

**THE REEDUCATION OF HONG KONG:
IDENTITY, POLITICS, AND EDUCATION IN
POSTCOLONIAL HONG KONG**

Edward Vickers and Flora Kan

Abstract

Hong Kong's post-1997 administration characterizes the city as "Asia's World City, and a Major City in China," but this formulation underplays or ignores what it is that gives Hong Kong its distinctive identity. Nor is this an accidental oversight: the new regime is engaged in a long-term campaign to resocialize Hongkongers as uncritical patriots who identify first and foremost not with Hong Kong, but with the Chinese "motherland." The essay begins by analyzing the political-cultural identity of Hong Kong, focusing on three facets of that identity: the distinctively local, the "pan-Chinese," and the global or international. It notes that a sense of Chinese ethnicity is only one element of local identity (albeit a strong one), and that it by no means necessarily translates into local support for the Chinese

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government, or for Hong Kong's own Beijing-appointed administration. However, in its campaign to promote a homogenous, totalizing sense of "Chineseness," the post-1997 regime has focused principally not on adults, but on children. History curriculum developers in particular have come under pressure to ensure that patriotism and adherence to the "one-China" principle are central themes of the local school curriculum. While some curriculum developers (those responsible for the Chinese History subject) have faced no great difficulty in conforming to the new political correctness, for those responsible for the History (or World History) subject, the "one China" orthodoxy has proved more constraining. The political context of educational policymaking in contemporary Hong Kong effectively prevents students from being exposed through the formal curriculum or textbooks to any account of the local and national past that differs from the orthodox, Beijing-approved version. This article concludes by raising a question that it cannot answer: What effect will this promotion of orthodoxy through the educational system have on the political and cultural identity of future generations of Hongkongers?



There is a wide chasm between the CE [Chief Executive] and the people. His linking of national security with *being Chinese* continues to make people uncomfortable. His belief that once Article 23 [the controversial "national security" legislation] is dealt with, he can get on with the economy also misses the point that Hong Kong people's real issue with the CE is how he sees and handles things (emphasis added).¹

The massive demonstrations that rocked Hong Kong in early July 2003, appeared to take many people by surprise, not least Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa himself. As Christine Loh observed at the time, a key element of Tung's governing strategy had been to attempt to bolster the legitimacy of his

¹ Christine Loh, *Christine Loh's Newsletter* (Hong Kong: Civic Exchange, July 7, 2003).

regime by invoking the blood-bond between local Chinese and their “motherland.” Indeed, phrases such as “We are all Chinese” had become something of a mantra for Tung in the years since he took office in 1997. The vision of Hong Kong as a harmonious, apolitical, capitalist utopia, bound together by “Chinese values” and presided over by a benevolent neo-Confucian patriarch in the person of its Chief Executive, was evidently not shared by the half a million citizens who took to the streets on July 1. Nevertheless, the central rhetorical role played by this concept of “Chineseness” during the post-1997 period begs several questions. Firstly, to what extent is the “chasm” that has undoubtedly opened up between Hong Kong’s new leadership and the bulk of local people a reflection of widely differing visions of what it means to “be Chinese” in the Hong Kong context? Secondly, if widely differing visions do exist, what are their origins? And thirdly, how have these varying visions been reflected in the school curriculum, and what role has been assigned to the curriculum itself in shaping local people’s sense of their “Hongkongese-ness” and “Chineseness”?

In this essay, we propose to focus on the third question (or pair of questions). However, before analyzing the role of education—and of the history curriculum in particular—in official attempts to mould identity consciousness in Hong Kong, we provide a brief survey of the political, social, and cultural changes that the territory (or “region”) has undergone since the 1970s. We examine the different dimensions of Hong Kong’s political and cultural identity—local, pan-Chinese, and international or global—as these have developed over the years, and consider the tensions between them. The neo-conservative political, cultural, and educational agenda pursued by the Tung regime since 1997 is then analyzed, both as it relates to the local context and to the rise of neo-conservatism across the border in mainland China. Noting the curious affinities between Tung’s post-1997 Confucian patriarchy and Britain’s pre-Patten colonialist paternalism, we discuss why

and how both British- and Chinese-sponsored local regimes, in general, have chosen to downplay the significance of any distinctive sense of local identity.

Turning to the school curriculum, we then examine how these issues relating to culture and identity have been reflected in or influenced by the content of school subjects. While our principal focus is on the two distinct subjects of History and Chinese History, of most direct relevance to any consideration of the role of education in identity formation, we also take into account the nature of the broader school curriculum. In particular, we note peculiarities in the way in which language and literature have been taught in local schools, and argue that these have also had an important bearing on the way in which a sense of local or Chinese identity is presented through the school curriculum. We do not attempt to measure or quantify the importance of the curriculum as compared with other factors (such as popular culture) in shaping identity consciousness among local students, nor do we assume that the political messages that syllabi and textbooks convey are transmitted in any simple, direct, and unmediated fashion. The actual impact of the curriculum on students' learning is a matter for further investigation; here we confine ourselves to examining the relationship between the political and cultural context and the process of curriculum development.² Our analysis of the curricula for the two history subjects demonstrates that local political realities, and the centralized, official nature of the curriculum development process, have effectively prevented curriculum developers and textbook authors from promoting any strong and distinctive sense of local identity. This conclusion leads us finally to consider the relationship between education, historical consciousness, and Hong Kong's democratic development.

² See commentary at the bottom of page 401.

**Identity Politics in Hong Kong:
A Three-dimensional Survey**

The Local Dimension

Hong Kong in the post-war period was essentially a refugee society, with a population consisting overwhelmingly of migrants from the Chinese mainland who had fled to the colony during the Chinese Civil War of the late 1940s, or during subsequent upheavals such as the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. At first, these refugees tended to maintain strong affective loyalties to their native places in China, and evinced a relatively weak attachment to Hong Kong itself. By the 1970s, however, this state of affairs had begun to change as the result of a number of factors, including: the rise to maturity of a second generation, born and bred in Hong Kong; the ending of the Cultural Revolution and the discrediting of the extreme brand of anti-imperialist Maoism associated with it; and a steady growth in local economic prosperity.

The late 1960s and early 1970s had witnessed the emergence of a number of pressure groups that lobbied the colonial administration on issues such as the status in Hong Kong of the Chinese language (which was not made an official language until 1974), and rampant corruption in the local police force. The Students' Movement of the time, which played a part in pushing for the Chinese language to be granted official status, was inspired partly by anticolonialist, pan-Chinese ideals—and many students (in Hong Kong as in the West) were attracted to the idealism of the Cultural Revolution. These were, of course, the years in which the bulk of Britain's remaining colonies obtained their independence, and in which protests against the imperialism, perceived as animating the American intervention in Vietnam, rocked university campuses around the world. (The Vietnam conflict had a considerable economic and demographic impact on Hong Kong,

which was an important port of call for the U.S. Navy, and which from the 1970s onward became a major destination for Vietnamese boat people.) Anti-imperialist sentiment certainly existed in Hong Kong, but almost uniquely for a colonial society it never manifested itself in an organized struggle for independence. This was in the main because, as many refugee parents of 1970s students were no doubt at pains to remind their offspring, the only realistic alternative to British rule was control by the as-yet unreconstructed communist regime across the border.

As the truth emerged concerning what had really happened in China during the Cultural Revolution, and as the People's Republic opened its borders to Hong Kong visitors from the late 1970s onward, the ideological and material gulf that separated local people from their mainland cousins became starkly apparent. Many locally-raised businessmen and tourists visiting China for the first time in the late 1970s were shocked by what they found there. The much-vaunted "motherland" turned out to be an ill-kempt, uncultured, scrounging delinquent—the sort of relative you would be tempted to lock away in the attic sooner than introduce to your friends. During the 1980s and early 1990s, *daihlohkyan*, or mainlanders, tended to be portrayed in local films and television soap operas as idiotic country bumpkins, sinister gangsters, corrupt party cadres, or indigent migrants scrabbling to enter Hong Kong's Promised Land.³ A "Great Hong Kong Mentality" took root, reflecting a widespread desire on the part of local Chinese to assert their distinctiveness from the *daihlohkyan*. We are *Heunggongyan*—Hongkongers—said the new generation: more sophisticated, more cosmopolitan and, above all, richer than the yokels across the border in the benighted mainland.

³ Benjamin K.P. Leung, *Perspectives on Hong Kong Society* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Then there was the language issue—not Chinese versus English this time, but Mandarin versus Cantonese. While schools in the rest of China were swept up in the drive to promote *Putonghua* or “the common speech” (as Mandarin is known on the mainland) at the expense of local dialects, in Hong Kong alone a nonstandard variant of Chinese held the field. Well over 90 percent of the local population were, and remain, Cantonese speakers, and when a Hong Kong person asks whether you can speak *Chungmun*, or “Chinese,” what he means by “Chinese” is Cantonese. In the same way, when Chinese was made an official language in 1974, the particular form on which this status was bestowed was never specified; it was taken as given that the spoken language of Hong Kong’s Chinese population was Cantonese. The official written language was Modern Standard Chinese (more or less the same as *Putonghua*), but it was Chinese written in the traditional, full-form characters—not the simplified characters used in the People’s Republic and in Singapore. In the popular press, moreover, a considerable number of nonstandard characters and expressions were and are used to represent Cantonese terms excluded from the “standard” lexicon, with the result that a mainlander would very likely find the headlines of a popular Hong Kong newspaper such as the *Pingguo Yatbo* (Apple Daily) all but incomprehensible. In this way, perhaps more than any other, Hong Kong still feels foreign to visitors from the rest of China—and vice versa. In short, as far as most Hongkongese are concerned, for someone to be considered a true *Heunggongyan*, the basic criteria are Chinese ethnicity, long-term local residence, and Cantonese language. Thus, one of Tung Chee Hwa’s many failings in local eyes is the fact that he speaks Cantonese with a distinct Shanghai accent.

Such prejudices do, it must be said, reflect a dark side to the assertion of local distinctiveness vis-à-vis outsiders of various descriptions. This is evident especially in antimainlander prejudice—a widespread sentiment that was shamelessly

exploited during the 1999 Right of Abode crisis by the then Secretary for Security, Regina Ip.⁴ In addition, blatantly racist attitudes pervade local society, directed particularly (but not exclusively) against the substantial Filipino community, the smaller but long-established communities of Indians and Pakistanis, and refugees or economic migrants from Vietnam. Hong Kong still lacks any law outlawing racial discrimination—a state of affairs that the government justifies on the grounds that “there is no popular demand” for such a law on the part of the majority of the local (overwhelmingly Chinese) community.⁵

Analyses of “Hong Kong identity” have tended to focus on issues of lifestyle and, to some extent, also of language, neglecting the political component integral to the sense of local distinctiveness. The Hong Kong ethos has famously been characterized as one of strongly procapitalist “utilitarianistic familism”—a focus on personal and family enrichment, in which political concerns had no place. However, the vision of Hong Kong as simply a depoliticized place to do business—a vision jointly cherished by local business leaders and mainland cadres—fails to account for the high levels of political engagement demonstrated by Hong Kong people at moments of crisis. The most famous instance was the massive demonstrations that followed the June 4, 1989 massacres in Beijing, in which about one-sixth of the entire local population is estimated to have participated. Election results since the early 1990s have

⁴ The government raised the spectre of 1.6 million impoverished mainlanders flooding into Hong Kong in order to mobilize public opinion against a ruling by the Court of Final Appeal upholding the right of children of Hong Kong permanent residents to come to Hong Kong from the mainland. This ruling was subsequently overturned by a committee of the National People’s Congress in Beijing, in an intervention widely seen as seriously undermining Hong Kong’s judicial autonomy.

⁵ See the official Web site of the Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor <<http://www.hkhrm.org.hk>>, for example their “Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Regarding the Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China,” July 2, 2001.

consistently shown substantial majorities supporting pro-democracy, anti-Beijing parties, on turnouts comparable to those seen for recent elections in established democracies such as the United Kingdom or the United States. Some public opinion surveys have shown that many local people evince a somewhat idiosyncratic understanding of the concept of democracy, though this should perhaps not surprise us, given the highly peculiar structure and history of Hong Kong's representative institutions and governmental structure. Hong Kong's substantial middle classes appear firmly wedded to a set of distinctly liberal-democratic values, including the rule of law and civil liberties, such as freedom of expression. These values, as well as an explicit rejection of communism, constitute an important component of the sense of Hongkongese-ness that distinguishes local Chinese from their mainland "compatriots."

Nevertheless, as the affluence of the 1990s gave way to economic uncertainty in the period following 1997, so the brash self-confidence that used to typify Hong Kong suffered a severe dent. In the 1980s or 1990s, it was possible to imagine local newspaper headlines declaring "Fog in Harbour—Mainland Cut Off," but by the early years of the new century it was Hong Kong that was more likely to feel isolated and becalmed by the shifting trade winds. Amid the fanfare surrounding the announcement in early 2003 of a new Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) between the mainland and Hong Kong, it was made perfectly clear that this was a case of the former assisting the latter. It was no longer possible for Hongkongers to regard their mainland cousins with the same arrogant assurance of economic superiority. The more prosperous coastal regions of China were fast catching up, and a new generation of highly-educated mainland "yuppies" were aspiring to the sort of ultra-materialistic consumer culture that had previously been identified with the "Hong Kong lifestyle." With jobs and people migrating at an escalating rate in both directions across an increasingly porous border, the fate of

Hong Kong's cultural distinctiveness began to seem as uncertain as its economic future.

The Pan-Chinese Dimension

To say that Hongkongers since the 1960s have developed a strongly distinct identity should not be taken as implying that local society has necessarily become any less "Chinese." While surveys of public opinion from the 1980s onward have consistently shown that, when given the choice between defining themselves primarily as "Chinese" or as "Hongkongese," the majority of local people choose the latter, few if any would regard the two categories as mutually exclusive. The sense of Hong Kong's distinctiveness vis-à-vis the mainland co-exists with a profound consciousness of cultural and even "racial" Chineseness.

If the popular demonstrations of summer 2003 against the Tung administration can be interpreted as defiant assertions of Hong Kong's autonomy and way of life, then other recent manifestations of public opinion display a rather different facet of local identity. In 1999, when NATO planes bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, apparently by accident, Hong Kong's Chinese-language media were virtually unanimous in voicing the "patriotic" outrage of local Chinese—and in refusing to entertain the possibility that the bombing could have been anything other than intentional. Prominent anti-Beijing figures belonging to organizations such as the Democratic Party were among the most strident in condemning what they interpreted as a calculated attack on Chinese interests by imperialist Western bullies.⁶ Three years earlier, many of the same individuals had been involved in noisy protests against the Japanese "occupation" of the Diaoyutai/Senkakuji islands—an archipelago of uninhabitable rocks northeast of

⁶ In the aftermath of the bombing, Democratic Party activists distributed leaflets door-to-door denouncing "American aggression."

Taiwan that are disputed by China and Japan. After a group of extreme Japanese nationalists had taken the provocative step of visiting the islands to rebuild a lighthouse, demonstrations and protests ensued in Hong Kong. These culminated in a trip to the islands by a small band of outraged patriots, in which one protester died attempting to swim ashore in heavy seas. Other protestors were rescued by the Japanese Navy, but this did not prevent the local media from hailing the dead man as a martyr to the cause of patriotic resistance against “Japanese imperialism.”

Episodes such as these demonstrated an acute local sensitivity to any actual or imagined foreign challenges to China’s territorial sovereignty or national dignity. Implicitly or explicitly, protests by Hongkongers over such issues also pointed up the failure of the Chinese government itself to mount a sufficiently vigorous defense of the national honor. As Ian Buruma has written with regard to early twentieth-century Japan: “When governments rule without popular representation or even consent, one form of rebellion is to be more nationalistic than the rulers. If the rulers are traitors to the nation, they should be overthrown.”⁷ In late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century Hong Kong (and in mainland China itself), ultra-nationalist protest can serve as a politically telling and emotionally satisfying method of impugning the virility of the national leadership.

However, there is more to expressions of outraged patriotism than simply implied criticism of the Beijing authorities. Chinese patriotism is for many Hongkongers a heartfelt, almost visceral sentiment—all the more so, it has been suggested, because of Hong Kong’s historical detachment from the Chinese mainland.⁸ In fact, the “China” with which local

⁷ Ian Buruma, *Inventing Japan* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2003), 53. Buruma goes on to observe that this “is a pattern that has occurred over and over again in east Asia, and it is not very conducive to liberal democracy.”

⁸ Bernard Luk, “Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum: Heritage

people tend to identify most strongly is long gone—if, that is, it ever existed at all. The fascination with a semi-mythical Chinese past manifests itself in the popularity of martial arts comics and novels such as the *Gum Yong (Jin Yong)* epics, in vogue for television dramatizations of old folk tales such as the *Judge Pao* series, in costume dramas and irreverent slapstick comedies of court life in ancient China, and in the adherence to folk customs and celebration of traditional festivals.⁹ This “folk Chineseness,” divorced from (and transcending) the realities of contemporary life in mainland China itself, is a cultural attribute that Hong Kong shares with Taiwan, where even campaigners for Taiwanese independence will describe themselves as *Huaren*, a term that Hongkongers also use to designate all Chinese—including overseas Chinese.¹⁰ In English, the closest approximation to this concept would be the term *Anglo-Saxon*, which was once freely used by British, Americans, Canadians, Australians, and others to assert and celebrate the supposed ethno-cultural unity of the English-speaking peoples, but which has now generally fallen out of favor (except with the French, who tend to use it as a term of abuse). As the term *Anglo-Saxon* did for a nineteenth-century Englishman or American, *Huaren* (or *Wahyan*) for a twenty-first century Taiwanese or Hongkonger carries distinctly racial as well as cultural overtones.

Despite this shared acknowledgement of an essential Chineseness, there is an important difference between the way in which citizens of Taiwan and Hong Kong typically conceptualize their identity vis-à-vis “China.” This is perhaps most strikingly evident in the terminology used to describe the local languages. In Taiwan, the local variant of the *Minanhua* lan-

and Colonialism,” in Philip Stimpson and Paul Morris, ed., *Curriculum and Assessment for Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Open University of Hong Kong Press, 1998), 51-74.

⁹ See Benjamin K.P. Leung, *Perspectives on Hong Kong Society* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Denny Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1.

guage spoken by most ethnic Chinese residents of the island is commonly referred to as *Taiyu*, or “Taiwanese.” In Hong Kong, by contrast, there is no concept of a “Hongkongese” language—no *Gongyu* or *Gongmun*; as noted above, Hongkongers typically describe their language simply as *Chungmun*, or “Chinese.” Moreover, there exists, at least among many more educated Hongkongers, a pronounced inferiority complex regarding the status of their version of Chinese as compared with Mandarin. Cantonese may be the badge of a true *Heunggongyan*, but at the same time, it is generally seen, in defiance of international linguistic categories, as an inferior “dialect,” and not a true language at all. Even while they may share the common prejudices against Mandarin-speaking mainlanders, educated Hongkongers frequently confess to feelings of embarrassment or shame at their own inability to speak good *Gwokyu* (“National Language,” as Mandarin is commonly called both in Hong Kong and Taiwan), as if this somehow diminished their claim to true “Chineseness.” To explore the reasons for this would involve too large a digression from our theme; suffice it to note that history, politics, economics, geography, and genealogy mean that Hong Kong’s bonds with its mainland hinterland remain far more intimate than Taiwan’s.

The International Dimension

Here, we are concerned primarily with the more political aspects of Hong Kong people’s identity, and the way in which these both influence and are influenced by the school curriculum. However, in their everyday lives, local residents arguably identify far less readily with politico-historical abstractions such as “Hong Kong” or “China” than they do with their company or workplace, or, above all, their families. Indeed, as noted above, the Hong Kong ethos has been characterized as

one of “utilitarianistic familism,”¹¹ a set of attitudes which, in layman’s terms, could be summed up by Margaret Thatcher’s notorious dictum: “There is no such thing as society; there are only individuals and families.” Other commentators have disputed this vision of the typical Hongkonger as an apolitical “economic animal” as something of a caricature, but there can be little doubt that in Hong Kong, as in any society, relationships developed through work and family constitute central components of any individual’s sense of his or her identity.¹²

It might be expected that workplace and family ties would tend, if anything, to pull “inward” and to promote a parochial outlook; there is, indeed, a strong element of parochialism in the typical Hong Kong worldview. There is also, however, a widespread sense of pride in Hong Kong’s status as an “international city.” What is meant by the phrase “international city” is seldom explored in any depth, and in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity, Hong Kong is not remotely in the same league as, say, London, New York, or even Singapore. Nevertheless, in economic and familial terms, the extent of Hong Kong’s global ties is impressive. Even if the workforce is overwhelmingly Chinese, a considerable proportion of it is employed by multinational companies involved in financial services or entrepôt trade, in locally-based companies with a global reach, or in the sizeable tourism and hospitality industries catering to a largely international clientele. Moreover, a history of large-scale overseas emigration over several decades means that many Hongkongers have close relatives or friends resident in Canada, Australia, America, the United Kingdom, or elsewhere, and many more have themselves worked or studied abroad for extended periods before returning to the

¹¹ Lau Siu-kai, “Utilitarianistic Familism: The Basis of Political Stability,” in *Social Life and Development in Hong Kong*, ed. Ambrose Y.C. King and Rance P.L. Lee (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1981).

¹² Michael DeGolyer and J.L. Scott, “The Myth of Political Apathy in Hong Kong,” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science—Special Edition on the Future of Hong Kong* (September 1996).

territory. Thus, the most intimate networks of relationships centered around family and workplace, in many cases, actually pull the individual “outward,” from a parochial toward a more international outlook.

The international facet to Hong Kong’s identity was strengthened in the 1980s and 1990s as a direct consequence of fears surrounding the territory’s impending retrocession to China. During this period, thousands of people, often relatively affluent professionals, migrated overseas—in particular to Australia, Canada, and New Zealand—primarily in order to secure foreign nationality for themselves and their families, and, thus, a bolt-hole abroad in the event of political or economic repression on the part of the post-1997 regime. Thousands more applied for passports under the British Government’s controversial scheme that granted full British nationality to middle-ranking professionals in certain “key” positions. Meanwhile, a large proportion of Hongkongers, who were unable to secure full right of abode overseas, took out “British National Overseas” passports. Precise figures are hard to come by, but a significant proportion of Hong Kong’s educated Chinese middle class thus holds foreign citizenship in one form or another.¹³ These ethnically Chinese foreign

¹³ The Hong Kong Transition Project (HKTP) in 2002 estimated the proportion of “returnees” in the local population at only 3 percent. However, this figure would not include the holders of British passports under the British Nationality Scheme, who did not need to qualify for British citizenship through residence in Britain. Interestingly, the HKTP survey did not directly question people as to their legal nationality (such a question might be regarded as intrusive by many Hongkongers), but instead asked interviewees to classify themselves as “Expatriate,” “Mainland Migrant,” “Mainland Professional,” “Returnee to Hong Kong,” “Hongkonger,” or “Other.” It would seem likely that the survey underreported the proportion of foreign passport holders, since many may have chosen to classify themselves simply as “Hongkongers,” particularly since the questions focused on *how the respondents perceived themselves*. Thus, for example, the HKTP survey showed that, while 30 percent of those surveyed had been born on the mainland, only 7 percent identified themselves as “Hongkongers” rather than “Mainlanders”—with the proportion of those doing so correlating with the number of years of residence in Hong Kong. See *The First Five Years: Floundering Government, Foundering*

nationals occupy influential positions in the local business, legal, educational, and administrative establishment (although the Basic Law excludes them from the top sixteen posts in the government, including that of Chief Executive). In late 2003, a minor stir was caused when Tsang Yok-sing, leader of the largest pro-Beijing political party and a member of the Executive Council, coupled a call for universal suffrage for the election of the Chief Executive in 2007 with a statement that the right of non-Chinese nationals to vote in Hong Kong was “rather dubious.”¹⁴ Tsang’s party would probably stand to benefit from a move stripping foreign citizens of their voting rights in Hong Kong, since educated and cosmopolitan middle-class voters tend to support prodemocracy politicians rather than pro-Beijing groups.

As far as legal citizenship rights are concerned, Hongkongers do seem, to borrow Lau Siu-kai’s term, to take a “utilitarianistic” attitude—seeing no contradiction, for instance, in using an Australian passport for overseas trips, but a “Homegoing Certificate” (*Wuiheungjing*) for visa-free travel to mainland China (thereby cheerfully ignoring the PRC’s strictures against dual nationality). The extent to which possession of, for example, an Australian passport impinges on a Hong Kong person’s fundamental sense of identity is a moot point; someone who has grown up with a sense of himself or herself as *Heunggongyan* and *Wahyan* is unlikely to feel that identity erased or supplanted the moment a foreign travel document is issued to him or her. For many children of such passport holders, educated overseas for all or part of their school career, it may be a different matter altogether (and many children of returned emigrants in fact continue to follow overseas school curricula within Hong Kong, in the territory’s large international schools sector). What is certain is that, though Hong

Democracy (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong Transition Project, May 2002).

¹⁴ Klaudia Lee, “‘Foreigners’ Right to Vote Questioned,” in the *South China Morning Post*, November 16, 2003.

Kong's population may seem relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity (well over 90 percent Cantonese-Chinese), in terms of legal nationality, educational experience, family ties, and career history, the picture is far more complex and diverse.

**Politics and Identity Post-1997:
The Tung Administration's *Kulturkampf***

Immediately after the 1997 handover, the troops of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) installed themselves in the various barracks and bases that previously had been occupied by the British Army's Hong Kong Garrison. The most prominent of these was the Prince of Wales Barracks in Admiralty—a prime location on the island shore of Victoria Harbor. The occupation of the Admiralty site was symbolic rather than strategic. The PLA was clearly not in Hong Kong to guard against any external security threat; its purpose was above all to symbolize, by its very presence, the restoration of Chinese sovereignty over the territory. The message was spelled out in large characters on huge banners draped across the sides of the Prince of Wales Barracks: *Ai Zuguo; Ai Xianggang*—"Love the Motherland; Love Hong Kong"—strictly in that order.

Beijing's policy regarding the role of the PLA in Hong Kong was a reflection of the regime's overall attitude toward the territory and its people. Hongkongers, it was felt, had been "led astray" politically and culturally as a result of British colonial influence, most flagrantly so under the last governor, Chris Patten. Their love for the motherland had been deliberately undermined by the colonial authorities, in large part (it was alleged) through manipulation of the educational system, and their consequent political unreliability had been brought home to the Central Government by their fervent support for the student demonstrators during the 1989 Tiananmen pro-

tests. A top priority of the post-handover regime, therefore, was to coax or cajole these wayward “compatriots” back into the Chinese fold, primarily by means of exhortation and education.¹⁵

It has long been a prevalent belief among the Chinese that effective government and education go hand-in-hand; in other words, that the state (traditionally in the person of the emperor) can and should attempt to educate the populace in morally “correct” behavior, just as a father lectures and admonishes his children.¹⁶ This view of the state’s educative, paternalistic function is still widely adhered to by Hong Kong people, even though it might seem to sit uneasily alongside the democratic aspirations that many of them also harbor. The colonial government consciously adopted such a role through various exhortative public campaigns. However, in stark contrast to the mainland regime, the Hong Kong authorities were emphatically not interested in the political socialization of the local population, except in a negative sense. Thus, in defiance of widespread assumptions concerning the nature of “colonialism,” the British did not, at least during the latter decades of their stewardship, make any effort to instill in Hong Kong people a sense of “Britishness”—quite the opposite. The government in London was anxious to minimize any potential costs or pressures for immigration from its remaining colonies, and, therefore, it took steps to deny right of abode in Britain to the majority of Hong Kong’s British subjects. It suited London’s

¹⁵ See Tung Chee-hwa, *Building Hong Kong for a New Era, Tung Chee-hwa’s Policy Address to the Legislative Council* (Hong Kong: The Printing Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, October 1997). Unlike the statements of some mainland officials prior to 1997, Tung’s policy addresses and public statements have tended to focus not so much on criticisms of colonialism (which would also imply criticism of local Chinese who collaborated with the British), and more on the importance of increasing knowledge of and affective loyalty to the Chinese “motherland” among local people.

¹⁶ For example, see Jonathan Spence, *Treason by the Book* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002).

purposes, as well as the avowedly liberal-democratic principles of post-colonial Britain, to position the Hong Kong Government as, to all intents and purposes, the government of a culturally Chinese but politically autonomous “international” city state. During the 1970s, the colonial government effectively underwent a “makeover”—with the granting of official status to the Chinese language, public campaigns to promote a depoliticized civic consciousness (as for example in the “Hong Kong Is Our Home” campaign), and a belated but determined effort to stamp out police corruption. The British were anxious to discourage identification on the part of local Chinese with the communist regime across the border, but they were also, at least prior to the Patten governorship, distinctly ambivalent about the emergence of any strong, politicized sense of local belonging. To have encouraged the development of any movement bent on asserting Hong Kong’s political distinctiveness not only from Britain but also from China would have been to invite an open challenge to the legitimacy of the colonial regime, while simultaneously incurring the wrath of Beijing.¹⁷

The Tung administration, in many respects, has evinced a hankering after the era of the 1960s and 1970s, when the colony was run by a coterie of senior government officials and city fathers drawn from the local business community, and when the bulk of the general population had hardly begun to think of itself as “Hongkongese.”¹⁸ Like pre-Patten British governors, Tung has sought to emphasize the Chinese and, to some extent, the international dimensions of Hong Kong’s civic identity, while downplaying or ignoring the significance of the local. Unlike his British predecessors, however, he has tried to give local “Chineseness” a distinct political flavor—

¹⁷ Matthew Turner, “60’s/90’s: Dissolving the People,” in *Hong Kong’s Cultural Identity* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1995).

¹⁸ Simon Vickers, “‘More Colonial Again’?—The Post-97 Culture of Hong Kong’s Governing Elite,” in *The International Journal of Public Administration*, special 2000 edition on the effects of Hong Kong’s handover.

one that carries the unmistakable whiff of the Beijing kitchen—and has done so in a context in which local political palates have become accustomed to a far more democratic recipe. The new government’s slogan for Hong Kong is “Asia’s World City, and a Major City in China,” thus defining Hong Kong primarily in terms of its relationships with “China,” “Asia,” and “the World.” In 2001, a consultation document produced by the government-appointed Culture and Heritage Commission, reported that commission members had reached a “consensus” to the effect that,

Hong Kong’s culture is a component of Chinese culture. The long tradition of Chinese culture offers a great treasure house for the sustained development of Hong Kong culture. It is our long-term goal to expand our global cultural vision on the foundation of Chinese culture, drawing on the essence of other cultures to develop Hong Kong into an international cultural metropolis known for its openness and pluralism.

Our mission is to encourage Hong Kong people, in particular the young generation, to appreciate and participate in the arts; to enrich their lives with a greater emphasis on culture; to strengthen social cohesion and shared values; and to build up the confidence and pride of Hong Kong people in their country and society.¹⁹

In common with other official statements on Hong Kong’s culture and identity (such as the curricular documents discussed below), this declaration implicitly adopts a vision of “Chinese culture” as a homogenous and totalizing essence, and sees Hong Kong’s culture as a mere subset of this greater whole. Hong Kong’s cultural distinctiveness is seen as deriving from its function as a sort of international entrepôt for trade in cultural essences—but in such a way that the essential Chineseness of local culture is never compromised. The idea that Hong Kong culture might itself offer a distinctive vision—

¹⁹ *Consultation Paper* (Hong Kong: Culture and Heritage Commission Secretariat, March 2001), 8.

or even several competing visions—of what it means to be Chinese in the modern world is nowhere entertained, since pluralism is here defined not as something internal to “Chinese culture,” but as an outcome of the interaction between “Chinese” and “international” cultures. There is, in short, no official vision of Hong Kong primarily as *Hong Kong*, the Tung administration apparently feeling that this would be at odds with the tenets of Beijing’s “one-China” orthodoxy.

The meaning and significance of “one China”—or the “one country” element in Deng Xiaoping’s “one country, two systems” formula for the reunification project—is an issue that has formed the subtext to many of the key political, legal, and educational debates in post-handover Hong Kong, with the government consistently choosing interpretations that emphasise the “one country” over the “two systems” element. At least in the cultural and educational fields, however, care has been taken to avoid the appearance of overt interference in day-to-day policymaking, reliance instead being placed largely on unofficial channels—such as the pro-Beijing press—or on platitudinous official or semi-official statements (such as Tung’s own policy addresses and the above-quoted report of the Culture and Heritage Commission) to remind middle-ranking bureaucrats, academics, publishers, and others of the ideological parameters within which they should work. Thus, conformity with the “one-China” principle is achieved more through “self-censorship” or “guided self-censorship” than as the result of any draconian system of central controls.²⁰

One example of the outcome of such an approach is the permanent exhibition at the new Hong Kong Museum of History, opened in 2002. Replacing an older museum that was closed in 1997, this vast and lavish display takes the visitor on a journey through “six thousand years” of Hong Kong history. It does so, moreover, in a way that ignores or sidelines all the

²⁰ For an analysis of some of the commercial and other pressures that encourage self-censorship, see Steve Vines, *Hong Kong: China's New Colony* (Hong Kong: Aurum Press, 1998).

most controversial issues in local history: the ethnicity of Hong Kong's early inhabitants is not discussed, and the conflicts between local aboriginal tribes (long-since obliterated or assimilated) and early Han settlers is not mentioned; the Opium War receives fairly orthodox nationalist treatment; the nature of the British colonial administration, and the collaborative relationships with local Chinese elites upon which it depended, is hardly discussed; the "contribution" of Hong Kong to revolution and, in particular, to the anti-Japanese war effort on the Chinese mainland is emphasized, but there is no recognition of the contribution made by non-Chinese groups (particularly Indians) to Hong Kong's early development; and the coverage of post-1945 Hong Kong renders the British presence in the territory almost totally invisible. While the exhibition was being prepared, there was some debate in the local press over the sensitive issue of whether to include coverage of the 1989 demonstrations—widely recognized as a defining event in Hong Kong's recent history. The demonstrations do, in fact, feature in the audio-visual presentation that concludes the exhibition, but they do so in the form of a brief clip in a triumphalist narrative of the events leading up to the 1997 handover. Under the caption, "Blood is Thicker than Water," the local reaction to the Tiananmen tragedy is bizarrely subsumed into this celebratory account of the territory's progress toward reunification. The museum thus focuses exclusively on the significance of this event as a manifestation of Hong Kong people's Chinese patriotism, implicitly invoking their "blood union" (*huet tong*) with their "racial" brethren on the mainland. In this way, the role of the 1989 events in accentuating both local people's alienation from the mainland regime and their sense of their distinctive Hongkongeseness is deftly sidestepped.²¹

²¹ For a fuller discussion of the new museum, see Edward Vickers, *In Search of An Identity: The Politics of History as a School Subject in Hong Kong* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), Chapter 3.

In Autumn 2003, the success of China's first manned space mission presented the Central and SAR Governments with a literally heaven-sent opportunity to promote Chinese national pride among Hong Kong people. China's astronaut hero, Colonel Yang Liwei, was sent on a six-day tour of Hong Kong, which was chosen as the very first city stop on Yang's round-China triumphal tour. Yang was feted throughout his visit, and the more than 40,000 people who packed the Hong Kong Stadium to welcome him bore witness to his genuine local appeal. This was widely felt to be an uncontroversial national achievement that all Chinese could celebrate, regardless of their political preferences—hence the government's eagerness to exploit it to the full. Pro-Beijing commentator Ho Hon-chuen declared in a newspaper article that Yang's visit “made the national and SAR flags dance together,” while Executive Councilor and pro-Beijing party leader Tsang Yok-sing wrote that the visit would “strengthen Hong Kong people's sense of national identity.”²² Ho and Tsang both made much of the educational benefits to be derived from the visit. “Yang Liwei has become an idol in the hearts of the people,” wrote an ecstatic Tsang. “Many young people show that they want to take him as their role model, and the special web-page that the Education Department has set up for the visit of the Aeronautical Group has been jammed with students' questions and messages of congratulation.” For his part, Ho noted that the visit presented an opportunity “for students in all our schools to simultaneously learn about space and citizenship,” and observed that the fact the only way to communicate directly with China's space heroes was by speaking *Putonghua* should serve to demonstrate to local people that “[learning] *Putonghua* is extremely important!”

²² Ho Hon-chuen, *Gei Yang Liwei fang Gang dafen* (Assessing Yang Liwei's Hong Kong tour), in *Ming Pao*, November 6, 2003 (in Chinese); Tsang Yok-sing, *Jixin bian Shicheng* (Being of one mind is the secret to success), in *Ming Pao*, November 6, 2003 (in Chinese).

The central thrust of the post-1997 regime's cultural policy thus appears to be the assertion of Hong Kong's eternal and indissoluble ties with the Chinese "motherland," and the denial of any elements in local history or culture that might qualify or weaken this vision of the SAR's unequivocal Chineseness. Such a vision does not preclude a nod in the direction of the "international" facet of local identity, but "Chineseness" and "foreign-ness" notwithstanding, official acknowledgements of the virtues of "pluralism" are still implicitly regarded as distinct "essences" rather than as fluid or porous categories. This appeal to the pan-Chinese aspect of the Hong Kong mentality as a means of encouraging closer identification with the Chinese mainland is made possible by the tectonic ideological shifts that have taken place across the border since the 1970s. As Beijing, to all intents and purposes, has abandoned communism in favor of free-wheeling capitalism and "one-China" patriotism, it has become better able to appeal to the Han chauvinism and latent xenophobia that remain important components of the ethno-cultural consciousness of many Hong Kong Chinese.²³

Nevertheless, as was demonstrated in 1989 and in subsequent elections to the local Legislative Council, Chinese patriotism for most Hongkongers by no means entails unquestioning support for the Beijing-appointed Tung regime. The most striking instance of this to date came in late November 2003 when, two weeks after Hongkongers had greeted Yang Liwei as a national hero, they went to the polls in District Council Elections which resulted in an emphatic defeat for pro-Beijing political parties. As far as most adult residents are concerned, attempts by a figure such as Tung to quell local dissent through appeals to patriotic sentiment are liable, if anything, to further fuel resentment—as is suggested by the

²³ For an analysis of the prominence of ethno-cultural chauvinism in mainstream contemporary Chinese culture, see Geremie R. Barme, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

quotation from Christine Loh at the start of this article. With schoolchildren, however, it is a different matter, and the Tung administration has made no secret of its ambition to socialize the younger generation as Chinese patriots first and foremost, uncritically supportive of Beijing's "one-China" agenda.²⁴ The remainder of this essay examines the role that has been assigned to the local school curriculum, and in particular to history, in winning young hearts and minds for the motherland. It discusses the ways in which the curriculum has or has not served as a vehicle for the distinctively local, pan-Chinese and international facets of Hong Kong's cultural identity, and how and why syllabi and textbooks have shifted in their treatment of sensitive issues related to local history and culture both prior and subsequent to the territory's return to Chinese rule.

History and Identity in the Hong Kong School Curriculum up to 1997

In the media frenzy that preceded Hong Kong's retrocession, both Chinese and overseas journalists tended to take it for granted that, since Hong Kong was a "colony," the local school curriculum must present students with a stereotypically "colonial" vision of the territory's past and present. The fact that most secondary schools used (or claimed to use) English as their medium of instruction was taken by some as confirmation of an ingrained colonialism in the educational system as a

²⁴ For a discussion of changes to the civic education curriculum before and since the handover, see Paul Morris, Flora Kan, and Esther Morris, "Education, Civic Participation and Identity: Continuity and Change in Hong Kong," in *Cambridge Journal of Education* 30, no. 2 (2000): 243-62. In the present article, we do not discuss the civic education curriculum, since in most local schools civic education as a distinct curricular area does not feature prominently. The official guidelines for civic education have reflected the same political influences that have affected the process of curriculum formation for subjects such as History and Chinese History, with an increasingly explicit emphasis on the importance of promoting patriotic sentiment among students.

whole.²⁵ In particular, however, it was alleged that the curriculum for history—always the most politically sensitive of school subjects—had been manipulated by the colonial government in order to put across a pro-British vision of the local past. It was inevitable—indeed, some implied, only natural—that the history curriculum should become the site for a struggle over the political socialization of Hong Kong's youth. As the British journalist Steve Vines put it in 1998, “The British were shameless in offering an imperial version of history. The post-British regime has been busy with the scissors and wants to ensure that the new generation learns its version of the past.”²⁶

Statements such as this seemed superficially plausible, but were in fact totally unsupported by the evidence. What was most striking about the pre-1997 school curriculum was not the prevalence of imperialist propaganda, but its absence. It is necessary to go back as far as the 1960s to find a time when local students were presented with a triumphalist account of Hong Kong history as one component of a larger narrative of British imperial progress. By the 1970s, British history had virtually disappeared from the school curriculum, and local history along with it, leaving students to subsist on a curricular diet of “Chinese History” (mostly ancient) and “World History” (mostly East Asian and European, with very little British content). Oddly, given the nationalist passions it continues to arouse among many Chinese, the only episode in local history that was still included in the junior and senior secondary curricula was the Opium War. Otherwise, students were presented, through the junior secondary subject of Economics and Public Affairs (EPA), with an ahistorical vision of Hong Kong as a cosmopolitan capitalist utopia.²⁷

²⁵ Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (London and New York, Routledge, 1998).

²⁶ Steve Vines, *Hong Kong: China's New Colony* (Hong Kong: Aurum Press, 1998), 258.

²⁷ See Edward Vickers, *In Search of An Identity: The Politics of History as*

The predominance of English as the medium of instruction in secondary schools was indisputably part of the historical legacy of colonialism, but by the 1980s this state of affairs persisted in defiance of the government's declared policy of encouraging "mother tongue" instruction. Moreover, the way in which English was taught as a distinct school subject was highly unusual, and difficult to account for by reference to any view of the curriculum as simply a vehicle for "cultural imperialism." Whereas in most countries, including the Chinese mainland, the English language curriculum tends to be seen in part as an opportunity for students to acquire some knowledge of the cultures as well as the language of the English-speaking world, in Hong Kong this is emphatically not the case.²⁸ Instead, English is treated as a Hong Kong language and general-purpose business tool, and textbooks predominantly feature stories or situations set in the local context, typically involving Chinese characters conversing with each other in English.²⁹ No research has yet shown exactly how or why this situation has arisen, but it may in part be accounted for by a pandering on the part of local publishers to parochial attitudes among teachers and students, encouraged by student-centered rhetoric emanating from the government and academia. It is also complicit with the desire of prehandover British administrations to discourage identification with Britain, and to foster instead a depoliticized sense of local "belonging."³⁰

a School Subject in Hong Kong, 1960s-2002 (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), Chapter 4. See also Paul Morris, Gerry McClelland, and Wong Ping Man, "Explaining Curriculum Change: Social Studies in Hong Kong," in *Comparative Education Review* (February 1997): 27-43.

²⁸ For a discussion of the English language curriculum in China, see Bob Adamson, *China's English* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004 forthcoming).

²⁹ See, for example, the English textbooks for Hong Kong schools written or co-authored by Edward Vickers, in particular, the *Target, New Target* and *Longman Target English* series published by Longman (Asia) (1994, 1998, 2003).

³⁰ Matthew Turner, "60's/90's: Dissolving the People," in *Hong Kong's Cultural Identity* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1995).

Within the predominantly English-medium school curriculum, meanwhile, there persisted throughout the period of British rule an unassailable redoubt of “Chineseness” in the form of the “Chinese language subjects”: Chinese Language and Literature, and Chinese History. As Bernard Luk has argued, and as we have discussed in previous publications, these subjects purveyed a depoliticized, culturalist vision of Chinese identity, rooted in the ancient glories of that civilization and entirely divorced both from contemporary mainland politics and from the local context.³¹ Following the communist victory in China in 1949, the curriculum process primarily involved the bureaucratic control of school subjects and curriculum materials via model syllabi, approved textbooks, and exhortation. The rationale for these developments arose from the government’s desire to combat the spread of communist influence in schools. Therefore, the literary output of post-1949 China was excluded from the curriculum, as were works by any Hong Kong authors. In the case of Chinese History, the effective end-date of the curriculum was set even earlier, and the chronological scope of the Certificate of Education Examination (CEE) syllabus was only extended to 1911, 1945, and 1949, in 1965, 1972, and 1979, respectively. In the 1995 CEE revision, the scope was extended only to 1976, thus excluding the 1989 June Fourth Incident.³² Hong Kong history

³¹ Bernard Luk, “Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum: Heritage and Colonialism,” in Philip Stimpson and Paul Morris, ed., *Curriculum and Assessment for Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Open University of Hong Kong Press, 1998): 51-74; Edward Vickers, Flora Kan, and Paul Morris, “Colonialism and the Politics of Chinese History in Hong Kong,” in *The Oxford Review of Education* (March 2003); Flora Kan and Edward Vickers, “One Hong Kong, Two Histories: History and Chinese History in the Hong Kong School Curriculum,” in *Comparative Education* 38, no. 1 (February 2002): 73-89.

³² Since the syllabus covered the entire four- or five-thousand-year history of China, and since most teachers tended to teach it chronologically, the more modern periods and topics tended to be neglected or crammed into the last few weeks of a term. See Flora Kan, *Chinese History in Hong Kong: The Secondary School Curriculum, 1946-2001* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 2002).

was not covered at all; for the émigré scholars who shaped the curriculum in the 1950s and 1960s, Hong Kong had no status whatsoever in the grand narrative of the Chinese past—it was a peripheral backwater, a traditional haven for pirates (Chinese or foreign), a colonial stain on the national character, and an occasional refuge for reluctant exiles from the motherland. For these scholars and their students, who continued to influence the development of the Chinese History curriculum right into the twenty-first century, the essence of Chinese history was the traditional dynastic narrative, and the moral lessons thence to be derived through the correct apportionment of praise and blame.³³

However, it was one of the curious anomalies of Hong Kong's school curriculum that it boasted not just one but two "history" subjects, since in addition to "Chinese History" there was a completely separate subject called "History." This situation had its roots in the curriculum for the Anglo-Chinese schools in the 1950s and 1960s; since it made little sense to teach Chinese history to Chinese students in English, the practice had arisen of using Chinese-medium history textbooks produced on the mainland to teach the history of China. However, as the political tensions associated with the Chinese Civil War and the subsequent Communist-Kuomintang stand-off spilled over into Hong Kong from the late 1940s onward, the colonial authorities became increasingly anxious to prevent inflammatory "antiforeign" teaching materials being used in local schools. Therefore, steps were taken to secure the collaboration of highly conservative émigré scholars in the development of a Chinese History curriculum especially for Hong Kong schools—a curriculum that would ignore the recent Chinese past, whose memory was so distasteful to them and so dangerous to their colonial masters, and concentrate instead on celebrating the ancient dynasties as a source both of ethno-

³³ Edward Vickers, Flora Kan, and Paul Morris, "Colonialism and the Politics of Chinese History in Hong Kong," in *The Oxford Review of Education* (March 2003).

cultural pride and of exemplars of the Confucian virtues, not least that of obedience to established authority. So successful was this project of establishing an autochthonous and distinct curriculum for “Chinese History” in Hong Kong that, by the 1970s, the subject had become entrenched as a potent symbol of, as well as a vehicle for, the ethnic pride of a Chinese population, uncomfortably squeezed between the barbarous excesses of communism on the one hand, and the humiliating anachronism of colonial subject-hood on the other.³⁴

The by then patent anachronism of Hong Kong’s political arrangements was, it seems likely, one reason why the topics related to both imperial and local history were quietly dropped from syllabi for History around 1970, with the exception of an unpopular optional module in the A-level syllabus that was retained until 1984. From the 1970s onward, curriculum developers responsible for the History subject, mostly locally-raised Chinese along with a handful of British academics, embraced a broadly liberal-internationalist perspective. They shifted the focus of syllabi onto progressively more contemporary periods and issues, while tending to devote about half of the subject content to topics in Western (mainly European) history, and half to the history of modern Asia, and, in particular, of China. A number of local educationalists associated with History and other humanities subjects were also aware of new international trends in history and “Social Studies” pedagogy, such as the “New History” movement, that from the 1970s enjoyed growing popularity among teachers in the U.K., North America, and elsewhere. Curriculum developers in many Western countries were attempting to make history education less stuffily academic and more skills-based and “relevant,” in terms of both teaching methods and subject matter, to stu-

³⁴ Flora Kan and Edward Vickers, “One Hong Kong, Two Histories: History and Chinese History in the Hong Kong School Curriculum,” in *Comparative Education* 38, no. 1 (February 2002): 73-89. See also Luk, “Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum,” and Vickers, Kan, and Morris, “Colonialism and the Politics of Chinese History in Hong Kong.”

dents in an era of universal compulsory secondary education. Hong Kong's schools likewise were moving rapidly from secondary provision for a privileged elite toward universal provision, and, thus, local curriculum developers were starting to face some of the same problems that had earlier confronted their Western counterparts. In addition, with competition intensifying among rival subjects for space in a crowded school curriculum, the rationale for maintaining two entirely distinct history subjects began to look decidedly shaky to a number of education policymakers.³⁵

In 1975, therefore, a proposal was made to launch a new Social Studies subject that would bridge the divide between History and Chinese History by offering a new course incorporating elements of history (both Chinese and “foreign”), Geography, and Civics, to be taught through the medium of Chinese (i.e., Cantonese). Despite what curriculum developers felt were its impeccably liberal credentials, this proposal was met with howls of protest from supporters of the Chinese History subject—teachers, academics, and elements in the Chinese-language media—who portrayed it as an insidious colonial plot to erase the Chinese identity of local students. To reduce the amount of time available for teaching the entire narrative of dynastic history, while attempting to teach the history of China in the context of a broad global narrative, was seen as a wholly unacceptable “denationalization” of the curriculum. The government, acutely conscious of its fragile legitimacy, and highly sensitive to accusations of colonialist behavior, quietly backed away from its intention to reform the Chinese History curriculum.³⁶ From 1975 until 1997, education policymakers tiptoed round this sacred grove of Chinese-

³⁵ Edward Vickers, *In Search of An Identity: The Politics of History as a School Subject in Hong Kong, 1960s-2002* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

³⁶ Paul Morris, Gerry McClelland, and Wong Ping Man, “Explaining Curriculum Change: Social Studies in Hong Kong,” in *Comparative Education Review* (February 1997): 27-43.

ness; while attempts were made to reform other school subjects, Chinese History alone remained inviolable.

The History subject, by contrast, underwent major reforms between the mid-1980s and 1997. Looking for ways to enhance their subject's "relevance" and popularity, curriculum developers for History introduced data-based questions aimed at fostering critical and analytical skills, trimmed the content of syllabi and adopted a more contemporary focus. They also, from the late 1980s, took steps to reintroduce coverage of local history, a topic clearly of maximum "relevance" to local students. The reintroduction of local history, first at sixth-form and junior level, and later at senior secondary level, came at a time when consciousness of Hong Kong's distinctive identity had become an incontrovertible sociological fact. A 1989 document explaining the decision over local history stated that the initiative aimed to "enhance pupils' understanding of the local setting [and] enforce their sense of identity to the local community" through "appropriate elaboration and discussion on the development of Hong Kong in the context of global issues."³⁷ No mention was made, here, of the importance of "the national" or "the Chinese" context.

Unsurprisingly, given their overriding concern with ancient periods and the doings of emperors and their ministers, curriculum developers for Chinese History evinced no enthusiasm either in the early 1990s or subsequently for the teaching of Hong Kong history in schools. However, a number of commentators in the Chinese-language press were highly critical of the decision to include local history in what was commonly referred to as the "World History" subject rather than in Chinese History. Once again, suggestions were made that a colonialist plot was afoot to "internationalize" Hong Kong history, at a time when Chinese officials were accusing the British authorities of attempting to "internationalize" the territory

³⁷ Jane Cheng, "History, A New Perspective," in *History Newsletter 1* (Hong Kong: Advisory Inspectorate, Education Department, 1989): 17-18.

politically.³⁸ The message emanating from Beijing was that Hong Kong was—and always had been—solely and essentially the legitimate concern of “China.” It is striking that all reference to the aim of encouraging, let alone “enforcing,” a sense of local identity was omitted from official documents from the mid-1990s onward. The new ideological parameters within which curriculum development would have to take place were spelled out in a 1995 statement by the Education Department:

Since the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, local educators believe that students of Hong Kong should have a more comprehensive understanding of the history of Hong Kong and her development. On the one hand, through teaching the developmental process and factors of success of Hong Kong, teachers can help students appreciate the efforts of the predecessors and value their achievements, and thus cultivate a sense of sentiment and responsibility towards Hong Kong; on the other hand, when they realize the close linkage between Hong Kong and China in history, the students would strengthen their sense of identity with their mother country, nation and culture. These two aspects could facilitate the return of Hong Kong to China and the implementation of “one country, two systems.”³⁹

Far from strengthening any sense of local distinctiveness, the teaching of local history thus now was envisaged, in anticipation of the 1997 retrocession, primarily as a means of reinforcing awareness of Hong Kong’s eternal and indissoluble ties with the Chinese motherland. The obligation to toe the party line on this issue clearly weighed heavily upon developers of

³⁸ See the review of press reaction to the move to reintroduce local history in Lee Chi-Hung, *An Investigation into the Factors That Shape the Design and Formulation of a Curriculum Package: A Case Study of the Local History Package for Lower Secondary Schools of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, unpublished M.Ed. thesis, 1996), cited in Vickers, *In Search of An Identity*, chapter 6.

³⁹ From *Wen Wei Pao*, translated and cited by Lee Chi Hung, “An Investigation into the Factors That Shape the Design and Formulation of a Curriculum Package,” 59.

the curriculum for History, as is evident from revisions made at the drafting stage to the local history sections of new syllabi for sixth form and, in particular, for the junior secondary level. The local history component of the new junior syllabus of 1995 was adapted from the teaching package for the pilot project in local history teaching conducted in the early 1990s. Like the pilot project, the new syllabus focused largely on “safe” topics in social history and on local heritage, in the form of archaeological sites and prominent old buildings, and did not address many of the more controversial issues in Hong Kong’s past. Nevertheless, the syllabus suffered even more controversial issues in Hong Kong’s past. Nevertheless, the syllabus suffered even more than the preceding pilot project from controversy-avoidance syndrome. A section in the pilot package entitled “The Refugee Problem” was omitted from the syllabus altogether (a description of Chinese fleeing mainland China for Hong Kong as “refugees” was impermissible); any explicit references to “the British” or “British rule” were deleted; and an entire new section was devoted to “relations with China.”⁴⁰ The original suggestion for the inclusion of the latter section appears to have come from a teacher responding to a consultation questionnaire, who proposed the following three themes:

- How China influenced Hong Kong and vice versa
- Hong Kong’s role in the modernization of China
- Hong Kong’s contribution to China

By contrast, the subthemes eventually listed in the syllabus were:

- Hong Kong and the 1911 Revolution
- China’s contribution to the development of Hong Kong
- Transition to a Special Administrative Region⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Vickers, *In Search of An Identity*, chapter 6.

⁴¹ From “A Summary Report on the Evaluation of Local History Pilot Scheme, 1992-3,” cited in Vickers, *In Search of An Identity*, 171.

The emphasis of the original suggestion was thus effectively reversed, so that Hong Kong would in no sense appear as an equal partner in its relationship with the mainland, let alone as a modernizing influence or model for China's development, but rather as a subordinate client, the recipient of benefits bestowed by Beijing.

When textbooks for the new junior secondary History curriculum were published, they conformed to the typical Hong Kong pattern and followed the letter of the syllabus. Publishers always had been nervous lest the Education Department should find any reason to leave their books off the official lists of "recommended" textbooks, but in the run-up to the 1997 handover and in the years since, an additional element of "self-censorship" came into play. A reluctance to offend mainland sensibilities has been accentuated not only by the transition to Chinese rule, but also by the fact that many of the major local publishers of school textbooks have become eager to gain a foothold in the potentially massive textbook market across the border. Shortly before Hong Kong's retrocession, publishers hastily revised their History and, in particular, their Chinese History textbooks to ensure that these conformed with the new political correctness. The results were sometimes too "correct" even for the Education Department, with an official recalling that one publisher submitted a revised edition in which all references to "Hong Kong" had been changed to "Hong Kong SAR [Special Administrative Region]" even in sections devoted to prehistoric life in the territory.⁴² The department produced its own list of necessary changes to textbooks, most of which related to terminology (such as the politically acceptable ways of referring to Taiwan and the Kuomintang), partly in an attempt to forestall over-zealousness on the part of publishers. Nevertheless, in deciding which terms and definitions were acceptable, officials themselves were obliged to take on board the received verdicts handed

⁴² Vickers, *In Search of An Identity*, 180.

down by mainland historians. For example, references to Hong Kong before 1997 as a “colony” were deemed problematic, since this description was seen as a tacit recognition of the legality of the “Unequal Treaties” under which the territory was ceded or leased by China to Britain (and whose legality was vehemently denied by Beijing). This stipulation, in particular, would require exceptional verbal dexterity on the part of authors and publishers. Rather than refer to Hong Kong itself as a “colony,” they avoided using any specific term to describe the territory’s political status, and instead used phrases such as “British administration,” “British rule,” or “British control.”⁴³

The new junior secondary textbooks published by Hong Kong Commercial Press (HKCP) are typical in the way in which they tread, and occasionally traverse, the line between historical accuracy and nationalist orthodoxy in their narrative of the local past.⁴⁴ Indeed, the layout and even some of the illustrations found in the HKCP books are virtually identical to those published by their main competitors, Aristo.⁴⁵ The account begins with the daily life of Hong Kong’s prehistoric inhabitants, skips to a description of a famous find of a Han dynasty tomb, and then to the southward migrations that brought *Wahyan* (*Huaren*) to the region during the Tang and Sung dynasties. However, while the author offers a relatively detailed description of the origins and customs of the various groups and clans of Han colonists, the question of what happened to the previous inhabitants of the area is nowhere addressed.⁴⁶ Evidence in contemporary chronicles suggests

⁴³ Ibid. A copy of the full list of terms that were required to be changed by publishers is reproduced as an appendix in Edward Vickers, *History as a School Subject in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, Ph.D. dissertation, 2000).

⁴⁴ Wong Suk-kum, *Chuansuo Shijie Lishi* [World History] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Educational Publishing Company, a division of Hong Kong Commercial Press, 2001), books 1-3.

⁴⁵ Nelson Y.Y. Kan, *Journey through History: A Modern Course*, 2d ed. (Hong Kong: Aristo Educational Press, 2003), books 1-3.

⁴⁶ *World History*, book 1, chapter 2.

that the aboriginal tribe occupying Lantau Island was “ethnically cleansed” by Han troops after a rebellion in the twelfth century.⁴⁷

The account of Hong Kong’s history under British rule focuses on the social and economic progress made by the local Chinese community during this period, while also acknowledging efforts made by the administration in the areas of law and order, education, public health, and housing. The main thrust of the narrative is a happy story of progress toward the prosperous capitalist utopia that is contemporary Hong Kong, briefly if rudely interrupted only by the four years of Japanese occupation during the Second World War. As in the new Hong Kong Museum of History, so in the HKCP textbooks, the British steadily fade from the picture as we move into the postwar period, until we reach the section on “China’s Contribution to the Development of Hong Kong.” The “contributions” made by China during the postwar period are seen as including not only the provision of basic amenities for Hong Kong (in particular, the supply of drinking water from across the border in Guangdong), but also, bizarrely, encompass the “provision” of investors and capital to jump-start the local economy in the post-Civil War years, and of a labor force consisting of those who fled to the colony from China during the same period. The fact is, of course, that these capitalists and workers, who were fleeing war, persecution, or starvation on the mainland, saw themselves as anything but part of some far-sighted Chinese project to boost the development of Hong Kong. However, the new History textbooks invite students to construe this mass influx of refugees during the postwar period as an instance of the motherland’s benevolence. This account of China’s “contributions” provides a fitting prelude to the uncritical, celebratory concluding section which describes the Sino-British negotiations over Hong Kong’s future, the draft-

⁴⁷ Peter Ng and Hugh Baker, *New Peace County* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1983), 22-4.

ing of the Basic Law (Hong Kong's post-1997 miniconstitution), and the handover of sovereignty itself.

It is important to note that these textbooks, though published after 1997, follow the junior syllabus that was finalized in 1995, a good two years before Hong Kong's retrocession. This serves as a reminder that the formal transfer of sovereignty did not constitute the kind of neat cut-off between "colonial" and "postcolonial" politics that many at the time and since have assumed that it did. The central tenets of post-1997 political correctness already were becoming clear by the mid-1990s, and curriculum developers and publishers, anxious to conform to the standards that would be expected of them under the new dispensation, already were trimming their sails to the prevailing wind from Beijing. The drive on the part of History curriculum developers to ensure that their subject would become more "relevant" to generations of students for whom "Hongkongeseness" meant as much if not more than "Chineseness" was therefore already becoming subordinated to the nation-building priorities of the incoming administration, even before 1997.

Promoting "Patriotism" through the School Curriculum— Chinese History for the New Hong Kong

The importance attached by the Tung administration to the socialization of young Hongkongers as Chinese patriots already has been noted. The school curriculum, and the history subjects in particular, would naturally constitute the principle vehicle for such a program and, as the above discussion of the treatment of local history in some of the newer textbooks demonstrates, the curriculum for History has very palpably begun to serve a nation-building function. However, the continuing existence of two entirely separate history subjects with very distinctive subject cultures needs to be borne in mind.

Notwithstanding the way in which local history was eventually presented in the syllabus and textbooks for junior level, for many of the curriculum developers responsible for the History subject, the idea of using history education as a vehicle for the promotion of uncritical, state-centered patriotism has remained unpalatable. This is demonstrated by the struggles both before and since the 1997 handover, in particular over the way in which local history should be dealt with in school curricula. In 2002, a minor furor erupted in the Chinese-language media when a consultative draft of a new curriculum for senior secondary History listed a topic on “administrative and constitutional reforms from Mark Young [a reformist postwar governor] to Christopher Patten.”⁴⁸ The subsequent draft not only omitted all reference to Young or Patten (famously designated a “criminal” by Beijing), but also was rewritten so that in the local history section references to “Hong Kong society” or “Hong Kong culture” were replaced with phrases such as “the local Chinese community” or the “coexistence and interaction of Chinese and Western culture [in Hong Kong].”⁴⁹ In the list of “aims” included in the syllabus draft, meanwhile, the importance of promoting “national identity” through history education was acknowledged, but it was the last item on the entire list.⁵⁰

Nothing better underlines the contrasting philosophies informing the development of the History and Chinese History subjects than the priority accorded to the promotion of “national identity.” For History curriculum developers, deeply influenced by overseas developments in pedagogy and assessment, the potential of their subject for training students in the skills of critical and analytical thinking has since the 1970s

⁴⁸ *Revised S4-5 History Curriculum, First Consultation* (Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Institute, March 2002). For a fuller discussion of the drafting process and the press reaction to the proposals, see Edward Vickers, *In Search of An Identity*, 205-16.

⁴⁹ *S4-5 History Curriculum Framework (Draft for Second Consultation)* (Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Institute, October 2002).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

become of paramount importance, and an emphasis on promoting uncritical patriotism is clearly incompatible with such an approach.⁵¹ Teachers and curriculum developers associated with Chinese History, on the other hand, have faced no such tension between conflicting values. The subject has always been firmly wedded to a state-centered, Han chauvinist account of the Chinese past, with an emphasis on cultural superiority reflected in such statements as this:

Through learning about technological inventions, cultural exchanges with foreign countries, and intellectual and religious thought, pupils will come to understand that Chinese culture has the spirit of accommodating other cultures and making innovative creations. In the process of development, Chinese culture could assimilate other nations' cultures.⁵²

This longstanding core belief in the existence of an eternal, immutable national “essence”—surviving and transcending China’s historical encounters with the “foreign” world—sits easily with the post-handover emphasis on political unity, or the “one country” element of the “one country, two systems” formula for Hong Kong’s reunification. Thus, the 1997 syllabus for junior secondary Chinese History stipulates:

One of the objectives of history teaching is, through understanding the nation’s culture and history, to establish in pupils a sense of recognition and belonging to the nation. The ultimate aim is to unite the nation and build up the nation.⁵³

This readiness to embrace the political socialization agenda of the post-1997 regime reflects more than just a pandering to

⁵¹ Edward Vickers, *In Search of An Identity*, 205-16.

⁵² *Chinese History Syllabus (F. 1-3)* (Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council, 1997), 5 (in Chinese), cited in Kan, *Chinese History in Hong Kong: The Secondary School Curriculum, 1946-2001*, 281. Kan makes the point that this particular syllabus aim remained unchanged through the period of Hong Kong’s transition to Chinese rule.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7.

political authority on the part of those responsible for Chinese History (though there may be an element of that as well). It is a reflection of deeply-held convictions regarding the virtue of patriotism, the ethno-cultural unity of China, and, at a more general level, the belief that one of history’s principal functions is as a vehicle for didactic moralizing. These beliefs are evident in the guidelines provided in the 1997 syllabus concerning how Chinese History can be used to promote patriotism, linking specific “learning objectives” to particular episodes from the Chinese past and to named exemplars of the patriotic virtues:

Learning Objective	Example in Chinese History
Show concern for the nation’s development.	The nation was partitioned into the South and North dynasties. The Sui dynasty unified the nation and developed national power.
Wholeheartedly serve the nation.	Officials’ deeds in defending the nation against the Jin and the Mongols.
Be selfless, and not gain personal benefits at the expense of the nation’s interest.	The deeds of Gao Zong and Yue Fei
Wholeheartedly serve the nation and protect the nation’s interest.	The deeds of Lin Zexu
Cultivate patriotic ideas.	The late Qing revolutionary movement.
Cultivate patriotic ideas.	May Fourth Movement.
Love peace. However, in the face of foreign invasion, one has to have a brave spirit, and be willing to sacrifice oneself for the nation.	War against the Japanese invasion.
Strive for ethnic unity and national unification.	The establishment of the People’s Republic of China.

From *Chinese History Syllabus, F 1-3* (Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council, 1997), 20-35.

The adoption in the run-up to 1997 of an explicitly state-centered approach to patriotism in place of the traditionally more culturalist approach does not represent as much of a

seismic shift for Chinese History as might at first be assumed. Although the Chinese History curriculum had originally been designed as a depoliticized, decontextualized treatment of the national past, its depoliticization had essentially consisted of an avoidance of twentieth-century history (and especially the Communist-Kuomintang conflict) and the adoption of a focus on more ancient periods. This had not prevented curriculum developers and textbook authors from embracing a far more “antiforeign” interpretation of, say, the Opium War, than their History counterparts.⁵⁴ After 1997, this nationalist perspective was made more explicit in textbooks, and was extended to the contemporary period with a celebration of the role of the People’s Republic in unifying China (though no celebration of communism as an ideology). References to “China” or “the Chinese” in textbooks were in many cases replaced by terms such as “the nation” or “compatriots,” but the narrative otherwise remained largely unaltered.⁵⁵ Some terminological tinkering was required with respect to the status of Kuomintang-ruled Taiwan, but by the late 1990s, this issue was far less explosive than it had been in the 1950s. Research suggests that rhetorical appeals to nationalism in syllabi and terminological alterations to Chinese History textbooks, by and large have not led to significant changes in the way in which the subject is actually taught in classrooms. The Chinese History curriculum was in any case already infused with an intense sense of cultural nationalism and ethnic pride in China’s ancient heritage. Hong Kong traditionalists, mainland communists and, for that matter, Kuomintang right-wingers in Taiwan could all agree in their commitment to national unity above all else, and in their die-hard opposition to “separatism” in any shape or form.

⁵⁴ See Flora Kan and Edward Vickers, “One Hong Kong, Two Histories: History and Chinese History in the Hong Kong School Curriculum,” 73-89.

⁵⁵ Kan, *Chinese History in Hong Kong: The Secondary School Curriculum, 1946-2001*, chapter 8.

Indeed, in their treatment of China's so-called "national minorities" (*xiaoshu minzu*), Hong Kong's Chinese History curriculum developers and, more especially, many ordinary teachers, always had tended to be far more openly chauvinist than would be acceptable in Beijing itself. For the mainland regime, which combines its dominion over the Han population of "China Proper" with rule over the vast and (at least until recently) non-Han territories of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia, it has been a priority to emphasize the historical unity of these peripheral regions with the Han center. There are occasionally heated discussions in the mainland press over whether traditional Han folk heroes such as the Song dynasty general Yue Fei, who fought the Mongol invaders in the twelfth century, can legitimately be designated "national heroes" (*minzu yingxiong*), since they displayed their heroics not in fighting *bona fide* foreign invaders, but in fighting the Mongols—who as every Chinese schoolboy knows (or should know) are not foreigners but a "brother nationality" (*xiongdì minzu*) of the Han. Apocalyptic episodes, such as the Mongol invasions of the twelfth century, are thus—in more orthodox mainland accounts—seen as strictly domestic conflicts, and Genghis Khan himself is posthumously honored in textbooks as "one of our country's great political and military leaders from the Mongol nationality."⁵⁶ Not so in Hong Kong. Here, far away from Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, the legitimacy of Chinese rule over "minority" areas is not an issue, and the heroic status of figures such as Yue Fei is not a matter for debate. Chinese History teachers in Hong Kong as a matter of course always have set questions in school examinations that explicitly define Mongols as "non-Chinese," without any fear of attracting criticism from the authorities. Thus, a typical question from one school runs: "In the Yuan dynasty, the Mongols adopted oppressive policies against the Chinese.

⁵⁶ People's Education Press, *Zhongguo Lishi* (Chinese History), Book 2 (Beijing: People's Education Press, 1993) (in Chinese).

Give an account of the way in which the Han people and the Southerners were subject to political and legal discrimination.⁵⁷”

While this interpretation of the Mongol invasions is, in fact, probably fairer than one that portrays them as a slight domestic misunderstanding, when it comes to the history of Hong Kong itself the position taken in official curriculum documents for Chinese History is rather more questionable. Prior to 1997, the Chinese History subject made no provision whatsoever for the teaching of local history, since from a Chinese nationalist perspective the topic was regarded as simply too peripheral and unimportant. However, following the retrocession and, perhaps more to the point, the implementation of a new junior secondary History curriculum that included local history, officials responsible for Chinese History felt it necessary to stake their own claim to this piece of curricular territory. They therefore prepared a special teaching package on local history which was issued by the Education Department’s Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) in 1999. In contrast to the syllabus and textbooks for the History subject, which to a limited degree do attempt to cover local history from a local perspective, in the Chinese History teaching package the focus was entirely on Hong Kong’s role as an occasional bit-player in the state-centered drama of the national past. The first two paragraphs of the package gave a fair indication of what was to follow:

From many archaeological discoveries, we have learnt that Hong Kong’s history can be traced back six thousand years to the New Stone Age. In the early period, it was inhabited by the people of the Hundred Yue Tribes, most of whom lived near the shore and fished and foraged for a living. Following the continuous progress of human civilisation, the culture of the northern central plains began to blend with the culture of the Southern Yue people, and Hong

⁵⁷ Quoted in Kan, *Chinese History in Hong Kong: The Secondary School Curriculum, 1946-2001*, 292.

Kong gradually fell under the influence of the northern culture. By the time of the Qin and Han dynasties, Hong Kong had already come under the administration of China's central government, and had become part of the Great Chinese National Family.

Hong Kong's long and close relationship with the inner regions of China has been proved by the teams of archaeologists who have been to Panyu County, photographed the Han Dynasty tombs there, and compared them with Hong Kong's Han Dynasty tomb at Lei Cheng Uk. This historical fact can enable students more deeply to appreciate that Hong Kong has been part of China from time immemorial.⁵⁸

Thus, the Chinese History teaching package made explicit the message that in the curriculum for History is merely implicit: that even the aboriginal inhabitants of Hong Kong were essentially "Chinese," or were painlessly assimilated into the great Chinese *volks-gemeinschaft*, despite historical evidence that would at least seem to indicate alternative interpretations. At the same time, in contrast to the approach adopted in the History subject, the local history teaching package for Chinese History contained a preface emphasizing that local history was merely an optional appendix to the main syllabus, to be taught only if time allowed.

The nationalist message is also the central theme of the new syllabus for senior secondary Chinese History, repeated again and again throughout the document in a way that marks a clear break with the depoliticized tone of official syllabi prior to 1997.⁵⁹ Interestingly, however, this was not the case with an earlier draft of the new syllabus, released for consultation in April 2001.⁶⁰ Reflecting pressures brought to bear on curricu-

⁵⁸ *Chinese History Subject, Special Package on Local History* (Hong Kong: CDI, 1999), i (in Chinese).

⁵⁹ *Chinese History Subject (S4-5), Revised Curriculum, Second Consultation* (Hong Kong: CDI, October 2002) (in Chinese).

⁶⁰ *Chinese History Subject (S4-5), Revised Curriculum, First Consultation* (Hong Kong: CDI, April 2001) (in Chinese).

lum developers by reformist elements within the CDI and the Hong Kong Examinations Authority (HKEA), this draft would have significantly reduced the proportion of the curriculum devoted to ancient history, and correspondingly increased the proportion devoted to twentieth-century history. It also contained a list of eight optional “special topics” for in-depth study, from which students were required to choose three. The first two on the list related to the history of Taiwan and Hong Kong, although predictably the first “teaching aim” of the Taiwan option was defined as “recognizing the fact that Taiwan has been part of Chinese territory from time immemorial.”⁶¹ Even this was insufficient to pacify the outraged fundamentalists of the Chinese History lobby, who fulminated in the local Chinese-language press against this attempt to water down the chronological coverage, dynasty by dynasty, of the full 5,000 years of China’s glorious past.⁶² The would-be reformers were forced to give ground, and to accept a new syllabus that substantially retained the content of its predecessor, and which—for good measure—hammered home the importance of Chinese History’s role in “strengthening national education and fostering students’ sense of their national identity.”⁶³

This was not the first time since 1997 that an attempt to reform history teaching in Hong Kong’s schools had been scuppered by resistance from the Chinese History subject community. The first such occasion had been in 1999, when the CDI floated a proposal, strongly supported by the History subject officer at the time, to create a “New History” subject at the junior secondary level that would combine world history and Chinese history in a common curriculum. A predictable uproar ensued, and the partisans of Chinese History were spurred to form a subject association, the Chinese History

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶² See Vickers, *In Search of An Identity*, 219-20.

⁶³ *Chinese History Subject (S4-5), Revised Curriculum, Second Consultation* (Hong Kong: CDI, October 2002), Section 2.1 (in Chinese).

Educators' Society, to lobby for the preservation of their curriculum *in toto*. As a result, "New History" went the way of Social Studies in the mid-1970s, and was quietly shunted into a CDI siding, where responsibility for drafting the new curriculum was assumed by a former subject officer for Chinese History.⁶⁴

The fate of these attempts since 1997 to reform the teaching of history, and the curriculum for Chinese History, in particular, is symptomatic of the "disarticulation" that has characterized the policymaking process for education as for other areas under the Tung administration.⁶⁵ On the one hand, the government would like a modern school curriculum for a twenty-first century international metropolis, offering a thorough training in information technology (IT) and in the critical and creative skills considered necessary for success in the "knowledge economy." This requires the freeing-up of more space in the school curriculum for IT and for other subjects considered to be relevant to the achievement of these goals, and thus the trimming back of time allocated to other subjects. The retention of two entirely distinct history subjects appears in this light to be entirely indefensible, especially given that since 1997 most schools have switched to teaching History as well as Chinese History through the medium of Chinese/Cantonese. However, the administration has nonetheless repeatedly failed to force through any fundamental restructuring of history education, primarily because it finds itself the prisoner of its own nationalist rhetoric. Since Hong Kong's retrocession, supporters of the existing Chinese History curriculum have been tireless in stressing the nationalist credentials of their subject not because they are mere tools or

⁶⁴ Vickers, *In Search of An Identity*, 221-26; Kan and Vickers, "One Hong Kong, Two Histories: History and Chinese History in the Hong Kong School Curriculum," 73-89.

⁶⁵ Paul Morris and Ian Scott, "Educational Reform and Policy Implementation in Hong Kong," paper forthcoming in *The Journal of Education Policy*.

dupes of Beijing but because, given the political climate that both Tung and his Beijing masters have helped to create, they know that by doing so they strengthen their hand in an ongoing struggle with their local rivals—in particular, the History subject community—over curricular territory.

Conclusion

Hong Kong's schools find themselves saddled for the foreseeable future with an anachronistic curricular division between two entirely distinct history subjects—a division that has its origins in the colonial politics of the 1950s, but which has derived new justification from the nation-building priorities espoused by the post-handover regime. In a sense, these two subjects of History and Chinese History reflect the conflicting identities and ideals that characterize Hong Kong society as a whole: on the one hand, a worthy but vague commitment to internationalism, on the other, a profound conviction of ethno-cultural distinctiveness (or even superiority), and somewhere between these two poles a space in which local identity uneasily subsists. Local identity in Hong Kong is a powerful social and cultural reality, but one that possesses only shallow roots in any consciousness of local history, and is therefore potentially vulnerable to attempts to smother local distinctiveness through appeals to an equally powerful belief in a transcendent, all-embracing Chineseness. Just such an attempt is integral to the overall project of Hong Kong's reunification with the "motherland," and has manifested itself in changes to the school curriculum, and, in particular, to the two history subjects, from the mid-1990s onward. The original purpose of the reintroduction of local history, for example, has been largely subverted through a calculated distortion of many aspects of the local past, and, in particular, of the key historical relationships that have shaped the Hong Kong of today, namely those with the Chinese mainland and with Britain.

In a political context in which allegations of “colonialism” (or neo-colonialism) and assertions of nationalism continue to color debate over the region’s future, not least in the field of education, it is essential that Hongkongers should be able to look critically at their own past. A school curriculum that really sought to engage local students with the history that has made them who they are would invite them to critically analyze the historical interrelationships among Hong Kong, China, Britain, and the wider world. It would encourage them to reassess what it means to be at once Hongkongese, Chinese, and perhaps even British, Australian, Canadian, or American as well. It would acknowledge the “contributions” made to Hong Kong’s development by ethnic groups other than the Chinese, but at the same time would not shy away from confronting students with the uglier aspects of the local past, recognizing that “the attempt to portray Hong Kong history as the result of consensus politics [is] fundamentally dishonest and politically distracting.”⁶⁶

Instead, however, recent changes to the history curriculum in Hong Kong have tended to stress the homogenous “Chineseness” of the region, at the expense of the many other elements that have shaped its past. Moreover, the prospects of this approach being superseded in the near future by a more critical, multifaceted, locally-oriented perspective appear to be slim, indeed, since for this to happen the current political regime would need to be replaced by one that did not feel obliged to base its claims to legitimacy upon assertions of nationalist political correctness. In other words, as a minimum (but not necessarily sufficient) requirement for meaningful reform to the history curriculum, Hong Kong’s political system would need to be democratized, since only an elected administration would have the will or the authority necessary to take on a vested interest such as the Chinese History lobby. Mean-

⁶⁶ David Faure, Introduction, in *Hong Kong: A Reader in Social History* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2003), xiv.

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while, in the absence of such democratization, it is conceivable that the “one country” orthodoxy that now pervades the school curriculum may gradually succeed in indoctrinating Hong Kong’s youth, and thus begin to turn historical fiction into political fact.

Vickers, E. and Kan, F. (2003) The Re-Education of Hong Kong: Identity, Politics and Education in Postcolonial Hong Kong. *American Asian Review*, 21, 179-228. has been cited by the following article: TITLE: Praises of Household Happiness in Social Turmoil: Lady General Hua Mulan(1964). AUTHORS: Yuan Tian.Â More than Politics: Forces Affecting Media Freedom in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Zhongxuan Dai. DOI: 10.4236/ajc.2018.61002 413 Downloads 811 Views Citations.Â Are Hong Kong Investors Interested in Shenzhen-Hong Kong Stock Connect â€”An Investor Behavior Analysis Based on Shanghai-Hong Kong Stock Connect. Xiaoyu Liao. DOI: 10.4236/jss.2016.43036 2 635 Downloads 3 466 Views Citations. Since Hong Kong's retrocession, the government has endeavoured to strengthen local citizens' identification with the People's Republic of China â€” a project that acquired new impetus with the 2010 decision to introduce â€”Moral and National more. Since Hong Kong's retrocession, the government has endeavoured to strengthen local citizens' identification with the People's Republic of China â€” a project that acquired new impetus with the 2010 decision to introduce â€”Moral and National Educationâ€™ (MNE) as a compulsory school subject. In the face of strong local oppositi...Â Many of my students from mainland China have written term papers directly addressing 'national education' in Hong Kong. His organization, Hong Kong Indigenous, never gained much traction beyond a fringe of disenchanting radical youth. But its warnings that Hong Kong was losing its special identity and must fight back have now found a new and far wider resonance as the authoritiesâ€™ often tin-eared response to the unrest inflames the public mood. â€œThis movement is not about independence. It is about returning Hong Kong to a free place,â€ said Emma Chan, a 20-year-old protester at the airport. Mr. Leung, she added, â€œis not a hero but he inspired a lot of us to be interested in politics.â€ â€œMany thought that politics