

Assessing China's Soft Power Approach to Managing Political Stability and Social Order in Hong Kong

Arpit Kaur, *Dr. Showkat Ahmad Dar

Research Scholar of Political Science

Sharda School of Humanities and Social science

Sharda University, Greater Noida India

Corresponding Author-

Assistant Professor

Sharda School of Humanities and Social science

Sharda University, Greater Noida India

Abstract

Post-1997, Hong Kong has operated within the “One Country Two Systems” framework, but recent political crisis and governance reforms have made Beijing rethink its methods of keeping political stability and social order. The paper evaluates the application of soft power as a governance tool in Hong Kong by China and the effectiveness of non-coercive tools in supplementing legal and institutional controls. Using qualitative research approach, the paper examines state policy documents, Chinese and Hong Kong media discourses, educational reforms, and cultural programs adopted since 2019 with the major focus on the development after the implementation of the National Security Law. The results have shown that Beijing uses soft power in the form of patriotic education, restructuring media, normalization of cultures and identity-oriented discourse, in order to reconstruct the meaning of national belonging and justify political power. Although such actions have helped curb popular discontent and institutional obedience, they have also made Hong Kong more polarized and liberal civic culture weaker.

Keywords China, Power, Stability, Governance, Identity

Introduction

The government of Hong Kong has also experienced a fundamental change in terms of governance since the massive anti-government demonstrations in 2019 and the enactment of the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) in June 2020 (Barrios, 2023)¹. Although much attention has been given to the use of coercive legal and institutional actions, the other not so noticeable but equally crucial aspect of the Beijing approach has been the use of soft power to ensure the state of political stability and social order through systematic operations. The Chinese state has been all the more interested in redefining identities, values, and the perception of the people in Hong Kong by means of cultural, educational and communicative efforts instead of repression alone (Veg& Cheng, 2021)². As the classical meaning of a soft power, suggested by Joseph Nye, is embodied by the capacity to influence others to get desired results by attracting and persuading them, but not coercing or paying or bribing, soft power can be understood as the use of such resources as culture, political values, and perceived legitimacy of policies (Nye, 2004)³. In China, however, soft power is no longer just an extrinsic diplomatic instrument but is also closely connected with the internal government and ideological control. The Chinese scholars and policymakers understand soft power as the ability to influence social thinking, moral agreement, and political legitimacy, especially in ideologically disputed areas like Hong Kong (Zhang, 2010)⁴.

After 2020, both Beijing and the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) have stressed precisely in terms of the importance of patriotic education, cultural production, media discourse, and historical reinterpretation to achieve social cohesion and national identity. The creation of the Working Group on Patriotic Education in 2024, the introduction of national security and constitutional education into school

curricula, and the popularization of the Chinese cultural heritage through museums, cinema, exhibitions, and government celebrations is a sign of a new strategic direction, that is, governance by persuasion and normalization (Qingqing, 2024)⁵. Such efforts correspond to the larger post-2017 focus of China on the improvement of “discursive power” (huayuquan) and the ability to resist westernized ideologies and what the Chinese government terms as western-style soft resistance. In that regard, Hong Kong is a serious test case of the inner soft power application in China. Hong Kong is a society that has been formed on colonial lines, liberal standards, and its own local identity which presents very peculiar challenges to political integration. The paper thus looks at the functionalities of the soft power policies of China in conjunction with law and institutional measures to stabilize the governance, redefine political identity, and naturalize a state-centred conception of order. This is through emphasis on ideological messages, cultural governance and media discourse, the research places Hong Kong in the changing framework of governance in China that is characterized by both coercive capacity and the persuasive strength to govern dissent and maintain long term political stability.

Problem Statement

After Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 through the One Country, Two Systems arrangement, it was assured that a considerable level of autonomy and a guarantee on civil liberties would be enjoyed in the city. Nevertheless, the mounting political instabilities, i.e., the 2014 Umbrella Movement and the 2019 Anti-Extradition protests, made Beijing reconsider its strategy of governance to regain political stability and social order. Although much research has been conducted on the National Security Law (2020) as a coercive law tool, not much has been done on the topic of soft power in the Hong Kong context (Xing & Li, 2023)⁶. The current literature focuses excessively on repression and institutional decay, and it pays little attention to the functioning of narrative framing, patriotic education, media control, and identity repair in conjunction with legal enforcement as the means of authorizing power in a historically pluralistic society (Lo, 2018)⁷. This disconnects between China and the Chinese political system obscures the possibility of creating a lasting stability or acquiescence as a result of depoliticization and self-censorship in the governance strategy.

Significance of the Study

The paper is relevant to the current literature, as it investigates the Chinese soft power as a governance tool in post-2020 Hong Kong, where explanations to the date focus on coercion. The paper expands upon the conceptual understanding of soft power by examining how persuasion, narrative management and identity construction supplement legal power to make the concept less externally oriented as it has been historically. It is theoretically relevant to International Relations and the study of politics because it involves the discussion of authoritarian resilience, hybrid governance and the interplay of soft, sharp, and hard power. On a structural level, the work has been an empirical study of post-National Security Law governance, examined through the mediums of media and education reforms, cultural normalization and patriotic accounts as a means of political stabilization. The results will have more universal comparative and policy implications, because the analysis framework can be extended to other semi-autonomous or conflict zones where states are progressively driven by information ideologies instead of coercion in a period of heightened information warfare.

Objectives

- 1) To examine the soft power strategy used by China in the management of the political stability and social order in Hong Kong.
- 2) To examine the use of soft power to supplement legal and coercive policies of the National Security Law.
- 3) To assess the effects of these strategies on the public sphere, political identity and the perceptions of legitimacy in Hong Kong.

The analytical context on this paper is based on a targeted theoretical framework, which is informed by the Soft Power Theory and Sharp Power Theory, since they are the closest lenses that can be used to study how China deals with maintaining political stability and social order in Hong Kong. The first theory is the Soft Power Theory developed by Joseph Nye that describes soft power as the power to influence preferences and behaviour through attraction, norms, values, and narratives instead of coercion (Nye, 1990)⁸. Although the concept of soft power is normally utilized in relation to the external connection of a state, the concept has been expanded in this study to look into soft power as a means of internal governance. The Hongkong manifestation of soft power is framed in terms of state-managed media discourses, patriotic education, culture and identity renewal that is used to legitimize power, to normalize governance activities and ideological orientations of the masses (Nye, 2020)⁹. Another theory is the Sharp Power Theory, which deals with the vices of classical laissez-faire soft power in authoritarian environments. Sharp power describes the effect by which power is executed by means of information management, manipulation of narratives, the repression of other opinions as opposed to being truly appealing (Walker & Ludwig, 2017)¹⁰. The theory is especially applicable to Hong Kong where soft power efforts are accompanied by repressive legal actions like the National Security Law. Sharp power can be used to understand the reinforcement of persuasive narrative by its legal constraints that generate an environment of governance where compliance is promoted by ideological conformism and self-censorship and no longer only by naked force (Wu, 2019)¹¹.

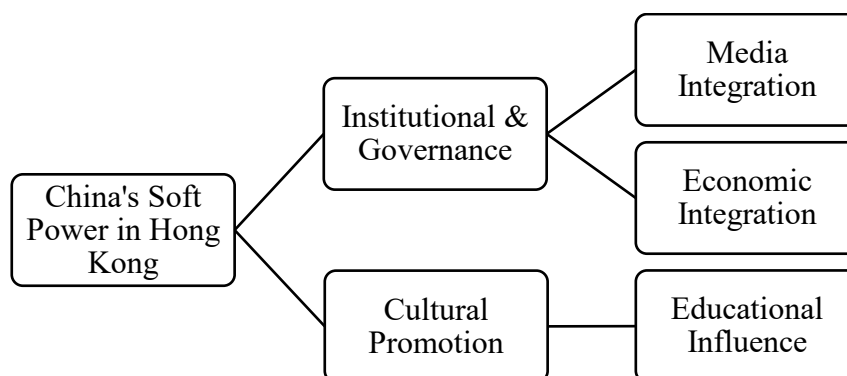
Methodology

The paper uses a qualitative research methodology, which encompasses an analytical research method to evaluate the concept of the soft power used by China in managing political stability and social order in the state of Hong Kong. Qualitative design is appropriate because the research aims at analysing the policies and the practices of governance, but not a numerical measurement. The study is grounded on the secondary data (official government documents of China and Hong Kong, policy statements, education and culture guidelines, media coverage, and speeches of the authorities). To provide analytical backdrop, academic literature, books and reports of international organizations are utilized. A descriptive content analysis is used to discuss the exercise of soft power in terms of education, media, cultural stories and identity construction especially following the introduction of the National Security Law. Hong Kong is taken as an example, which allows taking a closer look at the transformations in governance in the peculiarities of its historical and political context. Soft Power Theory and Sharp Power Theory are the two theories that inform the analysis of how the ideological influence, attraction, and narrative control are applied to foster stability and social order.

Result and Discussion

The Chinese soft power in Hong Kong functions on various, intertwined spheres that look to redefine the people and identity. Figure 1 describes the structure of Chinese soft power in Hong Kong, Cultural and identity initiatives encourage the Chinese traditions, language and national symbols to create a feeling of emotional attachment to the mainland. Patriotic discourse is instilled in education by reforming the curriculum, teaching civics and “Xi Jinping Thought” are taught (Law, 2025)¹². Information and media control enhances the pro-Beijing discourses and silences those who do not conform (Man & Lee, 2007)¹³. The economic integration promotes the development of dependency by providing Greater Bay Area opportunities, employment programs and business incentives. Lastly, institutional and governance alignment makes normal the mainland political values by legal, administrative, and policy reforms, which is cumulative in making long-term political integration (Shcherbak & Rukuan, 2025)¹⁴.

Figure 1: Chinese Soft Power Tools in Hong Kong



Source- figure compiled by author.

Cultural Promotions as a Soft Power Tool in Hong Kong

Since 2019, more culture- and identity-related programs have been implemented in Hong Kong to improve national awareness and social unity. The focal point of this strategy has been Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM) which was opened in July 2022, in facilitating Chinese civilizational heritage and cultural leadership development with the Bi-City Youth Programme, through which the Beijing-Hong Kong youth can exchange, participate in internships and study visits in the Palace Museum in Beijing. This has been followed by the opening of the M+ Museum in November 2021, which is promoted as a global museum of contemporary visual culture, in the West Kowloon Cultural District, meaning that the Chinese cultural stories are embedded into a global cultural environment, and previous venues such as the Xiqu Centre and Free space have been launched in 2019 (World Cities Culture Forum, 2023)¹⁵.

These institutional developments have been reinforced by policymaking cultural planning, the most prominent of which is the proposal of the Arts and Culture Development Blueprint in November 2024, which enumerates 71 initiatives to reflect the traditional Chinese and Lingnan culture and to become an East-West cultural exchange centre. This has also been made easier due to the financial and institutional assistance of the extension of the China National Arts Fund to Hong Kong in 2022 which will support dozens of projects in the large-scale productions, the visual arts, the work of young creators and the training of professionals that are presented in the Chinese Culture Festival annually which are also facilitated by financial and institutional assistance (HKSAR Government Press Release, 2025)¹⁶. The popularization of cultural nationalism in symbolic action has also been brought about by Intangible Cultural Heritage Month, which was launched in June 2025, with ethnic performances and Peking Opera to raise cultural self-confidence in the discourse of national security (Lei, 2025)¹⁷.

Along with these cultural programs the system of education has been strengthened by the education system based on patriotism. Students in secondary schools have been taught the Xi Jinping Thought, and will begin to be taught in the primary level in 2025, which encompassing national security education and historical accounts such as the Opium Wars and the Japanese invasion to instil patriotism into the minds of the students (BBC News, 2021)¹⁸. It stems from the broader revival of patriotic education that began in 2019 that entrenches the themes of national identity in humanities and arts courses through interdisciplinary approaches to forming a sense of national cohesion. Finally, urban-cultural initiatives such as Design District Hong Kong (#ddHK) that started in 2018 and was extended subsequently relocate the efforts into more mundane urban space, combining cultural expression with design tourism, further instilling cultural nationalism into the spaces of the urban setting (Tourism Commission, 2024)¹⁹.

Hong Kong Institutional and Governance structuring since 2019

The institutional restructuring that has been taking place in Hong Kong since 2020 with the aim of consolidating political power and creating long-term stability is particularly related to the governance model. The principal point of this modification was that, on 30 June 2020, the National Security Law (NSL) was accepted, which offered a security-first system of government on secession, subversion, and foreign impact. Security agencies

were expanded using the police, mass arrest, and preventing people was becoming the order of the day to eliminate the political dissidents by ensuring they were not politically vetted before participating in the government (Tsoi & Wai, 2024)²⁰. A mass restructuring of the electoral system which is commonly known as the patriots-only system reinforced such a security-based approach by rearranging the electoral rules in such a way that the loyalist domination and executive style of the rule became a reality. The Legislative Council reforms resulted in the increased number of seats, the oath of loyalty and the transition to the jurisdiction of Election Committee which caused an enormous decline in the number of voters in 2021 (Geopolitics Unplugged, 2025)²¹. The district council reformation at the grassroots level also diminished the opposition influence by cutting the directly elected seats by enormous proportions and increasing government and committee nomination, transforming the local councils to service provision-based but not political contestation-based ones (AMRO Annual Consultation Report, 2025)²².

In parallel with all these processes, the process of political screening was institutionalized and a new system called Better Electoral System was introduced which ensured that only candidates who embraced the principle of national sovereignty and nation security were able to challenge an election and a number of them would lose their candidacies even before the 2023 elections (Mo, 2024)²³. Meanwhile, the proposed accountability reform of top officials is to enhance the bureaucratic discipline by performance of the civil services according to the national development and integration purposes to further align the governance with the strategic interests of Beijing (Xinhua, 2025)²⁴. Finally, civil service commitment and judicial defensive factors have extended the political accountability further to the administrative and judicial sectors. Mandatory national security training, loyalty tests and dismissal of employees deemed disloyal have altered bureaucratic Denmark and judicial screening of national security cases has restricted judicial autonomy to conform to state security requirements (Maizland & Fong, 2019)²⁵. All these steps make the model of the governance based on the political loyalty, the security and the central power a formalized concept and to a great extent recalculate the political order of post-2020 Hong Kong.

Educational Influence as a Soft power Tool

After the 2019 demonstrations, China has significantly increased its command of the education sector in Hong Kong by reorganizing the education curriculum, encouraging patriotic information, and infusing the ideological elements to increase the national identity and political stability. These reforms, when put in the framework of civic and cultural education, will consist of soft power techniques and even a stricter adherence to the official narratives of Beijing, which will narrow the liberal, critical and pluralistic inquiry. The ideology is now taught in secondary schools and in primary grades in 2025, when the subject, Citizenship and Social Development, will replace Liberal Studies, which the authorities strongly criticized as promoting dissent, and under stricter teacher supervision and mandatory retraining will be taught (Huang, 2020)²⁶. It has since been likely to be substituted by the new ideology, Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, currently taught in schools, and is found in Chinese history, mandatory Mandarin, and civics courses to underline national rejuvenation, anti-colonial interpretations of the Opium Wars and politico-loyalty to the mainland (Davidson, 2024)²⁷.

Together with this, national security education was compulsory at every level of education by 2021 and NSL workshops, flag-raising ceremonies, and education on the political red lines was institutionalized with over 90 percent of schools having them by 2023 (Cottom, 2024)²⁸. To this, the resurgence of moral and national education in the wake of the NSL, investing in the Chinese achievements, Confucianism, and the unification of the Greater Bay Area in terms of its compulsory interdisciplinary orientation to the humanities contributed to it (Wong, 2025)²⁹. Patriotic teacher training and supervision have served to legitimize such changes to the curriculum with more than 100,000 teachers having been given national security training since 2020, censorship is becoming more restrictive, failure to adhere to censorship has been met with dismissals and even other more surveillance have been added to creating a culture of professional self-censorship (Kaur & Rayee, 2025)³⁰. All these transformations depict how education has replaced education as a major tool of governance by persuasion inculcating state ideology at the same time changing the political consciousness of the future generations in Hong Kong.

a) Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA): It gained momentum since 2003 and now Hong Kong is no longer a traditional entrepot, but a regional services and professional location (Min-Hua, 2016)³¹. The early 2020s tariff exemptions and market access provisions enabled Hong Kong firms to save costs, increased the scope of professional mobility, and created several service industries with the potential to cross-border investment.

b) Greater Bay Area (GBA) Initiative: The GBA was launched in 2019 and accelerated during the middle of 2020s to integrate Hong Kong with Guangdong and Macao to form one economic cluster. This has enhanced the involvement of Hong Kong in the technology, financial, logistics and tourism networks, boosted the contribution of GBA related activities to the total GDP and supported outward-oriented growth. Organizations that are small have the advantage of being able to determine their own distinct schedule. (Fong&Te, 2025)³²

c) Belt and Road “Super-Connector” Role: Hong Kong has been designed to play a financial and legal facilitator of overseas expansion by the mainland firms, managing a majority of outbound financing, and maintaining its high trade-to-GDP ratio. Mainland China has also become the largest trading partner of Hong Kong, which also established the city with external economic orientation even more firmly to the global strategies of China and Beijing. (Walton, 2023)³³

The integration of the Chinese economy with Hong Kong and its impact that has led to the recovery and stabilization of growth in the short run especially by exportation, finance, and tourism fuelled by demand of the mainland. Nevertheless, it has also exposed Hong Kong to Mainland economic cycles, property market volatility and greater geoeconomic risks. Although the trade and services surpluses have been comparatively robust in the environment of CEPA and GBA synergies, critics claim that the deep integration process has been accompanied by the decline in the economic freedom, slower growth in domestic demand, and the increase in the competitive pressures connected with emigration and integration. (Qian, 2025)³⁴

China's Media Integration Strategies in Hong Kong

a) Consolidation of Ownership

As the NSL, business entities related to the mainland slowly gained the control over major media corporations, and the opposition media of such profile were shut down. It was a turning point, as demonstrated by the closure of Apple Daily in 2021 and the growing influence of the state-affiliated entities on the older media (BBC News, 2021)³⁵. Consequently, the media situation in Hong Kong changed radically to the dominance of pro-Beijing. In 2019, the number of independent outlets was 15+ but in 2025, there were only 3, which is an 80% reduction (Kaur & Rayee, 2025).

b) State Media Extension and Public Broadcasting Reform

CGTN, Xinhua, and Ta Kung Pao are now significant players in the Hong Kong information environment and are state media. RTHK public broadcasting was also hit by funding reductions and restructuring, increasing Relativism-based programming and editorial independence dramatically (Freedom House, 2021)³⁶. Mainland content constituted 70% of RTHK content in 2025, increasing by 250% compared to the level of 20% in 2025 pre-NSL period (GeopoliticsUnplugged, 2025).

c) Legal and Regulatory Compliance

The enforcement of the law on sedition and national security became more powerful in 2024, with the introduction of Article 23 legislation. This resulted into raids on newsrooms, arrests and increased legal risks which institutionalized self-censorship to adjust journalistic practices to officially approved norms of patriotism (Amnesty International, 2025)³⁷. The annual number of journalist arrests increased to 45 per year in 2025 as compared to less than 10 per year before NSL, which was an indication of more climate of legal intimidation (Ma, 2025)³⁸.

d) Online Power and citizen confidence

Mainland digital applications like WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu have already attracted a big user base and advertising income in Hong Kong and it establishes a digital ecosystem that is closely connected with Beijing, especially around its Greater Bay Area (Kemp, 2025)³⁹. This has seen the local media revenue being diverted to platforms operated by the mainland, and the share of digital advertising on these platforms has increased by 15 per cent the earnings of the local media to 65.7 per cent in 2025, which is an increase of more than 350 per cent (Zhou, 2025)⁴⁰. At the same time, the level of trust of the local media in the population has decreased significantly during such changes, falling to 28% in 2025 against 52% in 2019, which is a 46% loss (Coirichi & Huang, 2023)⁴¹. The growth of digital platforms in the mainland and the decline of confidence in the local media together underline the ongoing increase in the power of Beijing-oriented media in information consumption and citizens opinion.

Long-Term Implications of Chinese Strategies in Hong Kong

Over the long term, the governance policies of China will most probably change the political institutions, the law, and the sense of belonging of Hong Kong fundamentally (Fong, 2017)⁴². In politics, the continued implementation of soft power and legal restrictions are likely to reduce the pluralism and competitive politics space. Political participation, civil society actions, and mechanisms of consultation have greater limits to their functions and have turned the system of governance into a form of semi-autonomous, participatory governing structures to a managed and compliance-oriented system. This realignment of institutions makes it more difficult to mobilize the opposition forces and loyalty as a condition necessary to the political legitimacy. This has been legally done by the normalization of the mainland-style principles of governance, especially through the National Security Law and institutional reforms that have changed the rule-of-law tradition that used to define Hong Kong incomparable with the mainland (Zhu, 2019)⁴³. Although formal legal procedures still exist, they have changed their role to ensuring state security and political stability as opposed to offering protection to civil liberties. In the long-run, this can internalize the legal compliance, in which self-censorship and anticipatory obedience takes the place of open legal suppression, which will effectively reorganise the legal order according to the priorities of Beijing.

Identity transformation is one of the most significant long-term impacts at the societal level. A state-centric formulation of the Chinese national identity is slowly taking over the historically specific civic identity of Hong Kong through education reforms, cultural promotion, and media discourse. The new generations that have been socialized in these systems could begin to think political conformity as a norm and nonconformity as illegitimate. Although such a process can guarantee the short-term social stability, there is a threat of long-term identity dissonance, intergenerational conflicts and loss of cosmopolitan and pluralistic identity of Hong Kong (Laikwan, 2020)⁴⁴. Taken together, these trends are directed towards a structural convergence between Hong Kong and mainland China, in which the political control, governance by law, and a formation of identity are merged in one and the same model of state-led stability. This change does not only reinterpret the inner order of Hong Kong but also has a wider dimension to the plausibility of the model of One Country, Two Systems and how China would handle the disputed space with a combination of persuasion and control.

Contribution of the Study

The present study indicates that the Chinese strategy of political stability and social order in Hong Kong is indicative of a “soft power” recalibration to fit in a more disputed and post protestive governance space. Instead of just relying on attraction, a multi-dimensional influence framework, which integrates cultural persuasion, economic incentive, institutional restructuring, and information management, is adopted by Beijing to transform the way people behave and the political expectations. One of the major reflections is that soft power in the Hong Kong case is becoming instrumentalized. Promotion of culture, reforms in education, and media discourses are positioned as confidence and identity enhancing activities, but these activities merge with legal and administrative restrictions that reduce ideological diversity. This shows that the classical soft power, which relies on voluntary appeal, is replaced by a soft-sharp power relationship, in which the agreement is controlled, and the options are gradually limited.

The paper also indicates the core role of “identity politics” in the “stability policy” of China. The historical memory and national belonging are recalibrated through education, heritage projects, and national narratives,

and especially among the younger generations. As much as such campaigns have lessened the presence of visible opposition and greater surface-level conformity, the root causes of identity tensions have not disappeared implying that the stability created by dictated narratives may not be deeply socially legitimate. In economic terms, the results indicate that integration is reassuring and leveraging. Greater Bay Area (GBA) and Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) are some of the structures that have helped stabilize and create opportunities in the Hong Kong economy after 2019, yet have also made Hong Kong increasingly reliant on Mainland markets. This reliance implicitly alters the political behaviour by influencing the economic stability with political orientation and creating the stability with the material benefit, but not the persuasion. The research is an indicator of a redefined public sphere in the media and information sector in terms of less pluralism and more self-censorship. Although narrative control has proved to be useful in reducing the mobilization and diffusion of protests, low trust among the population and growing dependence on alternative sources, including foreign or online ones, demonstrate that an informational stability does not always translate into the communicative legitimacy.

Comprehensively, the paper analyses the soft power strategy that China has employed in Hong Kong has succeeded in creating short-term order and governability, especially to counter the opposition and to avoid the occurrence of mass uprisings. It is, however, uncertain whether this model would be sustainable in the long run. The stability that is based on compliance, economic dependence and narrative control can persist at an institutional level, but it can entrench social disengagement and latent resistance instead of creating cohesion. The Hong Kong case, therefore, questions the traditional soft power approach and highlights the necessity to redefine the concept of influence in hybrid and post-liberal forms of governance.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the soft power policy of China to deal with political stability and social order in Hong Kong following the 2019 protests. This analysis shows that the strategy of Beijing is a re-modelled form of soft power, only that it goes beyond the attraction and persuasion to include economic integration, institutional realignment and the control of information. A combination of these mechanisms has changed the political, social, and cultural terrain of Hong Kong in such a manner that favours governability and national security. The results indicate that cultural promotion and educational reforms should be regarded as long-term mechanisms of political socialization, which should serve to reestablish identity and historical consciousness, especially in the generations of younger people. The economic integration systems including CEPA and Greater Bay Area initiative have both aided the post-2019 economic stabilization and also heightened structural reliance of Hong Kong on the mainland. The convergence of media and management of the discourse of the narrative has helped shrink the public space, downgrade the dissenting discourse, and strengthen pro-Beijing discourse of stability and patriotism. Taken together, such actions have worked successfully in decreasing mass mobilization and reestablished a superficial social order. Nonetheless, the research paper also finds out that the efficacy of this soft power strategy is inconsistent and conditional. Although stability in the short term has been obtained, conditioned consent, ideological conformity and limited pluralism have created lack of trust, self-censorship and disengagement of parts of Hong Kong society. The tensions of identity remain under acknowledged institutional compliance suggesting that the stability that has been imposed on people by telling the right story and commanding economic resources does not necessarily result in actual social harmonies and political authority.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

Funding

The authors declare that this research received no external or internal funding. No financial support was provided by any institution for the conduct or completion of this study.

Ethics Approval

The study is non-clinical in nature and is based exclusively on secondary sources such as published literature and legal documents, judicial decisions, and publicly available reports. It does not involve human participants, animals or any form of primary data collection. Accordingly, formal ethics committee approval was not required for the conduct of this research.

Author Contributions

Arpit Kaur contributed to the conceptualization of the study, literature review, data collection, analysis, interpretation of findings, and drafting of the manuscript. Dr. Showkat Ahmad Dar, as the Corresponding Author and Research Supervisor, provided academic supervision, methodological guidance, critical evaluation of the research design, interpretation of results, and substantial revisions to the manuscript. Both authors contributed to the development of the study, reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript, and accept responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and scholarly quality of the research.

References

¹Barris, R. (2023). Hong Kong National Security Law. *Congress.Gov*. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47844>

²Veg, S. and Cheng, E. V. (2023). Alternative Publications, Spaces and Publics: Revisiting the Public Space in 20th and 21st century China. *The China Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741021000254>

³Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs. ISBN-13: 978-1586482251

⁴Zhang, W. (2010). China's Cultural Future: From Soft Power to Comprehensive National Power. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630903134300?urlappend=%3Futm_source%3Dresearchgate.net%26utm_medium%3Darticle

⁵Qingqing, C. (2024). NPC HK deputy proposes establishing permanent national security education and training base in Hong Kong. *Global Times*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202403/1308118.shtml>

⁶Xing, J., & Li, M. (2023). Moving to Formality and Openness? An Analysis of China's New Two Tiered Sanctions Policy. *China Review*, 23(1), 377-406. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48717999>

⁷LO, S. S.-H. (2018). Ideologies and Factionalism in Beijing–Hong Kong Relations. *Asian Survey*, 58(3), 392–415. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26494056>

⁸Nye, J. S. (1990). Soft Power. *Foreign Policy*, 80, 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>

⁹Nye, J. S. (2020). Countering the Authoritarian Challenge: Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, and Sharp Power. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, 15, 94–109. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48573639>

¹⁰Walker, C. and Ludwig, J. (2017). The Meaning of Sharp Power. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power>

¹¹Wu, Y. (2019). Recognizing and Resisting China's Evolving Sharp Power. *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 26(2), 129–153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45216268>

¹²Law, W. Y. (2025). Changes in Hong Kong's Education Policies and Conditions in recent years under the atmosphere of Chinese Style Political Correctness. *Power and Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/17577438251407202?urlappend=%3Futm_source%3Dresearchgate.net%26utm_medium%3Darticle.

¹³Man, J. and Lee, F. L. F. (2007) 'Media and Politics in Post-handover Hong Kong: An Introduction', *Asian Journal of Communication*, 17(2). 127-133. https://doi.org/10.1080/01292980701306456?urlappend=%3Futm_source%3Dresearchgate.net%26utm_medium%3Darticle.

¹⁴Shcherbak, V. and Rukuan, W. (2025). The Impact of Guangdong-Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area Integration on Social and Economic Development. *Public Management and Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.70651/3041-2498/2025.1.02>

¹⁵World Cities Culture Forum (2023). *Cultural Policy in Hong Kong*. <https://worldcitiescultureforum.com/city/hong-kong/>

¹⁶The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Press Release (2025). *14 Hong Kong arts projects supported by China National Arts Fund (2026)*. <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202512/12/P2025121200266.htm>

¹⁷Lei, L. (2025). Hong Kong's cultural sector recognizes security needs. *China Daily*. <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/614266>

¹⁸BBC News (2021). *China Schools: "Xi Jinping Thought" introduced into curriculum*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58301575>

¹⁹Tourism Commission (2024). *District Design Hong Kong (#ddHK)- Creative Journey-Infinite Discovery*. https://www.tourism.gov.hk/en/tourismprojects.php?project=design_district_tw

²⁰Tsoi, G., & Wai, L. C. (2024). Hong Kong national security law: What is it and is it worrying? *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>

²¹Geopolitics Unplugged (2025). *How Hong Kong Lost Its Freedoms in Just Five Years*. <https://geopoliticsunplugged.substack.com/p/how-hong-kong-lost-its-freedoms-in>

²²AMRO Annual Consultation Report (2025). *AMRO Annual Consultation Report: Hong Kong China- 2025*. https://amro-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/1.-AMRO-Annual-Consultation-Report-on-Hong-Kong-China-2025_for-publication.pdf

²³Mo, M. (2024). Four years on: Hong Kong after the National Security Law. *Council on Geostrategy*. <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/four-years-on-hong-kong-after-the-national-security-law/>

²⁴Xinhua (2025). HK steps forward from governance to prosperity in 2025. *China Daily*. <https://www.chinadailyasia.com/hk/article/626305>

²⁵Maizland, L., & Fong, C. (2024). Hong Kong's freedoms: What China Promised and How It's Cracking down. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/hong-kong-freedoms-democracy-protests-china-crackdown>

²⁶Huang, C. (2020). Education reform looms in Hong Kong; future of liberal studies to be decided this year. *The Straits Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/hong-kong-leader-vows-education-overhaul-after-protests>

²⁷Davidson, H. (2024). A “patriotic education”: Hong Kong schools begin rollout of Xi Jinping Thought. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/sep/03/hong-kong-schools-begin-teaching-xi-jinping-thought>

²⁸Cotton, D. (2024). Patriotic education is far broader than you might believe. *China Daily*. <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/594167>

²⁹Wong, K. H. (2025). Is Patriotism Just Obedience? Hong Kong Under the National Security Law. *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2025/09/30/is-patriotismjustobedience-hong-kong-under-the-national-security-law/>

³⁰Kaur, A. and Rayee, Z. (2025). Sharp Power and Para Diplomacy: China's Strategic Influence over Hong Kong Since 2020. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 30(8). <https://iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.30-Issue8/Ser-7/C3008071724.pdf>

³¹Min Hua, C. (2016). What Kind of International Order Does China Want? *China Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.6978>

³²Fong P. K., Te A. Y. (2025). Can China develop the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area into a sustainable innovation technology and finance hub? *Public Administration and Policy*, Vol. 28 No. 3 pp. 254–270. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/PAP-08-2025-0145>

³³Walton, P. (2023). Chinese equity markets rally on hopes for official support. *FOREX*. <https://www.forex.com/en/news-and-analysis/china-roundup-nov-6/>

³⁴Qian, X. (2025). China's Regional Integration-“The Greater Bay Area”, in (ed(s). Julein Chaisse and Christoph Herrmann). *In the International Law of Economic Integration*. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780192871626 https://ieem.org.mo/wpcontent/uploads/2025/06/Annex_B_BookChapter_Qian_GBA_OUP2025.pdf

³⁵BBC News (2021). *Apple Daily: Hong Kong pro-democracy paper announces closure*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57578926>

³⁶Freedom House (2021). *Gutting Hong Kong Broadcaster, Apple Concessions, Propaganda Setbacks in Europe*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/china-media-bulletin/2021/gutting-hong-kong-broadcaster-apple-concessions-propaganda>

³⁷Amnesty International (2025). Hong Kong: Article 23 law used to “normalise” repression one year since enactment. *Amnesty International Australia*. <https://www.amnesty.org.au/hong-kong-article-23-law-used-to-normalise-repression-one-year-since-enactment/>

³⁸Ma, J. (2025). Hong Kong faces rising ‘soft resistance’ threat amid geopolitical rifts: experts.

South China Morning Post. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hongkong/politics/article/3306654/hong-kong-faces-rising-soft-resistance-threat-amid-geopolitical-rifts-experts>.

³⁹Kemp, S. (2025). Global Digital Insights. *DataReportal*. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-hong-kong>.

⁴⁰Zhao, H. (2025). Social Media Statistics for Hong Kong. *Meltwater*. <https://www.meltwater.com/en/blog/social-media-statistics-hong-kong>.

⁴¹Corichi, M., & Huang, C. (2023). How People in Hong Kong View Mainland China and Their Own Identity. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/shortreads/2023/12/05/how-people-in-hong-kong-view-mainland-china-and-their-own-identity/>.

⁴²Fong, B. C. H. (2017). One Country, Two Nationalisms: Center-Periphery Relations between Mainland China and Hong Kong, 1997- 2016. *Modern China*, 43(5), 523-556. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44505182>

⁴³Zhu, H. (2019). Beijing’s “Rule of Law” Strategy for Governing Hong Kong: Legalisation without Democratisation. *China Perspectives*, 1 (116), 23-34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26663901>

⁴⁴Laikwan, P. (2020). Identity Politics and Democracy in Hong Kong’s Social Unrest. *Feminist Studies*, 46(1), 206–215. <https://doi.org/10.15767/feministstudies.46.1.0206>