

Contextual Analysis of Hong Kong Education Policy in 20 Years: The Intention of Making Future Citizens in Political Conflicts

Steven Chung Fun **Hung***

The Education University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Originally, the capitalist society in Hong Kong under communism is exceptional, but the “one country, two systems” formula was a makeshift stratagem by the Communist Chinese government. The twenty years of history witnessed the tension of ruling and policy implementation. Education policy in political conflicts is, of course, the other arena in the Hong Kong context which reveals competitions, controversies and struggles among the cultural hegemonic engineering. This paper can contribute to enigmatic understanding and interpretation of generating educational reform and implementing education policy in this twenty-year history of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Keywords: *conflicts, policy, contextual, struggle and ideology*

1. Introduction: Statement of the Problem

Starting from the resumption of sovereignty, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was established in July 1997. There are many characteristics of state sovereignty in an authoritarian regime and particular understanding and explanation about education in this scenario should be interestingly catered for. This article will examine the processes that have been developed to maintain the education policy transformed in Hong Kong since the handing over of sovereignty. HKSAR having been established for twenty years, Hong Kong is exceptionally challenging in these social, economic and political transformations, particularly in terms of political conflicts. Under this revolutionary change, education plays a role which is special and difficult to understand. This paper uses historical context in investigating and analyzing what changes are adopted in educational policies, and how these policies are implemented.

2. Education Policy and Political Conflicts

Education policy represents the principles and government policy-making in the educational sphere as well as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems. It can directly affect the education people engage in at all ages. The Hong Kong government holds the constitutional right on education policy by the Basic Law and it is commonplace in the public administration literature. Major education reforms are underway around the world instrumentally in response to demands to make lifelong learning opportunities available to all. Making education accountable was ambivalent and paradoxical. But the key factor of education reform added in the Hong Kong context was the transfer of sovereignty from Britain to China. There were inevitable political conflicts. Citizens desire democracy and civil

liberties but the communist state exert more forces in controlling the people's freedom in Hong Kong. Democratization is important but its development is being constrained.

After the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the government was trying to come to terms with new information technologies, new social and economic situations, and political changes with a fast-changing globalized economy and competition. Education reform found itself at the nexus of a major political struggle in Hong Kong. Education policy is the arena between those who see it only for its instrumental and formal outcomes and those who believe in its potential for human nurturing and emancipation. The question of whether national policy has influenced education unquestionably must be answered "yes". Hong Kong is no exception under "One Country, Two Systems" policy. The typical example was that the then President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) put the emphasis on the importance of Hong Kong national education for the young people in a speech to banquet guests on the eve of the ten years' handover anniversary in Hong Kong.

Education policy analysis provides an opportunity to reflect on, learn from and look into this rich local and international experience. These are analyzed in terms of the circumstances and differences between policy making and the historical context, the government's legitimacy and the changing political situation. There are major limitations on the implementation of and influences in the development of these education policies that arise as a result of the "legitimacy deficit", which refers to the situation whereby the Special Administrative Region's government does not possess a strong mandate from the citizens to govern. Whilst the government can control a majority of seats in the legislature, this is done through a series of functional constituencies (Morris, 2004: 115). The Chief Executive is not directly

elected by universal suffrage. The political reform package by the government was voted in June 2015 which indicated that democratization in Hong Kong was halted.

3. Political, Economic and Social Context of the Twenty Years of HKSAR

Sovereignty problem in Hong Kong lasted for a long time and it transited via the Sino-British cooperation controversy. On the day of sovereignty being returned to Mainland China, the weather was very bad, with thunderstorms and heavy rains. The British army “exit show” performance turned out to be a mess. The unsuccessful transition of the Legislative Councilors did not catch many people’s attention. The Provisional Legislative Council that served as the temporary legislature is said to be a set, necessary law to be bound so that HKSAR’s social order could still be maintained according to the old operational model. But with the emergence of Thailand's Financial Crisis on 2 July 1997, for some periods of time it negatively attacked places in Asia. Finally, it attacked Hong Kong in December. The situation came as a sudden. The HKSAR was just established for a few months’ time (since July 1997) and the government had not experienced such kind of financial crisis before. The continuous economic decline had a far-reaching impact. As arranged by the Basic Law, the political democratization of the Legislative Council means that each voter can directly cast their ballot to their preferred person; this is being referred as “direct election”. The number of seats, in percentage, increased from 33% in 1998 to 50% in 2004. At this initial stage of HKSAR there were no appeals for political democratization. It also reduced the possibility of political conflicts.

But, with the bad economic situation, some social problems emerged. Many people lost all their savings in this financial crisis. A

decrease in property prices means that mortgage was even lower than the market value. These people became holders of negative assets. This led to a change in Hong Kong's overall economic structure: (1) the rich people could secure their asset positions; (2) the middle-class people had a decline in their social status because of the shrinking economic situation; (3) people in the lower social class suffered the most and they are the group who are highly vulnerable facing sharp decline of salary and job protection. The original orderly combination of "high, middle and low social class" immediately changed into contradiction, and conflicts ensued. The middle class was very much depressed, and the problem became worse. Educational reform served as the only effective method in responding to the unemployment problem. The truth is, practically, it could not solve the problem by this social engineering process. It just wrongly gave out a hope to the public and was unachievable. People in the educational sector, plus the parents, were passively asked to come out to take part in this societal construction work, being desirable but not attainable.

At the end of 2002 the government forced the promoting of the National Security Law legislation of the article 23 of Basic Law, hence endangered basic human rights. Political struggle started to emerge accordingly. The most unfortunate thing was the atypical pneumonia, or referred to as "severe acute respiratory syndrome" (SARS). It spread over Hong Kong very fast, creating pressure under such political oppression. There was an outbreak of large-scale protest demonstrations on 1 July 2003. A total of 500,000 protestors requested the Chief Executive and related government officials to step down. The Central People's Government then made adjustments to Hong Kong policies. First, it responded to the public's request that a few officials stepped down. Secondly, it did not force to legislate the National Security Law. Finally, even though the economic situation had improved, the first

Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa (董建華) did not complete his term of office and resigned.

In 2005, Donald Tsang Yam-kuen (曾蔭權) was elected and appointed to be the second Chief Executive. This reflected that senior-ranking officials during the British administration can undertake SAR governance. His first political task was the promotion of the constitutional reform package. Unfortunately, this was not successful. But the important discussion was about the heavy development of the economy. The political atmosphere did not immediately change because of the lack of democracy in Hong Kong. Instead, some members in the Democratic Party obtained important governmental appointments. The societal opposition was alleviated. Public surveys showed people's support towards the government sharply increased, while students' surveys showed their recognition of their Chinese national identity also increased. Some deep-rooted problems at an initial stage of SAR establishment were lessened. However, with the unsuccessful legislation of the National Security Law, the Central People's Government is prejudiced towards problems in Hong Kong. Social policies at different levels needed readjustment, the desire for social control became bigger, and some policies were seen. At the commemorative cocktail of the 10th anniversary of SAR establishment dated 30 June 2007, the Chinese President Hu Jintao directly requested the Chief Executive Donald Tsang to run a good national education for the young people. This is an important example. But finally, such national education is stereotyped to be "the worst", "brainwashing" education controlling the minds of teenagers and students.

The later social movements were said to awake the new generations, but the format and scales were not large. Basically, the government was able to maintain its governance. But the situation in China is different – because of Beijing Olympics 2008 and Expo 2010 Shanghai China,

many people were motivated from heart in hoping to construct a better society, such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic slogan “One World, One Dream” aiming to unite people together towards supporting the government. The fact is, the country’s regime is very ungrateful to the general public hence it does not gain support from them. The advocator of Charter 08 (零八憲章), Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波) was prosecuted and sentenced. Zhao Lianhai (趙連海) exposed the Chinese milk scandal and helped victims to fight for their rights; finally he was prosecuted and charged. Li Wangyang (李旺陽) was interviewed by the Hong Kong mass media with reference to the June Fourth Incident and later he committed suicide in an “unusual” way. All these slowly show a tyrannical regime. It is no longer related to democratic openness, and revolution. These are also related to problems of Hong Kong’s democratic political system and politics. While the government was promoting the “Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link Hong Kong Section” (廣深港高速鐵路香港段) plan, it triggered contemporarily Hong Kong teenagers’ awareness. In January 2010 the Legislative Council forced the passing of the implementation of the relevant railway construction. This created an inspiring introspection of the teenagers. The institutional irrationality and inequality were clearly seen. These youngsters are well-equipped to be the new blood of future democratic movements.

The biggest social movements took place when Leung Chun-ying (梁振英) was elected as the HKSAR Chief Executive. In his inauguration dated 1 July 2012, the number of protestors and demonstrators increased again, estimated to reach 200,000. The protestors believe that he is dishonest and should step down from the Chief Executive post. A few days later, a group of parents discovered that some contents in the to-be-implemented national education textbooks were seriously biased. They then organized a group named

“Civil Alliance Against the National Education” (民間反對國民教育科大聯盟). Later it evolved into a range of large-scale “anti-brainwashing national education” social movement. There were 30 organizations that protested in a march with more than 90,000 protestors on 29 July 2012, including many parents with their children. On 7 September, up to 120,000 attendees continued their occupation of the government headquarters area and the government announced shelving the subject indefinitely.

The Central People’s Government gave out a promise that universal suffrage could be implemented in the year 2017. But it was anticipated, or people already knew that this “democratic system” would not come true. In 2010, the “Five geographical constituencies’ referendum” intensified the means of democratic movement. The 2014 Occupy movement is a recent democratic movement in Hong Kong, and has a far-reaching impact until now. Many youngsters widely took part in it. They expressed their appeal against the uncivilized and undemocratic political system. On 31 August 2014 the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress set restrictions on the nomination of the Chief Executive candidates, and this provides insights that the election campaign is unauthentic. It is not accepted by the Democratic Party. Finally, in the Legislative Council’s motions, the government proposed a political reform package. But it was deemed to be decided in the negative and was not passed.

Hong Kong’s democratic development has thus stagnated. For Hong Kong’s political situation, the formation of the Chief Executive is done in a “small-circle election”. It is undemocratic in the sense that only 1200 members in the Election Committee are eligible to vote. In the district council elections and legislative council elections, there were government pro-China camp supports in resource control. The Democratic Party obtained more votes and successfully got more seats in

the elections. But the legislature itself is not democratic. People representing democratic power in the legislature are still the minority. People in the lowest social class are the weakest; they are unable to express their voices in society and are always suppressed. The same situation applies to the local educational system.

Therefore, the historical and political contexts are the prominent and inevitable influence on the nature and implementation of education. This paper seeks an explanation of the reasons for observing its legitimacy deficit while ensuring that it creates the conditions and influence for social and political disruption.

4. Method of Study: Analysis and Understanding of Education in Historical Context and Political Conflicts

The reflected explanation in a historical research is to understand from the perspective of Hong Kong's historical transformation and change. This research aims to illustrate during the past 20 years of HKSAR, with the emergence of political problems and conflicts in a historical context: What is the educational policy? Why it is needed to implement the related educational policy? It also illustrates that it is via Hong Kong's historical development and transformational political context that people have a better understanding of its educational policy. In other words, it explains how stakes are formed between education and Hong Kong's historical change of political conflicts.

5. Content of Study: Understanding Education Policy in Hong Kong Context

The context is so political that we classify the period by the terms of governance with three Chief Executives. They are: Tung Chee-hwa (July 1997 – March 2005), Donald Tsang Yam-kuen (March 2005 – June

2012) and Leung Chun-ying (July 2012 – June 2017). They governed Hong Kong for 20 years from July 1997 to June 2017.

5.1. Education Reform under the Tung Chee-hwa's Rule

With the establishment of the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, the territories have since served as the showcases for “one country, two systems” to Taiwan. These two areas should formally enjoy high degree of autonomy but the function of demonstrating “one country, two systems” to Taiwan is no longer applicable. The first Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, targeted to establish strong and decisive governance. He reflected in his first Policy Address as interventionist. On 1 July 1997, his message related to education for young people in his speech delivered at the ceremony to celebrate the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was:

We will continue to encourage diversity in our society, but we must also reaffirm and respect the fine traditional Chinese values, including filial piety, love for the family, modesty and integrity, and the desire for continuous improvement. We value plurality, but discourage open confrontation; we strive for liberty but not at the expense of the rule of law; we respect minority views but also shoulder collective responsibilities.

(Tung, 1997)

It was patriarchal. The newly established Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was told to reform education after the sovereignty transfer. One important factor that could trigger this reform was the Asian Melt Down, as the economic situation of Hong Kong suddenly turned bad. Moreover, it was the era of knowledge expanding at such an unprecedented rate and values being challenged deeply.

Nevertheless, the hidden agenda of education reform should be the reorientation of education and the destruction of colonial education. Therefore, the government repeatedly told the people:

In this changing world of the 21st Century, our younger generation needs to be equipped with a broad-based knowledge, high adaptability, independent thinking and the ability for life-long learning.

(Progress report on education reform (4), 2006, p. 3)

In 2000, the Education Commission recommended reforming the education system, with the objective of constructing a system conducive to life-long learning and all-round development. It was obvious that the keys were the promotion of traditional Chinese, the appreciation of collectivism, the avoidance of confrontation, a focus merely on the obligations and responsibilities of individuals toward China and the community, moral correctness and stress on societal values. The Hong Kong government repeatedly expressed that education systems and measures must progress in tandem to sustain the development of Hong Kong in order to meet the challenges posed by these unprecedented changes. It was in this context that the Education Commission, after extensive consultation, submitted to the Government the *Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong* in September 2000. The proposals were accepted by Tung Chee-hwa in his Policy Address in October 2000, which kicked off the reform of the education system in Hong Kong. The Education Reform was said to be student-focused. Aims of education for the Twenty-first Century were stated as:

To enable every person to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his/her own attributes so that he/she is capable of life-

long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovating and adapting to change; filled with self-confidence and a team spirit; willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large.

(Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong,
2000, p. 4)

Knowledge of our old society would not be able to cater for the challenges of an ever-advancing knowledge-based information society and the dramatically changing environment. Education in Hong Kong had to help students develop a global outlook, equip them with a repertoire of skills and the attitudes to respect knowledge and to learn how to learn.

Later, the other issue of “The Overall Aims of the School Curriculum” stated that:

The school curriculum should provide all students with essential life-long learning experiences for whole-person development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physical development, social skills and aesthetics, according to individual potential, so that all students can become active, responsible and contributing members of society, the nation and the world.

(Learning to learn – The way forward in curriculum development,
November 2000, p. 2.)

It proposed some guiding principles in planning a new curriculum framework for nine-year universal education, which aims to provide schools with a structure for outlining and developing different curriculum modes. It was also hope that the teaching contents can be

flexibly rearranged, modified or replaced with this framework in response to the needs of society and to suit different needs of students (Cheng, 2009: 69).

As a matter of fact, the most effectual section of education reform was not related to teaching subjects or knowledge. This period was characterized by a concern for developing and implementing educational reform policies designed to improve the quality of schooling (Morris, 2004: 113). The mechanism of educational assurance was introduced into the education system in Hong Kong. It was at the institutional level that schools should be under investigation. The government-inspected schools was designed to focus on matters of bureaucratic and administrative compliance with regulation (*ibid.*). Many work forces in schools were put into preparing school organization, management and inspection to the extent that teaching was ignored or marginalized. This management process was quite harmful for education in Hong Kong.

Education in Hong Kong had four major concerns which were generated by the Secretary of Education and Manpower Bureau, Fanny Law (羅范椒芬). The four major concerns were “Civic Education, Project Learning, Learning to Learn and Application of Information Technology in Education”. Hence, education was said to be re-orientated and re-organized. People started to feel such education reforms being done merely by “slogonization” – no more real policy being helpful for student learning. The process of re-making education was in progress but the public’s concern for education reform was decelerated.

To strengthen the sense of national identity among students, it was imperative to enhance students’ interests and concerns for the development of modern China through involvement in different learning experiences and life-wide learning (Curriculum Development Council, 2002: 3). Unfortunately, the Hong Kong government seems to be committed to hegemony of anti-democratism and ideology of counter-

civil rights, and the curriculum policy has emphasized culture and nation-building in the context of the history of anti-colonialism and anti-foreignism. Hence, the adopted political values for students are submissiveness and civic responsibilities toward the Chinese government, commitments to China and loyalty to Chinese nation. This should not be what education should do for students.

However, resistance has emerged against State-directed political socialization. The issue of national security law made the matter worse. People demonstrated against the bill in December 2002. During the first half year of 2003, the people were discontented with the anti-subversion bill, declined economic circumstances, mishandling of the SARS epidemic and poor leadership of governance. Protests resulted in a massive demonstration on 1 July 2003 and more than 500,000 people took to the streets. Hereafter, the day becomes the annual platform for demanding democracy and calling for civil liberties and social justice. Students mobilized themselves and organized to participate in the demonstrations. The governance of Tung Chee-hwa was so problematic that he resigned two years before his term expired. Tung struggled to deal with a number of recessions and lost the confidence of residents in Hong Kong and leaders in Beijing over his handling of the territory during that time.

5.2. Restructure of Education System in the Donald Tsang Administration

Donald Tsang served as the acting Chief Executive of Hong Kong after Tung Chee-hwa resigned in March 2005 as he was a popular civil servant educated at Harvard University who received a knighthood for his service during British colonial rule. Professor Arthur K.C. Li (李國章) still acted as Secretary for Education and Manpower Bureau. The review of education reform was conducted and it was expressed that

these reforms could be seen in the context of keeping pace with the progress of a knowledge-based economy in Hong Kong in the 21st Century.

With the concerted efforts of all parties concerned, all items of the Education Reform have gradually been implemented and were progressing in the right direction. The Education Reform has reached a new milestone. “The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong” was issued in May 2005. To allow the school sector ample of time for preparatory work, it was postponed from the original implementation in 2008 to putting on the practice of the new education system in 2009. The existing British system (3+2+2+3) was arranged to change to the new senior secondary school system (3+3+4). Reforming the academic structure entailed wide-ranging changes and transformations which had far-reaching implications for the community of Hong Kong. Success in implementation required the attainment of the crucial conditions including the development of a new senior secondary school curriculum, “a new public examination and assessment mechanism, smooth interface with university programmes and articulation with different pathways for further studies, vocational training and employment”, according to Arthur Li, Secretary for Education and Manpower, in his introductory message for 2005 Action Plan (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005). The academic structure was endorsed by the recommendation of the Education Commission to adopt a 3-year senior secondary and 4-year undergraduate academic system.

It was acknowledged that reducing one public examination would create more time for productive studying and learning. The new academic structure generated a great deal of public interest and discussion which was widely publicized and reported in the media. All

students were provided with three more years to study which originally were not completely provided. It made 9-year compulsory education change to 12-year universal education for all in 2009 Hong Kong. The characteristics in the circumstances, leading to unprecedented worldwide changes, were expressed as globalization, the explosive growth of knowledge, the event of information technology and the development of a knowledge-based economy (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005: 6). Hong Kong students must develop their adaptability, creativity, independent thinking and life-long learning capabilities (*ibid.*: 6). In addition to have three other compulsory subjects, Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics, Liberal Studies was adopted as a new core and compulsory subject to be taught in the New Senior Secondary school education.

It was recognized that Liberal Studies would enable students to make explicit connections across knowledge and concepts from different disciplines and enable them to examine issues from multiple perspectives. The subject would help students to become independent thinkers and life-long learners by adopting and applying an issue-enquiry approach to learning, studying and teaching (*ibid.*: 34). It can also play a unique role in the new senior secondary school curriculum by helping and nurturing students to connect concepts and knowledge across different disciplines, to look at things from more than one single perspective and to study issues not merely covered by any single discipline (*ibid.*: 36).

Liberal Studies aims to provide students a broadened knowledge base and enhances their social awareness through the study, exploration and investigation by inquiry of a wide range of issues. The curriculum selected focus on themes of significance to students which were designed to enable students to make good connections across different fields of knowledge and to broaden their horizons (Curriculum

Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007: 1). The aims of Liberal Studies are to help students become independent thinkers and enable them to develop multiple perspectives on perennial and contemporary issues in different contexts (*ibid.*: 5). The learning outcome of students by learning Liberal Studies can be that students should be facilitated to evaluate different aspects of life in Hong Kong with respect to the rights and responsibilities of individuals, social groups and the government and to demonstrate an appreciation for the values of their own and other cultures, and for universal values, and be committed to becoming responsible and conscientious citizens (*ibid.*: 5-6).

Hu Jintao, being the then President of the People's Republic of China, visited Hong Kong, gave a speech and stressed the importance of national education to students of Hong Kong on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of HKSAR (on 30 June 2007). The Chief Executive, Donald Tsang, responded to this with his 2007 Policy Address in October that included a section especially titled "National Education":

The decade following Hong Kong's return to the motherland has seen a growing sense of national identity in our community. To prepare ourselves for the next decade, we must have a better understanding of our country's development and a stronger sense of our national and cultural identity. The government made every effort to promote national education and the objective was to foster among young people a sense of affinity with China and heighten their sense of national pride and identity. Education gave more weight to the elements of national education in the existing primary and secondary curricula and the new senior secondary curriculum framework to help students acquire a clearer understanding of China and a stronger sense

of national identity. The Government encouraged more schools to form flag guard teams and to stage more national flag-raising ceremonies, and subsidize more Mainland study trips and exchange programmes for youths. They rallied the efforts of various sectors to bring about synergy in enhancing the overall effectiveness of national education.

(Tsang, 2007)

In addition, the Revised Moral and Civic Education Curriculum Framework was determined and published in April 2008. Basically, it was passed off as a governmental and administrative process which did not require consultation. Schools and teachers were merely instructed to adopt this revised curriculum via notices or at conferences.

Furthermore, the Central Policy Unit formed a team of its Strategic Development Committee called the Task Group on national education in September 2007 after the state chairman's visit to Hong Kong. The meeting agreed that there were many elements of national education that had been included in the basic education areas. They also projected forward to anticipate that the new senior secondary curriculum would include many elements related to national education. For example, the planned Liberal Studies curriculum included contents about China's Reform and Opening Up, about Chinese culture and modern life, the rule of law, and socio-political participation and identity.

After the successful propagation of Chinese national spirit during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the people of Hong Kong who identified themselves as Chinese reached a historic high. It was a satisfactory level from the perspective of the Chinese authorities. But the situation experienced a turnover within a short time in 2009. The governance of Hong Kong consisted in a limited democratic regime, linking towards a conservative stance. Hong Kong was constantly being

exposed to political challenges from all fronts. The Tsang Administration tended to be inclined to stay away from Hong Kong's controversy. As a matter of fact, various political, economic and social problems in Hong Kong often remained unresolved.

During the later stage of the Tsang Administration, there was the rise of young people as protesters who participated in various social movements. The typical examples were the Star Ferry Pier (天星碼頭) issue in 2007, the anti-high speed rail campaign (反高鐵運動) in 2009 and the Five Constituencies Referendum (五區公投) in 2010. Hong Kong core values are social justice, poverty alleviation and democracy. The political radicalization revealed the basic conflict among China, Hong Kong and citizens. The typical example was the participation of the candlelight vigil in Victoria Park on 4 June 2009. Several days before the night of 4 June, Donald Tsang gave an answer about the participation not being by most people of Hong Kong. Suddenly, participants drastically increased from 48,000 in 2008 to 150,000 in 2009. The number of attendants reached an exceptional high tide on the twentieth anniversary of the June 4 incident. Social movements became much more politicized and radicalized. The post-80s generation gave the new forces of Hong Kong's social mobilization. The subsequent prominent social movement occurred in December when the student activists mobilized to protest the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Express Rail Link.

As the Hong Kong government planned to adopt more national education for the youth in Hong Kong, the post-80s generation were the new political activists as the youth played a leading role in these social movements. Political and social activism and radicalism prevailed in Hong Kong. The post-80s generation actively participated in various social movements and demonstrations. The protests of young political activists were not a response by the young generations to the worse-off

socio-economic situations. The sense of political participation is related to the higher level of education attended. They are infused with new values that do not certainly materialize. It was observable that the young protesters organized and mobilized skillfully through the social-networking websites. It will not be that any mental or hegemonic engineering process can change the situation. The standard of the youth's political participation in Hong Kong was rare even by world standards. Five post-80s university students formed Tertiary 2012 (大專2012) to participate in the Five Constituencies Referendum and to help to make elections happened. They did so not for their own interest, but for the civil society of Hong Kong. It revealed their spirit of devotion. There were values not "educatable" in formal school curriculum.

5.3. Education Implementation in the Leung Chun-ying Administration's Turmoil

Just as Leung Chun-ying assumed office, he met with the educational problem related to the implementation of National Education. The introduction of National Education to the schooling curriculum was quite obvious for making it a compulsory subject and enhancing this patriotic and nationalistic project for future citizens. In fact, the introduction of Moral and National Education (MNE, 德育及國民教育) was a political action ordered by the central government of the People's Republic of China.

Scholarism (學民思潮) was a non-political-affiliated group founded by secondary students on 29 May 2011. They pointed out that the introduction of Moral and National Education was "brainwashing". Their first initiated demonstration merely attracted 300 participants. There were 200,000 protesters demonstrating when Leung took his office of the first day on 1 July 2012. After the march on that day, members of Scholarism protested outside the Central Government

Liaison Office. Their action was to be against the implementation of what they labelled as the brainwashing subject (National Education), but there were merely about one thousand protesters. The demonstration could not give any effective impact. However, after the 1 July march in 2012, they insisted on marching to and protesting outside the Central Government Liaison Office. These students were protesting against the Central Government's interference in the school curriculum of Hong Kong and introducing the brainwashing curriculum for the pupils of Hong Kong.

Later, a group of parents found the "China Model National Conditions Teaching Manual" (《中國模式國情專題教學手冊》), published by the National Education Services Centre under government funding, to be biased towards the Communist Party of China. The "Civil Alliance Against the National Education" was established immediately by 15 organizations, including Scholarism, Parents' Concern Group, Professional Teachers' Union, Hong Kong Federation of Students, Alliance Youth, Civil Human Rights Front and others. Scholarism continued protests for one month during the school summer holidays by various means, such as march and long march, demonstration, petition, sit-in, gathering and protest. The Civil Alliance Against National Education went on to occupy the government headquarters at the end of the summer holidays.

The government shelved the curriculum and gave the conclusion that schools had freedom and determined to exercise their discretion in how to handle National Education-related matters, including whether to develop National Education subject, whether to implement National Education as an independent or compulsory subject and whether to plan the implementation modes and schedule. The social movement against National Education gave a prominent demonstration of what later happened as the social disobedience of the Occupy Central.

The Chief Executive indicated in the 2013 Policy Address that “it is time to consolidate our education policies, and avoid drastic changes to give stakeholders some respite. Our future priority will be to ensure the quality of our education by further improving relevant measures in accordance with existing policies.” (Leung, 2013: 53) However, starting from the implementation of the new senior secondary academic structure in 2009, the society of Hong Kong has become more politicized. As the students studied Liberal Studies and the subject contained political contents, the political scenario of Hong Kong has finally showed that education made students more active in participating in politics. Pedagogy of Liberal Studies requires students to be critical and have multi-perspectives in learning, thinking and analyzing issues, and students were to be blamed for being politically active and radicalized. After Leung Chun-ying began his term of office as Chief Executive in July 2012, the society of Hong Kong has been politicized to its extreme. Before his term of office, social actions could merely cause more dispute. After his term began, mass participations were common in various social movements and radicalized actions. The society of Hong Kong was so politicized that education was also politicized as well. On one hand, patriotism and nationalism made political contents in schooling. On the other hand, the new initiated compulsory school subject of the new senior secondary curriculum, Liberal Studies, was considered too political.

The Occupy Movement was remarkable and outstanding. The peaceful protest was characterized as civil disobedience. The leaders of the movement were none of prestige or political leaders. They were newly produced student leaders as civil society just matched their social actions. Moreover, a large number of students were involved in the social movement for Hong Kong democracy. The conflicts could not come to a conclusion of democratization and the government still

considered education as being the evil extreme and the main culprit of the social unrest.

Education in Hong Kong is rhetoric. The government intends to escape from true problems. After the Occupy Movement, the political context changed very much. The authorities blamed education as the criminal ringleader of student activism. The authorities plan to re-organize education in Hong Kong. They proposed new initiatives for Hong Kong education. Education is chameleon-like and now is the common intention and expectation to tame teachers' activism and students' radicalism. They adopted the new policy of education contents. The implementation of the new policy does not go through direct reform of curriculum of education. The recent projects for students are made up by three contents which are STEM, moral education and cultural history education.

The 2015 Policy Address by Leung Chun-ying suggested to promote the STEM education. STEM is an acronym that refers to the academic disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics collectively. These are not new. It is merely ideological and scientific. As this moment, the promotion of STEM education aligns with the worldwide education trend of equipping students to meet the changes and challenges in our society and around the world with rapid economic, scientific and technological developments. The Education Bureau has invested a lot of money for the implementation of STEM recently to enhance the training of teachers, thereby allowing students to fully unleash their potential in innovation (Leung, 2015).

The STEM education report was released on 5 December 2016 and promoted in Hong Kong. There are five final recommendations updating the curricula of the Science, Technology & Mathematics Education Key Learning Areas: (1) strengthening the provision of quality learning experiences to students through support to schools on whole-school

curriculum planning and collaboration with organizations; (2) offering learning and teaching resource materials to schools; (3) enhancing professional capacity, knowledge transfer and cross-fertilization among schools and teachers; (4) synchronizing contributions from different community key players; and (5) adopting actions to continuously review the development of STEM education.

They express that STEM are important for the future investment but they cannot predict the actual future. A good example, for more details regarding the cancellation of Major in Mathematics/Physics and Major in Astronomy, is just given by Mathew Evans, Dean of Science of Hong Kong University in his reply to a student representative (14 March 2017):

... the Faculty has decided to close the majors of Astronomy and Maths/Physics to new entrants from 2018/19. The reason for this is simply that students are not choosing to enrol on these majors. The number of graduating students in each of the last five years has been 1, 6, 3, 5, 4 in Astronomy and 1, 6, 1, 6, 4 in Maths/Physics. Students have simply voted with their feet. The Faculty cannot afford to mount majors or courses that have small numbers of students, we have an obligation to use the funds provided to us efficiently and teaching niche programmes is I am afraid too inefficient and results in a waste of academic time that is better spent in increasing the quality of education for larger numbers of students.¹

That is to say that, even though the University of Hong Kong is the most prominent university in Asia, its scientific subjects were not easily sustainable. Some science majors should be stopped to enroll students. The major concerns of recent education settings are hegemonic, to downgrade the subject contents which contain ethical values or are civil

rights-related, such as democratic and political education, social equality and justice (rule of law). The advocated teaching contents are scientism, patriotism, nationalism and cultural traditionalism.

The 2015 Policy Address by Leung Chun-ying also suggested that the curriculum content of Chinese History and World History would be renewed. The objectives were to reinforce students' interest in and understanding of Chinese culture and history. However, the instrumental function of education is remarkable in Hong Kong. The education system is highly competitive as the places provided by the universities in Hong Kong are so limited. The Hong Kong government maintains direct control of the nature of the curriculum and the system of public examination (Morris, 2004: 112). Teachers and students have no choice and they should work hard in an attempt to secure success in the public examination (*ibid.*). Students prepare for such external and de-contextualized public examinations which are reinforced by the fact that students would be taking their examinations in English language. Schools are judged by reference to and held accountable merely for the examination results of their students (*ibid.*). As schools compete both to recruit "good pupils" and to prepare those pupils to perform well in the public examinations, there is a strong tendency to drop or reduce the time devoted to those school subjects that are viewed as of low status (cited in Morris, 2004: 113). STEM education, Chinese History and Moral Education are not preference.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Starting from the twenty-first century, Hong Kong has been unable to recover its competitive advantage in export-oriented manufacturing industries. The Asian Financial Crisis accelerated these competitions and declines. The government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

has been facing an acute problem vis-à-vis legitimacy. The re-colonial regime suffers from a substantial legitimacy and welfare deficit in Hong Kong. It could not benefit easily from expanding the distribution of public goods as these have already been provided on a mass level and resources are no longer plentiful. They could not improve key areas of social policy. The result is a greater potential for conflicts.

Going through economic restructuring, the Hong Kong government has doubts about the nature of its role, with attention quickly directing to education. The fundamental goal of education is to socialize students in prevailing regime values and to prepare for the manpower needs of the economy. But, the transition of sovereignty created a series of symbolic acts which targeted the shift away from a focus on the depoliticized and decontextualized education. This was associated with a transforming knowledge which focused on uncertainties, issues and controversies. Most governments are inherently conservative as far as education is concerned. The government implemented numerous initiatives to change every key aspect of school system in the first ten years of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Cheng, 2009: 66).

The Special Administrative Region's government can consider itself as responsible for the initiation of educational policies, the formulation of strategies, the promotion of educational plans and programmes, and the identification of prioritized values and attitudes in the education system. However, subsequent educational policy changes were often made with fake consultation or relatively little consultation with those who were charged with implementing them. It is questionable that the targets were achieved under authoritarian governance and amid social unrest in this twenty-year period.

Hong Kong is an international trading and financial metropolis. The extent of modernization is accepted well in the areas of education, civilization, communication, transportation, trading and stock market,

etc. Hong Kong is considered as an advanced territory – an international trading and financial metropolis. The aims of education for the twenty-first century had been expressed to enable and nurture students to attain all-round development in the domain of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according well to their values and attitudes. Students could be equipped with life-long learning, creative and critical thinking, as well as innovative and exploratory attitudes, and they should be investigating and adapting to change, filled with self-confidence and collective team spirit, willing to put forward successive effort for the public good, prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of the society, and contributing to the future well-being of China and the world at large (*Reform proposals for the education system in Hong Kong*, 2000, p. 4). However, students tend to compare the past experiences of colonization and decolonialization of education and the present nationalization, re-colonialization and the dominating globalization of the lifeworld. A series of actions were carried out to strengthen the Chinese elements in education. They represented a transforming tendency that avoided knowledge which focused on issues, controversies and uncertainties.

Originally, the education reforms in Hong Kong should share most key features of these international trends and could be considered as part of the international movement of education changes and developments in response to the challenges of globalization and international competitiveness in the new century (Cheng, 2009: 75). However, it should not be assumed or believed that education reform of the post-handover Hong Kong was being done for public vision and goodness. The initiation and process of education reform in the Tung Chee-hwa administration was actually a process of re-organization, re-orientation and re-transformation of Hong Kong educational settings. Since the education system reform was issued in 2005 it had been so questionable.

The new senior secondary curriculum was introduced and students would be provided free education for 12 years from primary 1 to secondary 6. Actually, the reformed education system abolished the British system and adopted the American or Chinese education system only.

Making Liberal Studies a new compulsory subject, schools and classrooms do change with the introduction and promotion of the subject. However, the extent and direction of expected change was not consistent with the intentions of policy initiatives. It did not seek the agreement on values between policymakers and implementers in how a particular programme would proceed and what its objectives would be. The programme of Liberal Studies would represent changes in target group behaviour but would be difficult to achieve without the consent and active participation of those who would bring about the change.

Education policies are sometimes considered and justified not as expected desirable ends in themselves, but as a means towards a more applicable, instrumental, productive and prosperous future. The promotion and implementation of Liberal Studies as a compulsory subject in the new senior secondary school curriculum obviously could not achieve its means and ends. Nowadays, the related authorities considered Liberal Studies as a school subject which advocated students' political participation. Liberal Studies was blamed as to relate with political radicalization of students' activism and radicalism. Interesting enough, for the learning outcome expressed in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide by the end of learning Liberal Studies, it was expressed that students should be able to demonstrate an appreciation for the values of their own and other cultures, and for universal values, and be committed to becoming responsible and conscientious citizens (Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and

Assessment Authority, 2007: 5-6). However, it is so unreasonable to easily come a conclusion that education could be successfully applied for nurturing students' self-determination.

In view of this context and the development strategy proposed, it was to be expected that the younger generation would be able and empowered to recognize their roles and responsibilities. As consequences, the spontaneous actions of students, citizens and residents of Hong Kong were particularly inspiring during these twenty years. These include the Hong Kong Secondary Students' Union's mobilization of students to participate in the 1 July 2003 protest, the post-80s generation's Anti-High Speed Rail Movement in 2010, Scholarism's initiation of the Anti-National Education Movement in 2012 and the Hong Kong Federation of Students' participation in the Occupy Movement in 2014 which all represented remarkable social activities which were, of course, worthy of note.

Recently, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's government adopted formal and informal education to depoliticize and instil the spirit of nationalism in students to minimize the potential challenge of the youth to its political legitimacy and to maintain its cultural hegemony. Depoliticization is the process distantiation of being persuaded, inculcated and instructed from acquisition of political knowledge or political participation, like what had been done by the British colonial government in the 1970s Hong Kong. In fact, reform measures tended to get into bureaucratic activities that merely kept participants busy but amounted to little real change in education. The barrier to implementation of educational reforms was a long-standing culture, a mixture of inertia and cynicism (Morris and Scott, 2003: 78). Nevertheless, the authorities always expect to do so by educational change to re-mould new generations. By the end of three terms of the Chief Executives' governance, the people including the pupils had

witnessed one after another dysfunctional leader. They are jackals of the same tribe. One thing is certain: Hong Kong will witness one after another social movement for our future.

Notes

- * Dr Steven Chung Fun Hung (洪松勳) serves The Education University of Hong Kong (formerly The Hong Kong Institute of Education) as an Assistant Professor and he achieves his performance in the domains of scholarship, professional research, and publications. He is honored to have been recognized for attaining excellence in the realm of research outputs and publications, skillful and effective teaching of pedagogical courses, and diligently fulfilling the University/Institute's duties and serving the community in a highly devoted and accessible manner. His publications have been exceptional, both in terms of quantity and quality, and internationally and regionally referred. His research areas are Hong Kong-based and focus mainly on civic education policy, student social movements and political and historical development of Hong Kong. Recently, he develops the study in the areas of local cultural heritages. <Email: cfhung@eduhk.hk, stevenchung@gmail.com>
1. "Official Reply from Professor Matthew Evans regarding the issue of Cancellation of Major in Mathematics/Physics and Major in Astronomy", Science Society, HKUSU (*Facebook*), 13th March 2017. <<https://www.facebook.com/scisochkusu/photos/a.467800163307572.1073741826.467741393313449/1277025585718355/?type=3>>; "University of Hong Kong plans to scrap astronomy major as students 'vote with their feet'" (by Kris Cheng), *Hong Kong Free Press*, 15th March 2017 <<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2017/03/15/university-hong-kong-plans-scrap-astronomy-major-students-vote-feet/>>.

References

- Cheng, Yin-cheong (2009). Hong Kong educational reforms in the last decade: Reform syndrome and new developments. *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 209, No. 1, pp. 65-86.
- Curriculum Development Council (2000). *Learning to Learn: The way forward in curriculum development* (consultation document). Hong Kong: Curriculum Council, November.
- Curriculum Development Council (2001). *Learning to Learn: Life-long learning and whole-person development*. Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council, June.
- Curriculum Development Council (2002). *Four key tasks – Achieving Learning to Learn: 3A Moral and Civic Education*. Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council.
- Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (2007). *Liberal Studies curriculum and assessment guide* (Secondary 4-6). Hong Kong: Education and Manpower Bureau.
- Learning for life, learning through life: Reform proposals for the education system in Hong Kong* (September 2000). Education Commission, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. <http://www.e-c.edu.hk/en/publications_and_related_documents/rf1.html> <http://www.e-c.edu.hk/doc/en/publications_and_related_documents/education_reform/Edu-reform-eng.pdf>
- Leung, Chun-ying (2013). *The 2013 Policy Address – Seek change, maintain stability, serve the people with pragmatism*, 16 January 2013. <<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2013/eng/>> <<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2013/eng/pdf/PA2013.pdf>>
- Leung, Chun-ying (2015). *The 2015 Policy Address – Uphold the rule of law, seize the opportunities, make the right choices: Pursue democracy, boost the economy, improve people's livelihood*, 14 January 2015. <<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2015/eng/>> <<https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2015/>>

[eng/pdf/PA2015.pdf](#)>

- Moral and Civic Education Section (2008). *To collect a hundred rivers, enrich young seedlings with moral rain: New revised moral and civic education framework*. Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council, Education Bureau.
- Morris, Paul (2004). Teaching in Hong Kong: Professionalization, accountability and the state. *Research Papers in Education*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March, pp. 105-120.
- Morris, Paul and Ian Scott (2003). Educational reform and policy implementation in Hong Kong. *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 71-84.
- Progress report on education reform (4)*. Hong Kong: Education Commission, 2006.
- Reform proposals for the education system in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Education Commission, 2000.
- Secretary of the Commission on Strategic Development (2008). Situation, challenge and prospect of promoting National Education in Hong Kong. In: Annex B of the document on the meeting of the task group on National Education of the Commission on Strategic Development. Hong Kong: The Central Policy Unit, 14 April.
- The new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education – Action plan for investing in the future of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Education and Manpower Bureau, May 2005. <http://334.edb.hkedcity.net/doc/eng/report_e.pdf>
- Tsang, Donald Yam-kuen (2007). *The 2007 Policy Address*. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Government, October.
- Tung Chee-hwa (1997). A future of excellence and prosperity for all (Speech by the Chief Executive the Honourable Tung Chee Hwa at the Ceremony to Celebrate the Establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China 1 July 1997). <<http://www.info>.

gov.hk/isd/speech/0701ceho.htm>

Yeung, Kevin (2014). LCQ4: Teacher and student participation in Occupy Central movement. (Press Release: written reply by the Acting Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council, Hong Kong SAR (May 28) to a question by the Dr Hon Kenneth Chan.) <*http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201405/28/P201405280332.htm*>

