

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Soft power and paradiplomacy of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region: a critical appraisal

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## ABSTRACT

This study evaluates Hong Kong's soft power through investigating the relations between the city's paradiplomatic ambits and performance and critically reflects on how the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) to further develop its presence in international stage and its identity as an active non-sovereign international actor. This study also enriches the literature of paradiplomacy and soft power of non-sovereign actors since the soft power analysis is still limited to state-centric research. This research also explores new angles to deal with Hong Kong-China relations by highlighting how the paradiplomacy and the soft power of Hong Kong can create space and flexibility for the city's international engagement. A theoretical framework which incorporates new institutionalism and normative theory to explain the interplay of paradiplomacy and soft power is proposed and tested. This study adopts multi-pronged method to investigate Hong Kong's soft power and its leaders' capabilities in upholding the city's international profile under "One Country, Two Systems". Through studying the international indexes, surveys of public opinion, official documents like Hong Kong Policy Addresses and conducting in-depth interviews, this study delineates and evaluates the soft power capacities within paradiplomatic ambits of the city. The key findings of the research indicate the HKSAR government has had a very restrictive understanding of the soft power for the city. In particular, the study proves that both institutions and values of Hong Kong are crucial for boosting the city's soft power. In contrast to the conventional system, the institutions of the HKSAR have limited the fostering of values of Hong Kong, but also the development of the city's soft power. This study shows that the tensions between the government and civil society have weakened some of the potential soft power resources. Moreover, the prevailing policy focus on strengthening the city's financial and economic status with respect to China's rise to power has not done justice to other stakeholders such as the film industry and the civil society who could have made considerable impacts on enriching and enhancing Hong Kong's global attractiveness. The paradiplomatic power of the HKSAR government has not been persistently pursued in the policy implementations. As the HKSAR government claimed it is committed to upholding the city's international profile and to promote its soft power globally, this study intends to make an original contribution to our understanding of the relations of the city's soft power, paradiplomacy and policy implementations.

*Key words:* Hong Kong, Non-Sovereign International Actor, Paradiplomacy, Policy Implementation, Soft Power

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