative fostered a burgeoning sense of identity as “Hongkongers”. The Governor of Hong Kong was appointed by the Queen or King of the United Kingdom until 1997, which means that the Hong Kong people never had the right to vote for their political leader. However, the Hong Kong government got administrative and financial

autonomy after the Second World War. In addition, Hong Kong has entered international organizations with an independent status and established trading relationships across the world. As Wu (2016) pointed out, Hong Kong used to have independent systems of laws and civil service, and the government could make social and economic policies on its own.

While transferring sovereignty in 1997, Hong Kong was populated by 6.5 million with an economy having a size of 1/5 that of the Chinese economy inhabited by 1.2 billion. But the case is no longer this. In the last two decades, the economy of Hong Kong has gone into stagnancy, with no change in outlook, gross domestic product (GDP) growth retarded, giving way to inequality. Meanwhile, China has ascended to economic might while the Hong Kong economy has shrunk to 3%.

Historically, it would be unreasonable to presume that the political and economic systems of Hong Kong could operate entirely devoid of intervention from the Chinese central authority. However, given China's trajectory towards global prominence, the central government might seek tighter control over the autonomous region. The resistance has heightened the central government's vigilance, as it cannot afford to have an uncontrollable city within its jurisdiction. To further enhance the control, various mechanisms were employed, including the provision of loans, acquisitions of publishing entities, and the suppression of content deemed critical of the Communist Party. Notably, the strategic endeavors extended to bolstering pro-Beijing lobbying activities and enacting laws and regulations, such as the National Security Law in Hong Kong. A particularly contentious instance was the proposal of the extradition bill, which stipulated the extradition of criminal suspects to mainland China. This proposition instigated profound apprehension among Hong Kong residents due to concerns about potential exposure to inequitable trials and undue harshness. There existed a prevailing

sentiment that such legislations, if enforced, could be weaponized against political adversaries, civil activists, and journalists.

In recent years, there has been palpable tension between protestors and law enforcement agencies. On the other hand, the central government was celebrating its 70 years of rule in China underscoring its enduring authority and stability. A pivotal moment in this backdrop was the 2019 District Council Election where democrats achieved a resounding victory, securing 17 of the 18 District Councils. It is clear that the government is facing a legitimacy crisis.

To summarize, Hong Kong used to be an “independent city” under the rule of the United Kingdom, while its new generation knows little about mainland China. The previous economic success achieved by Hongkongers made them culturally confident and lacking in this vein has given fertile ground for localism. “Localism” has been used to redefine the political landscape, cultural practices, as well as identity politics of Hong Kong. The term implied the unparalleled repositioning of the political dichotomy extended over decades amid the camps of “pro-establishment” and “democrats” in Hong Kong as a result of which a distinct category of “localists” came into being. In the wake of the fluidity of their organization and the existence of internal ideological rivalry, after the Legislative Council elections in 2016, members were steered towards localist discourses as per their political affiliations winning 8/70 seats in the law-making constituency (Kaeding, 2017). Moreover, the rise of localists promptly resulted in creating scholarly dialogues in Hong Kong encompassing areas such as China–HK bondage, the escalation of nationalism, the identity quest, and the advent of social activism. This context led to developing an ideological base to build up a collective action among Hong Kong localists to counter the “hegemonic shadow” of the Beijing government on the city through social confrontation.

According to So (2015), the renaissance of Hong Kong identity is due to the intervention made by China in sabotaging the process of democratization of Hong Kong and damaging civil liberties creating socio-economic mayhem in the city. Some researchers have conceptualized a central–marginal framework theorizing the uprising of localists in Hong Kong and linked it with ideological and shared response to state-sponsored nationalism by China (Fong, 2017b). A strategy boosted by rigid “Communist China” based on political activism to govern the regime in Hong Kong was noticed (Chan, 2017). Thus, localism in Hong Kong, to some extent, reflects “anti-China” implications, and caused political and excursive breaches in Sino-HK relations. Therefore, the exogenous significance of the China factor that exists behind the rise of localism in Hong Kong demands a pedagogical debate on the endogenic impetus that triggered localism in Hong Kong. Furthermore, it seeks to look out for the forces that drive Hong Kong localism besides the China factor.

Discourses leading to the rise of localism after deteriorating the bond between Hongkongers and mainlanders in current times helped to reshape the party-political ambitions and socio-cultural cognitive process of Hongkongers. These factors were identified as important variables behind the rise of localism in Hong Kong. Apart from this reality, localism delivers a pluralist as well as an alternative vision that is in contradiction to globalism as well as neo-liberalist implications. It contradicts nationalism and points to national pride in terms of centralized state power as a replacement for shielding the liberties and people’s freedom (Moore, 2014). The digressive development of localism in Hong Kong finds its basis in the diversity of ideological orientations coming out of the footmark of the China factor.

The first is linked with the association of Chinese nationalism with Hong Kong identity, including the uncertainty of dialogue amongst the national and local levels of Hongkongers. The second relates to the rise of nationalism among Hongkongers since the city attained the 20th anniversary of handover (Fong, 2017b). The presence of the China factor behind localism triggered local identity later in the post-colonial period coming out of its hybridized nature of identities, in which Hongkongers were able to carry a culturally distinct identity (Fung, 2007).

The intricate interplay between Chinese and Hong Kong identities has precipitated the emergence of Hong Kong nationalism, particularly in the face of increasing tensions between the city and mainland China. Despite the assurances encapsulated in the “One Country, Two Systems” framework, China has begun to exert its influence on the democratization process in Hong Kong. This includes matters of national identity, press autonomy, and economic stakes (Fong, 2017a). Such maneuvers reflect China’s intention to solidify its control over the former British colony, aligning with what it perceives as its sovereign priorities.

### **3. Political Development in Hong Kong**

Dating back to 2011, Occupy Central, an occupation protest, was staged to support the “Occupy Wall Street” movement in Central, Hong Kong, which is the central business district (CBD) of the city. This protest was portrayed by the mainland media as an anti-China protest. Initially, the occupation protest was organized by some left-wing student groups, aiming to oppose the capitalists’ designs which were backed up by the Communist Party of China against the British colonial government. The left-wing pro-democratic parties were involved in the movement. For decades, customary pro-democratic parties (泛民主派) sought

democratic reform in the political system of Hong Kong with the support of the Chinese government. Importantly, most members of pro-democratic parties acknowledged the “One Country, Two Systems” framework. Indeed, public sentiments towards localist campaigns were not that high due to non-interest from pan-democrats; all happened in 2014 during the Umbrella Movement.

People of Hong Kong were losing their trust in Beijing’s policies as Beijing did not show its interest in granting democracy to Hong Kong but rather aimed to control it; this factor created disappointment in the rank and file of Hong Kong society. The drop in trust came up on the horizon: at the time of the Beijing Olympics in the year 2008 when 53.1% of respondents showed their trust in the Beijing administration, while only 14.4% showed distrust, whereas towards the close of 2015, nearly 40% showed distrust, while only 35.2% showed their trust. This disillusionment was compounded by perceptions of the “One Country, Two Systems” policy and emergent resistance strategies. Some quarters placed the blame on the leadership of the pan-democratic parties, leading to a pivot towards “localism” as an alternative approach. However, the evolutionary process of democracy became hampered and could not make headway. Democrats in Hong Kong became a victim of “transitional fatigue”, which commonly emerged in hybrid regimes having a blend of both democratic and authoritarian elements (Ma, 2011).

Against this backdrop, an increased number of people in Hong Kong, mostly youth, were feeling disgruntled with the conduct of pro-democratic parties. This discontentment took them to the localist camp to stand off political intervention of China and in search of a new direction. The transition from the pro-democratic faction has resulted in creating localism, denoting a political movement that had the supreme aim of preserving the identity and autonomy of Hong Kong (Kwong,

2016). The growth of civil society has also contributed to awakening local conscience in Hong Kong. Society is getting away from the prevailing slogan of unitary nationalism as of Chinese and focusing on rebuilding a new identity for Hongkongers. In 2011, Chin Wan (陳雲)'s well-known publication *On the Hong Kong city-state* (香港城邦論) won the Hong Kong Book Prize organized by Radio and Television Hong Kong (RTHK, 2012), which is the symbol of the popularity of localism as an emerging political idea.

In 2014, the Hong Kong University Students' Union published the book *Hong Kong nationalism* (香港民族論), raising the concepts of nationalism in Hong Kong. The publication suggested that the political illusion of the pro-democratic camp was bankrupt. Hence, Hongkongers should affirm their will for sustainable autonomy and set self-determination of the future as the goal of the Hong Kong community (*Undergrad*, 2014).

The social unrest of 2019 in Hong Kong finds its linkage with riots that popped up in the 1960s powered by social unrest caused by impermanence, a sense of deprivation and polarization among the Hong Kong inhabitants (Cheung, 2009). Hong Kong had a young people population of about 3.3 million in 1966, below the age of 21 years (Jones and Vagg, 2017). Social unrest spread in the country when youth had allegiance to communist leftists who took part in the riots of 1967 responding to and supporting the Cultural Revolution in the Chinese mainland (Cheung, 2009; Adorjan and Chui, 2013).

Chinese culture is believed to have strong assimilative ability ethnically found in the Chinese nation (中華民族). Both immigrants and natives are eventually, if not easily, integrated into the Chinese society. Joseph Kitagawa (ed.) (2002) provides interesting examples regarding the cultural assimilation of Chinese. This is not a patent of communist China, since it dates back to thousand years ago. Even in the

1940s, after moving his government to Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek had clear intentions to sinicize the inhabitants of Taiwan who were assimilated by the Japanese under their regime. This includes renaming streets with names of mainland geographical regions, using Mandarin Chinese, forbidding the use of regional languages, growing pan-Chinese nationalism, and building a vision for Taiwan in the light of the Chinese perspective. The motivation behind the policy was to make the current immigrants approaching Taiwan from mainland China show more loyalty to the Republic of China, or the Chiang Kai-shek government, as compared to the previous tendency to remain loyal to their respective cities rather than to China (Morais *et al.*, 2010). The same motivation might lead to the adoption of the sinicization policy by the central government in Hong Kong. In recent years, due to the rising independence movement in Taiwan, some Chinese officials and diplomats also advocated the “reeducation” of Taiwan and the Taiwanese after the “reunification” (*National Review*, 11th August 2022).

The Sinicization attempts sometimes incite desensitization or localization movement (Morais *et al.*, 2010). In the case of Hong Kong, the localization movement reached a climax in 2014. On August 31, 2014, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress made a decision, commonly known as the “831 decision”, that changed the Election Committee into the Nominating Committee. There will be a so-called “universal suffrage”, but the candidates, two to three, must be nominated by the committee. Students led a series of protests against the NPCSC’s decision implemented on 22 September 2014, often called the “Umbrella Revolution”. It was assumed that over 1.2 million people participated in the protests, which were denounced as “illegal” by government officials in Hong Kong and Beijing (CCPOS, 2014).



#### **4. Discussion**

Originally, localism did not find its roots in politics. Starting with saving the Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier from demolition in 2005, the movements took a turn towards the political identity of Hong Kong. Truly, localism has embarked on a political dimension that culminated to differentiate itself from the mainlanders. The Legislative Council (LegCo) of Hong Kong after protests and successive elections provides a mirror image of 70 seats amid pro-government (establishment) and a blend of political integration, pan-democrats and localists (protest leaders). Consequently, localists remained successful in retaining a veto in government-supported legislation. However, despite passing through the electoral process, political conflicts arise. Though both the political camps such as the pan-democratic and localist camps vowed to promote democratic development, their mutual relationship did not reach a feasible end, but rather went into a confrontation with less cooperation. Their focal interests remained in China and Hong Kong respectively. There is another reality: the soft line approach followed by pro-Beijing legislators facilitated localism to grow and rise. Moreover, Hong Kong people had an inherent emotional attachment with a praiseworthy pride towards their identity as a citizen of Hong Kong; this led them to grow into a constructive force instead of following destructive protectionism. However, the transition in demands towards anti-Chinese sentiments raised concerns within the Chinese government, emphasizing their commitment to maintaining a certain "red line".

According to Oxford Analytica (2016), conflicts between mainland and Hong Kong fostered the rise of localism in the polity of Hong Kong. Moreover, the ideology borne by localism signifies an anti-China component for protecting Hongkongers' identity, interests, as well as values. Furthermore, the rise of localism supported the process of democratization in the state though it created challenges as well as

opportunities among the camp of pan-democrats. Hence, the ideology of localism brought an original thought in the political rank and file of the country. On the other hand, the Hong Kong administration, with the support of the central government, has taken a series of actions attempting to eliminate the localism activists. In 2016, five LegCo candidates, all of whom are localists, were disqualified by the Electoral Affairs Commission for advocating or promoting Hong Kong independence. After the election, Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching were sued by the government for their “misconduct” during oath-taking as elected members of LegCo.

Since then, the 6th Legislative Council (2016-2021) of Hong Kong has never met its full membership of 70 members. In fact, more legislators with localist or pro-democratic backgrounds were disqualified later, leading to a mass resignation of pro-democratic legislators. The council was then dominated by the pro-establishment camp. On 27 May 2021, the controversial bill named Improving Electoral System Bill 2021 was passed with a 40-to-2 vote.

Elected in December of 2021, the 7th LegCo is also dominated by the pro-establishment camp. In fact, because of the revised electoral system, not even one legislator is from the pro-democratic or localist camp. To some extent, the opposition parties in the legislative and political institutions have been eliminated. However, the identity issues of Hong Kong people could not be resolved. The localist groups grew with the loss of trust in the HKSAR officials who tended to punish rather than respond, which disappointed its residents. Adorjan and Chui (2013) raised an argument that a penal elitist was primarily concerned with seeking their legitimacy along with promoting citizenship as well as citizen identification with Hong Kong. According to Chris Cunneen (2011), a punishment policy targeted towards Hong Kong society is a kind of tool used as moral censure to finalize the national boundaries and

raise questions on shaping identity, sovereignty, and sense of citizenship for Hong Kong society.

Theoretically speaking, the localist discourse reflected significant implications for understanding the relationship amid the identity politics, legitimacy crisis and cultural clash in Hong Kong. Legitimacy crisis according to the localists, emerged as a result of intervention from the PRC. The localists regarded these interventions as illegal, and under this resentment, many perspectives regarding the governance of HKSAR and the future of Hong Kong popped up.

Proponents of the self-rule of Hong Kong held that Hong Kong has the capacity of self-governance. Therefore, the intervention by the PRC in the affairs of Hong Kong is illegitimate. According to them, the legitimacy crisis is due to the non-existence of democratic institutions and the lack of popular voting. Another perspective on “maximal autonomy” exercised by the PRC in the political development of Hong Kong holds it caused a legitimacy crisis among the public and lost its credibility.

## **5. Conclusion**

The issue in Hong Kong is not to assess who is a loser or gainer as a result of a shift in authority from the United Kingdom to China and change in the policy arena endeavored to be sustainable. Rather, it is about understanding the framing of policies, their sustainability, and the consequences that arise from various policy decisions. While the Chinese central government understands some of the socio-economic underpinnings of the localist discourse, it remains particularly sensitive to any challenges to its sovereignty or the “One Country, Two Systems” principle. It is evident that certain localist movements, especially those advocating for Hong Kong’s independence or self-rule, confront this

principle directly. Moreover, there is a prevailing sentiment in Beijing that some localist demonstrations might be fueled by external entities seeking to destabilize China, and the Chinese government has the ability and willingness to confront the international pressure (Qin *et al.*, 2021).

The China factor has triggered the identity politics and the legitimacy crisis in Hong Kong aggravated by a cultural clash between Hong Kong residents and mainlanders. More significantly, the public discontent amid localists is due to actions of the HKSAR government that ignited the legitimacy crisis, though this can also be viewed in an opposite way. Hong Kong exhibits both forms of localism, i.e., political and cultural localism. Political localism carries the idea that supports deliberative democracies in Hong Kong while cultural localism distinguishes itself from mainland-Chinese-orientated identity and rejects the yoke of Chinese identity in its current form and existing Chinese culture. Nevertheless, localist has been able to express a pluralist and alternate vision against globalism and neo-liberalist implications.

Over time, localist positions have evolved from advocating for Hong Kong nationalism to demanding outright independence, and now to a call for a distinct local identity through reforms. This evolution represents a fresh phase in identity politics during and after the colonial transition. This paper offers a unique analysis of political development in Hong Kong after assuming the HKSAR. To strengthen the “One Country, Two Systems” framework, it is suggested that the central government and the HKSAR might have regular dialogues to ensure clarity and understanding of respective roles and responsibilities, and ensure that economic integration with the Greater Bay Area respects Hong Kong’s unique business environment and practices.

## Note

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