This paper argues that the relative strength of local identities explains the readiness of the people in the two Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of Hong Kong and Macao in embracing the state-defined national identity. The national identities in the two SARs were shaped towards different directions. The local identity of Hong Kong has been converging with the national one. In Macao, a distinctive identity centred on the city’s cultural heritages is fostered.

THIS PAPER COMPARES the building of national identity in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao, and argues that the success of building a state-defined national identity in the two SARs is contingent on the strength of local identities as much as political elites’ intentional efforts. The strength of local identities is affected by colonial
education and mass media. In the post-colonial era, the national identities in the two SARs have been shaped in different ways although they come under the rule of the same sovereign state. Due to both the efforts of political leaders and pragmatic considerations of the people-in-the-street, the identity of the new sovereignty has become more receptive among the Hong Kong Chinese communities. In Macao, a local identity revolving around the cultural and historical heritage has been emerging out of the government’s economic rationality in promoting the city’s cultural tourism.

**Formation of Hong Kong and Macao Identities**

National identity is a sense of common history and culture shared by the communities within the boundary of a nation. It is able to strengthen territorial integration and maintain social stability—fundamental conditions for any modern government to augment the capacity of their governance, promote national economic development and improve the welfare of the public. In the period shortly after World War II, many former colonies gained independence. Building national identity was an urgent task for these newly independent countries which required a common national identity to consolidate the societies divided along the lines of ethnicity, religion and language.

The content and strength of national identity are affected by education curricula and mass media. By influencing education and mass media, the authorities may affect what people know, believe and treasure. During the colonial era, the education system and mass media of Hong Kong and Macao were unfavourable for inculcating a sense of belonging to China. In the 1950s, pro-Beijing schools in the two colonies perpetuated Chinese nationalistic sentiments. Out of the Cold War mentality and fear of communism, the Hong Kong government closed down some of these schools, and imbued students with a market-driven ideology. The utilitarian aspect of education was emphasised by adapting the British education system to the local system. English teaching was promoted. Students studying in schools with English as the instruction medium had an edge when furthering studies in both local and overseas higher institutes, as well as in future career advancement. Besides, the school curricula were de-politicised. The modified British education system was intended to develop a productive labour force rather than to promote the understanding and appreciation of culture, history and politics. Textbooks had to be based on model syllabi and could not be published without official approval. Chinese history subject excluded much of modern day China; the content had little relevance to contemporary Chinese politics and Hong Kong. Therefore the education syllabi did not create among Chinese students a consciousness of a shared past. Discussion on politics and display of flags and symbols with political nature in schools without the approval of the Director of Education were prohibited until the countdown to the handover to China in 1997.

In the early 1980s, the authorities had to prepare for the handover of sovereignty and phase in a more democratic political system. Political education became more relevant. Nevertheless, many school administrators and teachers who were educated in the old curriculum were therefore reluctant to teach politically controversial issues.

Education in Macao was also de-politicised but for different reasons. Unlike the
Hong Kong government which tightly controlled the school curriculum, the Macao government adopted a laissez-faire approach. Different schools were allowed to design their own history curriculum and discuss political and ideological issues. As the most popular destinations for the students to pursue higher education were China, Taiwan, Portugal and the territories adopting British education system (that is, UK and once Hong Kong), the education systems and curriculum of these territories co-existed in Macao. The political ideologies behind the diverse curriculum, if any, cancelled out each other and had limited impact on nurturing the identity of the students.

In regards to the role of mass media in identity building, films are useful for framing the histories, stories and national or regional distinction of a community and shaping the community’s identity. Hong Kong is at the centre of distinct film traditions; Hong Kong people’s identities are strongly connected with a cinematic impression, describing Hong Kong people as being efficient, smart and able to make a fortune.

The impact of the mass media on the two cities was different. While the mass media contributed to the rise of Hong Kong local identity, Macao did not undergo the same transformation. Macao films were almost absent and were narrowly restrictive within the small art scene. Macao people viewed Hong Kong television programmes very often, if not more often than local TV programmes. The collective image presented by media was primarily Hong Kong image and Hong Kong’s way of interpreting the world; local films and TV programmes could create a solid identity for Macao.

The emergence of Hong Kong identity was partially attributed to the rapid economic growth between the end of the 1960s and the turn of the 20th century and the competence of the people to stand out in the global economy. The success of the casino-based economy in Macao, however, fails to bring a sense of pride and cultivate a local identity. The lack of pride in the economic success is partly due to the fact that the lopsided economic growth has benefitted only a small number of people and bred corruption in the public sector. Apparently, market-driven value which is useful for explaining the emergence of Hong Kong identity and the reluctance of some Hong Kong people in taking on the Chinese national identity after the handover of sovereignty is of little use to understanding Macao people’s mentality towards their identity. Without a powerful sense of strong local identity, Macao people are believed to be more ready to accept the state-defined Chinese national identity than their Hong Kong counterparts.
although there is no doubt that, as discussed later, Hong Kong people have become more and more identified with China (Tables 1 and 2).

**Building National Identities in the Post-Colonial Era: Measures and Challenges**

Having reviewed the history of state formation in Europe, Rokkan argued that the strength of territorial centres built up on economic/ technological resources and cultural/ religious heritages is negatively related to the ease of state formation and national integration. Strong territorial centres tend to resist the encroachment of state power. Hong Kong is a strong territorial centre. Economically, it has long eclipsed the neighbouring regions as a regional hub of trade and communication, as well as a magnet of foreign direct investment and talents. The distinctive political, social and legal cultures fostered by strong territorial status, in turn, strained China-Hong Kong relations.

Beijing was often worried about keeping Hong Kong in the orbit of its control. In face of the assistance to the Chinese student leaders in the student movement in 1989 and the triumph of democracy camp and defeat of pro-Beijing force in the elections of Legislative Council, municipal councils, and district councils (or district boards before the handover), building of a national identity defined by the Chinese authorities was deemed urgent. Soon after the handover of sovereignty, the then Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa repeatedly called for more emphasis on national education to cultivate a

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**TABLE 1  IDENTIFICATION WITH CHINA AND MACAO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Proud to be Chinese</th>
<th>Proud to be Macao people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**TABLE 2  HONG KONG PEOPLE’S SELF-DECLARED IDENTITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>“I am a Hong Konger”</th>
<th>“I am a Chinese”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1997</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2002</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2007</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: “You Would Identify Yourself as a Hong Kong Citizen/ Chinese Citizen/ Hong Kong Chinese Citizen/ Chinese Hong Kong Citizen: (Per Poll)”, HKU POP Site, http://hkupop.hku.hk/*
sense of belonging to Chinese history and culture. Schools were required to teach students national anthem and raise national flag to cultivate allegiance to China on the part of students. Government subsidies were offered to schools and non-governmental organisations to organise China exchange tours. Independent civic education subject was introduced to step up teaching of Chinese history and culture.

The curricula of history-related subjects were also revised to increase the components on contemporary China and China-Hong Kong relationship, and to strengthen students’ conception that Hong Kong was dependent on China. The new junior syllabus of local history highlighted China’s contribution to Hong Kong’s development and Hong Kong’s transition to become a part of China. Hong Kong’s success was the result of China’s benevolence, like supplies of cheap food and fresh water, capital and entrepreneurship from China after 1949. In contrast, Hong Kong’s contribution to China’s modernisation was not mentioned.

In Macao, the SAR government has held or subsidised societal association to hold celebrations for National Day and Macao SAR Establishment Day, and activities condemning “secessionist movements” in Tibet and Taiwan. To produce teaching and reading materials, Education and Youth Bureau commissioned People Education Press, a Beijing-based publisher to compile textbooks for the subject on “moral and citizen education”. Through a publisher with mainland official background, the content of the textbooks would converge with Beijing’s ideology and official interpretation of patriotism. A website and an education resources centre were launched to advise school teachers on patriotic education, such as the procedure of raising national flag and points of notices when national flag is raised and national anthem is played. Since 2004, Macao schools have been subsidised to organise China study tours for school students. Through these tours, students may pay a visit to China’s “patriotic bases” – historic sites and venues which evidence Western imperialist invasion of China, display the exhibits boasting China’s cultural superiority and scientific advancement, and/or are related to the achievement of the Communist Party of China. Until January 2009, over 18,000 students had participated in this type of study tours.

Macao SAR Government-run television broadcast channel TDM followed the example of Hong Kong SAR Government to produce short TV films with a sound track of China’s national anthem. Documentaries produced by China’s television broadcast channel were broadcast to disseminate a positive image of China. The public support for the State Security Law passed in 2009 is indicative of the territory-wide patriotic feeling. In October 2008, Macao government issued a draft State Security Bill for consultation. Chief Executive Edmund Ho said that the Bill was aimed at safeguarding “the state sovereignty, and the unification, integrity and safety of the state territory”. Despite the possibility of violating human rights, the Bill received territory-wide public

Strong territorial centres tend to resist the encroachment of state power. Hong Kong is a strong territorial centre.
support. A survey undertaken by General Union of Neighbourhood Associations, a pro-Beijing societal association found that over 90 percent of the respondents supported the Bill although nearly 50 percent of all respondents said in another survey conducted by the same association that they did not understand the Bill. Meanwhile, the government received 657 letters from individuals during the consultation period of the Bill. Eighty-seven percent supported the Bill. Among the 127 letters from societal groups, ninety-seven percent expressed supportive of the Bill.

**Pragmatism and National Identity**

The impact of the measures on building national identities is minimal. A consensus on the effectiveness of the measures on shaping Hong Kong people’s identity has yet to be reached. Leung and Lee pointed out that local identity was entrenched after the handover: Cantonese became more commonly used among political and business elites. Mandarin never gained the same status as English did in the colonial era. The pro-Beijing forces and mass media in Hong Kong lamented that many Hong Kong people did not have a strong sense of Chinese identity. Leung Chun Ying, Convenor of Non-official Member of Hong Kong Executive Council (equivalent to the Chief Executive’s cabinet) pointed out that most young people wrote “British” in the job application forms when their nationalities were enquired. Li stated that many Hong Kong officials did not use the Beijing-centred term “inside China” (*nei di*) but “back to China” (*guo nei*), inadvertently implying the colonial legacy that China was regarded as a foreign territory.

However, survey data suggested a contrasting picture. The Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong (2009) found that Hong Kong people identifying themselves as a Chinese rose from 18.6% of the respondents in 1997 to 34.4 in 2008. Those identifying themselves as “Hongkongers” dropped from 34.9% to 21.8% in the same period (see Figure 1). In April 2003, 57.1% and 31.9% of the respondents in another survey claimed that they were Hongkongers and Chinese respectively. In October 2008, the former percentage dropped to 51.6% while the latter rose to 37.0%.

**FIGURE 1** HONG KONG PEOPLE’S IDENTITY, DEC 1997 – DEC 2008

![Graph showing the percentage of respondents identifying as Hong Kongers and Chinese from 1997 to 2008.](http://hkupop.hku.hk/)
Interestingly, pragmatic considerations of the governments and people on the street shaped the national identities of the two SARs in different ways. In Hong Kong, pragmatism helps to foster an identity of China in Hong Kong. Some local mass media were taken over by tycoons with large investment in mainland China and co-opted by the authorities. For example, *South China Morning Post* – the highest circulated and oldest English newspaper – was acquired by Chinese Malaysian Robert Kuok from Murdoch’s News Corporation in 1993. Kuok’s business in China includes bottle companies for Coca Cola, 50% ownership of Beijing World Trade Centre, oil refining and commercial properties. Before handover, he was invited to be a Beijing adviser on Hong Kong affairs. In 2003, Charles Ho – a Standing Committee member of the National Congress of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and CEO of British American Tobacco Hong Kong – acquired the Sing Dao News Corporation which ran a Chinese newspaper Sing Dao Daily and an English newspaper Hong Kong Standard Daily. Lai pointed out that certain mass media may censor news reports frowned upon by the authorities of China and deemed undesirable to the tycoon’s businesses in China. Their editors and senior journalists were told to tune down their criticism of the Chinese government. Journalists from mainland were appointed to senior positions while those critical of Beijing were sacked or forced to resign. The negative news reports of Chinese government’s corruption and brutality – most notably the reports of 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident – were said to have deterred many Hong Kong people from identifying with China. With fewer negative reports about China, Hong Kong people may one day become more willing to embrace the Chinese identity.

Pragmatism shaped the identity of the Macao people in another way. The endeavour of both the public and private sector in developing the economy has unintentionally cultivated a local identity revolving the cultural relics.
dimension of Macao identity, evidenced by the preservation of Guia Fortress. The fortress was a grouping of a fortress, chapel and lighthouse. The fortress and chapel were constructed between 1622 and 1638. The lighthouse, built between 1864 and 1865, was one of the earliest lighthouses along China’s coasts. In August 2006, the SAR government announced it had approved construction projects beside the hill topped by the fortress. The projects included several high-rise buildings measured over 100 metres, including the new headquarter of Central Liaisons Office (the representative of Beijing government in Macao).

Upon completion, the view of the fortress would be entirely blocked and the public would no longer be able to view it from a distance. The construction plan provoked public outcry; mass campaigns like demonstrations, signature campaigns and seminars were organised to protest against the construction plan. Complaint letters were sent to UNESCO. Thereafter, UNESCO’s representatives went to Macao to investigate and alerted Beijing government to the destruction to the view of the fortress. Soon afterwards, the Macao government announced it would lower the height of the projects to below 90 metres. Central Liaison Office followed suit and lowered the new headquarter to 88 metres, with three floors less than its planned project.

The mass campaign over Guia Fortress is unusual in Macao. Macao people seldom took to the street or openly confronted the authorities due to the small size of the city and the consequential vast control of the authorities over political resources, business opportunities and even personal pursuits. The open protests in the past usually revolved around issues of livelihood, for instance, the competition for jobs from migrant workers and the right of abode of the children born in mainland and to Macao residents. The campaigns for conserving Guia Fortress were different from past protests: they were related to preserving a collective memory over a historical heritage. Heritages have gradually become the commonly shared identity of Macao people.

**Emerging National Identity**

Building national identity has been on the agenda of the two SAR governments for further integration with mainland. With the forces of state and market in action, a sense of belonging to China was fostered. The younger generation is immersed in a context of rising China, and is taught to love China. They will be more receptive to China than their parents and grandparents who have personally experienced hardship under the communist regime. Identity shaping evolves in more than one direction. While the two SARs are found to be developing a state-defined Chinese identity, Macao’s local identity centred on its cultural heritages has quietly emerged. The emotional attachment to the cultural heritages can be traced back to the government’s effort to diversify its casino-based economy into cultural heritages. This contrasts with Hong Kong people’s economic logic that connects local identity with the national one.