

Taiwanese, Hong Kongers identify less with China

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In Taiwan and Hong Kong, residents are identifying less and less as Chinese — a trend that is troubling Beijing, according to a new study by American Enterprise Institute research fellow Michael Mazza.

“To young Hong Kongers, the city [territory] has always been part of China; to young Taiwanese, the idea that the island [sic] is part of China is an anachronism,” Mazza says in the study. “Given these differences, one might expect each community to relate to mainland China in very different ways — [but] one would be mistaken.”

The study, published this week in American Enterprise Institute journal *The American*, says that regular surveys on identity in Taiwan and Hong Kong reveal “long-term trends that must be troubling to the mandarins in Beijing.”

Mazza says that in Hong Kong, those identifying themselves as Hong Kongers significantly outnumber those identifying themselves as Chinese and that the divergence seems to be growing.

In Taiwan, 60.4 percent self-identify as Taiwanese, while only 32.7 percent identify as both Taiwanese and Chinese, he said, adding that: “A measly 3.5 percent identified as Chinese.”

“All told, there is very little support in Taiwan for unification, whether immediate or eventual,” Mazza added. “The people of Taiwan, an island that has enjoyed de facto independence for six decades and democracy for two, and which, arguably, has never actually been ‘part’ of China, increasingly identify with their locality and oppose unification with the mainland.”

He says these trends are due not only to the uniqueness of Taiwan and Hong Kong compared with China, but “also to aversion to China’s political system.”

In the study, Mazza asks: “What do Hong Kong and Taiwan see when they look at Beijing?” to which he answers: “The Tiananmen Square massacre, an absence of freedom, the violation of

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basic human rights, corruption run rampant and a Chinese Communist Party that spent decades rejecting thousands of years of Chinese culture before belatedly casting itself as that culture's ultimate defender."

Neither Taiwan nor Hong Kong are Chinese as the party understands it, but "each represents, in its own way, the China that could be," Mazza says. "Their very existence poses a threat to the party's legitimacy to govern."

Beijing has already lost the battle for the hearts and minds of the public in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the study argues, positing that "China now will have to reconceptualize its strategies for bending Hong Kongers and Taiwanese to its will."

The study concludes that "as the people of Hong Kong continue to demand a greater say in their own governance and as those on Taiwan remain engaged in a lively political debate over their own future, they'll also have to dig in and rededicate themselves to defending the already extant institutions and the way of life that make them so threatening to [Chinese President] Xi Jinping (习近平)."

"China's dictators are closing in, eager to extinguish, one way or another, the flame of freedom that burns in each," the study says.

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