

## **GUANGDONG'S EXCEPTIONALISM, PATRIOTIC EDUCATION AND DUAL CIRCULATION ECONOMY**

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January 2021

### **SUMMARY**

This paper touches the issue of the patriotic education in the Southern China province Guangdong. It argues that due to the local conditions, there are limitations in navigating centrally sponsored patriotic education. In fact, priority is given to manoeuvre between promoting the local culture of Lingnan, describing past foreign influences, republican, democratic history and “red” culture promoting the communist movement in Guangdong and the Greater Bay Area with Hong Kong and Macao. In order to secure its position within China, the government in Guangzhou needs to keep the Southern province culture proximity with Chinese overseas, as well as not to exaggerate promoting strong pro-Beijing patriotic feelings. Nevertheless, in the current context of partial decoupling, Beijing will try to push more pro-motherland feelings and create more loyal high-tech elites in Southern China. However, as argued in the paper, it might have a negative impact on the international human resources development needed for high-tech strategic autonomy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, Guangdong has not only been a gateway to China, but also the cradle of Chinese nationalism and republicanism. Guangdong, a province originally located at the borders of the Chinese world with Lingnan culture, somewhere along with the trade throughout history, was exposed to cultures such as Indian, Romanian, Persian, Arab or

Portuguese. By the late 1800s, it continued to serve this role with big, multicultural ports – in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Macao and Shantou, the last three opened after the Opium Wars. As a province highly influenced by Western powers, it was most firmly engaged in reforming backward homeland and strengthening its international position, as well as developing a republican idea, since they did not believe in the Qing dynasty's reforming China. Nowadays Guangdong is a province with a strong sense of its own identity based on Lignan culture and reformists experience. It is also a booming economy with foreign, Hongkongese, Taiwanese and Chinese overseas diaspora investments present.

Nevertheless, this cultural and republican provincial legacy has been tested by ongoing centralization and Xi Jinping's attempt to promote affiliation to the party across China. This paper addresses the questions as follow: how does Guangdong's exceptionalism affect patriotic education? To what extent does the Cantonese patriotic education reflect the province peculiarities? What is the role of Guangdong as a cultural "middleman" between Mainland China and other Sino-zone areas like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao and Chinese overseas? And finally, is the patriotic education in Southern China a part of plan for assimilation of Chinese overseas high-tech talents with the People's Republic of China?

### THE EXCEPTIONALISM OF GUANGDONG AND LIMITATIONS OF THE "RED CULTURE"

The domestic cultural peculiarities of the Lignan culture, a different type of Chinese dialect – Cantonese and the province's close relations with the Chinese diaspora of Southern China origins, has helped it to build a unique position within the PRC system that allowed the provincial government to secure Guangdong's role as a gateway to



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China. In order to secure such dominant position, it must attract more foreign resources rather than promoting the "red history" imposed by the central government. Needless to say, that Cantonese successes are mainly driven by the fact that people living in Guangdong are pragmatic, less politicized and business oriented.

One of the illustrative examples of Lignan culture is the Chen Clan Ancestral Hall in Guangzhou. The museum is seen as a representation of classical Lignan architecture. It

tends to favour green and white colours, avoid circular structures, adopt large numbers of relief carvings and sculptures, as well as have many open structures like balconies and verandas. In this regard, Lingnan style differs from those in the central plain (the birthplace of China). Going further the most important characteristic of Lingnan culture is its language (Cantonese). As the language of Southern China, it differs from Mandarin in both vocabulary and grammar. In the 1990s, written Cantonese has gained popularity and became the symbol of localism, especially in Hong Kong.

The second characteristic feature of patriotic education within the province is based on Guangdong's republican experiences. The central government needs to acknowledge the fact that Hong Xiuquan, leader of the Taiping Rebellion; Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao of the Reform Movement in 1898 and Sun Yat-sen, who led the republican revolution, all had associations with Guangdong, as an illustrative example. It means that the biggest number of China's reformers came from Southern China. After Qing dynasty collapsed, Guangzhou was against authoritarian tendencies from the capital city. When General Yuan Shikai hoped to consolidate his power and reign as monarch in the republican system of China, Sun Yat-sen had arrived in Guangzhou in July 1917 and established a democratic government and then the newly formed Constitutional Protection Movement. He quickly received the support of the South China militants whose power was threatened by the centralized tendencies of Yuan Shikai. Nonetheless, the entire Protection Movement failed to defend the constitution and a lack of a consolidated powerbase resulted in chaos across China. However, the Communist Party of China and the Nationalist Party (KMT) shared a common history that allows both to have managed the relationship after the Civil War. For example, in 2005 Po-Hsiung, vice chairman of the Kuomintang central committee visited Guangzhou and the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in the city. A similar situation occurred in 2006, Lien Chen, honorary chairman of KMT, as well as the leader of Taiwan New Party Yu Muming visited Guangzhou and also paid a visit to the same memorial hall. This later led both parties to the historical meeting between Xi Jinping and Ma Yingjiu in Singapore in 2015.

Being dominated by Lingnan culture and its Republican legacy, Guangdong cannot offer much to the CCP patriotic education. The Communist movement has only a few important places for cultivation, such as the museum of the 3rd National Congress of the Communist Party of China or Marshal Ye Jianying Memorial Hall. Both present the opposite

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sides of the relations to KMT. The first one describes the Third Congress in 1922 that urged the Communist Party to unite with nationalists, while the second praised the conversion of Ye Jianying from the KMT to the Communist Party. Marshall Ye was one of the leaders of the Long March, then later on removed from political positions during the Cultural Revolution and the great supporter of Deng Xiaoping in late 1970s. The cultural-republican history of Guangdong allows the province to limit the growing pressure for Beijing shaped patriotic education and be a powerful place for further development in a dual circulation economy.

### GOING THROUGH THE OPIUM WARS' MEMORY IN GBA

The current position of GBA could not further vary from its past. Right in Guangdong, in Humen (now the part of Dongguan city) in 1839 Chinese troops by the order of Lin Zexu destroyed British opium, which led to the Sino-British Opium Wars. The lost war and in consequence cession of Hong Kong marked the beginning of the century of humiliation (百年国耻 *bainian guochi*). This event, so to speak, also emboldened other countries to invade China and forced it into a semi-colonial status by signing the subsequent treaties, which gave away a territory close to Hong Kong: Macao. Portugal utilized its position and forced the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Peking in 1887 giving perpetual colonial rights to Macao was one of such treaties.

The memory of the Opium Wars is very powerful, as it stands as a caesura of Chinese modern history. It is included in patriotic education as a symbol of Western aggression, foremostly an act of Chinese braveness and a spontaneous act of resisting the foreign imperialism (which is not true, it was organised Chinese troops that resisted the Royal Navy). It stands as a great opportunity for the CCP to propagate nationalism based on

hatred for other countries. *Outline of Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area* issued in 2019 clearly states that the CCP aims to integrate Hong Kong and Macao with Mainland China, using the national rejuvenation (民族复兴 *minzu fuxing*) narrative.

Despite that fact, there are not many central level “patriotic bases” or “red tourism” sites in the biggest GBA cities, there are a number of such spots in Guangdong. The Opium Wars Museum in Dongguan is an exception however, the exhibition is not a typical Chinese museum. The initial impression suggests the museum will follow a Marxist historiography narrative. Visitors are welcomed with monumental cubic sculpture with iron chains implying “the shackle of Chinese people imposed by foreign colonists and their fighting spirit of getting rid of fetters”. Then the exhibition presents the history of foreign and Chinese social development. It shows the conflict between capitalist, industrial system and the Chinese agriculture society. However, it does not deepen this

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narration, only subtly referring to it. The museum balances on signalling facts well-known to Chinese visitors, and creating a story for foreigners who, if not engaged in the PRC understanding of history could not notice Marxist references. The exhibition also appeals to Chinese diaspora with, for example, the presentation of the Battle of Taiwan. The exhibition plainly describes that it was “Taiwan army and people” who defended the island, even though it could

(truthfully) state that they were Chinese troops. It is also worth noticing how the museum displays the complex description of Western powers with the opium dealers on one hand and the parliament members opposing the opium war on the other. The museum also suggests that not only the West is to be blamed for “disgracing” the Chinese nation and the “corruption of its soul”, but the Qing dynasty, which is presented as a backward ruler of “imperial ideology”, should be too. Nonetheless, the exhibition ends with the familiar conclusions, the Opium Wars were the humiliation of the country of the five-thousand-years old civilization; “the peace demands strength for protection”; Chinese should learn this lesson and work for the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation.

Analysing other memory sites of foreign aggression in Guangdong, one should take notice that the Hong Kong and Macao museums do not offer a collision with the colonial heritage. The main cities museum, Hong Kong Museum of History and Museum of Macau are both laconic in speaking about the quasi-colonial situation they had once been in. In the Hong Kong Museum of History, only one gallery is committed to the opium wars and colonial period, and while there is much information about it, it is comparatively small compared to a separate gallery about less than four years of Japanese occupation. The scheme repeats in Macao, the Museum of Macau presents a romantic vision of the city where “the East meets the West”. Moreover, the exhibition does not mention the Treaty of Peking or acknowledge the fact that Macao existed as a colony for over a century.

The dim commemoration of foreign aggression is definitely motivated by the “gateway” and “middleman” role of Guangdong. GBA is aimed to further economically develop the area, and as a consequence, attract investors not only from the Western world but also from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Chinese overseas diaspora. This purpose limits the magnitude and intensity of patriotic education in the province, as Guangdong cannot overemphasize the anti-foreign feelings.

### BETWEEN PATRIOTIC EDUCATION AND ECONOMICAL NEEDS

It is easy to identify strong centralization and reinforcement of the patriotic education campaign as a reaction to the pro-democratic protests in Hong Kong. The movement undermined Beijing’s goal of integrating Hong Kong into the GBA and needed a quick reaction from the CCP. As a result, “secret protection education” syllabus is to be introduced in schools and re-written textbooks will emphasize the connections with Mainland China. Recently media also reported the first blocking of a website on the grounds of national security.

The severe reaction is not a surprise. The CCP many times stressed the relevance of “proper” education presenting the Chinese history in 2019, on visiting Macao, Xi stated the “importance of teaching history as a means of consolidating the foundation of patriotism” and added that “every Chinese person should learn the history of its nation”. In this regard, Beijing sees the opportunity to integrate Hong Kong into the Southern

China economy based on the GBA integration only by imposing control rather than leaving “one country, two systems” arrangement as it was in the past.

Beijing based government clearly hopes to create the relatively loyal group, identifying themselves with the Chinese state first, and local cultures (e.g., Lignan) later, if at all. But, apart from that, there is one more problem the CCP needs to confront the talent shortage in the GBA. To achieve an effective model of cooperation that limits dependency on foreign markets, central and provincial government needs to attract young talents, especially in the high-tech industry. As recently reported by the Institute Mountain “The Weak Links in China's Drive for Semiconductors” states that Beijing faces the critical challenge of high-tech talents shortages. Chinese authorities estimate the deficiency as high as 200 to 300 thousand people. Being aware of the growing needs in 2007. “Talent Superpower Strategy” of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress was introduced and the Chinese government has established more than 600 ‘talent-recruitment stations’ around the world. In 2008 the party established the national Overseas High-level Talent Recruitment Work Group. It is clear that Beijing-based government seeks ways to captivate the young people (both Hongkongese and Chinese overseas), who otherwise could choose different technology centres in the USA, Japan or even Taiwan.

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It seems that the CCP is trying to accomplish this goal with loyalty to China created by patriotic education. Recently, the national security education base dedicated for Hong Kong and Macau youth was created. Located in Shenzhen, base will raise their “constitutional and national awareness” by the Mainland teachers and, supplementary with visits to high-tech enterprises such as Tencent, Huawei or DJI. Not only would it promote the image of progressive China, but also will create an opportunity for the firms to popularize the firm as a workplace among students, who later on could choose to join their personnel. A similar strategy, without too much propaganda content, could be used in the case of Taiwanese or overseas Chinese.

Moreover, the important part of incentivizing young talents is showing them China's model of governance that is stable and predictable compare to the Western model of democracy. By introducing patriotic education in Hong Kong, the authorities in Beijing hope to limit the negative impact of the anti-CCP protests and portray China as the quintessential and stable place for work. In this regard, Shenzhen became the vanguard of China's progress. The city is rather neutral and almost free of communist propaganda, there are no national-level "patriotic education bases" and, the local-level ones, as well as the "red tourism" sites in a vast majority, refer to the shared Chinese experience: ancient culture and anti-Japanese sentiment. In other words, while Guangdong turns to promote a more communist legacy, it seems that Shenzhen has no need for it. The city itself is a symbol of Chinese socialism's efficiency.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although, as stated in the official document *List of patriotic education bases in Guangdong Province Guangdong* (2017) is the base for "red culture" with 115 patriotic sides, when compared to the tradition of Lingnan culture and Republican period, it is minor in shaping the patriotic education in Southern China. In this context of historical and cultural differences, the central government, as well as the local party structures need to manoeuvre between promoting the communist history and local legacies. The critical factor, however, in shaping patriotic education is not related to the past but, is determined by the need of the provincial economic development. From the practical measures, the key factor from the provincial government is building Guangdong as the gateway for foreign capital and technology, as well as human resources for the future dual circulation economy in China, given that the high-tech powerful city Guangdong needs to provide its own economy with high-tech human resources. The cultural proximity to the Chinese overseas (mainly in Southeast Asia) helps; however, the more pro-CCP campaigns might threaten possible development in this area.

Optimistically speaking, the need for technological, financial and human resources pushes the CCP into more politically neutral positions, at least in Guangdong. Guangdong government is confronted with the complicated task of manoeuvring between promoting its pro-CCP patriotic education narratives, presenting itself as a liberal environment



suitable for investments, and appealing to Cantonese Chinese by means of Lingnan culture. As a result, the existence and calibre of patriotic education bases and red tourism sites tinged with the communist narrative are limited, and Guangdong uniqueness revealed.

This publication is funded by the budget appropriations for science for 2020-2024 as a research project under the program "Diamond Grant" no. 0041/DIA/2020/49.



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