

June 2017

Book Review: Education and Society in Hong Kong and Macao

Y.L. Jack Lam
Brandon University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci>

Recommended Citation

Lam, Y.L. Jack (2017) "Book Review: Education and Society in Hong Kong and Macao," *Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.
Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol33/iss2/7>

This Book review/Compte rendu is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact tadam@uwo.ca.

Canadian and International Education

Vol. 33, No. 2, December, 2004.

© Comparative and International Education Society of Canada

Bray, M. & Koo, R., Eds. (2004). *Education and Society in Hong Kong and Macao: Comparative Perspectives on Continuity and Change*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, HKU. Pages: 340. Price: 32.00 USD.

Reviewed by Y.L. Jack Lam, Professor Emeritus, Brandon University.

To those interested in the educational systems of Hong Kong and Macao and in the anonymous social, political, economic and cultural milieus in which these systems were conceived, nurtured and developed, this text edited by Bray and Koo should furnish some solid foundation. The book begins with a careful introduction, outlining the geographical contexts of the two places to familiarize those who do not know the region well. It briefly touches on the major theme of the book, justifying its title. It goes into the structure, showing how the chapters are laid out. It even goes to great lengths in explaining how the two spellings of "Macao" (Macau) come about. The same care can also be detected towards the end of the text with the senior editor devoting a chapter on methodology, reassuring the necessity and contribution made by authors of the respective chapters to the discipline of comparative education. As well, through the use of the Thomas and Postlewaite framework, the senior editor revisits the dichotomous trends of continuity and change to illuminate the societal contexts which shape Hong Kong and Macao's education systems.

Carefully parcelled in the well-conceived beginning and the end sections, are five chapters developed by different authors that closely examine various sub-sectors of education in Hong Kong and Macao, four chapters on contextual issues, and four chapters on the curriculum. In contrast to many books containing a collection of papers, credits must be given to the editors and authors of this text for closer than normal cooperation, evidenced by constant references to each other's work. The close collaboration is also reflected in the ways each chapter is structured. Preceded normally by reference to existing literature, some comparative works or generalized observation, the authors of each chapter will then focus the readers on the specific purposes that the chapter intends to achieve. Specific features addressed by the chapter are raised for comparison between Hong Kong and Macao. At times, important stages of development are segregated into periods for

discussion. Some generalization, conclusion or speculation is normally provided.

Additionally, while the reviewer has not had the chance to read the earlier version of this book, the inclusion of much recent information in quite a few chapters suggest that the text has undergone substantial revision and the data are quite up to date.

If one is to take a more critical look at the book, one would note, as all other texts containing collections of papers do, that there is uneven quality of writing among the chapters. Some are articulate, insightful and enlightening. Others are monotonous, dry and uninviting. Some are fair, objective and open-minded, while others are argumentative, strong-headed and biased. Given the divergent backgrounds of the authors, the observed shortcomings may be inherently difficult to rectify.

A second criticism one might make is the inclusion of materials that are of dubious nature. We can see that Civic education and History subjects are sensitive curricular materials that are highly susceptible to the political changes and these are of particular importance to illustrate the traumatic political transformation that Hong Kong and Macao have undergone prior to and after the reunification with China. Mathematics, however, is a neutral subject which is less immune to the sovereignty reversion. Its inclusion in the curriculum section raises the question regarding its utility or significance. If the inclusion is justified, then it begs the next unwelcome question as to why other subjects such as science, and other co-curricular areas not included as well.

Of the references that have been cited in the text, the conceptual framework that the senior editor adopts in his second last chapter deserves some additional comments. Bereday's model for undertaking comparative studies is somewhat outdated. His discussion of "description", "interpretation", "juxtaposition" and "comparison" ought not be treated as four types of comparison. Rather, in view of the current methodological development, they represent different stages in placing comparative data for analyses. On the other hand, the three-dimensional model proposed by Bray and Thomas (1995) is already clear enough in presenting the proper parameter for interpreting the data collected from Hong Kong and Macao, as all chapters tend to deal with the same population, focus on the same entity, and elaborate on comparable issues. Juxtaposing the outdated, unrefined Bereday's model (1964) with the recent model of Bray and Thomas (1995)

conjures a disharmonious conceptual configuration that does not justify the thrusts of this text.

Given all the care displayed in the preparation of this second revision, there are still some detected printing errors.

Overall, however, in view of the paucity of relevant comparative data from this region, the text should be a useful reference for students and scholars in comparative education.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jack Lam. Email: jack.lam@shaw.ca.
