

# **Study on the Effects of Commemorative Report on National Identity: The Discourse Construction and Identity Effect of Report on the Reunification of Hong Kong (1998-2022)**

Tang Jiayi

Institute of Guangdong, HongKong and Macao Development Studies, Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou, China, 510275

Li Chunfeng\*

School of Journalism and Communication, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China, 510632.

lcf327@stu2018.jnu.edu.cn

**Abstract:** This article analyzes 689 news reports published in Chinese local newspapers from 1998 to 2022 on the commemorative reports of Hong Kong's Reunification. The article explores how Chinese local newspapers in Hong Kong construct a unified collective memory through commemorative reports on reunification, thus influencing the national identity of Hong Kong society. The research finds that newspapers in Hong Kong with different political backgrounds have relatively fixed political stances. Therefore, the audience's political awareness are relatively stable. The Hong Kong public may consolidate their original stance on political identity under the influence of the commemorative report on the Reunification and the constructed collective memory constructed, such as nationalism, localism, and separatism. Compared with the relatively direct ideological tendency on the political identity, the framework selection and discourse expression of Hong Kong newspapers with different positions on the Reunification are more indirect and obscure on the cultural identity.

**Keywords:** Commemorative report; Collective memory; Media discourse; The Reunification of Hong Kong; National identity

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Collective memory represents a group of memories. It is not just a simple superposition of individual memories but rather integrates individual memories into a common past owned by a community. Meanwhile, it is a form of collective commemoration (Zerubavel, 1996). Although memory is an important tool and social clue for shaping identity, the other side of memory is forgetting, which means the weakening or even disappearance of identification. The construction of collective memory can help establish identity by showcasing the past, confirming the identity of a specific group, and thereby strengthening identity (Halbwachs, 2020). As a dynamic social

process, memory construction is jointly shaped by different participants, communities, media, and texts (Kansteiner, 2002).

The role of media in building collective memory has been widely recognized and studied in the academic community (Zerubavel, 1996). The media plays a dual role in memory construction and mnemonic practice. The media may be either a participant in the construction or a construction site, serving as a pathway and object for memory practice. Mass media is an important mechanism for constructing public historical memory, and news texts and their production practices are the main tools for creating memory (Wu, 2012). As a communication process, memory construction involves the presentation of a series of past representations, the circulation of text, and the analysis of text consumption (Kansteiner, 2002).

Early scholars who focused on the relationship between media memory and collective memory mostly started from the perspective of journalism research to study the memory construction of news reports in major historical events. The timing of anniversaries and important historical events can often provide a legitimate and reasonable news peg for news media which is a key medium for memory formation (Zelizer, 2008). Commemorative reports endow a person or historical event with symbolic importance, creating a unique commemorative space for an event. As a conventional topic selection framework for journalists, (Schwalbe, 2006) thought that commemorative reports could attract readers to participate in reviewing history, such as evoking and creating national memories. Among various commemorative reporting topics, the anniversary is the most common way for news media to attract public attention. It could provide an opportunity to rebuild and support collective memory by reassessing the past and its significance for current life (Brügger, 2016).

In media memory research, newspapers and television are the two categories with the most attention. At present, the common paradigm in academia regarding how media can participate in collective memory construction is to combine content analysis, text analysis, and discourse analysis of news reports to explain how media shapes collective memory. Through the content analysis of the reports on the Watts Riots in the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*, Reports could significantly affect the construction and maintenance of collective memory. He pointed out that the report created a social identity by presenting past content that connected current people with the state. When reflecting on the research methods of collective memory, (Kansteiner, 2002) particularly pointed out the important value of communication orientation in the research on collective memory. Meanwhile, he thought that collective memory research

should pay attention to the adoption of communication and media research approaches. Some studies suggest that the impact of media on collective memory is not only reflected in strengthening a certain memory but also in weakening collective memory about a certain event by ignoring a certain segment. In fact, forgetting is also a way for mass media to construct memory (Angel, 2016). Hence, media and collective memory are inseparable. The collection, editing, reporting, and storage of various texts by media have gradually evolved into social information memory, becoming the carrier for the survival of social memory. Furthermore, media memory enables the continuous reproduction and restoration of social events and gradually internalizes them into social collective memory.

Memory has political functions. Collective memory depends on media to carry the content of memory, and the media also constructs collective memory in the process. The social memory of a group will have an impact on their constructed identity. The identity is based on the selective memory of the shared past and history by the group. As some scholars have pointed out, the way to choose, remember, and interpret history reflects the current power relationship and mainstream ideology, depending on the state-society relationship at some stage (Wu, 2012). Through the mechanism of cultural reproduction, people have shaped a specific version of collective memory and a specific identity. From a diachronic perspective, the process of identity construction is actually a process of individual history establishment, which is influenced by the three dimensions of the past, present, and future. Therefore, researchers should place the group in a historical perspective for analysis to examine the identity characteristics of a certain group at the current moment and think about the factors affecting the identity of the group during the diachronic stage of change.

## 2. NATIONAL IDENTITY OF HONG KONG FROM THE MEDIA STUDIES

In the study of the changes in the society, politics, and media of Hong Kong, the Reunification of Hong Kong is the most important coordinate (Lee, 2007). Over the past twenty years, the Reunification has constituted one of the most important collective memories in Hong Kong society. The Reunification has started the practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" policy in China. Meanwhile, the national identity of Hong Kong has always been one of the core focuses of this policy. As a concept that refers to the identity and belonging of people towards the state (Guibernau, 2004),

national identity is an important basis for the legitimacy of "One Country, Two Systems" (Kit, 2014). Since the issue of the Reunification emerged in the last century, the national identity of Hong Kong people has always been a controversial issue. Even after the Reunification in 1997, the identity crisis of postmodernism still exists and even becomes more prominent. Some scholars even directly summarize the politics of Hong Kong after the Reunification as identity politics (Kwong & Yu, 2013). "While the existing culture has illustrated Hong Kong people's steady growth of pride and affinity for national symbols, re-explanation of three representative surveys (2006, 2008, and 2010) demonstrates that resistance to these cultural icons is also growing (Chan, 2014)." Research has found that the infrastructure between people from Hong Kong and mainland China has also intensified rapidly in recent years (Yu & Kwan, 2017). Despite the increasing attractiveness of the Chinese economy, separatist sentiment is still increasing in China (Lee, 2020; Pang & Jiang, 2019). In recent years, separatism in Hong Kong has intensified with the rapid changes in Hong Kong society and the conscious promotion of local ideological trends, showing a strong sense of exclusion towards the mainland and the country. Meanwhile, many Hong Kong people stubbornly attribute various issues in Hong Kong society to the Reunification. Under the influence of this discourse, the relationship between Hong Kong, the mainland, and even the state has gradually become antagonistic.

With regard to the research on the national identity of Hong Kong, the academic community has basically established a complete and clear academic distinction and theoretical context. According to the literature review, the national identity of Hong Kong shows three characteristics:

First, dual and misplaced differences exist between political and cultural identities. Brewer has found that Hong Kong people have vastly different identities towards the Chinese nation (cultural level) and the People's Republic of China (political level) (Brewer, 1999). "Cultural-economic China" is more welcome than a "political China" (Kit, 2014). Hong Kong people generally show a high-level identity with Chinese culture, but a significant difference exists between Hong Kong people and their political recognition of Chinese citizens and their national identity of the PRC. The perception and identification of Hong Kong people with the Chinese identity are most at the cultural level. However, their attitudes toward political identification are relatively ambiguous (Cheung & Yue, 2022). Although Hong Kong people identify with the Chinese culture and history, their political identities remain weak (Ma & Fung, 2007). In addition, the frequent cultural exchanges between mainland China and Hong Kong

during the Reunification era have led to increased anxiety in Hong Kong about whether to maintain its cultural independence (Wa, 2007).

Second, the national identity in Hong Kong highlights the characteristics of utilitarianism and instrumental. The national identity in Hong Kong is constantly fluctuating. Research has revealed that the patriotism cognition of Hong Kong youth has obvious characteristics of instrumentalism (Mathews et al., 2007). When China achieves some significant achievements in the international community, national identity in Hong Kong society may also show a phased upward trend over a period (Fung & Chan, 2017; Jiang & Celebrity, 2012; Lau et al., 2010; Wang, 2008). Due to a utilitarian and pragmatic urban characteristic, Hong Kong people have a strong and mature sense of the market economy, leading to a direct correlation between their identities, behaviors, and personal interests (Bruter, 2003; Gitlin, 1980). Under the influence of socioeconomic and political backgrounds, the Chinese identity of Hong Kong people will also be affected, especially the proportion of Hong Kong people with "Chinese" as their main identity will decrease after political and social events (Kitch, 2002).

Third, national education with school education as the driving force has long been an important means of constructing national identity in Hong Kong. Since the Reunification of Hong Kong, national identity has become an important part of school education. However, many studies have found that Hong Kong society is still resistant to national education projects aimed at enhancing national identity. Research has pointed out that thousands of school stakeholders protested against the introduction of the 2012 Guide of Moral and National Education. These conflicts have influenced the attitude of teachers toward MNE and curriculum choices (Lee & Yin, 2021). Some scholars think that the higher education system still retains a strong Western characteristic since the Reunification of Hong Kong, while Western-style university education hardly plays a significant role in the construction of national identity among Hong Kong youth (Shuk-mei Ku, 2007). The insufficient effect of national education on constructing national identity in Hong Kong society has caused some scholars to pay attention to the role of the media and sociopolitical culture (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2014).

Among the existing research achievements focusing on national identity in Hong Kong, in addition to some large-scale social surveys and academic research aimed at Hong Kong residents (especially the youth), more scholars have conducted research from the perspectives of school education, social culture, system construction, economic development, etc.

to analyze the current situation, causes and solutions of national identity issue in Hong Kong. However, few studies on national identity in Hong Kong from the perspective of media memory. By comparing the realization of Hong Kong TV media before and after the Reunification, some research has found that Hong Kong TV media have a higher national identity than paper media. The positive presentation of national identity is mainly reflected at the state system level. At the same time, cultural and economic identities are higher than political identities (Li et al., 2021; Liu & Zhong, 2020; Marginson, 2021). Through a case study of the *South China Morning Post*, another study found that the newspaper prefers to choose labels that foreground the local identity of Hong Kong rather than its national identification since the Reunification. Local media in Hong Kong influence the national identity and belonging of Hong Kong people by constructing a way that emphasizes local identity rather than national identity (Lee & Lin, 2006). In the context of social media in Hong Kong, newspapers are not only an effective tool for ideological propaganda but also an important component of social and political forces. When researchers focused on the national identity of Hong Kong, the perspective of media and communication should not be ignored. As a kind of media with influence on the public opinion of Hong Kong, the news framework and discourse choices constructed by newspapers will also have a significant impact on the political mentality of citizens.

As one of the most developed regions in the global media market, newspapers have always been the most important information source for Hong Kong citizens, with high credibility. The academic community has conducted extensive research on the Hong Kong newspaper industry after the Reunification. Wherein political orientation and commercial practices were always important factors for scholars to study Hong Kong newspapers (Meyers et al., 2009; Müller, 2013; M. Y. Wong et al., 2021). Commercial newspapers are the main component of the newspaper industry in Hong Kong. Also, market positioning, audience characteristics, and public demands of different newspapers are very distinct (Lee & Lin, 2006; Schwalbe, 2006). In the newspaper industry ecosystem of Hong Kong, a prominent feature is that newspapers with different political stances and interest orientations have been coexisting and competing for a long time. For example, *Wen Wei Po* and *Tai Kung Pao* have strong political characteristics, while *Apple Daily* and *Oriental Daily* are two newspapers with obvious market-oriented and popular characteristics. In addition, newspapers such as *Sing Tao Daily*, *Ming Pao*, and *Hong Kong Economic Journal* mainly target the elite and middle class (Shuk-mei Ku, 2007). Although the

market share of the newspaper industry has been squeezed to a certain extent with the popularity and popularization of new media in Hong Kong in recent years, the Hong Kong newspaper industry has always maintained strong vitality and a significant influence on public opinion (Schwartz, 1982; Tu & Kvasny, 2006). As a survey sample, media discourse has strong references, necessity, and adaptability in examining the national identity of Hong Kong society.

Previous studies have shown that national identity is closely related to individual memory of specific historical events (K. L. Wong et al., 2021) and current information received from the media (Wa, 2007; Zhang & Mihelj, 2012). Some scholars believe that the national identity of Hong Kong people is plastic, and historical memory and media use may affect their national identity. This paper proposes that the discourse practice of Hong Kong local newspapers toward the Reunification has a certain impact on national identity in Hong Kong through effective media memory construction methods. Among them, newspapers with different political positions have some differences in the process of applying the commemorative report on national identity to shape media memory, which brings about the construction effect of national identity at different levels and aspects. This paper takes the report on the Reunification as an observation sample to explore how the discourse construction of local news newspapers in the report on the Reunification affects the national identity of Hong Kong society from the perspectives of political and cultural identities.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE

For the study of media memory, the current academic community mostly chooses to integrate theory into specific media events using content analysis methods. This paper adopts a combination of content analysis and discourse analysis. The specific search method and content are as follows: In the "*Huike News*" database, the content containing the keyword "Reunification" in the news headlines of local newspapers in Hong Kong from July 1, 1998, to 2022 was searched. Due to the incomplete data of newspapers before 1998 in the *Huike* database, most Hong Kong newspapers studied in this study only had full-text data after 1998. Therefore, the period from 1998 to 2022 was selected as the research period. After excluding irrelevant reports, a total of 689 news samples were specifically analyzed for content in this report. Based on the academic

views of the existing Hong Kong media research literature, this paper roughly divides the political factions and political spectrum of Hong Kong local newspapers. The news samples were retrieved into three categories, established (leftist) media, elite (neutral) media, and mass (rightist) media. The number of reports on the Reunification by different types of newspapers on the anniversary of the Reunification since 1998 is shown in Table 1, including 484 reports by established (leftist) media, 118 reports by elite (neutral) media, and 87 reports by mass (rightist) media. From the distribution of samples, the newspapers with different political factions have specific discourse construction differences in the commemorative report on the Reunification, which will be compared in detail below.

Table 1: Sample and Factional Classification of Reports on the Reunification in Hong Kong (1998-2022)

Media Faction	Media	Quantity (Piece)
Established (Leftist) Media	Ta Kung Pao	205
	Wen Wei Po	180
	Hong Kong Commercial Daily	99
	Ming Pao	33
	Sing Tao Daily	27
	Hong Kong Economic Journal	36
	Hong Kong Economic Times	11
Elite (Neutral) Media	Headline Daily	5
	The Mirror	2
	Kung Kao Po	2
	HK01	2
	Apple Daily	49
Mass (Rightist) Media	Oriental Daily	19
	Sing Pao	19
Total		689

According to the view of Gitlin, the framework in media is "some tacit theories that tell us what exists, what happens, and what meaning it has, forming the principles we use when choosing, emphasizing, and presenting"(Gitlin, 1980). From the perspective of media framework theory, the audience is influenced by cognitive frameworks and forms their understanding of things based on these frameworks when they receive news reports. Critical discourse analysis reveals the multiple interactions between text and ideology through discourse analysis. According to the



media discourse three-dimensional framework theory proposed by Fairclough (text, discourse practice, social practice), the process of text production involves introducing macro-level structures (such as ideology, identity, and power relations) into micro-level texts, ultimately leaving traces in the finished product (Tu & Kvasny, 2006). From the perspective of content research, this paper examines the framework of national identity created by the local Chinese media in the commemorative reports on the Reunification. Meanwhile, this paper starts with political and cultural identities to study the ways and characteristics that Hong Kong newspapers influence the national identity of Hong Kong by shaping the collective memory of the local community about the Reunification.

#### 4. CASE STUDY: THE INFLUENCE OF REPORTS ON THE REUNIFICATION OF HONG KONG ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

Under the interaction of media, culture, society, and other structural elements, the discourse construction of national identity can also be treated as the construction process of media discourse and power. The study selected some reporting clips on the Reunification of Hong Kong from 1998 to 2022 as cases to analyze how the news text and memory discourse about the Reunification impact national identity from political and cultural identities.

##### 4.1 Commemorative report on the Reunification and Hong Kong political identity

The core of political identity is the construction of political sense. In the past 25 years, the local newspaper industry has had at least three impacts on the political identity of Hong Kong through the discourse construction of the commemorative report on the Reunification:

First, Hong Kong newspapers with different political spectrums have fixed political expression positions. Meanwhile, the political awareness and positions of their audience are relatively stable. Through selective consumption of newspapers from different political factions, group polarization of public political awareness is generated and strengthened under the influence of information segmentation. Through the discourse construction of reports on the Reunification over the past 25 years, the public from different positions in Hong Kong society is also unconsciously consolidating their prior views on their attitude towards the state. The

established, elite, and mass media all have a certain inherent framework in constructing the commemorative discourse of the Reunification. Since the readership of different newspapers is relatively stable, and research has found that Hong Kong readers are more inclined to consume multiple newspapers with similar political stances, the Hong Kong public has failed to resolve social differences under reports on the Reunification and commemorative discourse. On the contrary, long-term news consumption behavior could make the public consolidate their original judgments on political consciousness, such as nationalism, localism, separatism, etc. In the following part, this paper will present the differences in political identity tendencies of this media discourse through three news reports from established, elite, and mass media:

"Sister Fen remembers that on the 20th anniversary of the Reunification, President Xi affirmed Hong Kong's achievements and encouraged Hong Kong people to believe in the motherland, Hong Kong, and themselves. Sister Fen was moved and encouraged. She also encouraged Hong Kong people not to forget their original aspirations, to be close to their compatriots in the motherland, to walk hand in hand, and create a better tomorrow together. "(*Wen Wei Po*, " 22 Years of Hong Kong's Return to the Motherland ")

"Mr. Tsai, who had immigrated to Hong Kong in the 1980s, came to Hong Kong with his son today to visit the Reunification Celebration of Hong Kong. Mr. Tsai stated that he had been paying attention to Hong Kong news for many years but thought that Hong Kong had no progress in democracy and repairing social cracks. "(*Ming Pao*, " Citizen of Hong Kong Reunification Celebration in Victoria Park: Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor Dare not Speak for Hong Kong People ")

"Retired Mr. Wan, 65 years old, stated that Hong Kong has undergone significant changes since the Reunification, with both freedoms of speech and expression channels regressing. He hopes that 'One Country, Two Systems' will not change and believes that the system of China mainland should not be applied in Hong Kong" (*Apple Daily*, "The Great Retrogression after the Reunification Returning British Adherents in Hong Kong: The Government should not apply the system of China mainland to Hong Kong").

All three reports expressed their views on the changes in Hong Kong after the Reunification through interviews with ordinary citizens: established media advocated for integration and identification in political consciousness by emphasizing the relationship between Hong Kong and the motherland as one family; Elite media paid more attention to whether

the changes brought about by the Reunification to Hong Kong were positive, and thus affected the political identity of "One Country, Two Systems"; The mass media regarded freedom, autonomy, and even self-determination as the core discourse of political consciousness, and used whether there was enough freedom as the judgment standard of whether an individual identified with the state.

Second, the Hong Kong newspaper industry utilized the construction of the immigration issue to integrate collective memory into story narratives, influencing the understanding of Hong Kong people towards nationality in the news discourse of the Reunification and reflecting their sense of identification with the national political system. The disagreement with nationality could reflect the disagreement with the national regime, which was also the most serious symbol of the national identity crisis. On the national identity issue, some Hong Kong media used the migration to tell migration stories of different Hong Kong people in reports on the Reunification and convey their views and emotions on Hong Kong society under the "One Country, Two Systems" system after the Reunification. Generally speaking, this discourse strategy was more common in established media and mass media. Through the story of "Hong Kong people choosing to return to Hong Kong after immigration", established media presented the discourse expression that Hong Kong people had confidence in the state and local development after the Reunification. On the other hand, the mass media attempted to convey the dissatisfaction of Hong Kong people with their Chinese identity (nationality) through two frameworks: "Hong Kong immigrants refuse to return" or "young people hope to immigrate". For example:

"Since the Reunification of Hong Kong, the implementation of 'One Country, Two Systems' policy" and "Hong Kong People Governing Hong Kong" has achieved remarkable results based on the Basic Law. Many Hong Kong people who immigrated to foreign countries before 1997 have returned to Hong Kong every year, but the number of Hong Kong people applying for immigration has been decreasing every year. This comparison is more than any word." (Ta Kung Pao, "Unemployment alleviation can take everything easy")

"Gary, born in the 1980s, has immigrated to Los Angeles for 12 years. Twenty years 1997, he feels that Hong Kong has become increasingly poor in the cultural environment and life quality, and even prospects in recent years. This situation is difficult to make him return to Hong Kong." (Apple Daily, "Hong Kong male immigrants who are born in the 1980s refuse to return to Hong Kong: Hong Kong is getting worse")

Third, the elite and mass media constructed the collective imagination of some Hong Kong citizens on Anti-Reunification by constructing the demonstration topic on Reunification Day. They responded to the parade (celebration discourse) with demonstration (opposing discourse) to present the imaginary community resisting the national identity. This discourse could strengthen the collective understanding of its meaning within society by showcasing public emotions towards something in ritual activities, thereby enhancing public memory and identification (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2014). Before COVID-19 in 2020, the conflict between the July 1st Parade and July 1st Demonstration has long been used as a contrasting theme in the news about the anniversary of the Reunification to break the collective memory of Hong Kong society and citizens on this commemorative issue. For example:

"Today is the third anniversary of the Reunification. Many groups held demonstrations to protest against the government, including the Hong Kong Federation of Students, which was recently treated by the police with pepper spray and fists." (*The Hong Kong Economic Daily*, "Several groups demonstrated in the streets to celebrate the third year of the Reunification")

"The Loyalty League launched the 'One National Flag for One Person' campaign at noon, and marched from Southorn Playground to Golden Bauhinia Square to celebrate the 18th anniversary of the Reunification. About 20 people participated." (*Ming Pao*, "'One National Flag for Everyone' was held by Loyalty League, with 20 participants ")

## 5. COMMEMORATIVE REPORTS ON THE REUNIFICATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF HONG KONG

Compared with the relatively direct tendency on the political identity, the framework selection and discourse expression of Hong Kong newspapers with different positions on the Reunification were more indirect and obscure on the cultural identity. The impact of the Reunification commemorative report on cultural identity in Hong Kong can be summarized in two aspects:

First, the media highlighted nostalgia in the recollection of the past to form and strengthen a sense of cultural identity. Nostalgia is an important way to consolidate memory. From a temporal perspective, nostalgia and memory are both processes of looking back. At this level, different media had significant differences in the discourse tendencies and expression methods, forming two different paths of nostalgia. On the one hand, the

mass newspapers showed a reminiscence of the colonial period in the report in the Reunification, shaping the cultural identity of desinicization. As colonial history completely passed and time lapsed, the reminiscence of the past instead formed a memory element that strengthened dissatisfaction with reality and ultimately formed a negative destruction of the national identity. On the other hand, some newspapers track back to history. They told the memories of Hong Kong people about the 1997 Reunification or highlighted their positive feelings about the Reunification by comparing the past (before the Reunification) and the present to strengthen national identity at the practical level. However, researchers combined with specific analysis and found that few Hong Kong newspapers recalled the scenes and memories of the 1997 Reunification Night in their commemorative reports on the Reunification with the progress of history. As a result, the collective identity formed by positive nostalgia is gradually disappearing. For example:

"Wong Wing-Ping, who has been dealing with British officials for half his life, shares the political world before and after the Reunification of Hong Kong. 'Today, I feel that Hong Kong is falling. At least I had dignity as an official in the past.' Although Hong Kong was ruled by the British before 1997, it was constrained by incorruptible and efficient politics and a sound legal system, but today it is fluctuating. " (*Apple Daily*, "On the Eve of the 18th Anniversary of the Reunification: Cherishing the Memory of the Colonial Era")

"The excitement of Hong Kong people for the Reunification has permeated the streets and alleys before the handover ceremony, and the level of excitement is really like the sum of Chinese New Year, Christmas, New Year, Mid Autumn Festival... When I went to work, I opened the two old spring doors on the second floor and entered the familiar crowded newspaper office. At that time, I was in the old district of Wan Chai and sat at my desk. I could hear the 'ding' sound of the tram. However, on that day, I could hear the cheers of the people on the street that day." (*Ta Kung Pao*, "Return to the Day of the Reunification")

"History reached the moment on July 1, 1997, at midnight... After a century of vicissitudes, Hong Kong returned to the motherland, marking that Hong Kong compatriots have become the true masters of this land, and the development of Hong Kong has entered a new era. After this solemn announcement, over 4000 Chinese and foreign guests in the Great Hall stirred up endless applause. " (*Sing Pao*, Report on "97 Reunification with Unprecedented Glory")

Second, the development of local cultural identity after the Reunification

was presented with three keywords: regional culture, national emotion, and identity. The complex feelings of Hong Kong on the Reunification and national identity were reflected between integration and independence. At the level of regional culture, the established media highlighted that the cultural industry of Hong Kong integrated into the national development and connected with the mainland to form a new cultural industry pattern. In contrast, the mass media viewed this phenomenon as a manifestation that Hong Kong lost cultural independence and applied the report on the Reunification to show negative emotions, such as:

"In the past, co-productions were just a collaboration between capital and talents. For example, *Kung Fu* and *Kill Zone* were all co-productions, but they were Hong Kong stories. In recent years, films such as *Better Days*, *The Crossing*, and *Leap*, showed the ability of Hong Kong directors to grasp mainland themes while maintaining Hong Kong characteristics. From the content of the movie, we can see a trend of deeper cultural exchanges between China mainland and Hong Kong. " (*Ta Kung Pao*, "Hong Kong Film and Television after the Reunification")

"Stephen Chow is known as a Hong Kong director, and Stanley Tong introduced himself as a Hong Kong director. Even Jackie Chan called himself a Hong Kong director. Are they joking? How long have they yet to make Hong Kong films? Is their market in Hong Kong?" (*Apple Daily*, "Can Jackie Chan and Stephen Chow still identify themselves as a Hong Kong director after they took part in the Reunification Celebration on CCTV? ")

The established media focused more on strengthening the recognition of Hong Kong society to the country through the elements of national emotion and national identity in the commemorative report on the Reunification. In this discourse system, patriotic emotion and national feelings promoted internal cultural strength between each other. By highlighting national cultural emotion, the cultural identity level increases the positive evaluation of Hong Kong people toward local social development in the Post-Reunification era and enhances national identity. For example:

"Hong Kong is fortunate to have successfully returned to the motherland during its takeoff period. Over the past eight years, Hong Kong has been proud of the achievements made by the state in every aspect, and Hong Kong people have fully realized the deep care and strong support of the state for Hong Kong. The fate of Hong Kong is closely linked to national development and national rejuvenation" (Wen Wei Po, "The stronger the patriotism, the stronger the national spirit").

At the level of identity, the media with different political positions had

significant differences in the expression of reports on the Reunification. The discourse approach of the established media highlighted the pride of Hong Kong people in the Chinese identity by showing the strength of the state and the prosperity and development of Hong Kong after the Reunification; Elite and mass media kept a more critical attitude towards the situation that Hong Kong society has lacked follow-up social support and Chinese identity, which sparked a controversy in Hong Kong society over the Chinese identity:

"50% of the surveyed citizens feel proud to officially become Chinese citizens after the Reunification. Although the positive evaluation of the central government's policies towards Hong Kong has decreased by 4 percentage points since the Reunification, it still ranks high at 53%. "(Wen Wei Po, "After the Reunification, 50% of Chinese citizens feel proud ")

"The changing social situation has led to an increasing number of people questioning the 'One Country, Two Systems'. Meanwhile, the youth is turning to seek self-determination and Hong Kong independence. Yesterday, a survey conducted by the Hong Kong University Public Opinion Research Program found that the pride of Hong Kong citizens in Chinese national identity has significantly decreased by 7% compared to the same period last year, dropping to 31%, which is the lowest level since the survey was conducted in 1997." (*Sing Tao Daily*, "The national pride of Hong Kong people has reached a new low since the Reunification.")

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

As the famous collective memory scholar Barry Schwartz stated, "Recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information (Schwartz, 1982). To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present." Media has become a type and way of memory. News text and practice are also the main tools to create memories. At the same time, the news narrative of the mass media in commemorative events has an agenda-setting effect on public memory. Therefore, memory has become one of the critical ways for modern nation-states to enhance national consciousness, shape collective cohesion, and strengthen national identity. Moreover, "media is the extension of man," and the memory on the media is also an extension and expansion of individual memory.

The memorial imagination and collective memory of Hong Kong society about the Reunification experienced diachronic shaping, accumulation, and

precipitation. As an essential component of Hong Kong media, newspapers shaped the memory content of Hong Kong society and Hong Kong people about the Reunification in the process of discourse game, cultural confrontation, and ideological circle, producing the national identity perception of Hong Kong. With practical issues, the media processed and produced the Reunification memory to shape the collective memory of the Reunification and reshape the current memory and imagination of the social changes in Hong Kong since the Reunification. This move further constructed a national identity attitude that meets specific needs. Meanwhile, newspapers with different political positions have their commemorative discourse systems toward the Reunification. However, the established, elite, and mass newspapers had a particular reshaping effect on the collective memory of Hong Kong society regarding the Reunification. In the process of shaping the Reunification memory of different political ideologies and tendencies through selective changes, supplements, deletions, and narratives of the development process of Hong Kong after the Reunification, different discourse systems of the Reunification stories were constructed. With the changes and development of Hong Kong society after the Reunification, the collective memory characteristics presented by Hong Kong newspapers in the commemorative report on the Reunification also had specific stage changes. Especially the significant changes in the economy and politics of Hong Kong society after the Reunification were important factors affecting Hong Kong newspapers in constructing the news discourse framework of the Reunification. The Reunification presentation and discourse construction of the media memory reflected the overall structure of the mainstream ideology and media power relationship in local public opinion. Since the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020, the public opinion environment of Hong Kong society has entered a new stage. It has shown a more apparent trend of re-nationalization and self-censorship. However, it does not mean that the pursuit of a perfect national image and positive political issues will inevitably produce good results in the shaping of national identity.

Moreover, how to use the annual Reunification anniversary report to shape a collective memory discourse system that conforms to the goals of national governance, the current situation of social development in Hong Kong, and the psychological characteristics of Hong Kong people, and how to explore national identity in Hong Kong from the perspective of media discourse, is a practical issue that should continue to be concerned about and further expanded in the future study of politics, journalism,



communication, and public management.

### 6.1 Limitations

In terms of limitation, this research still has some unavoidable defects and problems that needs further improvement. First, the analysis sample selected in this study was the commemorative report on the Reunification of Hong Kong local Chinese newspapers on July 1 every year from 1998 to 2022. With the content analysis and discourse analysis of relevant content, researchers tried to analyze how the commemorative report on the Reunification affected the national identity. However, a significant decrease has occurred in the public expression of separatist remarks by local media in Hong Kong since the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020. If researchers want to examine the discourse construction of national identity in the Hong Kong news industry regarding commemorative reports on the Reunification from the media discourse and collective memory, it may not be enough to examine the news products published. In the future, researchers should expand the analysis samples to online platforms, especially the news materials published by Hong Kong news practitioners in overseas news communities. Second, the space constraint resulted that researchers could not analyze how commemorative reports on the Reunification affected the national identity in Hong Kong from a diachronic perspective. In the future, researchers can further divide the social development of Hong Kong since the Reunification in 1997 into several stages and analyze how the media discourse toward the Return in different stages impacts the national identity.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Keteng Edit (<http://www.ketengedit.com>) for linguistic assistance during the preparation on this manuscript.

### 7.1 Funding

This study was supported by the Funds of Guangdong Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science(GD22YTQ01)

### 7.2 Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### 7.3 Availability of data and materials

The materials used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

### 7.4 Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

### References

- Angel, A. (2016). Media and the construction of memory: The case of the Arboleda massacre in Colombia. *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies*, 8(2), 301-308.
- Brewer, M. B. (1999). Multiple identities and identity transition: Implications for Hong Kong. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23(2), 187-197.
- Brügger, N. (2016). Introduction: The Web's first 25 years. In (Vol. 18, pp. 1059-1065): SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England.
- Bruter, M. (2003). Winning hearts and minds for Europe: The impact of news and symbols on civic and cultural European identity. *Comparative political studies*, 36(10), 1148-1179.
- Cheung, C.-K., & Yue, X. D. (2022). Predicting Chinese identity and self-esteem by studying Chinese culture and history in Hong Kong youth. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 42(3), 529-541.
- Fung, A. Y., & Chan, C. K. (2017). Post-handover identity: contested cultural bonding between China and Hong Kong. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 10(4), 395-412.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. Oakland, CA: The University of California Press.
- Guibernau, M. (2004). Anthony D. Smith on nations and national identity: a critical assessment. *Nations and Nationalism*, 10(1-2), 125-141.
- Halbwachs, M. (2020). *On collective memory*. University of Chicago press.
- Jiang, Q., & Celebrity, A. (2012). "Soft Power and National Identity: Hong Kong Newspaper Coverage of the Olympic Champions of Beijing 2008 and London 2012," *Mass communication & society*. 16(6), 888–909.
- Kansteiner, W. (2002). Finding meaning in memory: A methodological critique of collective memory studies. *History and theory*, 41(2), 179-197.
- Kit, C. C. (2014). China as "other". Resistance to and ambivalence toward national identity in Hong Kong. *China Perspectives*, 2014(2014/1), 25-34.
- Kitch, C. (2002). Anniversary journalism, collective memory, and the cultural authority to tell the story of the American past. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 36(1), 44.
- Kligler-Vilenchik, N., Tsfati, Y., & Meyers, O. (2014). Setting the collective memory agenda: Examining mainstream media influence on individuals' perceptions of the past. *Memory Studies*, 7(4), 484-499.
- Kwong, K. M., & Yu, H. (2013). Identity Politics, in Hong Kong Under Chinese Rule. *Singapore: World Scientific*, 125–149.

- Lau, P. W., Lam, M. H., & Leung, B. W. (2010). National identity and the beijing olympics: school children's responses in mainland China, Taiwan & Hong Kong. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(5), 6729-6738.
- Lee, F. (2020). Solidarity in the anti-extradition bill movement in Hong Kong. *Critical Asian Studies*, 52(1), 18-32.
- Lee, F. L. (2007). Strategic interaction, cultural co-orientation, and press freedom in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 17(2), 134-147.
- Lee, F. L., & Lin, A. M. (2006). Newspaper editorial discourse and the politics of self-censorship in Hong Kong. *Discourse & Society*, 17(3), 331-358.
- Lee, F. L., & Yin, Z. (2021). A network analytic approach to selective consumption of newspapers: the impact of politics, market, and technological platform. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 98(2), 346-365.
- Li, M., Lin, H., & Maer, M. N. D. (2021). Relationship of living historical memories and news source with national identity: A latent class analysis. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 24(3), 364-377.
- Liu, M., & Zhong, J. (2020). Between national and local: Identity representations of post-colonial Hong Kong in a local English newspaper. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 36, 100401.
- Ma, E. K., & Fung, A. Y. (2007). Negotiating local and national identifications: Hong Kong identity surveys 1996–2006. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 17(2), 172-185.
- Marginson, S. (2021). One country, two political cultures: What way forward for Hong Kong's universities? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 84, 102426.
- Mathews, G., Ma, E., & Lui, T.-l. (2007). *Hong Kong, China: Learning to belong to a nation*. Routledge.
- Meyers, O., Zandberg, E., & Neiger, M. (2009). Prime time commemoration: An analysis of television broadcasts on Israel's Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Heroism. *Journal of Communication*, 59(3), 456-480.
- Müller, P. (2013). National identity building through patterns of an international third-person perception in news coverage. *International Communication Gazette*, 75(8), 732-749.
- Pang, Q., & Jiang, F. (2019). Hong Kong's growing separatist tendencies against China's rise: Comparing Mainland and Hong Kong college students' national identities. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 48(1), 3-28.
- Schwalbe, C. B. (2006). Remembering our shared past: Visually framing the Iraq war on US news websites. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 12(1), 264-289.
- Schwartz, B. (1982). The social context of commemoration: A study in collective memory. *Social Forces*, 61(2), 374-402.
- Shuk-mei Ku, A. (2007). Constructing and contesting the 'order'imagery in media discourse: Implications for civil society in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 17(2), 186-200.
- Tu, L., & Kvasny, L. (2006). American Discourses of the Digital Divide and Economic Development: A Sisyphean Order to Catch Up? Social Inclusion: Societal and Organizational Implications for Information Systems: IFIP TC8 WG8. 2 International Working Conference, July 12–15, 2006, Limerick, Ireland,

- Wa, T. Y. (2007). National identity and intercultural outlook: A critical review of Hong Kong's civic education since the 1980's. *Economia. Seria Management*, 10(2), 129-145.
- Wang, Z. (2008). National humiliation, history education, and the politics of historical memory: Patriotic education campaign in China. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(4), 783-806.
- Wong, K. L., Haste, H., Lee, J. C.-K., Kennedy, K. J., & Chan, J. K.-s. (2021). A proposed model for teachers' perceptions of national and moral education: a national identity building curriculum in post-colonial Hong Kong. *Journal of Educational Change*, 22, 221-246.
- Wong, M. Y., Kwong, Y.-h., & Chan, E. K. (2021). Political consumerism in Hong Kong: China's economic intervention, identity politics, or political participation? *China Perspectives*(2021/3), 61-71.
- Wu, L. (2012). Striving and Limitations of Media in Construction of History Memory. *China Media Report Overseas*, 8(2).
- Yu, F.-L. T., & Kwan, D. S. (2017). Social construction of national reality: Chinese consciousness versus Hong Kong consciousness. *Contemporary chinese political economy and strategic relations*, 3(2), 657-XIV.
- Zelizer, B. (2008). Why memory's work on journalism does not reflect journalism's work on memory. *Memory Studies*, 1(1), 79-87.
- Zerubavel, E. (1996). Social memories: Steps to a sociology of the past. *Qualitative sociology*, 19, 283-299.
- Zhang, M., & Mihelj, S. (2012). Hong Kong identity and the press-politics dynamics: a corpus-assisted discourse study. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 22(5), 506-527.