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ABSTRACT

In both Hong Kong and the United States, educational practices, especially those in the early stages of development, often do not lay an adequate foundation for lifelong learning. Using an approach rooted in developmental psychology, however, can help educators understand how individuals, groups, and societies develop or fail to develop an orientation towards lifelong learning. In Hong Kong, the prevailing ideology of Confucianism upholds moral virtue and familial unity and places tremendous importance on education. Parents in Hong Kong make enormous sacrifices for their children's education to secure both status and comfort in their old age. Despite a turbulent history and future uncertainty, people in Hong Kong generally remain optimistic about the future, in contrast to the cynicism widely felt in the United States, where the individual is the focus and family ties are weak. The educational burden in the United States is largely placed on the schools, resulting in a wide range of disparate opportunities for advancement. The comparably lax educational attitudes result in under-preparedness for students, but provide more opportunities for lifelong learning through such means as community colleges. While Hong Kong requires stability and greater emphasis on the intrinsic value of education, the United States requires more effective family and educational support. Attainment of these goals would foster supportive environments for lifelong learning, with both nations benefiting immensely. Contains 24 references. (YKH)

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In: Lifelong Learning: Policies, Practices, and Programs

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This paper examines and compares the development of and support for lifelong learning in Hong Kong and the United States with the framework of certain psychological and sociocultural perspectives. Of specific interest are Erikson's Eight Stages of Life, Confucian philosophy, family values and related influences, political uncertainties, and institutional variety in support of lifelong learning. Further, this paper argues that some factors which positively influence the development of a learning culture in Hong Kong, are absent in the United States, while certain strengths related to learning opportunities in the United States are weaker or absent in Hong Kong.

INTRODUCTION

The approach used to explore lifelong learning in this paper embraces psychological views which consider human life from lifespan perspectives. This approach is taken because it emphasizes significant and manifold possibilities and adaptations that affect human lives. To maximize human potential, and curtail the waste that can ravage lives, learning and development throughout the lifespan deserve our critical attention, especially from parents and teachers. Proper nurturance and growth of children and adults require that key factors associated with human development are appreciated and taken into account. As well, since people do not develop only in families and schools, it is important to recognize and consider sociocultural factors that underlie and influence individual behaviour.

Few would dispute the notion that the early period of socialization and human development is a time when foundations are set, and that these largely determine the course and quality of human life including much of the preferences and aptitudes that set the stage for lifelong learning. However, though much is known with regard to effective activities that could be practised during this period, actual practices most often don't reflect the best methods for producing and supporting development opportunities, socialization practices, and an orientation towards lifelong learning.

Attacks against education in the United States are commonplace, often criticizing ·ool and teacher quality. Further, many pupils and parents in the United States eive learning to be laborious and not "fun", clearly building a poor foundation ifelong learning. This perception may be seen as frivolous, contrasting with the

serious attitudes of Chinese pupils and parents (Stevenson & Lee, 1990). Compared to the United States, the rote curriculum and study approaches to learning in Hong Kong, Japan, and other societies in Asia and Europe force young people to study hard under conditions of extreme anxiety as they seek to pass life-determining examinations (Yee, 1989; 1992, Chapter 6). Whether through indulgence or drudgery brought about by poor application of what is known of psychological development, lifelong learning may be lost in both these contexts at precisely the time when it should be taking root.

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

In the past, psychologists focused mainly on very early child development in order to study the obvious and remarkable changes in life; however, more common now are approaches that consider human development as a broad lifespan issue, based in part on the realization that people develop and change from birth throughout life. Learning to crawl and walk, recognize close family members and surroundings, speak and understand language, and so forth, are pivotal stages in early maturation. The names and works of developmental psychologists, including Jean Piaget on cognitive development, Mary Ainsworth and many others on attachment, and Laurence Kohlberg on moral reasoning, are familiar to those with a grounding in psychology (see Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith & Bem, 1990, Chapter 3).

Humans experience rapid growth from birth through puberty and the teen-years, a period that requires favourable social conditions in order for the many changes which are taking place to blossom and mature. For example, children are born with what Noam Chomsky (1972) called the language acquisition device (LAD), lasting the first three years. During that period, the child soaks up whatever languages are used within the immediate social environment. Though people can and do learn languages throughout their lives, LAD is an innate process especially designed to help babies, who at that stage lack developed learning skills, to acquire linguistic acuity quickly. We know that language usage within the social environment influences children's linguistic, cognitive and emotional development, and that youngsters can be sadly shortchanged by untoward family conditions which provide meagre and unsavoury surroundings for language growth and more. As youngsters mature towards and into the teens, the brain and central nervous system provide increasing cognitive capability, which receives, digests, and remembers ideas and learnings from home, neighbourhood, and school environments. This is clearly a period when the proclivity and opportunity to embrace lifelong learning is pivotal.

In the United States, adolescence is often a trying, even volatile experience for youth and families as the child matures physiologically towards young adulthood. Although Asians and Europeans pass through the same biological changes, adolescence has not been as troublesome for them as in the U.S. This contrast no doubt comes from sociocultural differences, understanding of which points out the inseparable, complex relationship of nature and nurture as already implied with LAD. Although less obviously than children and adolescents, adults also develop and change significantly. In effect, humans are individuals with biological and personal

differences as well as members of sociocultural groups. Outcomes from this psychological and sociocultural complex produce the vast family of mankind and both affect the potential and propensity for lifelong learning.

ERIK ERIKSON'S STAGES OF LIFE

In order to help understand how the human complex develops in a comprehensive, systematic way, Erikson's (1963) developmental theory identifies eight major psychosocial crises that all individuals pass through. The theory argues that how these crises are resolved, or not, largely determines the quality of people's lives. The following paragraphs in this section focus on three of these stages.

Table 1:
Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development*

Stages	Pyschosocial Crises	Social Unit of Importance	Favorable Outcomes
1. First year of life	Trust vs. mistrust	parents	Trust & optimism
2. Second year	Autonomy vs. doubt	family members	Sense of control & adequacy
3. Third – fifth year	Initiative vs. guilt	family & relatives	Purpose & direction; ability to initiate
4. Sixth year to puberty	Industry vs. inferiority	neighborhood & school	Competence in social, intellectual & physical skills
5. Adolescence	Identity vs. role confusion	peer groups	Integrated self-image as a unique & worthy person; social roles in formation
6. Early adulthood	Intimacy vs. isolation	family & friends	Ability to form close, lasting relationships; to make career commitments
7. Middle adulthood	Generativity vs. self-absorption	interest & work group & family network	Concern for family, society & future generations
8. The Aging years	Integrity vs. despair	Family network & community	A sense of fulfilment & satisfaction with one's life; willingness to face death

* adapted from Erikson (1963, pp. 222-247)

1 shows that the first psychosocial crisis involves learning to *Trust or* t close ones and the immediate environment. Through the social atmosphere created by families, and their nurturing patterns, parents give their babies ample reason to feel loved or disliked, warm or cold, secure or fearful, and so forth, all of which creates a sense of trusting or mistrusting life and others. When babies are handled roughly, fed and cleansed irregularly, and spoken to without affection day after day, they learn to mistrust, a strong perception that can last their whole lives. However, for the most part, the universal cuteness of babies and their crying help win parental affection (cf. Ainsworth, Blehar, Walthers & Wall, 1978).

During stage five, adolescents struggle with the psychosocial crisis of *Identity versus Role Confusion*. This occurs in the teen years when questions such as, who am I, what am I going to be, and what is my role in life, become all important. In Hong Kong, and in many other societies, answers to these questions are generally ready-made, easy to understand, and given to young people by their families and society. However, adolescents in the United States are allowed more freedom and flexibility as well as far greater opportunities to be what they want, as compared to adolescents in other societies. As a result, answers to these sorts of questions are not so obvious, and the resulting psychosocial crisis may be more troublesome and painful for them and their families. In effect, indecision is fostered by parental tolerance and an abundance of options. One's academic ability and standing, career interests and options, peer pressures to conform, family support, and needs and problems surface and shape a healthy identity or, alternatively, enhance role confusion. From school, family and other role models, and personal inclinations, attitudes and habits, promoting lifelong learning can take root and expand during the teen years or they can wither and die.

Throughout the developed world, adolescents are thinking ahead to what they will do after secondary schooling — to seek work or participate in higher education. By this time, their families, teachers, and peers have helped to mould their tentative self-concepts — to be good or bad, an achiever, a laggard, a worker, a professional, a parent, or a patriot. Given an individual who has progressed into adolescence, who is academically "adequate" (in Hong Kong this means having done well in the Certificate of Education Examination at age 16, while in the United States it means good grades and above average scores on standardized tests at age 18), who has a supportive and loving family, who can handle peer pressure, and who can look forward to higher education with career options in mind, we can infer that this person has or is obtaining sound identity formation and a healthy self-concept. However, there is an important distinction to be made. Unlike Hong Kong's exam-driven frenzy, the U.S. system allows many youths to seek in-school fulfilment through sports and other extracurricular activities even when their grades are mediocre.

Although adolescents outside the United States tend to be more docile, they do not always escape *Identity versus Role Confusion* concerns intact. As strong sociocultural influences and parental pressures influence behaviour, teenage dependents may seem relatively conformist in societies such as Hong Kong. However, role confusion can erupt explosively, in turn leading to antisocial behaviour. By way of example, the crime rate for Hong Kong adolescents has been rising alarmingly over the past few years, teenage suicides have become increasingly common in East Asia, and recent studies report increased drug use among adolescents in Hong Kong as well as the United States.

During the eighth and last stage of life, *Integrity versus Despair*, the elderly consider their past and develop an overall sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their lives. Since nothing in the past can be modified, what they recall and regard as significant and how they and others interpret their lives provide an overall, deep-seated feeling of integrity and fulfilment or tragic despair and bitterness. Given an older person who is fortunate to have enjoyed a happy, compatible family and group of friends, a noteworthy career that has provided for self-pride and well-being as a retiree, hobbies and interests that stimulate learning, and a general sense of success despite the normal disappointments of life, that person will attain and enjoy integrity during the final stage. As Erikson said, when parents are not afraid of dying, their children will not be afraid of living!

Social-psychological perspectives, such as Erikson's Eight Stages of life, help anticipate and prepare for developmental changes and needs through the lifespan. More specifically, they can be used as a framework for understanding how individuals, as well as groups and the society as a whole, develop or fail to develop attitudes and values, including an orientation towards lifelong learning.

THE CONFUCIAN TRADITION

Hong Kong has a bustling population of 6.3 million, 97% of whom are ethnic Chinese. Although the territory is a mixture of East and West, Hong Kong residents have retained Chinese traditions, especially Confucianism, which upholds education and learnedness among its highest values. Confucian philosophy asserts that knowledge and virtue can be acquired by all who seek them, not just the educated and wealthy. The great sage believed that individuals must learn to become humane through lifelong study, reflection, discipline, and humility. This potential to learn and enhance the self separates human beings from lower creatures who do not have these same abilities. Since Confucianism continues to strongly influence the Chinese societies of East Asia, and has long been incorporated into the cultures of Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam, it may be argued that Confucian ethics have played a role in the recent economic success enjoyed by East Asian communities. Perhaps more importantly, it is abundantly clear that Confucian philosophy plays a critical role in so far as influencing attitudes towards learning (Yee, 1994).

In his Analects (Lau, 1979; 2:4 and 7:20), Confucius admitted that he himself had to work very hard to acquire the knowledge that brought him wisdom. Since so much is to be learned, education must be pursued at an early age, and throughout the lifespan, with hard work and discipline. Figurines of Confucius as a teacher often show him with a stern face, holding a stick to punish lazy and wayward students. In traditional China, a child's training was methodical. Children were first asked to do simple tasks, such as helping to sweep the floor, greeting elders, and responding to simple questions. In time, a well-defined curriculum was developed, including an introduction to the six arts — ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and

arithmetic. According to Tu (1993), this curriculum involves physical as well as mental and spiritual discipline and study.

Confucius wrote that, at the age of fifteen, his heart was set on learning. Thus, in Erikson's terms, as an adolescent Confucius marked his identity and role as a lifelong learner — one who could go beyond basic schooling to assume greater responsibility for his own studies and reflection. Thus, according to the ancient classic, *The Great Learning*, written by unknown Confucian scholars and memorized by Chinese youth, the goals of superior learning are to: (1) cultivate one's personal knowledge; (2) help others realize themselves; and (3) strive for moral excellence.

Besides teaching that people have the potential and responsibility to learn and improve themselves morally throughout life, Confucius also placed increasing demands of self-betterment on the most intellectually capable. Arguably, the most significant impact of Confucian educational philosophy on the Chinese has been his definition of the political role of intellectuals and their duty as scholar-officials to society and the ruler. The Confucian ideal of "inner sageliness and outer kingliness" implied that sageliness takes precedence over kingliness and that only a sage is qualified to be a ruler. At the very least, an emperor should try to see wisdom through diligent learning. Confucius hoped that education would cultivate a learned elite that would bring about political reforms to overcome China's problems and result in the ideal society, similar to that which had existed in ancient times (Association for the Study of Confucianism, 1988; Kuang, 1985).

Confucius also wanted moral education to influence the order and harmony of society. As Hall & Ames (1987) wrote, the West Han (202 B.C.- 25 A.D.) scholar-officials exploited this goal by establishing standards of ethical behaviour for the society-at-large. In turn, these became the tools and force of authoritarian misrule that have been the bane of the Chinese ever since (Yee, 1992). The authority of the ruler over the minister, the father over the son, and the husband over the wife were firmly set in the formulation of the "three bonds". Also, five vital relationships were established, then promoted and maintained with moral benevolence: ruler-minister, father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, and friend-friend. At the pinnacle, the sage king was the absolute master of and exemplar for society and all below.

Although those ideals have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish at the national level, success has been achieved within the family, the most stable and durable social institution of the Chinese (Tu, 1993; Yee, 1992, pp. 181-190). Emphasizing the great importance of the extended and nuclear family as key microcosms of society, Confucianism relates equally to families of all social levels in professing the values of filial responsibility, affection, fraternity, loyalty, and obedience. Irrespective of material advantage, Confucian values can be achieved and maintained whether a family or individual is rich or poor. Yee (1992, p. 185) wrote:

> *While the family provides vital human functions for all peoples, none can rival the Chinese familial group in its comprehensive handling of basic human activities across the centuries. The Chinese family is perhaps the most self-reliant of world families. Lacking viable state and community social systems, such as education, religion and social welfare, the Chinese... have made the most of the family to fulfil basic human needs and cultural aspirations.*

Most importantly, for thousands of years, the Chinese family has sustained and emphasized broad educational values, including an accent on and proclivity for lifelong learning, and fostered positive attitudes towards learning as it is linked with academic achievement.

THE FAMILY IN HONG KONG TODAY

Confucian values still direct Hong Kong families, most notedly in terms of parental concerns for their children's education. Despite Hong Kong's cosmopolitan, East-West mix of cultures, the people remain quite conservative in terms of social attitudes and values. Traditional Confucian values have undergone only slow erosion over time, and remain the dominant behavioral influence (Cheng, 1992). Compared to the United States, Hong Kong's families are cohesive, as the divorce rate is still very low despite increases in recent years. Attempts by the Hong Kong Government to influence community values is met with suspicion, while the people make conservative demands on the Government. Conservative values are well documented, with examples including public rejection of the decriminalization of homosexuality, demands for greater services for the elderly, and stricter control of pornography. However, the best examples of Confucianism's influence on the Hong Kong people is shown in their undiminished belief in the worth of education throughout the lifespan and the strong faithfulness of young people to their parents despite Hong Kong's current propensity for increased influence of Western culture (Rock Solid, 1996).

Hong Kong parents commonly make enormous sacrifices to support the schooling of their youth, whom they inculcate to a degree not seen in the West with the belief that social mobility and success in life are best achieved through educational achievement. Familial differences in wealth are seen in school options; the well-to-do send their offspring to the best schools that they can afford, even abroad, while the poor have no choice but local public education. The Institute of International Education reported that 12,018 students from H.K. were studying in U.S. colleges and universities in 1995-96 (Desruisseaux, 1996). Sizable as that number may seem, it is a drop of 7.1% from the previous year due to the rigorous recruiting by Australian institutions, though this may change given the most recent outbreak of anti-Asian bigotry in Australia (Chow, 1996).

In keeping with Chinese family values, parents look forward to their offsprings' future ability to provide for their old age and, unlike the West, regard support for their children's education as the best investment in social security. In its "Life Styles Special Report" (1996, p. 37) on family values, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported that readers of 10 Asian nations placed "greater stress on the need for harmony, and respect for authority, than [did] Westerners". Reflecting traditional respect for old China's scholar-official traditions, many Hong Kong parents have been pleased in the past to see their children enter the Hong Kong Government

ran ivil servants. Now the ambitions have changed somewhat, and more parents desire that their children achieve professional status, as in medicine, accounting, engineering, and law.

In terms of Erikson's Eight Stages of Life, therefore, the pragmatic, family-centred Chinese make the most of learning and its fruits throughout the lifespan. Education during the fourth stage (elementary school years), the fifth stage (secondary school years), and onward helps to promote an ongoing continuity of "generativity" and "integrity" for the generations. The link is clear: by doing everything possible to raise their youth with affection and inculcate a disciplined drive for higher levels of educational attainment, Chinese parents not only help their offspring advance and progress in life but secure satisfaction and dignity for their own senior years. Conditions that would bring an older Chinese to "despair" are easy to identify and comprehend.

There is, however, a significant problem underlying much of what may be termed the symbiotic link between education for the young and social security for the old. The Chinese connect learning almost entirely with the status, position, and security it brings, that is to say the extrinsic worth, rather than the intrinsic importance as taught by Confucius. In fact, it is the latter which is more supportive in the longer term for lifelong learning. Similar to hierarchical authority, supposedly based on moral benevolence that in practice became misrule through authoritarian paternalism, lifelong learning and education for self-improvement and humaneness has become linked primarily to status and well-being.

HONG KONG'S TURBULENT HISTORY AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The older generation of Hong Kong Chinese, those who lived through World War II, experienced very hard times during childhood and adolescence. Suffering from the war and consequent devastation, people of that generation faced severe economic hardships and even famine. It is not surprising, therefore, that education for most of them was a luxury and often impossible to obtain. In fact, the Japanese occupying force within Hong Kong tried to reduce the territory's population as much as possible, food and other essentials had to be imported, and the harbour was closed throughout the war by U.S. submarines and airplanes. Except for a handful of primary schools which employed the Japanese language, all schools, including the University of Hong Kong, were closed.

Following World War II, the Chinese who survived harboured a burning desire for hard work and education. While working day and night, many completed secondary education through evening and weekend classes as well as on-the-job training. Among this population, the drive for academic credentials, economic success and self-improvement was striking, and continues even today to be a hallmark of Hong Kong society. Through this behaviour it was clear that Confucian values were alive and well.

In Confucian societies, academic status and work merit have been and continue to be the most important criteria for determining employment and advancement. Not surprisingly, a survey of Hong Kong workers taken in the three-month period ending February 1993 found a strong correlation between educational attainment

and occupation (Choi, 1993). Of the managers and professionals who were surveyed, 30% (figures rounded to nearest percentage) had completed graduate and professional education, and 57% had completed degree-level education, post-secondary technical training or, at a minimum, middle school education. With regard to clerks, salespeople, and service workers, only 5% had completed post-secondary education. Almost 75% of manual workers, who had the least education, strongly agreed that education was important to personal success. Sharing traditional attitudes towards education, the Hong Kong labourers equated jobs and wages with education and learning. Clearly, the link between education and success, and the appropriateness of this link, continues to be strongly embedded within Hong Kong society. It is relevant to consider future events in the context of these beliefs.

After more than 150 years as a British colony, Hong Kong will return to China's sovereignty at midnight, June 30, 1997. The 12 years since the Sino-British Declaration was signed in 1984 have been filled with often raucous disputes over many matters affecting Hong Kong affairs and preparations for 1997. In that climate it is clear that many within Hong Kong view the historic turnover with unease. Activities of the past few decades, including Tiananmen Square and the Cultural Revolution, along with broad expectations to which the Hong Kong Chinese have grown accustomed, including political dissent and free speech, have contributed to this uneasiness. In this climate, about 60,000 people have emmigrated annually from Hong Kong since 1984 (Howlett, 1996, p. 396). The number would almost certainly have been higher, but has been buffered by the quotas imposed by Australia, Canada, the United States, and other "desirable" nations. True to expectations, those favoured by "free" societies have been the educated and the skilled; in effect, many of the best candidates and success stories of lifelong learning have emmigrated with their families. According to Yee (1992), Hong Kong has been the classic geographic and psychological "stepping-stone" from and to China for the Chinese people since it was ceded to the British in 1840.

Assessing attitudes within Hong Kong towards 1997, Cheng (1992, pp. 18-20) reported that "Younger and richer people are much more worried about 1997 than those who have no options other than to stay ... those who have the option to emigrate tend to do so in order to secure an 'insurance policy'. Afterwards, they can afford to have a realistic assessment of China's policy towards Hong Kong ... [after Tiananmen] about one-third of the territory's households were planning to emigrate...." Cheng said that the number of those seeking to move has declined because of "their realistic appraisals of the options and opportunity costs of emigration." As the changeover approaches, however, increased pessimism has been demonstrated by the sharp decline in law and medical school applications, especially by the best students. Graduation after 1997, even from one of Hong Kong's most prestigious institutions, presents a high degree of uncertainty (Cheng, 1996, p. 8). In pursuing education, especially in Hong Kong, where pragmatism is keen, people require purpose and stability so that they know what they study will be useful to their lives. However, polls conducted in March 1997 found that attitudes towards the 1997 turnover are mostly positive among all age groups in Hong Kong, perhaps due to the people's hopes for the best (Mak, 1997).

ugh Hong Kong's present circumstances are unique, the value and importance of lifelong learning is no less significant there than elsewhere, and may in fact be more portentous. For example, Hong Kong's future has clear implications for preparatory learning. Those who are unable to speak Mandarin Chinese should consider the study of China's national dialect, which differs greatly from Cantonese, the local Hong Kong dialect. Also, since Hong Kong has retained traditional characters in writing and printed matter, the simplified characters standardized by China will require study. At present, however, Hong Kong's situation has been trying, and much of the attention that would otherwise be directed towards lifelong learning is on hold.

THE UNITED STATES AND COMPARISONS WITH HONG KONG

Education in the United States differs greatly from Hong Kong (and most of the world), as the focus in the United States is predominately on the individual, not the family, and schools bear much more, if not all, of the educational burden. Though families in the United States vary, most play a more benign role overall than is the case in Hong Kong and other societies. In the United States, the traditional two-parent family is in decline, and more and more children are being raised in single-parent families and in poor homes, often verging on or actually in poverty. Budgetary and other institutional challenges faced by the U.S. public school systems are resulting in reduced educational expenditures, and a proposed system of school vouchers will allow more — usually the brighter and richer — students to attend private schools of their choice.

A national survey of 1,514 United States adults conducted towards the end of 1995 by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University, and *The Washington Post* (Morin & Balz, 1996) found that a majority of those surveyed have lost trust in human nature, the government, institutions in general, and each other. Besides widespread cynicism among adults in the United States, including the belief that life for their children will be worse than for themselves, the survey found that knowledge of basic civics and history was often misinformed and faulty. All of this and more indicates that the United States population may be suffering greater "isolation," "self-absorption," and "despair" in terms of Erikson's Stages 6 through 8 — alarming phenomena if verified through further studies. Whatever fears may be associated with 1997 in Hong Kong, cynicism is not one of them. This difference between the United States and Hong Kong may be linked to stronger family and group ties.

The present climate for financial commitments to education in the United States is not strong. Also, prevailing attitudes towards individual freedom and self-expression appear to be gaining strength, yet these do not materially enhance lifelong learning. There is overwhelming reliance on television for news and entertainment, and naive, uninformed answers to basic questions regarding the United States Government and society generally (for example, most respondents believed that the United States spends more on foreign aid than medicare and most could not name their House representative) suggest that lifelong learning carries low priority among the general population.

Students in the United States are faced with a multitude of choices and options.

Secondary schools, community colleges and universities provide a plethora of courses and discipline options for the large number of students who have not as yet decided what to do with their lives. Parents now indicate that they place less pressure on their children than in the past in so far as commitments to career planning and educational programming are concerned. Thus, student underpreparedness and opportunities to choose courses and change directions help to prolong adolescence in the United States, a luxury that other societies neither offer nor tolerate. While fewer than 10% of Hong Kong's university-age youth are admitted into higher education, more than 50% are accepted in the United States. Nearly all of those admitted into Hong Kong universities complete degrees in contrast to the assorted and individualized outcomes so common in the United States.

Also in contrast to the United States, very few secondary and university students in Hong Kong work part-time during the academic year. In Hong Kong, both parents of families with modest means will work long hours (14 hour workdays are common) so that their children can study full-time. Hong Kong university students can obtain incentive loans from the Government to cover modest living and tuition costs, while in the U.S., college and university students can also avail themselves of bank and government loans. However, interest rates for U.S. student loans are generally higher than is the case in Hong Kong.

It is difficult to generalize with regard to the differences between education in Hong Kong and the United States, and more particularly with regard to lifelong learning, but several issues are clear. In Hong Kong, education is taken seriously and treated with sobriety and dedication because students and parents recognize that failure to be admitted into a university will result in limited career options, leading in turn to reduced family income and a less secure old age. Higher education admission is the *summum bonum* of all the drudgery and exam fervour suffered by most Hong Kong young people, and the academic track leading to the university is obvious even within the lower grades. For the vast majority of those who are not admitted into local universities, or who do not have the means to study abroad, the future is inextricably linked to lower-tier jobs.

FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES

The individualized, indulgent (as compared to Hong Kong and other societies) nature of education in the United States creates many distinctions at every school level, perhaps the most important being students who sort themselves by, and perhaps for, academic achievement. For students seeking professional careers obtainable only through higher education, such as law and medicine, "identity" develops with little or no "role confusion". These students begin the process of meeting their reference group's expectations early. For example, secondary and university students associate with like-minded peers and take all or more than the required preparatory courses, and in turn their aptitude test scores tend to reflect greater motivation and readiness. For students in the United States who stretch out their search for "identity", high schools and community colleges accommodate needs and interests with the view that these students will make their own best career decisions over time. In other words, the United States system may seem inefficient and

lax ared to Hong Kong, but emphasis on individual preferences and providing varied and supportive curriculum menus are consistent with other values in the United States. In the end, this works well for many students. Interestingly, it could be argued that the Hong Kong system is inefficient, because the prevailing university track in secondary schools produces a failure rate of about 82% and there are few satisfactory alternate programs for those who fail to obtain university admission (Yee, 1994, pp. 48-50). Community colleges have not developed in Hong Kong, likely because the bachelor's degree is the basic career-entry card.

For early- or late-blooming students, provisions for lifelong learning in the United States have been consistent with the philosophy of the worth and dignity of the individual. Whether professional studies, job training, craft and hobby interests, literature, creative arts, and so forth, lifelong learning courses and programs are readily available at publicly funded community colleges as well as through private institutions. Terrance Brown, Chief Executive Officer of the Community Colleges of Spokane in Washington State, reinforces much of this perspective as he welcomes students to the Spokane community colleges (Community Colleges of Spokane, 1995, p. 1).

> *Welcome to Community Colleges of Spokane. Our colleges offer a warm, friendly environment for you to pursue new career opportunities, activities and personal dreams. No matter where you are in life — whether you're a high school graduate, a displaced homemaker, a dislocated worker, a single parent, a professional/ technical student or a college transfer student — our colleges can help you achieve your goals. Our faculty are dedicated to teaching, our classes are small, and our student services staff are ready to assist you. Your success, of course, will depend on your own commitment to learning. The opportunities you'll find here are many, and the rewards are rich and fulfilling.*

Recognizing that manual, unskilled jobs will soon be obsolete, the United States Government has worked to help the nation adjust to the challenges of the information age while at the same time improving overall educational quality. During the 1996 U.S. presidential campaign and in his February 1997 State of the Union address, President Clinton urged the adoption of new programs to promote mass education through the 14th year (community college), and on to university for all who are eligible. However, unlike the centralized, government-controlled educational systems of Hong Kong, other Asian societies, and Europe, education in the United States is decentralized, controlled by the 50 states and local school boards. This difference makes for slower and differentiated change throughout the United States. In fact, President Clinton's proposals may not receive support in Congress. By way of contrast, the Hong Kong Education Department can respond quickly to new policies and programs, having done so quite often in the past. However, an important concern with regard to Hong Kong's well financed educational system is that quality is often questionable in general and especially when new curriculum and policies are introduced. (With respect to financing, US$4.57 billion was allocated for

1,296,519 students in 1995 — see Howlett, 1996, pp. 434 & 459.) Regardless, this is not to argue that a decentralized system as in the United States is superior, particularly in the face of excellent evidence from the centralized educational systems of Germany, Switzerland and Singapore.

Table 2:
Key Features of the Educational Systems in the U.S.A. and Hong Kong*

	USA	Hong Kong
Main Purpose	Focus upon the individual. Develop individual to fullest potential. Transmitter of a cultural heritage that is still forming.	Focus upon effective, lawful citizenry. Develop literate, skilled citizenry ready to serve society's needs and to be able to be self-reliant and productive. Helps select future corps of leaders.
Instructional Mode and Style	Learner-centered; stress on understanding, application and ability to integrate learnings. Use of educational psychology and varied teaching aids and methods. Learner is motivated through self-interest and is mostly active.	Teacher-centered; stress on knowing many factual details and logic of disciplines. Use of lectures, homework and rote learning. Extrinsic and motivating force of examinations determining advancement. Learner is mostly passive.
Curricular Orientation	More present-future oriented. Concern for developing whole person -- cognitive, social-emotional, physical. Social interaction/relations seen as tool to promote whole person. Various tracks, such as university prep and vocational, for choice by secondary students.	More past-present oriented. Mastery of academic knowledge and skills given in preparation for traumatic, do-or-die exams. Linear progression in concepts and skills taught. Curricular prestige hierarchy delimits choice; most secondary students taking university prep.
Ideal Secondary School Graduate	Well-rounded, achieving student/person superior in academic studies as evidenced by grades. Has extra-mural hobbies and/or involved in extra-curricular activities, perhaps student leader and/or outstanding in sports.	Outstanding achiever in school, estimation most by teachers. Performs outstandingly in major examinations, especially for entrance to the best universities. Good-natured, relates well with superiors and peers.
Control and Administration	Administered by local communities through elected boards of education and board-appointed administrators. Each of the 50 states constitutionally responsible; not federal government. Strong tradition of democratic process.	Policies and procedures centrally controlled by the government with little discretionary power given to local authorities and schools.

* adapted from Yee (1989)

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In Hong Kong, the family firmly socializes children and adolescents to accept education as an important and immediate goal. Individual life chances are obviously and inextricably linked to education, as are family benefits including social security. In addition, the Confucian orientation towards the duties, discipline and reflection associated with education and learning directly and indirectly promote participation through the lifespan. Is this enough to sow the seeds for effective lifelong learning? Perhaps not. Uncertainties associated with 1997, along with the emphasis on education for extrinsic rather than intrinsic values, may act as a brake to the broader acceptance of lifelong learning at a time when the need has never been greater.

Similarly, but in different ways, imbuing the concept of and support for lifelong learning in the United States is hindered by significant challenges. Most obvious is the issue that education is broadly, and perhaps increasingly, viewed only as an in-school activity, and in that context this paper has described decreasing direct support from the family for education, particularly when contrasted with Hong Kong. In many families within the United States, and in low income single-parent families in particular, there is little initiative to help children and adolescents see the value of education and lifelong learning in particular. In addition to this, a host of educational options, coupled with little reason to make lasting choices and the absence of economic imperatives such as those found in Hong Kong, may lead to what Erikson described as despair.

Lifelong learning is critically important to Hong Kong and the United States, and both societies would be substantially better off if their peoples were more strongly imbued with the educational tools, commitment and philosophical support for learning throughout the lifespan. Erikson's stages create an effective platform for understanding and evaluating needs and drives as these relate to lifelong learning. Hong Kong has the underlying family support and Confucian tradition, while the United States has an institutional mix that provides an incredibly wide range of lifelong learning opportunities.

Most important for policy makers is to recognize the import of lifelong learning, both for individuals and the society as a whole, and to put in place strategies and practices that will support the development of a lifelong learning ethic. In Hong Kong, stability, confidence and greater emphasis on intrinsic values are required. In the United States, more effective family support and broad values that favour decisions made in support of education and lifelong learning are required. Hong Kong and the United States represent two very different societies, yet both are in need of policy support for lifelong learning. Interestingly, many of the strengths in Hong Kong (and in Confucian societies in general) appear to be weaknesses in the United States, and similarly, many of the strengths in the United States appear to be weaknesses in Hong Kong. In any event, every person in both societies has reason *to learn how to learn* and *to learn throughout the lifespan*.

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