

# National Identity-Building through the School Curriculum and the Two History Subjects in Postcolonial Hong Kong

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## Abstract

Since the retrocession of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the Hong Kong SAR government and key curriculum developers have been determined to make use of the school curriculum (formal and informal) and in particular, the two history subjects, 'Chinese History' and 'History,' to promote a national identity among students. This study shows that a Chinese national identity in ethnic, cultural and historical terms has been promoted through 'Chinese History.' At the same time, through the other history subject, 'History,' a Hongkongese identity that includes both an international and a national dimension has also been made possible. However, it is argued that in promoting a sense of national identity through the school curriculum, the government has turned the curriculum to a form of nationalistic propaganda. In addition, the emphasis on national identity would create tension between Hong Kong students, students from China and ethnical minority students.

**Keywords:** national identity, Chinese, Hongkongese, Chinese history, history, postcolonial

## 1 Introduction

In the years since the retrocession of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997 (also referred to as the handover), scholars have been interested in the impact of decolonisation on education in Hong Kong and in particular on the school curriculum, especially the history curriculum, as previous research has shown that the history curriculum was one of the vehicles used by the ruling authority to legitimise its ideology (Kan & Vickers, 2002; Phillips, 1998; Vickers, Kan, & Morris, 2003). What makes the study of education in postcolonial Hong Kong especially interesting is that after the British administration ended, instead of becoming an independent state as in the case of many other former colonies, Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the PRC. Moreover, the PRC is ruled by the Chinese

Communist Party (CCP), about which severe criticisms are made in Hong Kong's media concerning the 1989 June Fourth Incident, human rights, corruption, freedom of association, expression and religion, and other political issues. In contrast, Hong Kong has become accustomed to espousing and, to a certain extent, practising Western values such as the rule of law, freedom of speech, and other human rights. Recently, the image of the PRC has been raised by China's outstanding achievements, such as the hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games, the Shanghai World Expo and the space programme. More importantly, the PRC's steady economic growth has greatly impressed the rest of the world, especially as the USA and Europe have been experiencing a severe economic recession since 2008. The negative-cum-positive image of the PRC affects the identity of Hong Kong people: Do they feel themselves as Hongkongese, Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese or China's Hongkongese?

Throughout the 156 years of British rule, the identity of the people of Hong Kong was consistently ambiguous. In the 1940s, the political upheaval of the civil war in China forced tens of thousands of Chinese to flee to Hong Kong. When the CCP established its regime in China in 1949, and the Nationalist government (also referred to as the Kuomintang, or KMT) retreated to Taiwan, and the Chinese immigrants residing in Hong Kong tended to refrain from involvement in politics, particularly in the conflict between the CCP and the KMT. In such circumstances, the colonial government felt that it had to uphold two principles: Preventing anti-British sentiments in Hong Kong, and avoiding upsetting China (Kan, 2007). Hence, the colonial government chose to adopt an apolitical policy which was manifested in the political antipathy towards all political affiliations. As the governor, Alexander Grantham, stated in 1950, "we cannot permit Hong Kong to be the battleground for contending parties or ideologies" (Hong Kong Hansard, 1950, p. 41, cited in Lau, 1982, p. 36).

The intentions of the colonial government were manifested in a depoliticised and decontextualised school curriculum (Kan, 2007; Morris & Chan, 1997). During the 1970s, with the deliberate efforts of the colonial

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government to develop the socio-economic infrastructure of Hong Kong and with the promotion of 'Hong Kong is our home' activities, people in Hong Kong began to establish a sense of Hongkongese identity (Mathews, Ma, & Liu, 2008; Wang, 1997). The most important reason for the emergence of the Hongkongese identity, accordingly to Lau (1997), was a common anti-Chinese Communist Party sentiment particular among those who had fled to Hong Kong after the communist established its regime in China. This sentiment induced them to regard themselves as Hongkongese. Other factors include the laissez-faire capitalist system, rule of law, human rights and Cantonese as a unique popular culture. Margaret Ng, a former legislator, told a reporter from The Guardian that the uniqueness of Hongkongese lies in the fact that "we are Chinese without being only Chinese. We observe universal values without losing our own cultural identity" (March 23, 2012). The establishment of a unique Hongkongese identity can also be attributed to the highly adaptive and industrious nature of the people of Hong Kong during colonialism. Chow (1999) refers to the endurance of Hong Kong people from the 1950s to 1980s as a "Hong Kong sentiment" (p. 30). However, in the transition period leading up to the handover, the government and influential sectors of society were concerned with stimulating the people of Hong Kong to identify with the PRC, even though, for many people, the PRC was a communist state estranged from their daily lives.

Since the handover, the issue of identity has been hotly contested. The SAR government, in relation to Hong Kong people as not yet feeling a complete affinity with the PRC, has promoted *ren xin hui gui* (retrocession of people's hearts). For the SAR government, a Hongkongese identity is undesirable. Instead, the people of Hong Kong should regard themselves as Chinese, or at least "Hongkongese but also Chinese." It was unacceptable to the PRC government when an opinion survey by Albert Chung of the University of Hong Kong in December 2011 showed that the number of Hong Kong people identifying themselves as simply 'Hong Kong citizens' had reached a ten-year high, while the number of those considering themselves as 'Chinese citizens' had dropped to a 12-year low. As a consequence, Chung's survey was severely criticised by the Director of Publicity, Culture and Sports of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government, Hao Tiechuan. Hao maintained that since Hong Kong is the SAR of the PRC, the identification with both Hong Kong and China is 'unscientific' and 'illogical.' Hao's criticism reflected the displeasure of the PRC government concerning the way in which Hong Kong people identified themselves, which might have led to political pressure being placed on the SAR government with regard to the promotion of Hong Kong people's national identity.

## 2 Inquiry: Theme and Methods

If the SAR government feels politically obliged to promote a national identity in Hong Kong, fostering that identity in students through the school curriculum becomes an important strategy. Traditionally, the history curriculum is one area that is deemed ripe for revamping in the process of decolonisation (Jansen, 1989). However, given the diverse connotations of national identity, what are the conceptions of national identity as manifested in the education policy and the history curriculum in Hong Kong? The question is rendered more complex by the fact that the history curriculum in Hong Kong comprises two subjects, namely History and Chinese History, for reasons to be explored in a later section. The curricula of the two subjects are worthy of study as they are collectively concerned with the interpretation of national history and indigenous history and hence they are regarded as effective vehicles to cultivate students' national/indigenous identity (Coulby, 2000; Kan & Vickers, 2002; Osborne, 2003; Vickers & Jones, 2005). In order to answer this question, first-hand document sources were collected and analysed, including policy documents, speeches, newspaper articles and official curriculum guides. These documents are deemed relevant as they can reflect the context within which key government officials, politicians, teachers and journalists express their views on national identity and/or the relationship between national identity and the history curriculum. In addition, two sets of the most popular Chinese history textbooks (the 2005 edition) and one set of the most popular History textbook (the 2004 edition) are also analysed so as to reveal the possible identity that history textbooks intend to promote in students.

## 3 Conceptions of National Identity

With respect to national identity, there are diverse views about its meaning. Smith (1991, p. 15) has presented a comprehensive view of national identity as:

...Complex constructs composed of a number of interrelated components -- Ethnic, cultural, territorial, economic and legal-political. They signify bonds of solidarity among members of communities united by shared memories, myths and traditions that may or may not find expression in states of their own, but are entirely different from the purely legal and bureaucratic ties of the state.

Milton Esman (1994) regards national identity as identification with an ethnic community:

The set of meanings that individuals impute to their membership in an ethnic community, including those attributes that bind them to that collectivity and that distinguish it from others in their relevant environment. A psychological construct that can evoke powerful emotional responses, ethnic identity normally conveys strong elements of continuity (p. 27).

Joireman (2003), however, views national identity as:

The politicised form of ethnic identity that develops when an ethnic group adopts a common political identity and their ethnicity is no longer just a cultural or social identifier (p. 12).

Smith (1991), Esman (1994) and Joireman (2003) have different concerns about the components of national identity. For Smith (1991), it is all-inclusive. Esman (1994) and Joireman (2003) focus on ethnicity; however, Esman (1994) is culturally oriented while Joireman (2003) sees ethnicity as a political attachment. The above views place emphasis on the aspects about the nation with which to identify, but fail to acknowledge that in the process of identification, the 'negative' aspects of the nation have to be ignored or covered up. People are thus induced to see only the 'good' side of the country. In addition, it should be noted that in cosmopolitan cities where multi-ethnicity is a distinctive feature, the cultivation of national identity signifies a distinction between the 'national' and the 'non-national,' hence creating an 'other' that might lead to the marginalisation of ethnic minorities and to racism. This potential outcome is pertinent to Hong Kong as it is an international city with over 450,000 non-Chinese people (6% of the population) (Census and Statistics Department, 2011).

Of the different components of national identity, kinship, cultural or historical ties are hereditary in nature and are regarded by Geertz (1963), van den Berghe (1978) and Smith (2004) as primordial. In contrast, the constructivist approach (Brown, 2000; Joireman, 2003) views national identity as an elusive socially constructed and negotiated reality. The primordial and constructivist views of national identity reflect the two perspectives on Hong Kong's current debate about national identity. For some, their national identity is premised on the inborn ethnicity (primordial). They identify with China's race, geography, history, and culture. Those attached to the constructivist view consider ethnicity as flexible, with people free to make choices about being Hongkongese, Chinese, Hongkong Chinese or China's Hongkongese. This paper adopts the primordial and constructivist approaches in order to understand the notion of national identity

as manifested in the education policy and the history curriculum.

With regard to the literature on national identity in Hong Kong, Morris, Kan, and Morris (2000), focus on post-1997 civic education in Hong Kong, argue that "the loyalty being promoted is not to the state per se, but to a sense of national identity based upon a homogeneous and totalising sense of Chinese culture, morality and values" (p. 259). Vickers (2005) concludes in his study that the identity of Hongkongese has been overshadowed by a 'homogenous and totalizing vision of 'one China'' and hence, not promoted (p. 268). On the teaching of national identity in Hong Kong, Mathews et al. (2008) find that "the level of instruction into national identity seems minimal in most primary schools" (p. 87). On the other hand, in secondary schools, teachers were too occupied with examinations to spare time to talk about national identity. Mathews et al. also point out a typical phenomenon in Hong Kong: "Unless examined, national identity will not be taken seriously, by teachers and students alike" (p. 88). They further remark that "many teachers expressed love for the Chinese 'race' or tradition, but almost none we interviewed, even from 'pro-China' schools, expressed love for the Chinese state today" (p. 91). However, Mathews et al. (2008) do not go into other aspects of the curriculum and explore the intended identities to be constructed for students. Hence this paper aims to fill the gap and provide a more comprehensive picture of identity formation through the school curriculum and the two history subjects.

#### 4 National Identity: An Official Perspective

With the establishment of the SAR government, the cultivation of students' national identity became a key issue on the policy agenda for education, as the first SAR Chief Executive, C H Tung, stated in his first policy address:

We will incorporate the teaching of Chinese values in the school curriculum and provide more opportunities for students to learn about Chinese history and culture. This will foster a stronger sense of Chinese identity in our students..... As we face the historic change of being reunited with China, for every individual there is a gradual process of getting to know Chinese history and culture, so as to achieve a sense of belonging (Policy Address, 1997).

The policy address not only indicates the determination of the Chief Executive in fostering "a stronger sense of Chinese identity" and "to achieve a sense of belonging" but is also geared towards pleasing the PRC government.

In 2000, Hong Kong implemented comprehensive educational reforms. According to the Chairman of the Curriculum Development Council (CDC), Cheng Honkwan, the reform was “to cope with the challenges of the 21st century” (CDC, 2001). One of the overall aims stipulated in the policy document *Learning to Learn -- The Way Forward in Curriculum Development* was for students to “understand their national identity and be committed to contributing to the nation and society” (p. 6). Although the meaning of ‘national identity’ was not defined nor the ways in which students could contribute to the nation, it clearly indicates that the government has no intention to cultivate a distinctive Hong Kong identity in students. In the Key Learning Area (KLA) Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE) grade 7 ~ 9, the document specified its intention for students “to have a deeper understanding of the history, culture, natural and human environments of China, and strengthen their national identity” (p. 46). For General Studies (primary schools, grade 4 ~ 6), students were expected to “develop an awareness of their role in society and national identity through understanding local society, Chinese history and culture” (p. 64), whereas teachers were reminded of “strengthening students’ affective development, especially towards their national identity and Chinese culture” (p. 64). A specific section named *The issue of Chinese History and Culture* was included, to highlight the role of Chinese history in nurturing students’ national identity. For example, “A sense of national identity is cultivated through understanding elements of Chinese history and culture, (e.g., history events, arts, scientific and technological development, achievements of outstanding Chinese)” (pp. 23-24). Overall, with reference to the primordial approach, this education policy document specifies clearly the intention of the SAR government to develop students’ national identity geared towards identification with China’s history, culture, and achievements. Political and ideological dimensions were excluded from the official discourse; The government intended to cultivate students’ national identity through the development of students’ affective commitment.

At a ceremony commemorating the tenth anniversary of the handover in 2007, Hu Jintao, President of the PRC, strongly urged that “We should put more emphasis on national education...foster a strong sense of national identity among the young people in Hong Kong and promote exchanges between them and the young people of the mainland so that they will carry forward the Hong Kong people’s great tradition of ‘loving the motherland and loving Hong Kong’” (Hu, 2007). Hu’s ‘advice’ might imply that young people in Hong Kong had not yet developed a national sentiment with respect to the PRC. The Chief Executive at the time, Donald Tsang, in interpreting Hu’s

discourse, recreated the form and structure of national education and included the notion prominently in his policy addresses during his tenure 2007 ~ 2011. In these addresses, ‘national education’ was not included as an item under ‘Education,’ but separately under ‘Governance,’ which indicated that the introduction of ‘national education’ into the school curriculum was regarded not as an educational initiative but as a political endeavor. In other words, education is seen as a means to achieve the political end of developing students’ national identity. The following extract of Donald Tsang’s policy address is illustrative:

...We will attach great importance to promoting national education among our young people, so that they grow *to love our motherland and Hong Kong, and have a strong sense of pride as nationals of the People’s Republic of China.* ...To enhance our young people’s awareness and understanding of our *country’s development, the land and the people, the history and the culture.* We will give more weight to the elements of national education in the existing primary and secondary curricula and the new senior secondary curriculum framework to help students acquire a clearer understanding of our country and a stronger sense of national identity (Policy Address, 2007, italics added).

In proposing that students should be encouraged to appreciate “the land and the people, the history and the culture,” Tsang wanted to make use of primordial attachments to develop students’ affective commitment towards the PRC. In his subsequent policy addresses (2008 ~ 2011), the key theme was a reiteration of the importance of cultivating students’ national identity through the school curriculum. At the same time, the government would also provide funding to schools and non-government organizations to organize activities to foster a sense of being nationals of the PRC in students. Activities included study tours, where students could visit historic places and places (such as the Yangtze River Delta) that reflected China’s achievements. In all these policy addresses, however, the government tried to avoid associating ‘national identity’ with the CCP, which can be regarded as the attempt of the SAR government to distance national identity from politics. However, the PRC is a communist regime, and in identifying with the PRC, it would be difficult not to identify with the CCP. The student union of the Hong Kong Institute of Education viewed this promotion of national identity as being skewed because “the Chinese Communist Party has been severed from China’s history and culture, thus creating a special national identity and national education of the style of the PRC”

(Mingpao editorial, 2012). According to Smith (1991), this PRC-style national identity, denotes the legal-political ties of the state and it is what many Hong Kong people try to distance themselves from (Fairbrother, 2003; Kan & Vickers, 2002; Vickers & Jones, 2005). Therefore, on the surface of this form of national identity is a connotation of primordial identification; though, it also could be viewed as conforming to legal-political identification. However, the analysis so far indicates that the Hong Kong SAR government intended to stress on the primordial identification rather than the legal-political identification.

In 2010, Donald Tsang proposed the introduction of 'Moral and National Education' as a new and compulsory subject for all students (primary 1 to secondary 6) in the 2013 school year. However, in 2012, the China Model Teaching Manual was published (by the National Education Service Centre with a subsidy from the government). In it, the CCP was praised as an "advanced, selfless and united ruling group" (cited in Mingpao editorial, 2012) while the relationship between the Democratic and Republican Parties of the United States was denounced as a "fierce inter-party rivalry [that] makes the people suffer" (Mingpao editorial, 2012). This publication provoked serious conflicts between the government and opponents of 'Moral and National Education.' Tens of thousands of people (mainly secondary and tertiary students and parents) took to the streets to protest against the introduction of 'brainwashing national education.' In view of the strong opposition to 'Moral and National Education,' the in-coming Chief Executive, C.Y. Leung, was forced to shelve this school subject. The failure of 'Moral and National Education' drew attention to the role of Chinese History in developing national education and hence students' national identity. Teachers, politicians and journalists variously expressed their views. For example, Ho Hon Kuen, the vice chairman of the political party Education Convergence, regarded Chinese History as "the source where people understand their culture and their race, then they come to develop their affection to the nation. This is how we develop our national identity" (Hong Kong Economic Journal, 2013). Ho's view was shared by Tang Wing Chun, a consultant of the government central policy unit, who commented, "Chinese History is the gateway to understanding the Chinese race .....students can find their roots and establish their national identity" (Sing Tao Daily, 2013). Arguing in the same line, Chu Ka Kin, a Chinese History teacher, suggested that "only when Chinese History is made a compulsory subject, would students be proud of being a Chinese" (Sing Pao, 2013). Lau Tin Chi, a journalist, echoed Chu's view that "the aim of Chinese History is to nurture a real Chinese" (Sky Post, 2013, p. 10). Lau Juen Yee, the former president of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, also agreed that "as

Chinese History can help students establish their national identity and is not as controversial as National Education, it should be made a compulsory subject" (Hong Kong Economic Journal, 2013). In other words, they all perceive the subject's content on history, ethnicity and culture as conducive to building students' national identity, which is geared to primordial identification. Lau Tin Chi and Chu Ka Kin even suggest that the mission of Chinese History is to nurture "real" Chinese people and for students to feel proud of being Chinese. This explains why, after shelving the Moral and National Education, Chinese History has become the target for promoting national education and hence developing students' national identity.

In view of the importance attached to Chinese History in cultivating students' national identity, it is worth examining the nature of national identity that the two history subjects seek to promote in students.

## 5 The Promotion of National Identity through School Subjects

The school curriculum is considered to be the most direct and powerful vehicle for building the national identity of students in a state-sanctioned way. As Smith argues: "The socialisation of individuals in a society as 'nationals' and 'citizens' is nowadays achieved through compulsory, standardized, public mass education systems, through which state authorities hope to inculcate national devotion and a distinctive, homogeneous culture" (Smith, 1991, p. 16). The following sections analyse the characteristics of national/indigenous identity as promoted through the two school history subjects in Hong Kong: Chinese History and History.

## 6 Identity Formation through the Two History Subjects

In the school curriculum, History is perhaps the most viable agent in socializing students' national/indigenous identity as it involves cultural transmission, heritage and nationhood, and is presented as collective memories. There have been two history subjects in Hong Kong since 1948, when Chinese History and 'Chinese Culture' were offered as one subject in Anglo-Chinese schools<sup>1</sup>. In Chinese middle schools, History included the history of China, Europe, the United States, and South East Asia. It was not until the 1960s that Chinese History became a single

<sup>1</sup> According to the annual report of the Education Department, the offering of Chinese History and 'Chinese Culture' as one subject was aimed at giving more choices to students sitting for the School Certificate Examination.

independent subject in both Anglo-Chinese schools and Chinese Middle schools. At present, the school curriculum includes History, which comprises the history of Europe, Modern China, Japan, South East Asia, and Hong Kong, and Chinese History, which deals with the history of China and Hong Kong (only for junior secondary). While Chinese History is taught only in Chinese, History is taught in either Chinese (in Chinese medium of instruction schools) or English (in English medium of instruction schools) (Kan & Vickers, 2002). The identity that the government aims to cultivate through History and Chinese History is investigated below through an analysis of the official curriculum guides (the intended curriculum) and textbook narratives (resourced curriculum).

## 7 An Indigenous, Hongkongese Identity

In the case of Chinese History, it was not until 1997 that Hong Kong history was introduced into the S1-3 curriculum, and even then the curriculum guide stated that Hong Kong history should be regarded as merely supplementary to the history of China. Teachers were reminded that only when they had time left after the teaching of Chinese history should they talk about Hong Kong history (CDC, 1997, p. 5). Hong Kong history, was thus only a marginal inclusion in the S1-3 Chinese History curriculum, and its aim was “to establish a passion for their native land and a sense of ethnic identity” (CDC, 1997, p. 4). The implication here is that Hong Kong has always been part of China, and the people living there are members of the Chinese race. Hence, the inclusion of Hong Kong history is aimed at enhancing the formation of a national identity, in this way facilitating the decline of the “Hongkongese” identity.

In S4-5, S6-7, and the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Chinese History (introduced in 2009), Hong Kong history is a null curriculum, implying that Hong Kong history is not regarded as important in Chinese History. Hence, there is little chance of a Hongkongese identity being established through the curriculum. At the junior secondary level, the Chinese History textbooks include, after the narrative of each dynasty, a one-page section called ‘Hong Kong history: Past and present,’ which briefly describes the conditions of Hong Kong during each particular dynasty. For example, in the textbook *Inquiring into Chinese History*, at the end of the chapter on the Qin dynasty (221 BCE-207 BCE), the Hong Kong history section states: “In the Qin dynasty, Hong Kong belonged to the Nanhai county, Panyu district. Thereafter, Hong Kong was formally under the administration of the central government” (Chan, Chan, Kwok, Man, & Cheung, 2005, p. 20). This implies that during the Qin dynasty, Hong Kong was only a tiny

place on the southern tip of China and assumed an inferior geographical identity. In other textbooks, Hong Kong is portrayed in the form of cultural reminiscences, and examples are shown of traditional cultures that still survive in Hong Kong, such as the Wong Tai Sin Temple and Tin Hau Temple. This kind of piecemeal narrative can only promote a fragmentary historical-cultural Hongkongese identity. In other words, from colonialism to post-colonialism, the Chinese History curriculum has never enabled students to understand Hong Kong history, nor has it aimed at encouraging the development of a Hongkongese identity among students.

Hong Kong history was introduced into the other history subject, History, in the 1996 S1-3 curriculum and, in contrast to Hong Kong history in the Chinese History curriculum, is much more substantial in its coverage -- From the earliest times to the twentieth century -- And has been seen as an important component of the curriculum. In addition, in the S4-5 History curriculum (2003) and the NSS History curriculum, twentieth century Hong Kong has received considerable attention. The aims of Hong Kong history in the S1-3 History curriculum are: “To contribute to students’ knowledge and understanding of their community and culture... and “to demonstrate that they know and understand the main features of the history of Hong Kong and to relate them to wider themes of world history” (CDC, 1996, p. 7). Here, “their community and culture” implies Hong Kong culture rather than Chinese culture, as the part on China only covers the twentieth century. Similarly, the S4-5 curriculum and the NSS curriculum state: “Students are expected to appreciate the characteristics and values of their own culture, and respect the culture and heritage of other communities” (CDC, 2003b, p. 2; 2007a, p. 2). Obviously, “their own culture” also refers to Hong Kong culture, with which students are expected to identify. In addition, the History curriculum aims to relate Hong Kong history to the development of the wider world. All this implies that since the handover, the History curriculum has always been aimed at strengthening students’ understanding of Hong Kong, which in turn has made it possible for a Hongkongese identity to be established. One History textbook, for example, emphasises that under the British administration, Hong Kong enjoyed a unique and outstanding economic status in the Asia Pacific region: “...By the 1980s, Hong Kong had begun to take up an active role in the promotion of trade in the Asia-Pacific Rim. Hong Kong is in a unique position because the Hong Kong government has for a long time adopted a very clear and consistent policy of free trade... Hong Kong is an important international financial center in the Asia-Pacific Rim...” (Wong & Leung, 2004, pp. 79-81). The focus in History textbooks is on Hong Kong’s transition from

a sparsely populated fishing harbour to an international financial centre, and on the pride Hongkongese feel in themselves. In their description of Hong Kong's political development, History textbooks tend to focus on the ways in which certain eminent Chinese strove to exert their influence during the British administration. In addition, it is clearly stated in textbooks how the Hongkongese prepared themselves for "Hong Kong people rule Hong Kong" during the political transition between 1984 and 1997, for example:

Since the 1960s, local Chinese have become the majority in the Executive and Legislative Councils. Some were Chinese elites from the business sector. Chung Sze Yuen and Lydia Dunn were two outstanding figures...In the early 1990s, many local Chinese were promoted to the secretariat level of the civil service, such as Anson Chan and Donald Tsang. Both have held senior positions in the government for many years...Some local Chinese elites began to form political parties and emerged as party leaders in 1980s and 1990s... (Wong & Leung, 2004, pp. 30-33)

In short, while History has encouraged the development of a Hongkongese identity, its counterpart, Chinese History, has deliberately been aimed at marginalising this indigenous identity.

## 8 A National Identity

Prior to the handover, the colonial government was cautious about Chinese History education because of its politically sensitive nature: Nationalism or national sentiment was taboo, and ethnical-cultural identification rather than ideological-political identification was seen as a more viable reason for continuing Chinese history education (Kan, 2007; Morris et al., 2000). In addition, the representation of 'China' in Chinese History was ancient and abstract, and was detached from a real and tangible 'China.' The impact of this curriculum on Hong Kong students is described by Luk (1991, p. 668).

Thus, generations of Hong Kong Chinese students grew up learning from subjects about Chinese culture to identify themselves as Chinese, but relating that Chineseness to neither contemporary China nor the local Hong Kong landscape. It was a Chinese identity in the abstract, a patriotism of the émigré, probably held all the more absolutely because it was not connected to tangible reality.

After the handover, however, one of the aims of the Chinese History S1-3 curriculum was for students, "through knowing the ethnic culture and national history, to identify with, and have a sense of belonging to, the race and the nation" (CDC, 1997, p. 7). The same identification applies to the S4-5 Chinese History curriculum (CDC, 2003a, p. 2). Therefore, both the S1-3 and the S4-5 Chinese History curricula aim to promote an ethno-cultural and historical identification with China rather than a political and ideological identification. In other words, with regard to national identity, no reference is made to the CCP state.

Curriculum developers regard knowledge of the traditional culture and the contemporary achievements of China as important because they constitute the basis upon which students can identify with China. This identification can stimulate their sense of duty to, and appreciation for, the achievements of the nation (CDC, 2003a, p. 2). For example, the NSS Chinese History curriculum guide includes a new section called *The Development of 20th Century Traditional Chinese Culture: Inheritance and Change*. Another example can be seen in the textbook *New Century Chinese History* in the section on 'Invention and establishment of technology,' where the following specification is noted: "China was one of the earliest civilized countries and made significant contributions to ancient astronomy and geology...paper making, the compass, gun powder and printing were China's four great inventions...contributed to the development of world civilization..." (Chan et al., 2005, p. 127). All these specifications in the curriculum guide and textbooks imply that Chinese History has an instrumental function of helping students to construct their national identity, which can facilitate the socialisation of students into an 'appreciation for the achievements of the nation.' As the Chinese History curriculum guides specify: "...China is actively involved in developing commercial and cultural exchanges with other countries, and hence in the areas of politics, economics and culture, China has played a decisive role in the world" (CDC, 2003a, p. 23; 2007b, p. 21).

These positive value judgements are echoed in other textbooks: "In economic development, the opening up of the country and reform policies achieved brilliant results... in the year 2000, the GDP was ten thousand billion US dollars, 24 times that of 1978, which led to improvements in people's standard of living and China's strength. As a result, China's international status and competitiveness were upgraded..." (Leung, Lok, Tse, & Yeh, 2005, pp. 75-76). This kind of one-sided 'praising the virtues' expression is regarded as necessary by Wong Fu Wing, the chairman of the Promotion of the Hong Kong Basic Law Committee, who says: "What society now needs is to strengthen citizens' understanding of, and passion for, the nation so

as to enhance Hong Kong people's sense of responsibility to the nation and hence their contribution to the nation. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to use passionate propaganda to stimulate Hong Kong people's patriotism as they had long been under the British rule. There isn't any problem with the lack of critical thinking" (Mingpao daily news, 2005). In other words, Wong deems it necessary to promote uncritical patriotism, which according to Schatz, Staub, and Levine (1999), refers to love of country coupled with a rejection of criticism. However, cultivating students' uncritical patriotism would be against the principle of the education reform in which one of the generic skills to be promoted in students is 'critical thinking.'

In terms of such aims, however, the Chinese History curriculum guide is self-defeating as, on the one hand, it highlights and reminds teachers about the need to instill in students an appreciation for the virtues and achievements of China's past, and on the other hand, it stresses the need "to develop students' skills in organizing, synthesizing and analyzing source materials; and to enhance skills in critical thinking and evaluation of historical events through methods of inquiry" (CDC, 2007b, p. 2). There is an apparent contradiction in the guide's emphasis of both independent thinking and national sentiment. At the same time, special attention should be paid to the nature of the national identity promoted through Chinese History as the identification -- Cultural, historical, geographical and ethnic -- is essentially from a Han-centered perspective, while the interests of ethnic minorities (of which there are 55 officially recognized groups in the PRC) and of non-Chinese residents of Hong Kong are ignored.

In contrast to Chinese History, the S1-3 History curriculum guide (1996) refers to 'civic identity' rather than 'national identity.' For example, one of its aims is "to prepare students for adult life and citizenship" (CDC, 1996, p. 7). Here it is worth noting that there is a slight difference between civic identity and national identity. Civic identity entails a broader connotation, which can include having an identity with a region, and/or a nation and/or the world (Heater 1990), whereas national identity is restricted to the nation. Since the History curriculum includes the study of major countries in the world (including China), the aim of developing students' civic identity is logical. The themes relating to the history of China include only: 'Early civilization -- The Huanghe Valley' and 'The growth and development of Hong Kong in the twentieth century -- Relations with China.' The S4-5 History curriculum guide (2003) covers major developments in Asia and the world in the twentieth century. The part on China, 'Modernization and transformation,' covers only the 20th century. Therefore, the History curriculum does not help to promote a cultural identity among students

mainly based on traditional culture. However, one of the objectives of the curriculum guide is for 'students to develop an understanding of the beliefs, experiences and behaviours of their own nations as well as the other nations...' (CDC, 2003b, p. 2). That the curriculum guide uses 'their own nations' rather than 'China' or 'our nation' signifies a sense of detachment from China. However, there are also two objectives, "to have a sense of national identity and to become responsible citizens" (p. 3) and "become responsible citizens with a sense of national identity and global perspective" (CDC, 2007a, p. 3), which seem rather strange in that there is neither justification for, nor reference to, having a sense of national identity in the curriculum guide. The phrase 'to become responsible citizens' is not clear whether it is referring to 'a responsible Hong Kong citizen' or 'a responsible PRC citizen.' However, in view of the inclusion of Hong Kong history, it is logical to interpret it as 'Hong Kong citizens.' It is also important to note that as responsible citizens, students have both rights and responsibilities in Hong Kong which would further consolidate their Hongkongese identity. Whereas for Chinese History, national identity is seen in ethno-cultural and historical terms, for History, the identity being promoted is a Hongkongese identity rather than a national identity. Therefore, the inclusion of 'having a sense of national identity' as one of the aims in the History curriculum guides reveals that curriculum developers are mindful about being politically correct.

In short, with the inclusion of Hong Kong history, the History curriculum helps to contextualize students' Hongkongese or 'Hongkongese but also Chinese' identity. In contrast, the Chinese History curriculum is characteristically ethno-cultural and historical, conveying the sentiment of 'blood is thicker than water.'

## 9 Conclusion

For post-colonial states, it is a legitimate act to foster national identity among students. However, for Hong Kong, however, where the post-colonial context involves a reunion with an estranged motherland whose ideological-political orientation is markedly different from Hong Kong, such an act is a sensitive issue, and one which places the SAR government in an awkward situation. Before President Hu Jintao's engagement in the discourse on Hong Kong's national identity, the SAR government had previously tried to avoid touching on the ideological-political aspects of national identification and hence intended to foster a depoliticised national identity among students. Such an intention was manifested in the education policy of the education reform and was realised in the type of identity promoted through the two history subjects. The identities

to be promoted through Chinese History and History are a depoliticised 'national identity' and a 'Hongkongese identity' respectively. Students are encouraged to identify with China's culture, geography, history, Han race and achievements. The sources of identification are primordial and at the same time, decontextualized. Under the 'One country, two systems' policy, the national identity to be constructed is what Luk (1991) describes as 'abstract' and 'intangible,' and an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991). Hence, it is not possible for students to develop their 'national identity' through practising civil rights and responsibilities (Habermas, 1994). In the case of History, the subject has the potential to establish in students a Hongkongese identity with both national and international dimensions. In sharp contrast with 'national identity,' the analysis shows that the 'Hongkongese identity' is premised on more 'tangible' and 'accessible' persons and events, as shown in the textbook narrative by figures such as Chung Sze Yuen, Lydia Dunn, Anson Chan and Donald Tsang. It is thus more favourable for students to develop their 'Hongkongese identity' through a constructivist approach.

The former Chief Executive, Donald Tsang once told the press that "Hong Kong people's patriotic spirit has Hong Kong characteristics: not only are we proud of being Chinese, we also identify with international values such as human rights, equality and democracy" (Mingpao daily news, 2006). Obviously Donald Tsang admitted that there is a marked difference in the ideological-political belief between Hong Kong and the PRC and that as a consequence, the people of Hong Kong have a special kind of identity: Patriotic with Hong Kong characteristics. Although the school curriculum only constitutes one of the factors in influencing students' national identity, the two histories have made possible two identities among students: Chinese with Hong Kong characteristics and Hongkongese with local, national and international characteristics.

It should be noted that one's identification is not static. The force at work in school is the curriculum, as analysed in this study, which is constructed in a government-sanctioned way. At the same time, there are other dynamic forces, which emerge at particular points in time. For example, when there are negative views of the PRC, particularly relating to ideological-political aspects of China, people tend to contrast this with Hong Kong's positive upholding of the rule of law, human rights and freedom of expression, and they would feel proud of being Hongkongese (Mathews et al., 2008). Conversely, the PRC's economic development and achievements in the latest space project, the 2008 Olympic Games, the 2010 Shanghai International Expo, and other exploits are all regarded as bringing glory to all Chinese, including Chinese in Hong Kong. The two identities are thus constantly shifting with regards to which

identity is the more dominant at any one time. However, it is important to note that an emphasis on either the Chinese identity or the Hongkongese identity might not be beneficial to Hong Kong. First, there is an increasing number of children from China settling in Hong Kong. Second, a large number of non-Chinese children are also living in Hong Kong. Hence the government's deliberation of students' national identity might lead to social disintegration. It should also be noted that the government's control of the curriculum makes it vulnerable to being turned into a form of nationalistic propaganda (Low-beer, 2003). Since Hong Kong is a metropolitan city, one wonders if it would be more appropriate to develop in our students an aspiration for a human identity.

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