

**Schooling, Politics and the Construction of Identity in Hong Kong:
The 2012 'Moral and National Education' crisis in historical context**

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ABSTRACT

Since Hong Kong's retrocession the Government has endeavoured to strengthen local citizens' identification with the People's Republic of China (PRC) – a project that acquired new impetus with the 2010 decision to introduce 'Moral and National Education' (MNE) as a compulsory school subject. In the face of strong local opposition, this policy was withdrawn in 2012, and implementation of MNE made optional. This article seeks to elucidate the background to the MNE controversy of 2012 by locating the emergence of a distinctive Hong Kong identity in its historical context, and analysing successive official attempts (before and after the 1997 retrocession) to use schooling for purposes of political socialisation. We argue that the school curriculum has projected and reflected a dual sense of identity: a 'Chineseness' located mainly in ethno-cultural qualities, and a 'Hongkongeseness' rooted in civic attributes. While reinforced by schooling, local civic consciousness has been intimately related to a tradition of public activism strongly evident since the 1970s, and further strengthened post-1997.

Key Words: Hong Kong; Reunification; National identity; National and Moral education

Introduction:

2012 witnessed two popular protest movements in Hong Kong: a campaign to assert Chinese sovereignty over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands; and a successful campaign against the introduction of a new compulsory school subject, 'Moral and National Education' (MNE). While these movements sent superficially contradictory messages about national identity, most participants were likely oblivious to such contradictions, instead seeing themselves as asserting a distinctive 'Hong Kong Chinese' identity. It is our argument here that understanding the nature and origins of that identity, and the ways in which the formal school curriculum has reflected and reinforced it over several decades, is crucial to any attempt to analyse and explain the extraordinarily heated controversy that erupted over MNE.

Whilst the introduction of MNE as a compulsory subject was announced in 2010 and withdrawn in 2012, this initiative was the culmination of a nation-building project with much earlier antecedents. The MNE controversy was significant in that it: dominated public discourse for nearly 18 months; involved numerous marches, public protests and strikes; prompted the creation of over 24 civic groups dedicated to opposing the new subject; witnessed the emergence of secondary school students as leaders of the opposition movement; severely challenged the legitimacy of the Government; and contributed significantly to the subsequent pro-democracy 'Occupy Central/ Umbrella Movement' of 2014. Groups associated with the MNE and Umbrella movements also developed strong links to the youth groups in Taiwan involved in the 'Sunflower' protests of 2014, which were prompted by similar concerns over growing mainland Chinese economic, political and demographic penetration of local society. The extent to which these movements not only shared inspiration and tactics, but fed off each other, was illustrated by the resounding defeat of Taiwan's ruling KMT in local elections in the autumn of 2014 – an outcome attributable in part to the impact on Taiwan of the spectacle of youth protest

against Beijing's denial of democracy in Hong Kong (Rowen 2015). The MNE controversy thus forms part of a larger pattern of youth rejection of Beijing's interpretation of the 'One Country: Two Systems' formula that has important ramifications for mainland China's relations with both Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The conflict over MNE has been variously explained. Most analysts portray the opposition as a manifestation of tensions latent since before the 1997 retrocession between local values and those of Beijing, but differ over the specific nature of the values at stake. Some describe the MNE controversy as arising from a conflict between the promotion of nationalistic patriotism and strong local civic values (Kennedy, 2012; Cheung Y.F 2012). Chan (2012) sees local resistance as a reflection of a Hong Kong identity constructed in opposition to the Mainland and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as an alien 'Other'. Others have represented it as: an attempt at Chinese nationalistic indoctrination at odds with Hongkongers' more universalistic values (Leung 2012a; Ma 2012; Veg 2013); a prioritisation of the "one country" principle at the expense of the "two systems" Beijing is sworn to uphold (Chong 2013); a promotion of uncritical patriotism undermining the critical thinking and active learning officially promoted as pedagogical goals (Leung 2012); and a clash between the values of a mature civil society and an authoritarian party-state (Chong 2013). Leung (2013) and Ma (2013) stress the key role played in recent protest movements by the young, which they attribute to: frustration with the grand narratives of both the colonial and mainland regimes; a nostalgic sense of Chinese identity along with an image of the mainland as Hong Kong's primary 'Other'; and the critical role of the internet as both a source of information and a tool of communication and organisation. Mainland scholars, meanwhile, have tended to attribute local unwillingness to recognise the priority of national loyalties to the 'brainwashing' effects of colonial education (Chong and Chan 2012) – even though those most emphatic in opposing MNE belong to the generation schooled *after* 1997 (Veg 2013).

Despite differences in emphasis, all these explanations recognise a fundamental tension between competing conceptions of identity and citizenship as central to the ongoing arguments over Hong Kong's political future. However, these analyses provide little explanation as to the nature and genesis of the values which define the Hong Kong identity, and how these relate to the content of the local school curriculum.

This article identifies and analyses the nature and roots of the local values and identity which have been portrayed as the basis of the opposition to the introduction of MNE by setting the conflict in the context of a long history of local disputes over the political uses of schooling. We begin by reviewing the MNE saga itself, up to the point at which the government capitulated to popular pressure, through an analysis of key policy and curricula documents as well as existing scholarly literature. We then turn the clock back, analysing official attempts to use schooling for purposes of political socialisation over recent decades. A grasp of this legacy is crucial to understanding the politics of education and identity in Hong Kong today. We argue that Hong Kong's experience has broader implications for analyses of the role of schooling, and of evolving meanings of being 'Chinese', both locally and in the broader region. Our analysis also challenges claims that Chinese generally (Lee), or Hongkongers specifically (Lau), are uninterested in political issues unrelated to their material well-being, and that therefore exaggerate the novelty of the campaign in opposition to MNE and associated civic movements.

Focusing especially on the 1970s and after, we argue that schooling has been deeply implicated in the development of a distinctive Hong Kong identity incorporating both ethno-cultural and civic elements. Official curricular shifts are significant, we maintain, not just for their role in shaping popular identity (which also depends on a range of factors beyond the school gates), but also for how, in both content and execution, they reflect the evolving relationship between state and citizens.

As a number of analysts (e.g. Tsang 2003; Lo 2001; Mathews 1997) have noted, most Hongkongers have long held a dual, hybrid, or, as Hughes and Stone (1999) describe it, a 'multi-level' sense of identity, seeing themselves as both members of an ethno-cultural Chinese civilization (transcending current political arrangements), and citizens of a locally-circumscribed, modern polity. Protesting Japanese territorial claims (over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands) signifies loyalty to the ancestral motherland, while opposition to MNE signifies rejection of state encroachment on the freedoms constitutive of local identity. Numerous scholars such as Ma (2012), Kaeding (2011), Kit Man (2013), Tse (2014) and Veg (2013) argue that these different conceptions of identity reflect the classic distinction between ethnic and civic forms of nationalism. Civic identity has been associated with a form of participatory democracy despite the absence of representative democracy, with the civic ideals (or 'core values') definitive of Hong Kong identity including an attachment to the rule of law, respect for human rights, political pluralism and democracy (Jones 2014; Tsang 2003). These encompass a sense of the importance of civic action and 'speaking up' to those in authority (Mathews et al 2008). The importance attached to such values is has been consistently borne out by surveys (e.g. Hong Kong Transition Project 2012) that suggest selective popular identification with both 'ethno-cultural' and 'civic' conceptions of identity.

The civic freedoms of the Hong Kong 'Special Administrative Region' (SAR) that distinguish it from the mainland are enshrined in the 'Basic Law', underpinning the 'one country; two systems' arrangement. From Beijing's perspective, this arrangement represented a tactical concession: achieving national unity while preserving Hong Kong's economic utility. However 'systemic' differences have handicapped Beijing's attempts to 're-unify' hearts and minds. The doctrine of national reunification that led Deng Xiaoping to view Hong Kong's recovery as a 'sacred responsibility' (Vogel 2011) renders heretical any vision of local identity that diverges from mainland orthodoxy. Especially since the 'Tiananmen Incident' of 1989, this official orthodoxy has been characterised by the promotion of patriotism, defined in post-

socialist terms as a generalised support for the party-led project of national 'revival'. In recent years, the CCP's standard response to unrest in its borderlands, including Hong Kong, has been an intensification of 'patriotic education'. But here, Beijing and its local proxies find themselves both constitutionally obliged to tolerate an education system designed to frustrate the dissemination of an explicit ideological agenda, and confronted with a populace accustomed to viewing political identity as a matter of personal choice.

The constitutional limitations on the central government's authority within Hong Kong are cited by Qiang (2008), an official at Beijing's local Liaison Office, as the very reason why additional patriotic education is required. Since, he argues, colonial education rendered local residents submissive to the West and reluctant to identify with China, it is necessary to use 'national education' to reinforce consciousness of 'one country', thereby ensuring both national and local prosperity and stability. Qiang's views are predicated upon conceptions of a unitary and essentially homogenous Chinese nation-state long central to the construction of national identity on the mainland (Duara 1995). Deep-seated fears of foreign domination and national dissolution have disposed intellectuals and policymakers to heed Liang Qichao's early-twentieth-century call for the use of history to forge a unifying sense of Chinese citizenship (Moloughney and Zarrow 2011). Drawing on indigenous traditions linking historical studies to moral formation, mainstream scholarship has represented loyalty to the state as the supreme moral duty. Even Communist historiography and school curricula, despite focusing (at least until recently) on the experience of the 'working masses', have minimised the local or peripheral, instead privileging the teleology of modernisation and national unification (Dirlik 2011; Jones 2014).

Morris and Sweeting (1991) distinguish three modes of relationship between politics and schooling: political indoctrination (directly promoting a state-mandated orthodoxy); political socialisation (encouraging a disposition to embrace a particular political outlook) and political education (fostering

critical awareness of a range of political values). Overall, while the former mode has long prevailed in the PRC, Hong Kong shifted in the 1980s from a peculiar form of political indoctrination (involving state-fostered depoliticisation) towards more pro-active political socialisation. MNE has been portrayed by its opponents as an effort at reimposing indoctrination, attempting an awkward marriage of mainland-style ideological orthodoxy and the traditional depoliticisation of colonial days – even while the curriculum has simultaneously sought to promote the critical discussion of public affairs through the teaching of ‘Liberal Studies’ (see below). As such, the MNE initiative both illustrated and aggravated contradictions inherent in the governance model of post-1997 Hong Kong, as well as official attempts to articulate and defend it.

The Moral and National Education (MNE) controversy:

Prior to the attempted introduction of MNE, official strategies for national consciousness-raising since 1997 mainly involved appeals to ‘traditional Chinese values’, heritage, notions of common ancestry and other markers of ethno-cultural ‘Chineseness’ (Ma, Fung and Lam 2011); orchestrated celebrations of ‘national’ events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics (Vickers 2011) and Chinese space missions (Ma, Fung and Lam 2011); and – to some extent – the invoking past victimhood at the hands of common foes in school curricula and museums (Morris and Vickers 2013).

In parallel, a range of extra-curricular programmes were launched or expanded, including youth visits to the mainland and flag-raising in schools (Vickers 2011, Kan 2012). Various new policies or initiatives signalled official intent to pursue ‘national education’ in a more concerted fashion, but had a minimal impact on classroom practice. These included a 1998 ‘Outline’ on Civic Education at junior secondary level (S1-S3) which, in common with earlier such documents, retained a focus on moral education, was non-mandatory, and provoked little public reaction. In 2000, proposals for a general reform of the

school curriculum identified “Moral and civic education” as one of four key curricular areas, but again emphasised personal morality, portraying identity as a multi-level concept extending to notions of global citizenship. In a speech delivered on the tenth anniversary of Hong Kong’s retrocession in 2007, President Hu Jintao made a point of stressing the need for efforts at ‘national education’ to be redoubled. But a subsequent revised Curriculum for Moral and Civic Education (CDC 2008), while further emphasizing ‘National Education,’ once again confined itself to exhortation rather than compulsion.

However, in the same year a government-appointed Task Group on National Education (TGNE) published a report stressing the need to promote ‘National education’ through a variety of means. The annual Policy Addresses of the Chief Executive, especially in 2008 and 2009, highlighted the need for Hongkongers to develop a stronger sense of national identity. This official rhetoric, and increased funding for ‘National Education’, appears to have stemmed from mounting impatience in Beijing at the failure to convert widespread affinity with an ethno-cultural ‘China’ into identification with the PRC regime. The state was, in Gellner’s (1983) terms, intent on merging the national with the political in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, research suggested that local youth were far more inclined, relative to their mainland (or American) counterparts, to take an instrumental rather than sentimental view of citizenship and ‘patriotism’ (Mathews et al 2008), while surveys such as those conducted by the Hong Kong Transition Project indicated resistance to the demands of patriotic loyalty. According to research by Kennedy and Kuang (2014), when asked to choose between region and nation, over 70% of local students expressed a stronger attachment to the former than the latter.

The TGNE report was presented as a response to a 2007 speech by President Hu Jintao, and the annual Policy Address of the same year, in which:

“...the Chief Executive said that every effort should be made to promote national education, with a view to enabling members of the general public to become new Hongkongers who love the motherland and Hong Kong and take pride in being citizens of the People’s Republic of China.

The report elaborated:

“After years of efforts, results of surveys... showed that although the percentage of respondents who identified themselves as ‘Chinese’ had slightly increased over the past decade..., it was still lower than that of those who identified themselves as ‘Hong Kong People’, reflecting the need for the government to put in greater efforts in promoting national education.” (TGNE 2008, 9)

National education was presented as part of a broad programme for developing local, national and global dimensions of citizenship. However, Kit Man (2013) demonstrates that the national dimension overwhelmingly prevailed, with the local and global largely ignored. Moreover, the report defined national identity in explicitly ethno-cultural terms:

“...the sense of “we-ness” should be cultivated from three aspects, namely (1) racial ties, noting that we are all connected by blood as Chinese, sharing the same features of dark eyes, black hair and yellow complexion; (2) culture and heritage, which refers to our sharing a wealth of long-established, profound cultural legacy of China; and (3) our country itself ...” (TGNE 2008, 9).

The report stopped short of recommending the introduction of a compulsory school subject, but noted the many barriers to promoting national education in Hong Kong, and explained:

“The difference in political systems and social cultures between Hong Kong and the Mainland posed a challenge to cultivating a sense of national identification among the Hong Kong people. It is difficult for them to embrace the idea that they are part of a system with an ideology and values that they are not familiar with.” (p.31)

The introduction of MNE as a compulsory school subject was announced in the Chief Executive's 2010 Policy Address, with a consultative draft of the Curriculum Guidelines following in May 2011. MNE was to be taught throughout the twelve years of schooling, and was to cover multiple 'domains' – 'personal', 'family', 'social', 'national', 'global' – in a concentric vision (often associated with Confucian approaches to moral instruction) (CDC 2012, 14). In the guide, the focus is on the 'national' domain; references to Hong Kong are relatively scarce, and typically involve euphemistic use of the term 'society'. Rather than portrayed as a legitimate source of identity in itself, 'society' (as opposed to 'the nation') is represented as a sphere in which one's actions should be inspired by a sense of 'commitment, mutuality, sense of belonging, national identity, patriotism, solidarity' and 'cultural heritage' (CDC 2012, 11).

The need for MNE is described as arising from 'a general consensus among different sectors of society that national education is important to our younger generation' (CDI 2012, 1). However, the 'society' the subject was intended to reconstruct was meanwhile becoming markedly less 'consensual' and more unreceptive to messages preaching state-centred nationalism. Since 1997, Hong Kong has functioned largely as an offshore haven for mainland capital, mainly invested in local property. The resulting inflation gradually put home ownership beyond the reach of even relatively wealthy locals. Moreover, the mainlanders nowadays immigrating in increasing numbers are no longer the impoverished country bumpkins of earlier imaginings (see below), but represent a far more visible presence, with a more direct impact on the local labour market, public services, the transport system and other aspects of daily life. Until the 1990s, Hongkongers had defined themselves by reference to their assumed superiority – material, cultural and educational – to mainlanders (Mathews et al 2008). But in recent years, perceptions have changed, with born-and-bred Hongkongers increasingly fearing relegation to second-class citizenship.

In late 2011, resentment boiled over against generally relatively wealthy pregnant mainland women (dubbed 'locusts'), who were travelling to Hong Kong to give birth in such large numbers that maternity wards were turning away local mothers. Other widely-reported sources of tension included: the alleged suicide of journalist Li Wangyang; luxury goods stores discriminating against locals in favour of high-spending mainlanders; and a shortage of baby milk powder as mainlanders bought up 'untainted' local supplies for resale across the border. Increasingly, the abstract high culture which locals had been taught at school to associate with 'China' (see below) contrasted markedly with their day-to-day experience of the mainland and mainlanders..

The 'consultative' MNE curriculum guidelines were thus released in an atmosphere of considerable local-mainland tension (Yeung 2012), further exacerbated by comments from a senior official at the Central Government's Liaison Office:

“...if we look at...Western countries..., we will find this kind of 'necessary brainwashing' is an international convention. Some people say that there is a need to help primary and secondary school pupils develop critical thinking. However, the usual practice in the international community is to nurture critical thinking in universities.... Some people say MNE should not follow the central government's line. But would that still be called national education?” (Fung 2011)

These remarks reinforced perceptions that MNE was a programme of political indoctrination, broadening support for the opposition.

A revised version of the guidelines, addressing minimally concerns raised during the consultation exercise, was issued in April 2012. Teachers had expressed concerns about the strain that twice-weekly MNE lessons would place on timetables, and about vague assessment arrangements. It was not just the desirability of the new subject that was questioned, but its necessity, given that much of the prescribed content could be, or was already, taught through other subjects (Leung 2012).

A pro-Beijing organisation subsidised by the SAR Education Bureau, the Hong Kong National Education Services Centre, was commissioned to prepare teaching materials.ⁱ Their manual (on ‘The China Model’) was published in March 2012. This attracted little media comment until early July, shortly after the conclusion of an ‘election’ (conducted by a Beijing-appointed ‘election committee’) for Hong Kong’s Chief Executive, a process that featured multiple corruption scandals. Critics then latched upon three features of the text: China’s Communist government was described as a progressive and selfless regime upholding stability and prosperity; multi-party democracy in the West was dismissed as a chaotic, conflict-ridden system that victimises ordinary citizens; and controversial episodes such as the 1989 Student Movement (and the associated ‘Tiananmen Massacre’) were ignored (HKNESC 2012, 10). Opposition quickly mushroomed to encompass a broad coalition of over 20 civic groups comprising the main teaching union, religious bodies, parents and, not least, ‘Scholarism’, a student group which took the lead in galvanising its more-established counterparts (Kan 2012; *Guomin Jiaoyu Jiazhang Guanzhu Zu* 2013). This coalition was pitted against the local government, pro-Beijing pressure groups, and the pro-Beijing media. While opposition groups in general did not object to pupils developing a better understanding of their country, they argued that this should not involve instilling blind patriotism or uncritical loyalty to the Beijing regime (Parents’ Concern Group on National Education 2012).

Meanwhile, the government’s cause was damaged by the perceived ineptitude of the newly appointed Secretary for Education, who made a clandestine – but quickly-revealed – visit to Beijing in the midst of the furore. His attempted defence of MNE was widely ridiculed, and contrasted with the articulacy of his young critics. He explained:

“Even a lot of people who said opposite to the programme these days, but if you ask them are you Chinese, they would categorically tell you, I am Chinese. This is the national pride, this is

identity, this is the one we're not shy, we're not implicit to say, this is the one we're looking for, identity, number one" (Ng 2012).

In early August, pro-Beijing newspapers claimed that opponents of MNE had been 'brainwashed' by the West, and, on September 7, China's Minister of Education insisted on the subject's necessity (Chong and Tam 2012). However, opposition continued to escalate, with public marches, a siege of government headquarters and hunger strikes. On the eve of Legislative Council elections (due on September 9), the Chief Executive announced that, in the interests of encouraging 'school-based curriculum development', MNE would be rendered 'optional' – thus confining it to a curricular limbo. He denied having consulted Beijing over this decision.

Meanwhile, for many local youngsters, arguably the most potent form of 'national education' during this period was the experience of resisting MNE itself (Chang 2012; Veg 2013). Scholarism and other groups involved in the anti-MNE coalition subsequently participated in plans to 'Occupy Central' as part of a campaign for democratisation. There have also been signs of a hardening line from Beijing, with senior figures emphasising the priority of 'national sovereignty' and 'security' (Kan 2012: 69). The *Global Times* decried 'a few local people's nostalgia for [the] colonial past and sense of superiority against mainlanders' and exhorting them to 'share in the integrity and glory of being Chinese' (Kan 2012: 67). On July 1st 2014 up to 500,000 people marched to protest the failure to introduce a democratic system for the appointment of the CE, with hundreds of thousands participating later that year in the 'Umbrella Movement' and the 79-day occupation of part of Central District – the aftermath of which has witnessed a further hardening of Beijing's stance on local democratisation. All this is suggestive not only of growing antagonism between Hongkongers and mainlanders, but also a growing polarization of local society – reflected in the resilience of electoral support for pro-Beijing political parties, even in the immediate aftermath of the MNE episode. Locally based commentators have

meanwhile traded alarmist claims about the 'de-Sinification of Hong Kong', some depicting MNE opponents as Taiwan-style 'separatist forces' (Kan 2012: 67).

Hongkongers' dual identity: the antecedents

Hongkongers' dual identity was both the 'problem' MNE was designed to solve, and the source of its demise. In analysing schooling's contribution to this duality, we focus on important shifts in official approaches to education's role in political socialisation. Leung and Ng (2004) identify three curricular phases: depoliticization prior to 1984; politicization from 1984 to 1997; and repoliticization after 1997. However this periodization fails to capture significant shifts during the colonial period. Accordingly we identify five distinct periods: the pre-1970s colonial era; from then until the mid-1980s, when it became clear that China would resume sovereignty; the period from about 1984 until 1989; 1989 to 1997; and from then until 2010.

Depoliticisation: the colonial legacy prior to the 1970s

Rather than fostering national identity, Hong Kong's school curriculum was tasked, from the 1950s, with blocking active projects of state-centred political socialisation. The aim was to quarantine Hong Kong from the spill-over of China's Civil War, which was sparking riots between local Kuomintang and Communist supporters. The colonial government's limited educational efforts had hitherto focused on training a local *compradore* class through elite secondary schools. Meanwhile, the colony's *entrepot* status dictated that the border with China should remain porous to people and goods. Hong Kong existed not to transform Chinese subjects into British ones, but to promote Sino-British trade. But following China's Civil War, while trade remained crucial, the colony acquired a new function as a refuge for those fleeing conflict, persecution or famine. Moreover, these refugees stayed on, changing the nature of society and its demands on government, especially in the sphere of education.

As early as the 1920s, Governor Clementi, concerned at the anti-Westernism of Nationalist textbooks, had cultivated ties with conservative scholars opposed to China's Republican regime. In the post-war period, the threat of mainland-inspired political instability seemed all the greater, especially with Hong Kong's young, mixed and – to colonial eyes – regrettably excitable population. The British saw a conservative brand of Confucianism, invoking the ancients to stress the virtues of political quiescence and subservience to benevolent rulers, as the best sedative for a restive populace. Missionary bodies fleeing the turmoil on the mainland were encouraged to set up schools, on the tacit understanding that they could receive Government funding and teach their beliefs, so long as they did not encourage subversion. In 1952, a Syllabus and Textbooks Committee (STC) was established, and this recommended more direct official curricular control, especially for *Chinese History*. The STC report also suggested focusing more on 'social and cultural history' rather than 'political history', and emphasising the 'good points and virtues' of Chinese civilisation which, it claimed, were often forgotten in a contemporary China too inclined 'to imitate other peoples' (Education Department 1953, 12).

The locally-published textbooks that eventually emerged in the 1960s embodied this vision. The content of the school subjects *Chinese History* and *Chinese Language and Literature* largely excluded the modern period, depicting a civilisation ineffably ancient and glorious but far-removed from contemporary Hong Kong (Luk 1991). As Luk explains, the curriculum helped inculcate 'a Chinese identity in the abstract, a patriotism of the émigré, probably held all the more absolutely because it was not connected to tangible reality' (668).

Although the British set the curricular parameters, it was Chinese scholars, teachers and officials who wrote the syllabuses and textbooks. Prominent among them were students of the conservative historian Qian Mu, who fled to Hong Kong in 1949 and in 1950 helped found New Asia College (incorporated into the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1963). Qian, author of the influential *General History of China*

(*Guoshi Dagang*), stressed the incommensurability of Chinese culture with key elements of Western civilisation. Particularly congenial to the colonial authorities was his rejection of both proletarian dictatorship and representative democracy. Instead, he praised the institutions of the Tang dynasty, which included the use of examinations (rather than elections) to select officials on the basis of intellectual and moral excellence, and a state-sponsored historiography tasked with providing the governing classes with a gallery of moral exemplars (Kan 2007). The sense of Chinese moral superiority that consequently infused the curriculum was unthreatening to the British; and for conservatives of Qian's ilk, Communism was the greater evil.

The curriculum also included a 'History' subject, generally taught in English, with content and pedagogy drawing heavily on English precedents. Until the 1960s, local history was available as a sub-topic within this, floating between papers on British Imperial and Commonwealth History, modern East Asia, or Sino-Western relations. In a 1960-64 syllabus for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education (HKCE), the remit of this sub-topic was: 'The development of the Colony of Hong Kong, 1860-1941: distribution and composition of population; living conditions; development of trade, education, medical services and public works' (cited in Vickers 2005, 88). Excluded were, *inter alia*, issues of inter-racial relations, Hong Kong's role in harbouring Chinese revolutionaries, and political affairs in general (including the thwarting of moves towards representative government). The 1941 end-point also obviated the need to deal with content potentially embarrassing to the colonial authorities, local elites, and the mainland regime.

However, even this sanitised account of local history was seldom taught, and by the 1970s it had disappeared from the curriculum altogether, despite the efforts of some historians to promote it (Sweeting 1974; Vickers 2005). Its demise was little lamented by many first-generation immigrants, for whom Hong Kong was no 'native place' (see Joniak-Lüthi 2013), but simply where they happened to

live. Memories of war with Japan, Civil War, and then the experience of life under colonial rule, served to accentuate a strong, even defiant, consciousness of 'Han-ness' – buttressed by the relative homogeneity of the overwhelmingly Cantonese population (largely cut off, during this period, from the mainland). It was this uncomplicated and abstracted form of ethnic Han cultural identity that the local school curriculum reflected and reinforced.

The end of acquiescence: early 1970s-mid 1980s

Before, during and after their discussions over Hong Kong's retrocession, both British and Chinese authorities repeatedly invoked stereotypical portrayals of the local population as politically apathetic and concerned only with their families' economic wellbeing (e.g. Lau 1982). However, the 1970s witnessed an erosion of habits of popular acquiescence, forcing the colonial government towards a more consensual approach to governance. Invoking a distinction between 'national' and 'civic' identities, Governor Maclehoze observed in 1972 the need to:

“...govern by consent without the aid of the electoral system...We cannot aim at national loyalty, but civic pride might be a useful substitute...” (quoted in Yep and Lui 2010: 253)

Maclehoze envisaged a depoliticised consciousness focused on prosperity, public order, clean government and tidy streets, assuming, like Beijing's later proconsuls, that 'Chinese' ethnicity inevitably meant affiliation with the Chinese state. However, movements such as the anti-corruption protests of 1973, the teachers' strike of 1974 and the Precious Blood Golden Jubilee School saga in 1977 were in fact highly politicised, if concerned with local grievances rather than mainland politics.

Assertions of Chinese identity were nonetheless central to protests against 'colonial' policies by increasingly well-educated and politicised local youth. The Chinese Language Movement, spearheaded by university students, secured recognition of Chinese (in its spoken form, Cantonese) as a parallel official language from 1975. Attempts to reform the teaching of the 'Chinese' school subjects met with

determined opposition. In 1975, a new *Social Studies* subject was proposed, combining elements of *History*, *Chinese History*, *Geography* and *Civics*. Its proponents envisaged more local content taught through the medium of Cantonese, with consequent pedagogical benefits, including the more effective fostering of civic engagement. They particularly aspired to revolutionise the teaching of *Chinese History*, which they saw as reactionary in its ethos and methods. The proposals met with a furious response from *Chinese History*'s teachers, associated academics, the new Professional Teachers' Union (PTU) and the local media (Morris, McClelland and Wong 1997). All portrayed the plan as a colonial plot to undermine Hongkongers' Chinese identity. In a face-saving retreat, officials redefined *Social Studies* as an optional subject – a strategy reprised almost forty years later in the case of MNE.

Such protests generally aimed not to overthrow the colonial government, but to voice specific grievances over corruption, threats to public interest, or perceived 'colonial' challenges to Chinese cultural identity. Moreover, many succeeded, since the authorities, conscious of their fragile legitimacy and unwilling to resort to force, tended to back down in the face of determined resistance, often resorting to the symbolic enactment of policies – retreating from compulsion in the name of 'choice'. A pattern emerged whereby large-scale, peaceful protests became a stock method of blocking unpopular government initiatives.

The sidelining of *Social Studies* meant that curricular coverage of Hong Kong was largely confined to the subject of *Economics and Public Affairs* (EPA), compulsory at the junior secondary level. This offered a descriptive account of contemporary laws, institutions, geography and economy – but little history and no politics. In EPA texts, local distinctiveness was related closely to the government's observance of the rule of law, the separation of the executive and judiciary, and the evils of corruption – principles that differentiated Hong Kong from the Mainland and were conducive to the emerging pattern of civic engagement.

Meanwhile, beyond the classroom, public information initiatives aimed to inculcate the civic pride sought by Maclehoose, notably the 'Hong Kong Is Our Home' campaign, exhorting local people to care for the local environment. Only in the small number of privately operated, Beijing-affiliated 'patriotic schools' was overt political socialisation conducted. By the 1980s, a new generation, born, bred and educated locally, was moving into influential positions. Their culture was thoroughly Cantonese – not only the standard language of domestic intercourse, but also spoken at school (intermingled with English), heard on radio and television, in popular songs (Cantopop) and at the cinema, and read (through non-standard characters) in newspapers and comic books. Reflected back by these media was the image of a distinctive 'lifestyle' characterised by garish consumerism, irreverent humour, and, increasingly, pride in a Hong Kong seen as exemplifying the rule of law, civil liberties (and the associated willingness to challenge authority), urban sophistication, and, above all, prosperity and the freedom to flaunt it (Turner 1995; Ma 1999).

However, this lived cultural identity was accorded little recognition by the colonial authorities, and was ignored in the school curriculum, still infused with a culturally abstract but politically amorphous 'Chineseness'. Local consciousness was rooted in the 'banalities' of everyday life and popular culture (Billig 1995, 69), and especially in a sense of how 'we' (sophisticated, internationally-aware urbanites) differed from 'them' (poor, backward yokels) across the mainland border (Leung 1996).

Identity consciousness, national and local: the 1980s

Confirmation in 1984 of Hong Kong's impending retrocession inevitably sparked discussion over how the territory's identity and values, and those of the PRC, should be represented in the local school curriculum. British policy was at this time dominated by a cadre of China specialists anxious to avoid antagonising Beijing. They cherished a vision of Hong Kong as it had been *circa* 1960: a city of humble strivers, politically apathetic, and focused on enriching themselves and their families – the vision implicit

in the hitherto depoliticised school curriculum. For the PRC, where to get rich was now deemed 'glorious', concerns to maintain political stability made this vision similarly attractive. Besides, 1980s China was a beacon of reformist Communism, and many expected political liberalisation to proceed alongside the economic variety. Doubts regarding the retrocession were thus balanced by optimism; China was changing for the better, and Hong Kong might support this evolution. But if this were so, perhaps Hongkongers could push at the boundaries of the politically permissible, and define more clearly both national and local identities, and the histories and values that distinguished them.

Debate continued throughout the decade over what 'a high degree of autonomy' actually meant. A Basic Law Drafting Committee brought together local appointees and mainland officials. The former consisted mostly of business people, unrepresentative of the broader community (Ghai 1999), but discussion of Hong Kong's future extended far more widely across a vibrant civil society, subjecting the government to complex and often conflicting pressures. Schooling was not immune to this ferment, with different subjects and curricular initiatives reflecting the concerns of particular constituencies.

Amongst existing school subjects, *Chinese History* stood at one extreme, evincing no significant alterations during this period. As guardians of a timeless and essentialised 'Chineseness', those responsible saw no need for change following the Joint Declaration (Kan, Vickers and Morris 2007). Revisions to the *Chinese Language* curriculum were similarly minimal, consisting of the introduction of a small proportion of post-1949 mainland texts, all of a studiously depoliticised nature (Morris 1991).

But *History* curriculum developers, committed to emphasising their subject's 'relevance' to students' lives, faced greater challenges. They were also concerned for their subject's popularity, since it was seen as difficult and dull, and struggled to attract students. In 1988, a revised HKCE syllabus extended the subject's chronological end-point from 1949 to 1970. Thematically, the focus was on modern state

formation in Europe, the USA, the USSR and China, providing pupils with a historical framework both more politicized and, arguably, more relevant to Hong Kong's future. The curriculum now furnished a narrative of China's post-1949 political development, but unrelated to any account of local history.

Hong Kong's contemporary politics, and its relationship with China, were gradually accorded more extensive treatment in *EPA*. References to the territory's 'colonial' status had been eliminated during the 1970s, but no vision of democratisation was expounded – rather, the *status quo* was descriptively summarised. From 1987, among the matters described was 'the future development of Hong Kong' as envisaged in the Sino-British Joint Declaration (Morris 1991, 127). Although details of future constitutional arrangements remained necessarily vague, the commitment that 'Hong Kong people' would 'rule Hong Kong' implied democratisation of some kind. From 1984, *EPA* textbooks introduced local pupils to the 'principles and forms' of 'representative systems' and 'liberal democracies', without spelling out their relevance to the local context (125). But the government faced growing criticism over schooling's inadequacy to prepare pupils to exercise the rights and duties of democratic citizens.

In 1984, calls from the Legislative Council and pressure groups for the urgent introduction of 'a true democratic education' were initially rejected by the government as 'too risky'. But in April, the Examinations Authority announced that a new school subject – *Government and Public Affairs* (GPA) – was being developed (though initially only at 'Advanced' level). Public pressure thus prompted acknowledgement of the need to prepare students for the exercise of liberal-democratic citizenship. But although *GPA* materialised, it did so, like *Social Studies* before it, as a largely symbolic 'option' adopted by very few schools.

Meanwhile, in 1985, the Education Department (ED) issued cross-curricular 'guidelines' on 'Civic Education in schools' that emphasised identification with and pride in Chinese culture (as did revisions

to the *Social Studies* curriculum at around the same time). No specific reference was made to the impending retrocession, and while certain political concepts were invoked (e.g. 'representative systems under liberal democracies'), greater stress was placed on describing governmental institutions and detailing the rights and responsibilities of a good citizen. A conservative ethos was evident throughout, because, as the text explained, 'In the light of Hong Kong's recent political development, evolution should be the watchword and the emphasis... will be on civic education as a politically socialising force for promoting stability and responsibility' (CDC 1985,8). Avoiding analysis of democracy was justified because 'democracy means different things to different people' (11). The values expounded chimed with the Confucian nostrums of a 1981 set of Moral Education Guidelines: '... to develop a moral sensibility, to promote character formation and training, to encourage correct attitudes towards life, school and community' (cited in Morris 1991, 131).

More significant in influencing lesson content was the secretive process for vetting school textbooks, with decisions and 'suggestions' from the ED communicated directly to publishers. Then, as now, quiet compliance was the norm, on pain of exclusion from the recommended list. The scant information available on revisions 'suggested' sheds light on official concerns (Morris 1991). For example: references to Hong Kong as a colony were to be removed from *History* and *EPA* texts; discussions of the Korean War were to portray China in a more favourable light; and references to Tibet and Mongolia as separate countries were forbidden.

Official reluctance to offend Beijing was evidently at work here, and the effect was increasing self-censorship. As 1997 approached, publishers went further – with one adding the acronym 'SAR' to all references to Hong Kong from prehistoric times onward (Vickers 2005). However, no major curricular shift followed the retrocession. The diverse nature of changes to subject curricula around this time – some (*History, EPA*) embracing a more liberal-democratic agenda, others (*Social Studies, Geography*)

adopting fuller and more favourable treatment of the contemporary PRC, and others still (*Chinese History*) hardly changing at all – demonstrates the relative autonomy of subject communities and the limits of official authority over schooling. Conscious of their weak legitimacy, the colonial administration sought to minimise public confrontation over sensitive issues by eschewing compulsion and resorting to symbolism (Morris and Scott 2003). The result was that schools on the whole continued to eschew a crudely prescriptive approach to political socialisation.

Hiatus: 1989-1997

Expectations of political liberalisation on the mainland evaporated in June 1989, following the suppression of the pro-democracy Student Movement. Massive protests by local sympathisers alarmed the mainland authorities, previously encouraged (not least by the British) to see Hongkongers as politically quiescent. Ironically, these demonstrations – organised by ‘The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China’ – while exhibiting vehement national feeling, also contributed to a realisation that democratisation, if it were to happen, must initially be a purely local affair. Thus the stakes involved in asserting a distinctive local identity were significantly heightened.

A new and – from Beijing’s perspective – less compliant Governor, Chris Patten, was installed in 1992, and his announcement of democratising reforms crystallised the divide between those prioritising defence of what he termed Hong Kong’s ‘core values’ and those stressing loyalty to the Motherland. Both camps contained strange bedfellows, as ‘sudden patriots’ from the business community allied with old-style Maoists faced off against local democrats aligned with colonial administrators (Pepper 2006). However, Patten’s political reforms were generally unmatched by radical shifts in other areas of policy, education included; here, the established pattern persisted – cautious trade-offs among stakeholders, symbolic initiatives, and careful navigation of the presumed limits of Beijing’s tolerance.

Ostensibly, the move during these years to introduce local history into the school curriculum seems contrary to this trend. However, in contrast to the situation in Taiwan around the same time, fostering or celebrating local identity was not highlighted as a primary curricular aim. A local history 'pilot project', proposed in 1989, had initially aimed to 'enhance [students'] understanding of the local setting [and] enforce their sense of identity... in the context of global issues' (Cheng 1989, 17-18). But following criticisms in the pro-Beijing press, the ED subsequently emphasised the convergence of local and Chinese identities:

“On the one hand, through teaching the developmental process and factors of success of Hong Kong, teachers can... cultivate a sense of sentiment and responsibility towards Hong Kong; on the other hand, when they realise the close linkage between Hong Kong and China in history, students will strengthen their sense of identity with the mother country, nation and culture. These two aspects could facilitate the return of Hong Kong to China and the implementation of 'one country; two systems'...” (1995 ED statement, cited in Lee 1996, 59)

This shift in emphasis was reflected in changes to teaching materials on topics such as the post-war influx of refugees. References to 'refugees' in an early 1990s draft of the A' level syllabus were expunged and changed to 'population influx' (Vickers 2005). Later, in the local history chapters of textbooks for junior secondary level, this 'influx' was explained in the context of the mainland's 'contributions' to Hong Kong's development, on the grounds that the people thus 'moved' provided cheap labour and capital that helped fuel economic growth (Kan 2003). In coverage of relations with the mainland, the published syllabus emphasised China's contributions, whereas suggestions earlier submitted to the curriculum committee had stressed precisely the reverse (Vickers 2005, 169). Meanwhile, with respect to domestic social and political arrangements, coverage of the local past tended to portray 'the *status quo* as the natural order of things' (Lee 1996).

By contrast, those responsible for the *Chinese History* curriculum actively sought to entrench their subject's status by emphasising its utility in promoting cultural pride and state-centred nationalism. A 1997 revision of the junior secondary syllabus detailed new 'learning objectives' related to patriotism, indicating topics relevant to this purpose. For example, the need to 'wholeheartedly serve the nation and protect the nation's interests' was exemplified by Lin Zexu (hero of the Opium War), while 'striving for ethnic unity and national unification' was epitomised by 'the establishment of the PRC' (CDC 1997).

As 1997 approached, pro-Beijing figures insisted that local ambivalence towards reunification reflected the deficient patriotism of a populace deracinated by prolonged exposure to 'colonialism'. This narrative of alienation from national 'roots' implied a pressing need for patriotic re-education. However, despite demands for an emphasis on China's history and shared 'traditional values', there was no immediate attempt to introduce a compulsory subject performing the role of Morals or Politics lessons on the mainland (Vickers 2009); nor was history accorded any special priority by the ED. The Civic Education Guidelines, revised in 1996, further acknowledged the need to promote Chinese patriotism, but also promoted for the first time the importance of concepts central to civic identity, especially the rule of law and the separation of the Judiciary from the Executive branch of Government. However as 'Guidelines' they remained optional and thus served a largely symbolic function.

Jones (2014) argues that during this period the rule of law, long celebrated in *EPA* (if not in the cross-curricular Civic Education Guidelines), obtained, through the media and political discourse as well as schooling, a status akin to a "national ideology" distinguishing Hong Kong from the Chinese mainland. Although the colonial government itself had in fact frequently traduced the rule of law, the latter now came to symbolise both the positive aspects of Britain's colonial legacy and, notwithstanding the absence of an elected government, the local presence of crucial attributes of a liberal-democratic society.

Patriotic re-education and schooling – a hardening official line: 1997-2010

In many spheres, the new SAR Government appeared emboldened to tackle head-on controversial issues fudged or avoided by its colonial predecessor. But it found itself similarly constrained by fragile legitimacy, a constitution that limited its scope for action, a strong tradition of oppositional civic engagement, and a populace of whom many saw no connection between their Chinese identity and the regime in Beijing. While unelected regimes elsewhere could attempt to manufacture legitimacy through state propaganda, Hong Kong's leaders had to confront both entrenched popular aversion to indoctrination and a media that, however self-censoring in its coverage of mainland news, was often witheringly critical of the local authorities. Moreover, many business elites remained convinced that Hong Kong's prosperity rested upon the maintenance of the rule of law and political stability. Despite the immense powers invested in officials by the 'executive-led' system, the political levers at their disposal were remarkably weak.

In the educational arena, several episodes served to remind officials of the limits to their effective authority. There was an attempt in 1997 to compel most local secondary schools to use Chinese rather than English as the medium of instruction – but, in the face of fierce protests from schools, parents and students, the government was forced to compromise. The colonial government had long advocated 'mother-tongue' instruction on pedagogic grounds, but had confined itself to exhortation for fear that attempts at compulsion might provoke precisely this sort of reaction (Morris and Adamson 2010).

The pressure on school timetables caused by the introduction of new subjects – notably *Putonghua* (Mandarin) – prompted a late-1990s move to consolidate history teaching at junior secondary level into one school subject, to be taught in Cantonese. In a manner recalling the *Social Studies* controversy of the 1970s, this was effectively aborted by opposition from educationalists associated with *Chinese*

History. They argued that, given the 'need' to reconnect locals with their Chinese heritage, their subject's status should be enhanced rather than diluted (Vickers 2005, 219-224).

More broadly, during the early post-handover years, a 'softly-softly' approach to National Education was adopted. A prominent role was accorded to cultural policy, with museums encouraged to borrow from the mainland exhibitions celebrating various aspects of China's heritage and history (Vickers 2005; 2011). Olympic athletes, astronauts and assorted national heroes were paraded before locals to encourage them to bask in China's national triumphs (Ma, Fung and Lam 2011). Educational initiatives seemed largely limited to distributing patriotic song-and-dance routines for use in kindergartens (Morris 2009). In 2005, a group of students was sent on the first annual 'summer boot camp' run by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). On their return, the then Permanent Secretary for Education noted that 'this experience will have greatly strengthened your understanding of and identification with the traditions of awe-inspiring military prowess exemplified by these sons and brothers of the People' (quoted in Vickers 2011, pp. 95-6). Such culturally oriented and optional activities, eschewing direct allusions to political ideology, provoked little opposition amongst a population long-imbued with a strong sense of ethno-cultural 'Chineseness'.

But such efforts were eclipsed by reaction to an attempt in 2003 to instigate anti-subversion legislation that would have curbed local freedom of expression. Massive public opposition prompted a humiliating official climb-down and a surge in support for pro-democracy parties. As Loh (2003) noted, this reflected a widespread discomfort with the Chief Executive's '...linking of national security with being Chinese'. Pepper (2006) argues that the demonstrations of 2003 prompted Beijing to intervene more directly in local politics; if local people were uncomfortable with the linking of national security with 'being Chinese', then – the national leadership apparently concluded – more forceful instruction in the

meaning of Chineseness was necessary. Between 2006 and 2012, 'National Education' spending rose from HK\$5m to HK\$96m (Ming Pao 2012).

A combination of revisions to existing subjects and textbook self-censorship had already lent a more 'patriotic' flavour to the school curriculum. For example, when the government introduced a compulsory 'Liberal Studies' subject to promote 'critical' reflection on public affairs, published teaching materials typically reproduced mainland orthodoxy in their China coverage, while refraining from overtly politicised statements (LSEB 2006; Vickers 2011). However, this new subject allows teachers considerable latitude in deciding what and how to teach, since it is not constrained by officially approved textbooks, and the syllabus explicitly encourages classroom discussion of current affairs. It seems that many teachers have used the subject to encourage pupils to think critically (Han 2013).

However, by 2008, officials, from President Hu Jintao on down, were signalling that 'National Education' had to be delivered in a more concerted fashion. As noted above, the broader context for this move included shifting relations with the mainland, and a hardening in Beijing's attitudes towards internal dissidence and the outside world. Whereas in 1997 Hong Kong had seemed a glittering prize to a relatively poor China, by the mid-2000s its economy was increasingly dependent on the mainland. The CCP remained nervous of internal opposition, related not only to burgeoning economic inequality, but also to separatist agitation in Tibet and Xinjiang. Viewed from Beijing, Hongkongers' demands for democratic reform, and refusal to acknowledge the precedence of Chinese over local identity, looked like another instance of Western-inspired subversion.

Part of the context for this attempt to intensify national education also relates to the commitment, enshrined in the Basic Law, to introduce by 2017 universal suffrage for elections to the post of Chief Executive. The Occupy Central movement that emerged in the aftermath of the anti-NME campaign

aimed to ensure that the new electoral system guaranteed genuine popular choice. For its part, Beijing signalled that 'patriotism' would remain a requirement for holders of senior posts in all arms of local government, judicial as well as executive. NME had been designed to mould local sentiment in the national image, thus rendering Hong Kong safe for democracy. But the extent of existing civil liberties, intertwined with a strong local civic consciousness, has continued to obstruct attempts to install a programme of national education into schools.

Conclusion

The parties on each side of Hong Kong's identity wars (Fung 2011, Ming Pao 2012) have both accused each other of indoctrination. The assumption that a passive student body can be moulded according to the ideological predilections of an all-powerful establishment is widely held across the political divide. However, the history of attempts to use the local school curriculum for purposes of political socialisation demonstrates that the relationship between schooling, identity and values is far more complex than many have assumed. The strong sense of local distinctiveness that pervades contemporary Hong Kong emerged largely despite official programmes of political socialisation rather than because of them. The curriculum and approved texts certainly played their part in codifying or entrenching conceptions of ethno-cultural (rather than political) Chineseness, civil liberties and the rule of law, but the evolving sense of 'Hongkongeseness' ultimately had its roots more in popular culture than official propaganda. For example, the introduction of local history, far from attempting to create a local identity *ab initio*, was a *post-hoc* attempt to give popular identity consciousness a 'back-story'. Later efforts to slot this story into a 'patriotic' China-centric narrative of Hong Kong's development were far from convincing – and, if the MNE saga is any indication, have failed to convince large swathes of local youth. In other words, curricular innovations have tended to follow rather than to lead shifts in popular consciousness, and where they have challenged mainstream opinion, as with *Social Studies* in the 1970s, medium of instruction policy in the 1980s and 1990s, and MNE in 2012 – they have met with strong public

opposition.

Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that Hong Kong's 'public' is a far from monolithic entity. There is and has always been a substantial constituency that supports explicitly patriotic, pro-Beijing 'national education'. This is partly because Hong Kong's ties to the mainland are in many respects so strong – and becoming stronger. Local business elites are increasingly dependent on, or dominated by, mainland interests. The population of first-generation immigrants from the mainland, whom surveys indicate are more likely to identify with Beijing, is constantly being replenished, with Beijing's control of Hong Kong's immigration policy constituting one important source of local resentment. By the same token, the tendency of many new immigrants to cleave to the motherland is hardly surprising, given the prevalence of anti-mainland sentiment amongst locals. Meanwhile, the infrastructure of 'leftist' groups and organisations, which have long commanded significant support amongst segments of the local population, have received a new lease of life since 1997, as Beijing has played an increasingly active role in coordinating support for the post-retrocession authorities. As Pepper (2006) has observed, pro-Beijing political parties are better funded and more cohesive than their pan-Democrat opponents.

But cutting across, and reinforced by, this political polarisation, there has been a growing polarisation of income and opportunity. The strength of anti-Beijing sentiment amongst local youth can be partly attributed to the perception that the "Hong Kong Dream" has evaporated, as the best jobs, and the best flats, increasingly go to mainlanders. This accounts for the irony that it is now the pan-Democrats and their supporters who seemingly expect more of the state in terms of support for collective welfare, while the nominally socialist mainland regime and its local supporters insist on a neoliberal vision of Hong Kong as primarily a 'place to do business'.

The prioritisation of local over national identity implies a prioritisation of local over purportedly national

interests, and hence the promotion of the welfare of Hongkongers. Equally, the insistence that political identity be invested solely in 'China' reflects the assumption that it is ultimately the greater good of the wider nation, encompassing and transcending local concerns, that counts. 'National Education' has attempted to disseminate the latter message to local youth, not just through schooling but also through a range of activities, including a vast programme of publicly-subsidised exchange visits to the mainland. Outside the classroom, meanwhile, pro-Beijing interests now control virtually all of the conventional print and broadcast media, with the exception of the *Apple Daily* newspaper.

However, in contrast to the situation on the mainland, the Internet in Hong Kong remains entirely free, and for local youth this is the primary source of information on current affairs, as well as an important vehicle for political mobilisation (Han 2013). This helps account for the signal failure of the post-1997 'National Education' drive: those schooled since the handover appear even more insistent on their 'Hongkongeseness' and even less likely than their elders to identify as 'Chinese' (HKTP 2014).

Almost twenty years after the retrocession, researchers therefore need to recognise the continuing and profound distinctiveness of Hong Kong society, and its education system, vis-à-vis mainland China. This is demonstrated in the degree of official control over schooling. Whereas on the mainland, Communist oversight of the drafting of school curricula is relatively untrammelled, in Hong Kong, Beijing's appointed proconsuls find themselves as constrained as their colonial predecessors by weak government legitimacy, and similarly hobbled in the face of popular opposition.

But at a deeper level, Hong Kong's continuing 'search for an identity' illustrates the shifting and diverse nature of understandings of 'Chineseness' in contemporary Chinese societies more widely, including on the mainland, where local and regional identities still retain a powerful hold on popular consciousness (Joniak-Lüthi 2013). The official line on Chinese identity emanating from Beijing continues to deny

legitimacy to this plurality or diversity: 'two systems', but 'one country' – and only one vision of what 'country' means. On the mainland, where official control not only over school texts and conventional media, but also over the Internet, remains strong, it is still possible to suppress dissenting voices. But attempts in Hong Kong to deploy similar techniques of media control and curricular manipulation have proved counter-productive. This is due only in part to the legacy of a colonial state that, exceptionally in the East Asian context, adopted a largely agnostic stance regarding identity formation through schooling. In the Information Age, attempting to retrofit an internationally-engaged, prosperous post-colonial city-state with the apparatus of state-led, top-down nation-building is arguably a Sisyphean task. As the late Tony Judt (2008) observed:

'Until the last decades of the twentieth century, most people in the world had limited access to information; but within any one state or nation or community they were all likely to know many of the same things, thanks to national education, state-controlled radio and television, and a common print culture. Today, the opposite applies.' (p. 5)

Therefore the conflicts over education in contemporary Hong Kong may prefigure a more widespread phenomenon: the diminishing capacity of the modern state to impose a singular national narrative.

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ⁱ In drafting the texts, this organization actually relied mostly on Beijing-based scholars – a fact that goes a long way to explaining the failure of the resulting materials to take account of local sensibilities.