

# **Approaching Hong Kong during the Acceleration of Mainlandization in the COVID-19 Crisis**

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## **Abstract**

There are currently much more clinical and sociological studies related to public health issues than humanities studies to conceptualize the sophisticated evolution or devolution of China after the accidental outbreak of the medical and managerial crisis from Wuhan. Insufficient focuses have been laid on the interrelated political practices that the Chinese government executes when the public prioritized their personal health.

Corresponding to the Chinese leaders' ambitious goal of actualizing "China Dream" and "national rejuvenation" by the mid-twenty first century and after a series of, what they consistently term, "riots" happening in Hong Kong since mid-2019, regional control towards national unity was not disrupted but even intensified during the pandemic. This article is concerned with how local contexts, as a methodological core, help to raise multiple enquiries into the currently accelerated mainlandization of Hong Kong. It proposes that various stakeholders (the Chinese government, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government, and the pro-establishment Hong Kong public) are, no matter consciously or unconsciously, taking advantage of the public health crisis to move forward a progressive implementation of overall jurisdiction in response to the year-long social unrests caused by the controversial extradition law amendment, and that Regional Studies scholars who care about China might reflect on local contextual complicities to generate prospective perspectives.

**Keywords:** mainlandization, pandemic, local context, Hong Kong studies

## Introduction

The academic journal *Regional Studies* states its distinctive purpose as “connect(ing) insights across intellectual disciplines in a systematic and grounded way to understand how and why regions and cities evolve.” (*Regional Studies*, 2020) Concerning China Studies (or, more precisely, Hong Kong Studies as local studies in this paper), what insights and disciplines shall we consult for a particular issue and how to make connections between them? At present, there are much more clinical and sociological studies related to public health issues than humanities studies to conceptualize the sophisticated evolution or devolution of China during the pandemic. Chinese and international scholars had completed researches on the transmission of the coronavirus in mainland China at certain temperature and humidity (Qi, et al., 2020), the spatial dynamic of the COVID-2019 based on information related to population and medical care (Kang, Choi, Kim, & Choi, 2020), the technological responses of hospitals in mainland China to the sudden outbreak (Yan, Zou, & Mirchandani, 2020), and many others, specific enough to even offer suggestions for urgent hemodialysis based on the experiences from Peking Union Medical College Hospital (Chen, et al., 2020). However, perhaps due to the tardiness of non-medical publication, insufficient academic focuses have, by far, been laid on interrelated political practices that the Chinese government executes when the public prioritized their personal health. Similar to the side-tracking strategy that President Donald Trump adopted to dissolve the internal dissent against him (such as shifting the public focus to his diplomatic achievement in North Korea and the Middle East, threats from China, and problems of mass media), Chinese leaders were also dedicated to telling half-truth / unprovable “facts” and distracting their people to maintain stability and security after the accidental outbreak of the medical and managerial crisis from Wuhan. Corresponding to their ambitious goal of actualizing “China Dream” and “national rejuvenation” by the mid-twenty first century, regional control was not disrupted but even intensified in the name of health. Especially after a series of, as what the China and Hong Kong governments consistently term, “riots” happening in Hong Kong since mid-2019, various parties opportunistically took actions in response to the sublime demand for national unity.

This article is concerned with how local contexts (signifying the events related to Hong Kong), as a methodological core, help to raise multiple enquiries into the currently accelerated mainlandization of Hong Kong (referring to “rapid integration, the large influx of Mainlanders, and Beijing’s interventionist approach toward Hong Kong’s affairs since 2003” (Ping & Kwong, 2014: 1095), that can be extended to an anti-democratic methodology in avoidance of disparity. It proposes that diverse stakeholders are taking advantage of a public health crisis to move forward an aggressive implementation of overall jurisdiction in response to the year-long social unrests caused by the controversial extradition law amendment (and also to the Greater Bay blueprint, which is not a focus of this paper). *Regional Studies* scholars who care about China might reflect on relevant contextual complicities to generate

prospective perspectives.

### From the Central to the Local

First of all, one shall speculate on the secretive operation of the Chinese government, which normally delivers positive speeches to validate central decisions. Concerning Hong Kong affairs, the Third Bureau of the United Front Work Department is playing a significant role. By Lyman Van Slyke's illustration, the united front originally exercises "one form of expression of its patriotism by asserting that the united front includes all patriotic Chinese; and by insisting that the Party leads the united front, it equates support of the Party with nationalism." (Lyman, 1967: 3-6). Currently, it reports directly to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and takes charge of coordinating various parties to keep Hong Kong on the track of the central government's political agenda. Reminiscent of the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States and the Secret Intelligence Service of the United Kingdom, the Department holds a confrontative function to extirpate anti-CPC power especially within the Greater China regions. It confidentially connects the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO), the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government, the Hong Kong police, the pro-establishment camp, local entrepreneurs, pro-China media, and so on for collaborative actions towards a patriotic, one-China, homogenous, and harmonious ideology, and against democratic voices at precise moments. Besides its elementary support to the legitimacy of the CPC through organizing an expanding non-Party social forces for the CPC's proclamation of its representation of the majority of the Chinese people, (Wang & Groot, 2018: 569) the United Front Work Department practically takes actions to intervene into social incidents, not limited to the level of propaganda. For instance, in their study of the 2004 Legislative Council Elections in Hong Kong, Sonny Lo, Yu Wing Yat, Kwong Kam Kwan, and Wong Wai Kwok attribute the successful prevention of "the pan-democratic camp from capturing half of the seats in the crucial Legislative Council" to the economic and patriotic measures that the United Front Work implemented top-down from the central government to Hong Kong locals. (Lo, Yat, Kwan, & Kwok, 2005: 25-26). This implementation alleviated the governing crisis of the Tung Chee Hwa regime, "which has been plagued by poor leadership and weak crisis management." As a common sense in Hong Kong, the pro-establishment camp obtained funding from pro-CPC stakeholders to annually offer *se zaai beng zung* (the Cantonese phrase to signify snake feast, vegetarian feasts, moon cakes, and rice dumplings, which is, in Jeffie Lam's term, "a mocking reference to handing out sweeteners" [Lam, 2020: 274]) during traditional Chinese festivals to the poor and the elderly in exchange for their votes for two major elections in Hong Kong (the Legislative Elections and the District Council Elections). Underneath this commonly known unofficial approach, there are much more sophisticated strategies that the Department deployed to maintain the authoritative tie between the CPC bureaucracy and the Hong Kong government.

After handover in 1997, the Chinese government kept a large degree of silence until Xi Jinping's regime. Starting from the 500,000 join historic march against proposed codification of Hong Kong Basic Law Article 23 on 1 July 2003, pro-democratic activities have not ceased. Politically, there were controversies over the promised universal suffrage concerning the elections of Chief Executive and Legislative Council seats (since 2003), five constituencies' resignation and by-election (2010), the Umbrella Movement (2014), imprisonment of Hong Kong democracy activists (2017), and disqualification of six already-elected Legislative Council members due to their pro-independence stance (2017). In the public scenarios, localists had organized the campaign for conservation of Queen's Pier (2007), the recovery of Shang Shui from the activities of mainland parallel traders (2012), and so on. All these endangered the authority of the Chinese government, which endorses the power of the Hong Kong government. Towards the highly pro-democratic Hong Kong citizens,<sup>1</sup> the Chinese government encountered a dilemma of either increasing populist power through practicing universal suffrage or empowering one country over two system. It then passed the Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Issues Relating to the Selection of the Chief Executive of the HKSAR by Universal Suffrage and on the Method for Forming the Legislative Council of the HKSAR in the Year 2016.<sup>2</sup> This proposal for a gradual achievement of universal suffrage failed to satisfy the local parties and civilians who asked for "real universal suffrage" and was even deemed the CPC's conspiracy of intervening into Hong Kong politics.

Witnessing how Carrie Lam, serving as the fourth and current Chief Executive of Hong Kong since 2017, mistreated the legislation of the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019, and even led to a record-breaking strike of 2 million people, the United Front Work Department increasingly manipulated its apparatuses, including governmental institutions, media, and pro-establishment parties, to validate official discourses and the actions of the Hong Kong police (even those that violated formal regulations) and to stigmatize opponents, especially the radical ones. As an organization conscious of the use of words and the moments of actions, the Department precisely utilized the pandemic to tighten the CPC's control over Hong Kong citizens.

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1 Corresponding to the intensely political circumstance, a research shows that 85% of Hong Kong interviewees agree that Hong Kong people are best described as "fight for democracy," "uphold honesty and prevent corruption," "fight for freedom," and "fight for equality." (Low, Busiol, & Lee, 2016: 425)

2 The Decision states that when the selection of the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is implemented by the method of universal suffrage:

(1) A broadly representative nominating committee shall be formed. The provisions for the number of members, composition and formation method of the nominating committee shall be made in accordance with the number of members, composition and formation method of the Election Committee for the Fourth Chief Executive.

(2) The nominating committee shall nominate two to three candidates for the office of Chief Executive in accordance with democratic procedures. Each candidate must have the endorsement of more than half of all the members of the nominating committee.

(3) All eligible electors of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region have the right to vote in the election of the Chief Executive and elect one of the candidates for the office of Chief Executive in accordance with law.

(4) The Chief Executive-elect, after being selected through universal suffrage, will have to be appointed by the Central People's Government. (Legislative Council, 2017: 4)

While the Hong Kong government was banning gatherings of more than four people, on 21st April, 2020, the HKMAO used strong words to comment on the independently operated legislature of Hong Kong, especially singling out Dennis Kwok, Legal sector lawmaker, for “paralysing” the Legislative Council with “malicious” filibustering. (Wong, Cheung, & Sum, 17th April, 2020) This high-profile intervention prepared legitimacy for passing a tailor-made security law for Hong Kong (to prevent, stop and punish acts in Hong Kong related to subversion, secession, terrorism and foreign interference) at the National People’s Congress on 27th May, 2020. Constitutionally violating the Basic Law, which authorizes the Hong Kong government, not the Beijing, to advance Article 23, the new law deserves our attention to not simply the width and depth of its harm to the “one country two systems” operation of Hong Kong, but also how discursive politics overrides legal autonomy, public willingness and professional opinions. Furthermore, the top-down manipulation and secretive communication oriented by the Central Committee are still mostly under suspicion. For those interested in Chinese politics, there is necessity to reflect on whether it is possible to construct a less speculative model to schematize the execution of the united front work concerning the opportunistic actions during the pandemic and beyond. As Edmund W. Cheng’s systematic research on the united front work reveals, on the one hand, “historical legacies and new forms of patronage have provided the PRC’s apparatus in Hong Kong with patriotic allies, abundant resources, and discursive tools to implement its agenda and to monitor its allies and agents;” and on the other, the Hong Kong regime oriented by the united front work has been manipulating “legal institutions, modern bureaucracy, civil society organizations, and social media [...] to justify coercion, to avoid accountability, or to amplify contention between people.” (Cheng 2020: 32). The superficial representation of local politics could help trace back to the historical trajectory of the CPC regime’s formulation of stabilizing strategies and even forecast its hidden tendency. However, the concrete collaboration and affiliation of the CPC’s institutions remain mysterious. Except endlessly waiting for the government becoming more transparent to the public, it seems more possible to organize and unveil diverse internal linkages between various parties and individuals to draw a big picture about the efficient coordination toward the somehow ambiguously imagined mainland, and, as a very bold suggestion, to further propose a reverse practice through the United Front Work Department to prompt democratization.

### **The Hong Kong SAR government’s reciprocation**

The 12th June 2019 Hong Kong protest ended with tear gas, rubber bullets and bean bag rounds changed not the Chief Executive’s decision of modifying the controversial extradition law, but the yellow-ribbon (pro-democratic) public’s mind to recognize the uselessness of peaceful actions. The 2019 Yuen Long attack on 21st July and the Prince Edward station attack on 31st August furthered a disbelief in the righteousness of the police, regarded as colluding with the administrative side of the

government, the aboriginal power of the New Territories, and triad organizations, and resulted in mass destruction of MTR stations, shops with a pro-government stance (such as Maxim's), shopping malls (such as Festival Walk), public facilities (especially traffic lights), banks (including HSBC and Chinese banks), most of the universities, and so on. The government had attempted to practice the Prohibition on Face Covering Regulation but failed to stop the unceasing valiant reactions to the government's repressive and structural violence.

Without the central government's participation in Hong Kong politics and the concession of pro-democratic parties which are regarded as selling benefits to mainland China or Western countries, the cultural differences between Hong Kong and mainland China are supposed to be unlikely significant enough to hinder the progress of mainlandization. At least as scholars could observe, before mid-2019, urban art images, such as street art and contemporary graffiti, are varying towards an ongoing cultural mainlandization of the urban space regulated by the People's Republic of China (Valjakka, 2015), and the giant market of China has caused the formation and popularity of "post-Hong Kong cinema" – predominantly coproduced films with distinctly Sinicized guise that might efface Hong Kong aesthetic traditions (Bettinson, 2020). However, whenever social discontent and anxiety about abrupt assimilation to mainland China were triggered by the aggressive agendas initiated by the government, the Hong Kong public would become conscious about their local identity and tend to confront with, what they deem, the colonial others through creative representation with a strong sense of dichotomy. As Sebastian Veg's research (2016: 691) on the creation of textual public space during the Umbrella Movement reveals, "participants repeatedly expressed a strong commitment to creating spaces for deliberation and making decisions by consensus." This strong commitment was boosted to historical high after the Hong Kong government, led by Carrie Lam allegedly under the direction of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government, represents an apathic and even antagonistic attitude to its opponents after the 12th June 2019 Hong Kong protest (at least as what they perceive from the live scenes of demonstration, press conferences, and other practical and discursive responses to protesters). The yellow-ribbon soon developed a Lennon Wall culture to disseminate public demands through collectively built and shared spectacles. In response, the government and pro-government stakeholders jointly attempted to eradicate all these widespread images, which are visually more powerful than those displayed during the Umbrella Movement limited to small occupied areas. Concurrently, opponents created anthems (such as "Glory to Hong Kong"), representative icons (such as LIHKG Pig and LIHKG Dog), slogans (such as "Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our times"), business models (such as the operation of Yellow Economic Circle), propaganda strategies, and funding systems, diversifying their resistance to the rigidly obedient government and increasing their personal belonging to a free Hong Kong. These complicate the solution to a plight dominated by the anti-mainlandization majority, which had granted a great triumph to pro-democratic candidates at the



District Council Elections.<sup>3</sup>

The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, despite further eliminating the Hong Kong public's trust in the Chinese government, offered the Hong Kong government a turning point to overwhelm its opponents through repressive state apparatuses. Under the umbrella of the scary coronavirus (especially due to the SARS experience in 2003) and the crowd control hence enforced (limiting the gathering size to a group of four), the Hong Kong government promptly took a series of actions to pacify the public up to the central government's standard. On 18th April, 2020, the police arrested barrister Martin Lee Chu-ming, media tycoon Jimmy Lai Chee-ying and 13 other supporters of the opposition camp. On 15th May, 2020, the Independent Police Complaints Council published an unpersuasive report in place of a truly independent one that most of the public request, and, on the same day, the first protester to plead guilty to the charge of rioting was sentenced to four years of imprisonment. On 22nd May, 2020, Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority cancelled a controversial question about whether Japan did more good than harm to China in the period 1900-1945, in response to the criticism from the Chief Executive, the Secretary for Education and the official state-run presses, despite opposition of 97% interviewed History teachers (RTHK, 21th May 2020). This kind of actions, identified by the yellow camp as deliberate and opportunistic, is continuing. For instance, after I completed the first draft of this paper, on 31 July 2020, Carrie Lam, with legitimacy authorized by the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, utilized the resurgence of coronavirus cases to postpone the Legislative Council election from September 2020 to September 2021. Her decision frustrated the pro-democracy candidates who were supposed to win a majority of the Council seats, and finally led to all democrats' resignation after Lam's request for disqualifying four lawmakers.

When there were some voices expecting beneficial measures to alleviate social tensions, such as "progressing universal suffrage" which expressed by Anthony Cheung Bing-leung in an interview published by Hong Kong Economic Journal, 26 June, 2020 (Wong, 2020), the administrative side of the Hong Kong government was dedicated to promoting the validity of the National Security Law, and the police seemed to correspondingly cast a "deterrent effect" on the organizers and supporters of the 2020 Hong Kong pro-democracy primaries through a series of actions, such as accusing the Public Opinion Research Institute office of dishonest use of a computer. The issues of the promised political reform and social unfairness, such as housing, which the official media of mainland China stereotypically regarded as a core cause of the Hong Kong "riots," are still out of agendas. The Hong Kong government appears to be duplicating the side-tracking strategy that the mainland adopts to avoid direct conflicts with the public, neglecting the potential of utilizing the Beijing's authority to execute compulsory measures, such as calling back the lands from the New Territories landlords for increasing housing supplies, in order to compensate for the reduced freedom of speech and gathering.

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3 As South China Morning Post reports, "Among the 452 seats up for grabs, the pan-democrats were victorious in 347, the independents – many of them pro-democracy – won 45, while the pro-establishment camp had to make do with 60. The pro-democracy camp now has control of 17 out of 18 district councils. It won all elected seats in Wong Tai Sin and Tai Po district councils." (Lam, Sum, & Ng, 2019)



From all these coincidences, we shall heuristically examine the contrast between the slow response of the Hong Kong government to the COVID-19 crisis (such as blocking immigration) and its quick, rigid, precise and suppressive decisions made to control mass behaviours and speech. Its political mysophobia had effectively turned down professional arguments, reminiscent of Dr. Li Wanliang being reprimanded for warning about the new virus. One shall constantly illuminate relevant political rhetoric, side-tracking strategy, bureaucratic culture and social phenomena to unveil how Hong Kong ideology under internal institutional pressure turns to be Chinese socialistic despite dissensus and resistance.

### From the bottom: the non-populist public

According to Lukasz Zamecki's observation of the Chinese government's attempt to achieve mainlandization (restricted by the one country, two systems principle), there are four direct and formal instruments: 1) "using the already mentioned interpretations of the Basic Law by the Standing Committee of the [National People's Congress];" 2) "regulating the influx of mainlanders into Hong Kong on the basis of a two-way permit (a part of that is the Individual Visit Scheme) or a one-way Permit (settlements of up to 150 mainlanders in Hong Kong per day);" 3) "funding investments in Hong Kong;" 4) "asserting control over important decision-makers."<sup>4</sup> (Zamecki, 2020: 232) The second and third instruments (together with the unmentioned education policy that attracts recruitment of mainland students for raising university ranking and capitals) attracted the influx of Chinese immigrants, who bring into Hong Kong another life culture and ideological convention. These new Hongkongers, despite not necessarily patriotic, mostly hold a pro-government stance (Wong, Ma, & Lam, 2016: 909).<sup>5</sup> They, together with the older generation of Hong Kong locals and immigrants, policemen and their relatives, and those with vested interests manipulated by governmental institutions, chiefly compose the blue-ribbon camp, opposite the yellow-ribbon one. As also the residents with Hong Kong identity cards, the blue-ribbon believers take counteractions to support the Hong Kong and Chinese governments with a wish for the return of social security and stability. They establish and sustain new pro-government media, such as Silent Majority and Speak Out Hong Kong, and form supportive organizations, such as Hong Kong Coalition, Defend Hong Kong Campaign, Politikh Social Strategic, Caring Hong Kong Power, and

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4 Zamecki further categorizes the decision-makers into five groups with illustration: "[Hong Kong Special Administration Region] executive (through controlling the process of nomination of the Chief Executive)," "political parties (so-called Pro-Beijing parties, such as [Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong]," "civil society organizations (trade unions, local organizations; non-official CCP members in Hong Kong)," and "industrial and service tycoons (due to the fact that most of the big businessmen are also entrepreneurs in mainland China, they do not want to act against the CCP)." (232)

5 As summarized in their journal paper, Stan Hok-Wui Wong, Ngok Ma, and Wai-man Lam state that "immigrants can serve as staunch support of the conservative incumbents of a regime, due to a self-selection effect; immigrants are more likely to accept the political status quo and be less sympathetic to the opposition who might demand progressive changes. [...] Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong are more pro-establishment and supportive of pro-government parties." (909)

Hong Kong Youth Care Association Limited. All these media and organizations criticize against anti-governmental opinions and safeguard the public validity of the Hong Kong government regardless of its generally condemned performance, such as the failure in guaranteeing the supplies of surgical masks (Cheung & Wong, 1st April 2020).<sup>6</sup>

Since 1997, there had been increasing sociological studies to investigate into the discrimination, depression, and adaptation related to new immigrants (such as International Social Service of Hong Kong, 1997; Chou, 2011; Ng, Lee, Wong, & Chou, 2015; Tu, 2018); however, there shall be a paradigmatic shift to reversely study in the discrimination, depression, adaptation that locally born Hongkongers encountered in a hybrid culture increasingly dominated by Chinese comers. As a private observation, I went to a Sichuan-style restaurant in Hung Hom and a waitress solely spoke to me in Mandarin despite my insistence on using Cantonese. This experience, which I have never had in Hong Kong for over thirty years, reveals the Chinese immigrants' Sinocentric confidence in tuning Hong Kong customs in accordance with those of mainland metropolises. This kind of eradication of the Cantonese culture has profoundly modified the anthropological scenes of Guangzhou, and Chairman Xi's prompt propagation of nationalism is granting the public standardized assurance to detect and remove differences, not only in Hong Kong, but also the rest of the world that Chinese people can reach.

Upon the patriotic discourse that connects the mainland public, individual commercial decisions backed up by Chinese funding further gave new immigrants a sense of belonging to their motherland, instead of a disobedient part of the motherland. During the pandemic, the economies of China and Hong Kong were both damaged. However, in order to maintain security and harmony, and strengthen its control over Hong Kong, the Chinese government instructed Chinese enterprises to increase investment in Hong Kong. On 15th May, 2020, Realord Group Holdings Limited and Viva China respectively took over Sincere and Bossini, two uniquely Hong Kong enterprises financially affected by the social movements and the pandemic. Besides, during some critical moments, such as the legislation of the National Security Law, Chinese firms follow the command from Beijing to guarantee the stability of the Hong Kong stock market (as the Hang Seng Index could be interpreted as reflecting the level of anxiety of the public).<sup>7</sup> This incorporation of the Hong Kong free market with planned-economy operation not only generates monetary incentives for the aboriginal upper classes, but also gradually reforms the local hegemonic culture towards the socialistic other.

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6 As reported by South China Morning Post, "Out of nearly 850 people polled, seven in 10 said they would credit the community response for beating the coronavirus, while more than half objected to the idea of Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor's administration being commended for it. [...] Analysts and medical experts said the study indicated most Hongkongers, many of whom lived through the severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) crisis of 2003, were deeply upset by the government's epidemic response, and that the onus was now on officials to better address their concerns."

7 As Richard Frost reports on 6 July, 2020, "Hong Kong's rallying stock market is defying predictions of the death of the city in the wake of a new security law. The Hang Seng Index jumped 7.8% in the three days after the law was imposed on July 1, its biggest rally since April 2015, and entered a bull market on Monday. The advance was led by mainland Chinese firms listed locally, with Geely Automobile Holdings Ltd. and China Life Insurance Co. jumping more than 29%."

## Reflection

Underneath the multifaceted stress originated from the central will to extirpate local dissensus, changes are not simply a result of competition for legitimacy and public acceptance. These involve subtle utilization of eventual opportunities, such as the uncontrolled spread of coronavirus, and also long-term deployment. Besides the united front works that emerged long before the handover in 1997, demographic policies are worth further examination.

Current researches on migrants always surround the issues of personal adaptation, identity, welfare equality, and governmental finance; moreover, from a perspective of reinforcing national unity, immigration holds a slow, steady, procedural, and continuous function to holistically metabolize a social structure. While 150 mainland China-born people are issued with a People's Republic of China Permit to come to Hong Kong every day, how shall we observe the incremental mainlandization of Hong Kong? How to enquire into the merge of older-generation and newer-generation Hongkongers (from polarized background, commonly either impoverished grassroots coming through family connections or social elites affiliated with the mainland rich, intellectual and powerful) with different belonging and recognition? Furthermore, after a series of policy changes in favor of mainlandization during the pandemic, how to redefine Hong Kong and what will be new meanings of "one country, two systems," "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong," "a high degree of autonomy," "remaining unchanged for 50 years," and so on? Is there any effective approach that the general public can adopt to negotiate with an increasingly authoritarian government? Perhaps, all these can be extended to predict and strategize for the future of those regions related to the Belt and Road Initiative, which may encounter dilemmas if the initiator obtains an opportunity. 2020 is a year of publication related to Belt and Road Initiative with titles such as Jeremy Garlick's *The Impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative: from Asia to Europe*, Chan Eve Man Hun's *Belt and Road Initiative – Collaboration for Success*, S. Mahmud Ali's *China's Belt and Road Vision: Geoeconomics and Geopolitics*, Richard W. T. Pomfret's *China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Eurasian Landbridge, and the New Mega-regionalism*, Xinchun Rong's *Belt and Road Initiative: Interregional Cooperation between Asia and Europe*, Christian Ploberger's *Political Economic Perspectives of China's Belt and Road Initiative: Reshaping Regional Integration*, etc. Studying the expanding influence of China in the globe is definitely not a simple issue of its success or failure. Local responses in the process of power bargaining shall be given more emphasis as the locals have been gradually subordinated and marginalized. Hong Kong, as the closest counterpart of China, is a significant case to study, and other cases shall take this as a contextual reference.

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