*The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* Vol. 19, No 2, 2020
http://iejcomparative.org

# The influence of politics in Hong Kong's education system 23 years after its handover from the United Kingdom to China

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*This article examines how politics has shaped Hong Kong's education system and the curriculum 23 years after the British handover of Hong Kong to China. Particularly, through the concept of nationalism, the article examines how the education system is being shaped. The article is intended to provide international readers with a perspective of the political and socio-educational dynamics at play in Hong Kong. The central question at issue is: how has political culture and identity been promoted in school education under the framework of "One Country, Two Systems" after the transfer of Hong Kong sovereignty from Britain to China? Two areas—the censorship of curriculum materials and the politicization of nationalism—particularly reflect the influence of power relationships, and the historical and societal pressures on the formation of students' identity in school education.*

*Keywords: political culture; construction of identity; censorship of school education; politicization of school curriculums; Hong Kong*

## INTRODUCTION

The formation of culture, identity, nationhood, and educational curriculum is a dynamic and, at times, contentious process. Culture, in Émile Durkheim's (1995, pp. 231–232) view, is an appealing web of representations, holistically enveloping the vast value, belief, and symbolic systems of a natural collectivity in society (also see Pickering, 2000, pp. 16–17). Durkheim (1964, p. 128) also asserted that every society displays and requires a sense of continuity with the past, and that the past confers identities on individuals and groups to allow us to see collective memory as one of the elementary forms of social life. Halbwachs (1992, p. 38), who accepted Durkheim's critique of philosophy, defined the process of shared recollection of the past as "collective memories" in social processes and showed how shared memories can be effective markers of social differentiation.

The core components of nationalism prior to the early 20$^{th}$ century included language, ethnicity, religion, and territory. Bendix (1964) noted that such a version of nationalism was founded on an ideology of inclusion and was part of nation-state building. As argued by Hobsbawm (1991, 1992a, 1992b) and other scholars on nationalism (e.g.,

Gellner, 1983; Greenfeld, 1992), "old" nationalism was fundamentally a nationalism of state patriotism. Along this line, national education systems attempted to establish a monolinguistic culture to foster social solidarity and national cohesion around an internally homogenized population (see Durkheim, 1974; Green, 2013; Weber, 1976). The leading variance between "old" and "new" nationalism is that "today nationalism has lost its attachment with citizenship and has become a nationalism of exclusion", and citizenship has become de-territorialized and pieced into the disparate discourses of participation, responsibility, rights, and identity (Delanty, 2000, p. 96). According to Bauman (1992), who is viewed as one of the few social theorists to fuse an analysis of the postmodern condition in postmodern sociology between the late 1980s and early 1990s, nationalism comprises an ambiguity that stems from the "interplay of inclusive and exclusive tendencies" and needs as much assent in the identification of the national-self as the national-other (pp. 683–684).

Nationalism is a strategically assembled illusion that necessarily requires a "programme of unification and a postulate of homogeneity" (Bauman, 1992, p. 683). In the beginning of the 2000s, Bauman (2000) turned away from "postmodernism" to redirect a theory of "liquid modernity" in which the existence of identity is only applicable to a modern society that is "liquid"; that is, always changing and transforming (also see Bauman, 2001). Huntington (1996) believed that the age of ideology had ended and the world had reverted to a normal state of affairs characterized by cultural conflict. Functionally, national identity is the "process whereby a nation [is] reconstructed over time" (Zimmer, 2003, p. 173); Anderson (1991) and Gellner (1983) have defined identity as "imagined" and "invented" in a neutral and descriptive manner, respectively. These valuable contributions to our understanding of how nation-states use culture and identity to deploy power and politics have been shaped and organized within diverse systems of production, reproduction, consumption, and distribution.

In sociology, power is considered a relational concept. The play of power is inherent in social relationships as well as in the education system. Foucault's theory of disciplinary power (1977) and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power (1979) are among the most innovative efforts in recent social thought to explore the dynamics of power in society. Foucault (1980) adopted the term "power-knowledge" (French: *le savoir-pouvoir*) to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge and defined through as a continuous discourse, never fixed but always changing relative to its context. Aronowitz and Giroux (1993, p. 83) observed that, in Gramsci's (1988) view, "[t]he production of knowledge is linked to the political sphere and becomes a central element in the state's construction of power". Thus, they considered social control not only an instance of domination but also a form of emancipatory practice.

For the last four decades, Michael Apple has explored and articulated the relationship between knowledge, teaching, and power in education, stating that:

> Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a people. (Apple, 1993, p. 1)

The process of change in the meaning of knowledge is as diverse as the form of government and people being governed; it is at this juncture where power, culture, and learning experience come together to produce particular identities in education. Individuals understand the interplay between cultural and historical contexts and their subjective experiences in relation to belongingness and nationality as operating within "the realm of primordial being" (Gilroy, 1997, p. 310). It is in this context that such perspectives are not only value-laden but also exhibit the particular relationships of power and knowledge formations. In other words, the production of knowledge serves the interest of power in social institutions. With regard to the nature of knowledge production, social control, and political institutions in modern societies, this process can be interpreted as teaching school students how to follow rules and obey the authorities and authority figures. This can be seen in how the political dimension of education is regulated by power relationships and what particular forms of knowledge in school are regarded as "official" (see Apple, 1993, 2012). In his book *Can education change society?* Apple (2012) argued that struggle and resistance are both always present and always active in education policies and practices in contemporary education.

## THEME OF THE STUDY

In the past few decades, Hong Kong's (HK) political activism has been influenced by the unique characteristics of HK and its relationships with the British Colonial Government and the People's Republic of China (PRC). China's civil wars between 1945 and 1949, the 1949 takeover of China by the Chinese Communists, and China's Cultural Revolution (1967–1977) precipitated a huge influx of Mainland Chinese refugees into HK. Those born in HK after 1949 have not had first-hand experience of Mainland China until after the Open-Door Policy imposed by Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) in the late 1970s (see Table 1 for a chronology of major events in HK 1842 and 1997; for details, see Carroll, 2007; Tsang, 2004).

During the British colonial period (1898–1997, see Table 1), separation from Mainland China allowed HK people to develop a political culture and identity of their own. The image of such separation of HK's identity was articulated in popular culture by projecting a distinct "Hong Kong way of life" (Fung, 2004, p. 401) and by the spread of the term "Hong Kong person" (Ma, 1999, p. 13). HK's mass media (particularly film and television) contributed to the articulation of this separate local identity by particularly focusing on the cultural differences between HK people and the Mainland Chinese (Mathews, Ma, Lui, 2008).

Perhaps the most significant differences between the HK population and that of Mainland China are language and sociocultural identity. The official HK languages are Cantonese and English and for Mainland China it is Putonghua;[1] written Chinese in HK uses traditional characters while that of Mainland China uses simplified characters. Western culture, particularly in the 20th century, has been a significant influence in HK

[1] Indeed, article 9 of the *Basic Law* states that only Chinese and English are HK's official languages. The Civil Service Bureau has also emphasized that Chinese and English are the official languages of HK and is committed to openness and accountability in producing important documents in both languages (Civil Service Bureau, 2020).

but not so much the case in Mainland China, and the Mainland Chinese exhibit a loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party not found in HK.

**Table 1. Chronology of major events in Hong Kong**

| Year | Major events |
|---|---|
| 1842 | The Treaty of Nanking was signed. China ceded the island of Hong Kong to the British after the First Opium War (also known as the Anglo-Chinese War). |
| 1860 | After the Second Opium War (also known as the Second Anglo-Chinese War), the First Convention of Peking (i.e., an agreement between the Chinese Qing Dynasty and the United Kingdom, France, and the Russian Empire) ceded a significant portion of the Kowloon Peninsula to the British. |
| 1898 | The Second Convention of Peking was signed between the Qing Government and the United Kingdom (UK) on 9 June. China leased the New Territories, together with other islands, to the British for 99 years on 1 July. |
| 1937 | With the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, Hong Kong became a refuge for thousands of Chinese fleeing Mainland China. |
| 1941 | Japan occupied Hong Kong. The Imperial Japanese occupation of Hong Kong started when the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Mark Young, surrendered the British Crown colony of Hong Kong to the Japanese Empire on 25 December. |
| 1945 | After three years and eight months under Japanese martial law, the British administration was returned to Hong Kong. |
| 1946 | The UK re-established the civil government. |
| 1949 | Ma Zedong proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Mainland, and many Chinese (particularly capitalist-leaning Chinese citizens) fled to Hong Kong. |
| 1950s | Hong Kong enjoyed economic revival based on light industries such as textiles. |
| 1967 | Severe riots broke out in Hong Kong that were mainly due to the influence of China's Cultural Revolution. |
| 1982 | The UK started discussing Hong Kong's future status with the PRC. |
| 1984 | The UK and China signed the Joint Declaration on the conditions under which Hong Kong would revert to Chinese rule in 1997. Under the principle of "One Country, Two Systems", Hong Kong would become part of the PRC but retain its capitalist economic system and a partial democratic political system for 50 years after the 1997 handover. |
| 1992 | Chris Patten became the last British Governor of Hong Kong. |
| 1994 | The Legislative Council approved a controversial constitutional reform package proposed by Chris Patten on 29 June. |
| 1997 | Hong Kong was handed back to the PRC after more than 150 years of British control. Tung Chee-hwa, a Shanghai-born Hong Kong businessman and politician, was the first Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). |

An April 2016 telephone survey of 722 respondents aged 18 and over conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, found that over half the respondents (55%) thought that Putonghua would not replace Cantonese to become the most commonly spoken language in HK, and more than three-fifths (61.45%) expected that simplified Chinese characters would not become more popular than traditional Chinese characters 20 years after the handover.

Relationships between the people in HK and Chinese Mainland authorities have been relatively tense since the beginning of the 2000s. The percentage of HK people who self-identify as Chinese has declined sharply since 2008, while self-identification with HK identity has been on the rise (Public Opinion Programme, 2017). Despite China's growing economic attractiveness, HK students "have a much weaker sociopolitical identity with China than their mainland counterparts", which is the chief source of "their separatist tendencies" (Pang & Jiang, 2019, p. 4). In the last decade, HK has witnessed a rise of social movements based on local identities. These HK identities, tangled with "colonial history and regional geopolitics, is a negotiation between the local, the national, and the global" (Wang, 2019, p. 420).

During the peak of summer in 2019, hundreds of thousands of people in HK demonstrated against a proposed extradition bill that would have granted the Chinese Government the legal means to request the extradition of fugitives in HK.[2] The mass protests from June 2019 to January 2020 were among the largest in HK's history. The ongoing anti-extradition bill protests coincided with the 1 July pro-democracy march in 2019 (1 July is the anniversary of the return of sovereignty of HK to China). Organizers claimed that an estimated 550,000 people showed up to protest, though the police allege the number was only 190,000 (*Hong Kong Free Press*, 2 July 2019). A large number of secondary school and university students formed an anti-government movement (though it was described as "not centrally organized"). The protestors chose the roles they would play in the rally, such as participating on the front line that clashed with the HK police (the *Yung Mo*, "valiant") or being in the group to deliver resources and provide support but not fight with the police (the *Wo Lei Fei*, "peaceful, rational, non-violent") (Pang & Jiang, 2019, p. 479).

The relationship between HK and the Beijing authorities has also become increasingly complicated and continues to evolve. Organizers reported that, on 2 September 2019, 10,000 students from 200 secondary schools did not turn up for the first day of the new school year, with thousands of them rallying in central HK (BBC News, 2 September 2019; South China Morning Post Reporters, 2 September 2019). During the rally, students chanted "Liberate Hong Kong; revolution of our times". The school boycott, co-organized by localist party Demosisto (a pro-democracy youth activist group in HK), was part of a broader anti-government campaign triggered by the extradition bill.

Having been a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the PRC for 23 years, HK's education system faces challenges when attempting to maintain HK national identity while simultaneously adapting to a required new Chinese cultural identity. Because of the 150 years of British colonial rule, HK society has a relatively

[2] On 23 October 2019, Hong Kong's Secretary for Security, John Lee, announced the official withdrawal of the extradition bill.

capitalist culture. Upon reunifications with the motherland in 1997, the context for current education policies is to instil school students with a socialist Chinese cultural identity, therefore, promoting Chinese social cohesion, as is further explored in the following sections.

In the rest of this article, I examine the post-1997 school curriculum with its integration of the principle of "One Country, Two Systems" by drawing attention to the dynamics and the politics of the construction of national identity in HK's school education associated with—though not solely determined by—national education in the last two decades. The sources of data include selected relevant government documents, education policies and curriculums, and curriculum guidelines. The paper reviews broad literature on the political dynamics of educational changes, development, and implementation. The paper concludes by considering some implications of the current school curriculum formation. To begin with, however, the next section discusses the political and cultural contexts in which this study of society and education development in HK takes place.

## THE POLITICS OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE POLICY ADOPTED IN EDUCATION AFTER 1997

Demonstrations in HK, particularly the 2003 protest,[3] which were clashes over patriotism and Chinese nationalism, have sparked a series of major changes in HK politics and school education (see Fung & Lui, 2017; Morris, 2009). In June 2014, the State Council Information Office of the PRC issued a White Paper entitled *The practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" policy in HKSAR*, which sought to establish Chinese Mainland "comprehensive jurisdiction" over HK. Following this comprehensive and controversial statement, national identity in the HKSAR became a significant issue for the people of HK. In 2014, the Umbrella Movement was formed and localism became the dominant theme in HK identity politics (Chen & Szeto, 2015). At least two major kinds of localism feature and coexist in HK: (1) "one whose logic is based on anti-China blaming of the immigrant", and; (2) "one whose modus operandi is to rebuild local communities" (Chen & Szeto, 2005, p. 436).

There has been much discussion of the concepts of culture, and the meaning of local and national identity in HK's school education before and after the resumption of Chinese sovereignty. As argued by Robert Bauer (an American linguist and a Cantonese expert), "the difference in languages between HK and the mainland, where Putonghua is dominant, [has]served as a very useful barrier to reinforce the boundary that separate[s] the two places" (cited in Chu, 2017, p. 207). The Putonghua-Cantonese and national-local identity struggles were fully reflected in the controversy over the Education

[3] The *Basic Law* is regarded as a "mini-constitution" for the HKSAR and was introduced in 1997 at the handover of HK to China. The *Basic Law* stipulates that the HKSAR would enjoy a high degree of autonomy and that the capitalist system and way of life in HK would remain unchanged for 50 years after 1 July 1997. In September 2002, the HKSAR released its proposal to implement article 23 of the *Basic Law* and introduced the *National Security (Legislative Provisions) Bill* to the Legislative Council in 2003. Following a massive demonstration by HK people on 1 July 2003, the HKSAR Government removed its proposed bill from the legislative programme. The anti-government demonstration held on 1 July 2003 (i.e., the sixth anniversary of the handover from British sovereignty) was regarded as the biggest rally against the enactment of article 23 of the *Basic Law*, since the return of HK to Chinese sovereignty, with a turnout of over 500,000 HK people.

Bureau's (EDB) note about the status of Cantonese in China. This occurred in January 2014, after the EDB posted a note on its language learning support webpage specifying Cantonese as a Chinese dialect and not an official language, resulting in a severe backlash from HK citizens. The note was quickly removed, but not before it triggered a debate about the status of Cantonese in HK, where about 90% of the population are Cantonese speakers. Anti-Putonghua slogans appeared in subsequent demonstrations in HK (for details, see Law, 2019, pp. 146–151). Some of HK's young people have organized groups to protect Cantonese as a mark of their local identity and have denounced Putonghua as their national language and identity. The representative group Societas Linguistica Hongkongensis (SLH) (a volunteer-led activist organization) was established in 2013 to raise alarm bells over Putonghua creeping into HK.

Between October 2017 and February 2018, the Education University's Academy of Hong Kong Studies for the New People's Party surveyed 1,279 students (78.7% born in HK and 20.2% born on the Mainland) attending Grades 10 and 11 in 11 HK secondary schools regarding their HK identity (Yuen, 2018, p. A26). In response to a rating scale of 0 to 10, where 0 = "absolutely incompatible" and 5 = "half-half", 36.6% of the students chose a score of 5, 19.6% chose a score between 1 and 4, and 8.7% chose 0 (Yuen, 2018, p. A26). There was a clear difference between the orientation of students born in HK and those born in the Mainland, with the overall national identity of students born on the Mainland being high. The findings also showed that the respective 29.4% and 58% of those who were born in HK and Mainland China maintained that the identity of HK and Mainland China could be negotiated. The data indicated that the students from Mainland China were generally more open to identity negotiation, while most of the HK students had a stronger sense of local identity. Given the continuing protests, it may seem untimely to discuss HK's identity issue in school education, featuring an identity crisis, with the use of "Kongish", the chanting of slogans, and the singing of the Cantonese song "Glory to Hong Kong" in student protests.

## CENSORSHIP IN THE CURRICULUM

Education can be thought of as a dynamic process that is rooted in sociocultural and political contexts. Schools play an essential role in advancing the political agendas of the government and imposing the dreams of the ruling party (see Cheng & Fell, 2014; Gadir, 2015; Morris & Chan, 1997; Ogunniran, 2020). Schools are important because they make what is considered "official knowledge" available. A mode of censorship in the HK school curriculum has been observed by academics, publishers, and bureaucrats (Vickers & Jones, 2005, p. 182), in that requirements have been made not to confront or offend the Chinese authorities over sensitive issues. For example, terms adopted in the textbooks were altered from "Hong Kong" to "Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" and "Taiwan" to "Taiwan Province". The EDB and its publishers have been urged to produce "appropriate teaching materials" in line with the *Basic Law* to maintain the One-China Policy, and schools are confined to providing prescribed information.

This promotion of a national Chinese identity has been a central component in curriculum development in HK since the island's transfer of sovereignty from the UK to PRC. The HKSAR is now expected (1) to prepare students as citizens of the Chinese

authorities; and (2) to secure stability in its governance. That is, after 1997, the HKSAR Government was expected to abide by the "One Country, Two Systems" policy. As such, textbooks used in HK must be approved by the EDB and be based on their alignment with the school curriculum and formal quality criteria (see Education Bureau circular memorandum 30/2019). A spokesman for the EDB emphasized that no pro-independence advocacy or activities should appear in school texts, and the promotion of illegal political campaigns for independence must be banned in schools (Cheng, 2016).

The process of approving textbooks was/is one of the mechanisms of curriculum control adopted by the ED/EDB. Censorship of and self-censorship by HK publishers have been exercised with a view to ensuring that textbooks are deemed "politically correct" by the PRC authorities (see Morris, 1992; Morris & Adamson, 2010). In April 2018, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said that China has always had sovereignty over HK, and school textbooks should not describe the 1997 handover as a transfer of or taking back or recovering sovereignty (Lum, 2018). After the proposed removal of these words from school textbooks, the official protocol office changed its website to delete any mention of a "handover of sovereignty".

Revision of the Chinese History curriculum in the HK's school curriculum has been controversial because of fears of political censorship. Unlike countries or regions that have one history subject in their core curriculum, such as the PRC, Singapore, Spain, the UK, and the US, there are two history subjects in HK's school curriculum: History (also referred to as World History) and Chinese History. Steps have been taken to incorporate local history into the two history subjects in secondary schools (Law, 2004; Vickers & Kan, 2003). In 1997, local history was introduced into the Chinese History curriculum for junior secondary classes (Curriculum Development Council, 1997). A previously independent topic, HK history, was inserted into the World History curriculum in 1998–1999. Then, in the last ten years, local history has been integrated into both Chinese and World History lessons taught in secondary schools (Vickers & Kan, 2003).

Since September 2016, the EDB has engaged in public consultation on the revision of the secondary school curriculum with respect to the Chinese History curriculum, and a new syllabus is expected to take effect in the 2020 school year. The new compulsory Chinese History subject for the junior secondary level will be about the city's background and the development of Mainland China. Relationships between HK and China since 1949, the Sino-British negotiations on HK's handover to China, the establishment of the *Basic Law*, and the city's mini-constitution will also be part of the new syllabus (see Curriculum Development Council, 2017). However, when asked in a press conference about whether the incidents of the 1967 riots in HK and the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident in Beijing would be covered, Deputy Secretary for Education, Hong Chan Tsui-wah, said that it was impossible to go into detail on each single incident from the past. Education Secretary Kevin Yeung also stressed that the HKSAR believes that these two events are not significant or important enough to warrant inclusion in the revised Chinese History curriculum (*The Standard*, 31 October 2017).

Another means of control of education is in the types of questions that can be asked. For example, the HK Diploma of Secondary Education history examinations in May 2020 asked candidates, "Did the Japanese occupying China in the war result in more pros or cons?" from 1900 to 1945. The EDB slammed the question, which was criticized for

seriously hurting the feelings and dignity of Chinese people (particularly those who had suffered greatly during the Japanese aggression), and urged the Hong Kong Examinations Assessment Authority to follow up and rectify the question. Consequently, the controversial question was invalidated on 22 May (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2020).

Textbooks in HK are published by different local publishers, and schools have a right to choose whichever textbooks they prefer. Unlike those for the three other compulsory subjects—Chinese, English, and Mathematics—textbooks for liberal studies require the approval of the EDB. In September 2019, the EDB announced that they would consider the possibility of requiring publishers to submit their liberal studies textbooks for approval by the EDB and, in the long run, EDB would produce a list of recommended textbooks. The HK Government's requirement that publishers of liberal studies textbooks seek approval of content has brought about mixed reactions—some feared government scrutiny would lead to political censorship, while others considered it the right thing to do.

Since June 2019, young people in HK have continued to join protests and there has been increasing violence. Some commentators believe that the school education system is to blame (Liu et al., 2019). Former HK Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa (now a vice-chairman of China's top political advisory body) stated that the liberal studies subject, which was designed for senior secondary school students in 2009 for the university entrance examination, was a failure. He encouraged HK's young people to be radical in violent protests in 2019 (see *South China Morning Post*, 2019).

## POLITICIZATION OF NATIONALISM IN THE CURRICULUM

The issue of national identity (though it was not officially discussed as an issue before 1997) among the younger generation has become highly politicized in HK. Under the unprecedented framework of "One Country, Two Systems" the EDB has published teaching materials in accordance with the *Basic Law*,[4] including in curriculums such as the general studies subjects in primary schools, life and society subjects and Chinese History at the junior secondary level, and liberal studies at the senior secondary level (see Curriculum Development Council, 2011; Education Bureau, 2012). Some of these introduced materials might account for the rise of localist sentiment in HK, such as the raising of pro-independence banners in September 2017 and, immediately thereafter, a joint statement by ten university presidents in HK who objected to "recent abuses" of free expression on campus and claimed that the removal of such banners contravened the *Basic Law*.

The HKSAR Government is attempting to overcome such encounters, which have resulted from the long colonial period, by promoting Chinese culture in the school curriculum. One of the most significant influences of China's cultural heritage was an increase of students' engagement in learning about China's cultural heritage. The HKSAR Government encouraged schools to assemble flag guard teams and promote

[4] According to article 27 of the *Basic Law*, "Hong Kong residents shall have freedom of speech, of the press and of publication; freedom of association, of assembly, of procession and of demonstration".

flag-raising ceremonies. National symbols and rituals, such as respect for the PRC flag and singing the PRC anthem, indicate how nationalization (i.e., the actions of a government asserting or taking control of a nation-state) has emerged to various degrees in schools. In 2008, a National Education Funding Scheme for Young People was launched to subsidize and support large-scale national education activities, including the organization of Mainland trips for young people (HKSAR, 2009). Since 2001, moral and civic education has been accorded as one of the four Key Tasks aimed at nurturing students in the seven priority values and attitudes in whole-person education: "Perseverance", "Respect for Others", "Responsibility", "National Identity", "Commitment", "Integrity", and "Care for Others" (Curriculum Development Council, 2014, p. 24, 2017, p. 3).

On 30 April 2012, the EDB declared that moral and national education, aimed at promoting a deeper sense of identification with China among local HK, would be introduced as a standalone subject in a "progressive manner" through a three-year initiative, becoming compulsory in primary schools in 2015 and in secondary schools in 2016 (for details, see Chong, 2017; Fung & Lui, 2017). This declaration sparked protests among HK citizens, who claimed it was "brainwashing" youth in the form of pro-Mainland propaganda. During the peak day of the protest on 29 July 2012, 90,000 people, or 32,000 as estimated by the government, took to the streets to demonstrate. In September 2012, protestors, including parents, teachers, and students, expressed their outrage concerning the launch of national education initiative in the school curriculum by taking part in a demonstration outside government headquarters in HK. The trigger for the protest was a 34-page booklet entitled *The China Model* (which paid homage to China's one-party system) that was given out to primary and secondary school students (see Lai, 2012; Veg, 2017). On 9 September 2012, the government announced an indefinite suspension of the compulsory implementation of the new curriculum, thus ending the political crisis.

China's opposition to Japanese imperialism is integral to the history of the PRC's national anthem in HK's schools. In September 2017, the National People's Congress Standing Committee of the PRC (China's top legislature) approved the *National Anthem Law*, which came into effect on the Mainland at the beginning of October 2017. Attendees at events where the PRC's anthem is played are required by law to stand solemnly. According to a government document submitted in March 2018 to the Legislative Council's Panel of Constitutional Affair, the local bill will include political statements that primary and secondary schools will need to teach students to sing and understand the history of the Chinese national anthem. Education about the anthem in primary and secondary schools is compulsory, and sanctions are applied to those who ignore or disrespect the work. In June 2020, the EDB set out guidelines advising schools to observe the anthem rules during other events, such as open day and sports day. School heads are encouraged to look into cases of violations by teachers and students and to call the police if the acts involve serious and deliberate insults to the Chinese anthem. If the Chinese flag is raised at the same time the anthem is played, attendees must face the flag. The law criminalizes singing malicious parodies or derogatory forms of the anthem, which could lead to a maximum fine of HK$50,000 (US$6,400) and a three-year prison term. However, international schools in HK are not required to teach students about the Chinese national anthem. The HKSAR hopes that the Chinese national flag and the Chinese national anthem ("March of the Volunteers")

will help strengthen students' patriotism, which is why all schools must participate in flag ceremonies, particularly on National Day on the 1st of October.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

By exploring the political construction and paradigms of knowledge, the formation of identity, and the support of the paramount ideology through school education, knowledge is not viewed as independent; rather, it is a reflection and reconstruction of the social and historical contexts in which it was fabricated (see Apple, 2012; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Foucault, 1980). With a particular focus on state, knowledge, and power, this article has described the political struggles and the changes to the education system of HK in response to the political considerations raised by the British handover of HK to China in 1997. The multifaceted implications of the politicization of HK school education are an extension of the political system that usurps teaching and learning freedoms. The introduction of national identity teachings is a means of emphasising the principles of HK as part of China and "One Country, Two Systems", and to promote a unifying cultural identity. It is a political commitment to help students find their roots and adjust culturally and psychologically to the political handover.

A culture of self-censorship and government control has already grown in schools, particularly after Beijing introduced and enacted the *National Security Law* in HK on 1 July 2020. After a curriculum guide is created, textbooks and other related teaching resources regulate how the topics and contents are delivered, as well as the extent of the descriptions that can be made (see Morris & Adamson, 2010, p. 38). Publishers, despite having the "final" authority to print textbooks, may have to delete politically sensitive texts so that the textbooks can be included in the "recommended textbook list". This self-censorship of HK publishers is also exercised to ensure that their textbooks are "politically correct" according to the PRC Government. The implication of self-censorship, the singing of the Chinese national anthem, and the ban on political activities in schools, but not national education issues, are increasing social pressures on the post-colonial bureaucratic administration's education policies and education reforms in the interpretation of "One Country, Two Systems".

In the past few months, a teacher in a government school in HK was suspended for allegedly using "inappropriate teaching materials", and a pro-Beijing secondary school music teacher's contract was not renewed, allegedly because she allowed her students to perform the song "Glory to Hong Kong" (which is deemed an "inappropriate song") during the school's music examinations (Zheng, 2020). In October 2020, a HK primary school teacher, who reportedly taught students about the concepts of freedom of speech and independence, was deregistered by the EDB for using pro-independence materials through the design of his teaching plan for the class. This incident is regarded as the first time that the EDB labled a teacher with "professional failure". Kevin Yeung, the Secretary for Education, said that the incident happened prior to the introduction of the *National Securities Law* (NSL) but, for future cases, they would consult with law enforcement agencies. There has been a call for the EDB to develop teaching materials for schools on the NSL and to provide training for teachers on using them. Part of the NSL includes an introduction of "national security education" in school and university

education. The clear picture to students and teachers is that no pro-independence advocacy or activities will appear in schools. The EDB has also ordered schools to review all reading materials in the curriculum that may be deemed as violating the NSL. Chinese nationalism, cultural identity, and cultural experience have emerged as one of HK society's fundamental problems (see Fairbrother & Kennedy, 2011; Tse, 2007).

A further implication of the educational challenges of the post-1997 handover is socialization into a "One Country, Two Systems" society. Political control can be seen as a form of cultural identity in relation to the curriculum. This framework of "official" knowledge centred on what is included and excluded in textbooks signifies the exercise of power by the EDB. The post-colonial HK state's selective avoidance of offending China is the reason for the exclusion of the 1967 riots and the 1989 TSI, while other events, such as Deng Xiaoping's policy of economic reform and opening to the world, have been retained in the revised course syllabus for junior secondary Chinese History education. The History and Chinese History subjects are considered a significant terrain of inclusion and exclusion. For China, the 1989 TSI was regarded as "disloyal" and "unpatriotic" (Ho, 2007), and HK was described as a subversive base that intended to overthrow the Chinese Communist authorities because of its support of the Beijing democratic movement. The excluded topics in the revised History curriculum and the introduction of topics/subjects, such as education in *Basic Law* and national education, are examples of how citizenship education, civic education, policymaking, and discourse are all tightly connected with power relations in society.

The question of how power works in school education depends on how it can be produced, reproduced, and consumed through the various school subjects and activities in school (see Apple, 2008; Gramsci, 1988). This is what Foucault (1977) referred to as power-knowledge, with the implication that the two coexist. The concept of power-knowledge has had a lasting impact on our understanding of how knowledge is created, distributed, and delivered in classrooms (see Foucault, 1980; Green, 2013). The debate about the politics of knowledge bears, as we have observed in HK, a remarkable resemblance to debates about the notion and practice of its development in Western and non-Western contexts. The outcome depends on the future levels of political stability and local, national, and international relations. In school education, collective memory, cultural identity, and nationalism exert influences both from the top-down impositions of a state-supported nationalistic narrative and bottom-up strategies that should also matter (see Gramsci, 1988). The framing of needs and their projection into school education entail processes of negotiation between inherent and interpreted understandings of needs and between diverse forces in the educational setting. This can be seen in how education is used for nation-building and how tensions between the local and the global are inherent in the curriculum (see Apple, 1996; Ho, 2007; Law, 2004, 2017, 2019). On 16 January 2020, Chief Executive Carrie Lam noted that the "One Country, Two System" framework could be extended if authorities believe that it can be smoothly implemented past its 2047 expiry date. However, there still might be time for HK academics to balance global, national, and local elements with the "One Country, Two Systems" structure (Law, 2017).

To conclude, with a specific emphasis on power relations in producing and consuming knowledge in schools, I have argued that the challenges in the current wave of HK education reforms have been in response to the dynamic, contentious process of political construction in its production of new cultural/national identity. It has been

observed that the included and excluded knowledge and school activities in school education have varied in the dimension of political and social encounters to boost students' patriotism and affiliation with the Mainland. HK education is deeply implicated in the Chinese politics of culture, and it will remain an issue for future political and cultural development. How far is it possible to articulate the concept of "One Country, Two Systems" in school education identity after the 23rd anniversary of HK's handover from Britain to China? What should be remembered is the types of education practices that can facilitate thinking about the dynamics and dilemmas of identity, power, and politics to understand the curriculum contents. As education is a social institution, there is a question of how policymakers value pedagogical reflection in the teaching profession and how knowledge is identified, delivered, and contextualized in the classroom pertaining to teachers' and students' identity construction; this may be worth observing in the future, particularly during or in the aftermath of the ongoing 2019–2020 anti-government demonstrations in HK.

**Acknowledgments**

The author would like to thank the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKBU12656516) for providing financial support for this review of education policy.

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