

**The Functions of Hong Kong's Chinese History, from colonialism to
decolonization**

Flora L.F. Kan, Faculty of Education, the University of Hong Kong

Flora L.F. Kan is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education, the University of Hong Kong. She teaches and publishes in history education, curriculum studies and education policy analysis.

Email : flfkan@hku.hk

Address: Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

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This paper examines the nature and socio-political functions of Hong Kong's Chinese History during colonialism and since decolonization, and argues that these functions have resulted in a curriculum that is characterised by rote learning and geared towards social control. Students are initiated into the traditional, orthodox view of Chinese history and prescribed moral judgements. As a consequence, there is little chance for independent thinking on the part of students.

Keywords: Chinese History, orthodox, academic rationalism, Han-centred, moralising, social control

Introduction

History teaching in Hong Kong is unique among school subjects in the passions it arouses – public and private, political and bureaucratic, emotional, intellectual and physical – as interest groups struggle to control curriculum development. The purpose and ownership of history remain contentious due to the distinctive nature of Hong Kong as a post-colonial society. The region has inherited from the colonial era an unusual approach to the teaching of history, whereby Chinese History has become separate from the subject, History, informed by its own philosophy and pedagogical assumptions, and viewed as a discipline with concerns entirely separate from ‘World’ History, and indeed from the history of Hong Kong itself. Previous research has examined the historical origins of the split between History and Chinese History in the local school curriculum, and the influence of the politics of Hong Kong’s transition on curriculum development in this sensitive area (Vickers, 2005; Vickers, Kan & Morris, 2003; Kan and Vickers 2002). This article develops and extends this research, focusing particularly on the philosophical rationale underpinning the Chinese History curriculum.

Officially, the function of Chinese History is to transmit the traditional orthodox view of history, to act as a moralising agent, and to help promote feelings of national identity among young people, as encapsulated by the former Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa, 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 (Policy Address, 8 October 1997).

Chinese History can perhaps be seen as the prime curricular vehicle for educating (or re-educating) Hong Kong students as patriotic Chinese citizens, amidst perceptions among the Beijing leadership and their local supporters that Hong Kong people lost their sense of national identity under British rule, and to compensate for this need a substantial measure of ‘national education’.

At the same time, however, an alternative view persists amongst sections of the local educational and political elite that is opposed to such a nationalistic drive. For example, as previous research has demonstrated, those responsible for developing the curriculum for the subject of History have been attracted by the fashion, particularly prevalent in the UK, parts of the USA, and other parts of the English speaking world since the 1970s, for using history education to teach the skill of critical thinking, through encouraging students to work with primary sources, and initiating them into some of the techniques used by professional historians (Kan & Vickers, 2002). The thinking behind this approach is reflected in the current UK Social Studies Curriculum (2005), which demands that its ‘Advanced’ level history students ‘analyse and explain different historical interpretations and [begin] to evaluate them.’ Across the USA, a number of Social Studies Curricula, such as that of the state of Arizona (2005), require Grade 12 students to analyse historical and current events as historians, using primary and secondary sources to evaluate the legitimacy of the commentaries of particular historical events and draw conclusions. The Australian Capital Territory, Board of Senior Secondary Students History Framework (2004) says that History students should ‘critically assess sources of information about the past, and statements made about it, and come to realise that knowledge is problematic’.

It is important to note that such statements of intent do not necessarily reflect classroom reality, and that there are potentially serious problems inherent in an approach that goes so far in stressing the cultivation of generic skills over the accumulation of historical knowledge (see, for example, Cave, 2005). However, it is broadly accurate to say that for almost half a century in the West, despite differences on various issues, especially postmodernism, history educators have followed historians such as G.R. Elton in insisting that history as taught in schools should initiate children into the skills of the professional historian – in other words, the skills of research, analysis, reasoning and the weighing of evidence to reach an independent conclusion. This is in sharp contrast to the idea of history championed by those associated with the Chinese History subject in Hong Kong. With this dichotomy of approaches in mind, this article investigates the origins and nature of the orthodoxy and moralising aspects of the Chinese History curriculum and their impact on teaching, learning and examination during the colonial period and in the subsequent post colonial era.

Origins of Chinese History

Chinese History has frequently been criticised as a boring and conservative subject in the Hong Kong curriculum, performing moralising and conservative functions in the service of the state and requiring students to memorise established views rather than encouraging them to use rational arguments to interpret history. However, it is important to note that these characteristics did not originate in Hong Kong during the colonial era, but were inherited from traditional Chinese historiography. The reason for this is that, according to Kan (2007), in the 1950s, the key Chinese History curriculum developers were Chinese History specialists who had fled from China and had brought with them the traditional Chinese historiography which they incorporated

into the Chinese History curriculum. Therefore, in order to understand fully the development of the curriculum and the ways in which its functions have been manipulated by the ruling authority during the colonial era and after the handover of sovereignty, it is necessary to trace the origins of Chinese historiography.

The traditional purposes of writing history, according to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*, attributed to Confucius, c.551-479 B.C.), were essentially to highlight moral behaviour, differentiate the Han from the ‘barbarians’ and to establish hierarchies. For more than two thousand years from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.) to the end of the Qing dynasty (A.D.1911), Confucianism was the official philosophy of imperial China.

Contemporary Chinese politicians of an authoritarian inclination tend to appeal to a stereotyped, homogenized and anachronistic version of Confucianism known as ‘Chinese values’. Tu Weiming (1999) specifies the relationship between political legitimacy and Confucian studies by referring to the interpretation of Confucian thoughts by political leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew, Jiang Zhongzheng and Jiang Zemin. In ancient China, narratives of Dynastic Histories numbered 24 by the time the Qing dynasty collapsed, constituted the orthodox account of the Chinese past (*The 24 Dynastic Histories* were histories of the imperial dynasties, or more precisely, histories of the imperial families). History in the hands of imperial court officials primarily served the function of legitimising each new dynasty by emphasising the failings (and especially the moral failings) of its predecessor. Its moralising role also made history a resource with which to exhort or admonish rulers or ministers who appeared to be straying from the ‘correct’ path.

There were two types of orthodox historians who, although tending to share a similar state-centred vision of the nature of history and its moralising purposes, differed primarily in their apportioning of moral praise and blame. One group were those individual *literati*, such as Sima Qian, for whom writing history was a private business, while the second were the official historians who worked in the *Guoshi guan*, (Historiography Institute, A.D. 618 to 1911) where history writing was conceived as a national enterprise and a collective work. *The 24 Dynastic Histories* were mostly written by official historians. In addition, history was written to serve the interests of the state (for example, loyalty was defined in terms of adherence to the current regime), and the narrative focused overwhelmingly on the doings of the political elite, the imperial court, and various notable individuals. Chinese History's orthodox characteristics subsequently had a significant impact on historians.

Despite much criticism of Confucian thought during the early Republican period (from 1911 to the mid-1920s), particularly following the May 4th Movement (from 1919), by the time of the Japanese invasion in the 1930s, history in general and the Confucian classics in particular were regarded as an important means of stimulating patriotic sentiments. Influential historians such as Qian Mu saw history, and especially Confucian studies, as a source of national revitalization. Following the Chinese Civil War, Qian fled to Hong Kong in 1949, setting up New Asia College in 1950, and in 1963 this became one of the colleges of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His book *The General History of China (Guo Shi Da Gang)* remains one of the most popular references for Chinese History students in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Some of Qian's students, including Sun Kwok-tung and Wong Fuk-luen, taught Chinese History in the Chinese University of Hong Kong and were authors of some of the earliest local Chinese History textbooks.

Confucianism and imperial politics in China thus led to a strongly-ingrained view of history as a practice, whereby ‘correct’ views on individual events and personages were dictated by the state, and the function of history was geared towards providing moral exemplars to guide the behaviour of individuals (see Alisa Jones, 2005).

In Hong Kong itself, these principles were major influences on the development of the curriculum for Chinese History, both at school and university level. The highly conservative, traditionalist emphasis on the ancient dynastic past on the part of exiled scholars who had taken refuge in Hong Kong after the Communists established their regime in 1949, such as those at New Asia College, coincided neatly with the desire of the colonial government to render the teaching of Chinese History depoliticised and decontextualised. Thus emerged a local subject community of teachers and scholars of Chinese history which was willing to cooperate with the government in developing a local curriculum. At the same time, the presence of the Communist regime across the border prompted key players in curriculum development to exercise a form of self-regulation in order to avoid upsetting the Chinese government. Chinese History was thus a subject that encouraged students to identify culturally with China, but distanced them from modern Chinese politics.

This study ranges from 1945 to 2008, and for the purpose of conceptualisation, has been divided into three phases that relate to changes in the broader socio-political context and changes in education and curriculum policy. Throughout the three phases, three dominant themes have typified the official curriculum and the teaching, learning and examining of the subject: the study of Chinese History as a continuous whole, an orthodox historical viewpoint, and a Han-centred viewpoint. Concerning the first theme, it was thought necessary for Chinese History to be studied as a continuous

whole in order for students to appreciate China's greatness and hence establish students' affiliation with China. Thus, the curriculum covered more than 3000 years of history (~2100 BC / ~1600 BC to 1911, 1945, or 1976), with heavy emphasis on the earlier periods (particularly in the first and second phases), for example, the Han, Tang and Ming, which were regarded as the golden periods of Chinese history. With regard to an orthodox historical viewpoint, accounts of historical events and personages, together with concomitant value judgements, were set out in accordance with *The 24 Dynastic Histories*, and students were expected to follow the stipulated orthodox views. The Han-centred viewpoint was evident in the way in which emphasis was given to the superiority of the Han over other races.

1945-74

In this initial period after World War II, the government began a massive expansion of education. At the same time, mindful of the political conflict on the mainland, and its own vulnerable status as colonial ruler of Hong Kong, the colonial government was determined to exercise strict control over all aspects of education and to pursue an apolitical school curriculum. In the 1940s, schools adopted the Nationalist Government's Chinese History curriculum until *The Report of the Chinese Studies Committee* in 1953, which recommended that Hong Kong should devise its own curriculum emphasising social and cultural history, rather than political history. The Committee also advised that this curriculum should aim at reinforcing Chinese moral and social values:

To the modern Chinese, the problem [the collapse of traditional beliefs] is even more realistic, for many of them have lost respect for most of the long-established Chinese virtues, but have not been able to assimilate the best of the Western virtues. This is indeed a vital need: to have all the sound and healthy elements in the fabric of the Chinese social life and culture to be revived. ...*The study of History has a high moral and social value*, for it can not only provide standards of reference by which to criticise our own age, but

also give one the ability to get outside oneself.’ (p. 21) (Italics added to show the Committee’s perception of the value of Chinese History)

Although the moralising function of Chinese History, which was emphasised in the *Report of Chinese Studies* and in line with *The 24 Dynastic Histories*, was not explicitly expressed in the examination curriculum, nor realised at the level of teaching and learning, and examinations, it provided the background for its inclusion in the later phases. (A more detailed analysis of these three aspects is made in the second phase [1974-97] and the third phase [1997-2008] as during these periods teaching syllabuses were issued in which official views on Chinese History were clearly presented.) It was also during this first phase that the notion of ‘the study of Chinese History as a continuous whole’ began to take root. At all levels (junior secondary, Certificate Education Examination (CEE, Grade 11) and Higher-level/Advanced-level), the Chinese History curriculum was characterized by the adoption of the orthodox views enshrined in *The 24 Dynastic Histories*, and a Han-centred viewpoint, both of which focused primarily on imperial court history, with cultural, social or economic history accorded a distinctly minor role. Teachers rarely challenged accepted views contained in textbooks:

Rarely did teachers challenge views presented in the textbook. Teachers tended to use only one textbook to teach and assume that it could solve all the problems in history learning. (Wu, 1973, p.172).

Publishers followed the examination syllabuses closely to ensure that their textbooks would successfully pass the official review, their safest option being to adopt a conservative approach. The traditional orthodox views and the Han-centred viewpoint were reflected in the syllabus topics, textbook narratives, examination questions and the marking schemes. Typical of many examples from H-level and A-level examinations are questions such as: ‘Examine the achievements made by the

Han race in the anti-Manchurian struggles in the Qing dynasty'. (H-level examination question, 1952). Students were simply expected to reproduce 'model answers' in the examinations, and it was not at all surprising that students regarded Chinese History as an unpopular subject.

1974-97

During the second phase, in the absence of contrary views in the subject committee, the subject community was able to secure the inherited nature and role of Chinese History in the school curriculum. A strong culture was established around the subject, helping to shield it from the broader curriculum reforms that took place in the 1990s (Kan, Vickers and Morris, 2007). The minimal changes that were made can be attributed more to the personal preferences of subject officers and committee members and of the local subject community, than to any official influences from the 'colonial' authorities (see Vickers, Kan and Morris, 2003). Those who exerted the most influence during this period were, as in the previous phase, government officials. D. L. Luk, an education officer, managed to acquire a virtually free hand in deciding on issues regarding the Chinese History curriculum. Luk's views on the nature and role of the subject to a large extent coincided with the pre-existing characteristics of the Chinese History curriculum between 1974-97: an emphasis on transmitting a highly conservative vision of morality and Chinese culture, limited scope for criticism of received verdicts on historical events or figures, the need for Chinese history to be studied in its entirety, a stress on memorisation:

Section A (dynastic history) was more important. Each dynasty has its own characteristics. We stressed that all these characteristics had to be brought up in our teaching so that we could see the *greatness of Chinese History*... To promote moral education and civic education through teaching Chinese History was something required by the then Director of Education, M.K. Leung. At that time all subjects received the same instruction. My senior, P.S. Chan (History senior inspector) asked me to do this [draft on how to incorporate civic and moral education in Chinese History teaching]. Hence I

used one hour to complete a one-page table which incorporated *moral values* into specific events and personages ... (Italics added, personal communication, 4 August 1999)

According to Luk, moral values could be taught through the study of imperial court history. Thus, the 1982 teaching syllabus, which Luk had a key hand in drafting, most noticeably continued to emphasise the development of good behavior in students through studying Chinese History, and a new aim to this effect was stated in this syllabus (although it was already implicitly included in the curriculum in the first phase): ‘to develop students’ good behaviour through studying the deeds of historical personages’ (Chinese History syllabus, 1982, p.6). The following are examples of the orthodox views concerning the deeds of personages in the 1982 teaching syllabus:

After the unification of China, Qin Shihuang oppressed his people and levied heavy taxes on them. That was why the Qin dynasty only lasted for 15 years. (p.19)

Emperor Wu Di’s rule – was the most glorious period of the Han dynasty. Teachers should explain how he extended Chinese territory [his military action was described as ‘extended’ rather than ‘invaded’] and undertook many construction projects. In terms of military and cultural achievements he contributed to a prosperous period in the Han dynasty. (p.16)

The above official prescriptions were established views concerning both the reasons for the rise and fall of individual dynasties and the good or bad behavior of individuals. To illustrate these orthodox views further, the Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) issued a curriculum circular in 1993, which emphasized ‘the historical lessons to be learnt from the disasters caused by the factional conflict in the later Han period: this was a conflict between right and wrong, one that represented the state’s interests (state university students and courtiers) versus private interests (eunuchs)’ (Curriculum circular, No. 21, 1993, p. 12). The official guide uniformly stated which party was right and which was wrong, but seldom required teachers or students to

supply arguments to support such claims, or to look for counter-arguments based on evidence. It is therefore doubtful whether high-sounding aims such as ‘to cultivate students’ objectivity and analytical powers’, which also appeared in the official curriculum, were really valued highly by curriculum developers.

A new aim appeared in the 1990 syllabus (Grade 10-11), ‘to nurture students’ good behaviour’, which encouraged emulation or condemnation of those about whom traditional moral judgements had been made in the syllabus or textbooks, judgements such as: ‘Qin [Shihuang] created a *tyrannical* government, people were extremely discontented and this led to the downfall of the dynasty (bad)’; and ‘Han Wu Di rewarded academic achievements and expanded the territory; he was to be applauded (good)’(p.11).

The views expressed by key decision makers concerning the moralizing function of Chinese History show the thinking behind this aspect of the curriculum:

The value of Chinese History lies in its moral values. Let students learn the moral values. I believe men make history, and history repeats itself. There is a direction in history. Nothing changes except the names of people and places. That is why politicians must learn history. (D. L. Luk, personal communication, 4 August 1999)

History was thus seen largely as a gallery of moral exemplars, and analysis and argumentation based on evidence were not a major concern.

With regard to Chinese culture, as in the Grade 10-11 syllabuses in the first phase (1945- 74), the first and principal aim of the 1990 syllabus was ‘to understand traditional Chinese culture’ (p.6) to establish a cultural rather than a political sense of Chinese identity. However, although officials saw the study of Chinese culture as important for the stimulation of student interest, and for the aim of fostering pride in Chinese culture, it should be noted that the account of the ‘glory’ of Chinese culture

continued to be very much Han-centred, focusing on the culture of China's majority Han. Meanwhile, the cultures of the two non-Han ruling races, the Mongols and the Manchus, were portrayed in a negative light: in fact, both their culture and their ruling policies were denigrated. In the case of the Mongols, this is illustrated by the following extracts from the syllabuses:

They [Mongols] were nomads when they set up their regime in China. They were good at battles, poor in organization. Therefore, during the Yuan reign, there was continual confusion and chaos in politics and customs. Teachers can discuss with students 'what was the impact of the low social status given to the Confucian scholars' ...Teachers can discuss with students the fact that in the Yuan dynasty, the emperors did not have any ideals in administering the country. Their ruling policy was segregation, suppression, and deprivation. Hence Yuan rule was bound to fail. (Chinese History syllabus, 1990, p.31)

Similar disparaging and dismissive views were expressed regarding the other non-Han dynasty, the Qing dynasty, with respect to their culture and their rule:

Students do not have much interest in the cultural systems of the Manchus. Hence a brief narration would suffice. There is no need to emphasize the evolution of culture during the Qing dynasty. (Chinese History syllabus, 1975, p.38)

The study of Chinese History as a continuous whole that had been a major feature of the syllabuses of the first phase (1945-1974) retained its prominence in the 1975 and 1982 syllabuses. It was thought that students needed to study the whole of Chinese dynastic history in order to understand the meaning of 'continuity' and 'evolution' in Chinese History. Consequently, there was an enormous amount of material to be studied and there was actually little room or time for students, through analysis, to develop arguments and arrive at their own conclusions.

During this second phase (1974-97), changes made to the official Chinese History curriculum were minimal, and individual rote learning, rather than collaborative group work and critical thinking, was promoted.

The overwhelming emphasis that the curriculum gave to dynastic history was reflected in Chinese History textbooks during this time. An analysis of textbooks by Pong Long-wah (1987) identified the following characteristics of their content:

One-fifth concerned palace intrigues, one-quarter to one-third dealt with warfare, one-tenth was about rebellions and uprisings, 7-8% concerned literary achievements, and 5% artistic or cultural activities. Regarding the historical figures depicted as playing dominant roles, one-quarter were emperors, one-third scholar-officials, one-eighth soldiers, and the others were eunuchs, women, monks, merchants, and artisans. (p. 113)

Pong's analysis reveals two aspects of the Chinese History curriculum: first, the content of dynastic history was irrelevant to the interests of students; second, in the official syllabus 'dynastic history' was synonymous with 'political history', but in reality Chinese History's 'political history' (or dynastic history) took a very distinctive form and was not 'political history' in its western sense. It had more to do with the events and personages of the imperial court, and these characteristics of dynastic history were regarded as 'the basic facts of the rise and fall of dynasties' (Chinese History syllabus, 1990, p.6), the learning of which was stipulated as one of the aims of Chinese History teaching in the official syllabus. This implies that curriculum developers attributed the rise and fall of dynasties to key persons (and their moral virtues, or lack of them), while macro and structural perspectives had no part to play in analysis and explanation.

Teachers and newspapers meanwhile increasingly criticised the syllabus for the sheer volume of its content, its emphasis on memorisation, and its continued avoidance of contemporary history: As reported in *Ming Pao* and *South China Morning Post* respectively:

We have conducted interviews with teachers concerning the new Grade 10-11 Chinese History syllabus. They generally consider the syllabus too long and fragmented. There is a big jump from one event to another. Students have no option but to learn by rote (*Ming Pao*, 5 November 1994).

Students are not hearing about post-1949 events because there are no questions dealing with the period in HK examination papers (before 1995 only pre-1945 questions were asked in the CEE). A study conducted by Julian Leung revealed that most secondary school teachers do not go past World War II in their teaching of Chinese History (*South China Morning Post*, .10 June 1990)

This observation was confirmed by CEE reports (for example, reports from 1980 to 1997) which revealed that students did not pay much attention to history from 1911 to 1976, as was shown in the relatively few attempts to answer these questions.

Textbooks also reflected the traditional, orthodox view of Chinese History set out in the syllabuses during this time as this would be a prerequisite for textbooks to be included in the recommended list (revealed by Y.H. Cheng, *Economic Journal Newspaper*, 31 July 1982). As a consequence of many teachers' over-dependence on uncritical and inadequate textbooks, much of the teaching of Chinese History, far from encouraging original thought, was concerned with getting students to learn the traditional, established 'facts' of history. As an article in the *Young Post* (13 May 1986) complained 'only facts are taught, and no analysis or evaluation of these facts'.

Cultural history was not very popular with either teachers or students. Many teachers found it difficult to teach and, being more familiar with dynastic history, tended to concentrate on that. The following comment gives some indication of the difficulty and boredom associated with teaching and learning of cultural history:

I taught Chinese History from the 1940s. During this time the curriculum was difficult and boring. The 1975 syllabus (Grade 7-9) included cultural history as Section B. However, topics in Section B were more suitable for sixth-form or university students, for example, the history of intellectual thought, foreign relations, and technology. Junior form students were not able to handle all these. (Permitted teacher, *Ming Pao*, 27 July 1988)

As already mentioned, examination questions and marking schemes reflected a Han-centred view of Chinese History, assuming the superiority of the Han race and denigrating the two non-Han races. For example, one question which often came up in the CEE about the Yuan dynasty concerned the relationship between the downfall of the Yuan dynasty and its poor ruling policies. From 1970 to 2000, there were 11 years in which questions were set on the Yuan dynasty's downfall and its ruling policies. In another instance of Han-centredness, the question and marking scheme below show how the examiners differentiated the Han culture from that of the Qing, treating the Manchus in a very negative fashion:

The power of the Qing was grounded in the policies of conciliation and oppression adopted in the earlier period. (1) What were the intentions of the policies of conciliation and oppression? (2) Give three examples to illustrate the two policies.

- (1) Conciliation policy – make use of the Han people to rule over Han [territory].
- (2) Oppression policy
 - being aliens, Manchus' culture and economy were backward. Hence they needed to use force to maintain their rule.
 - since anti-Manchu activities were increasing, the policy was to consolidate the dynasty's rule.
- (3) Examples of conciliation – 8 were listed
- (4) Examples of oppression – 7 were listed (CEE 1987)

Thus, examination questions, marking schemes and textbook narratives identified two characteristics of Qing rule: first, the Hans were highly civilized, while the Manchus were aliens, backward and uncivilized; second, the reason why the Manchus were able to rule for 260 years was because of their policies of conciliation and oppression in ruling the Han people. These Han-centred conclusions were in line with the curriculum, which judged the Mongols and Manchus in the same disparaging way.

In this period, the Chinese History curriculum was controlled by the government bureaucrats. In terms of curriculum development, it was very much an inheritance from the first period (see, for example, Kan, Vickers and Morris 2007), with very few major changes made in the three dominant themes. Although the junior and senior curriculum were respectively extended to 1976, which meant in principle that students had to study more than 3000 years of history, teachers and students alike tried to avoid modern history in teaching, learning and examinations. Also, orthodox views were presented that aimed at indoctrinating students into an uncritical acceptance of the behavior of certain historical personages. In addition, a Han-centred viewpoint which differentiated the Han race from the non-Han race was also embedded in the official curriculum guide, teaching and learning, and examinations.

1997-2008

Since the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the government's promotion of national identity and patriotic education has been intensive. However, the means by which these are disseminated is not restricted to the official curriculum; there are other channels through which students are constantly exposed to such propaganda. For example, the government has stipulated that the Chinese national anthem be played every day before the evening news on television; the majority of schools practise national flag raising on important occasions (leftist schools perform national flag raising every day); funding is offered by numerous organizations for students' study tours in China; and deliberate efforts are made by the government to promulgate the achievements of China, amongst which economic growth, the space mission and later on, the Olympic games were key items of propaganda. All this has been geared towards fostering in students, and people in general, a sense of affinity with China and hence, towards establishing their national identity. Against this background, the 1982

junior level syllabus was revised and introduced in 1997. The revisions were principally aimed at meeting the political needs of the Hong Kong government, in particular, the building of a sense of national identification and the implementation of the principle of ‘One country, two systems’. Similar revisions were made in the CEE syllabus (for Grade 11-12 students) in 2003, in which it was clearly stated that history education, as an important component of national education, should be regarded as a vehicle to strengthen students’ recognition of the country and its people. For example, for political reasons, the new aim of promoting patriotism was most explicitly stated in both the junior level and CEE syllabuses:

... to cultivate in students a sense of national identification and a sense of belonging to China and its people.

Although no reference was made to the ideology of the Communist regime on the mainland, it was apparent that the key curriculum developers intended to politicise and contextualise the Chinese History curriculum after the handover because they saw an opportunity to strengthen Chinese History’s position within the school curriculum.

However, Chinese History continued to be based on dynastic-political history, requiring students to study the whole of Chinese history, which covered more than 3000 years. For the junior level syllabus (1997), in order to reinforce the pre-eminence of traditional culture, 21 learning objectives with corresponding illustrations of events and personages were listed in Section B (cultural history). Students were thus still expected to accept unquestioningly the greatness of traditional Chinese culture, which was assumed to equate to the culture of the ‘Han’ majority.

One novelty in the junior level syllabus (1997) was its stipulated emphasis on the role of Chinese History as a vehicle for moral and civic education – and, in

particular, for patriotic education. For example, one objective stipulated ‘to cultivate good conduct through knowing historical personages and events’ (p.7). Also, for the first time, specific objectives of moral and civic education were set and illustrations were given of the good or bad behavior of certain historical figures with the aim of transmitting the orthodox views concerning correct or incorrect values for students to emulate or condemn. For example, to illustrate the learning objective of ‘cultivating patriotic ideas, and not harming the nation’s interests for the sake of personal benefits’, the syllabus used an example in Chinese History ‘Shi Jingtang ceded sixteen districts located in the northern sections of modern Hebei and Shanxi provinces’ (Chinese History syllabus, 1997, Grade 7-9, p.22) (Shi Jingtang was a non-Han person, and at that time there were territorial conflicts between the Han and the non-Han people). The objective implied that the ‘nation’ referred to the Han and hence even the non-Han people should consider the interests of the Han as their top priority. In addition, certain topics were specified, together with advice on the teaching points and appropriate teaching and learning activities, and teachers were advised to refer to the prescribed manual even if they attempted to tailor the curriculum to suit the needs of the school.

In contrast, the CEE syllabus (2003) was less prescriptive and advice was given to teachers to help promote students’ critical thinking. For instance, one of its stated objectives for students was: ‘through knowing and *critically examining* the historical events and personages, cultivate good conduct’ (p. 3) (in stark contrast with the junior level stipulated aim: to cultivate good conduct through *knowing* historical personages and events). In addition, less established views were presented regarding important historical figures and it was suggested that students should examine historical figures from different perspectives. This change can be attributed to the

fact that in the face of curriculum reform and the emphasis on ‘Learning to learn’ (Education and Manpower Bureau 2001), curriculum developers could no longer confine themselves to the prescriptive orthodox views, but instead, had to follow the broader curriculum emphasis and gear the curriculum towards promoting students’ thinking skills. This does signify an important breakthrough in the development of the Chinese History curriculum in the third phase. However, it should be noted that the official intention may not be realised in the actual teaching and learning.

Just as in the first and second phases of the subject’s development, textbook accounts of the two non-Han administered dynasties continue to be based on orthodox Han-centred historical views of Chinese history, which portray the Mongols and the Manchus as inferior to the Han in terms of both administrative ability and culture, and as oppressive rulers of China. An examination of the junior level internal examination papers of a sample of ten schools revealed that whenever there were questions asked on the Yuan dynasty and Qing dynasty, they would in one way or another be related to the administrative measures adopted against the Han people. In one of these schools, there was an examination paper that differentiated the Mongols from the Chinese – ‘In the Yuan dynasty, *the Mongols adopted oppressive policies against the Chinese*. Give an account of the way in which the Han people and the Southerners (people living in the southern part of China) were treated differently in political affairs and legal matters’.

As well as adopting a Han-centered approach to history, most textbooks follow the orthodox views, which have also always been characteristic of the Chinese History curriculum. Concerning the new aim of ‘national identification’, many textbook narratives closely follow the views presented in the official curriculum. In particular, since the handover, the Chinese Communist Party has been portrayed more

favorably. For example, in editions since 1997 the phrases ‘allied with the Russians, *allied* with the Chinese Communist Party’ have been used, compared with ‘allied with the Russians, *accommodated* the Chinese Communist Party’ (The term ‘allied’ gives a higher status to the Communists than ‘accommodated’) in the earlier editions.

While the promotion of ‘national feeling’ is evident in textbooks, politically sensitive issues, such as the 1989 June Fourth Incident, have been dealt with in a cautious manner by authors and publishers in order to avoid provoking the Beijing government. Among the four most popular Chinese History textbooks, only the textbook published by Manhattan Press briefly mentions that ‘in May 1989, young students and a large mass of people demonstrated at Tianamen Square. In June, the government intervened and the incident was resolved’ (Grade 9, p. 163, 2000).

On the other hand, references to national feeling are largely absent from actual teaching practice. In the internal examination papers of three schools, there was not one question that related to ‘national identification’, and an analysis of the examination papers of a further six schools also indicated that this seems to be one aim of the intended curriculum that is largely ignored at the classroom level. Neither was national identification included in the 2008 CEE. Thus, teachers seem to be following the well-established ‘pattern’ of teaching dynastic history rather than promoting a sense of national identification. It can be regarded that some teachers themselves find it difficult to identify with a communist regime and hence they would avoid discussing (and examining) national identification.

It is clear then that although, since 1997, both the junior level and CEE syllabuses have included ‘national identification’ as one of their aims, this aim has largely been presented in textbooks rather than in teaching, learning and examination.

Regarding the three dominant themes: the study of Chinese History as a continuous whole, a Han-centred viewpoint and an orthodox view, the development of Chinese History in this period has largely been inherited from the last two periods, except that at the CEE level (2003) there were less prescriptive views and teachers and students were given room to interpret historical events and personages. This change can largely be attributed to the curriculum reform that took place in 1999 and the emphasis on promoting students' critical thinking skills.

Conclusion

Hong Kong's Chinese History curriculum is characterized by didactic teaching and testing of established knowledge (except for the 2006-2008 CEE paper). Its roles have been as a moralising agent and a guardian of the Han-centred orthodox view of Chinese history, and these roles can be regarded as a form of 'social control', which Porter and Stradling (1982) define as being to initiate students into prevailing social norms related to work, family and citizenship.

The academic orientation of Chinese History applies to both its form and its content. In terms of curriculum form, Chinese History has tended to emphasise individual rote learning and examination-oriented study. As for curriculum content, the focus has always been very much on content knowledge, characterized by orthodoxy, moralising, and a Han-centred interpretation of history, which took shape as early as the Confucian period and were later on incorporated into the orthodox *24 Dynastic Histories*. Since the purpose of *The 24 Dynastic Histories* was to serve the interests of the state, individual events and personages in the imperial court were recorded in detail with a view to highlighting good or bad deeds and loyal or disloyal behavior. Moreover, over the last 60 years the time frame and content knowledge of Chinese History have been continually expanding. This can be attributed to the

chronological approach adopted by curriculum developers, who have insisted that Chinese History is sacred and indivisible and needs to be studied in its entirety before one can come to appreciate the essence of Chinese culture. One result of this is that the whole 3000 years of history is repeated three times (Grade 7-9, 10-11 and 12-13) in secondary schools in ever-increasing detail. Another very important feature of Chinese History has been its focus on imperial court history, supplemented by cultural history. The rise and fall of dynasties are interpreted as being attributable mainly to the deeds of emperors and their court officials, while the social structure or relationships between the economic and political infrastructures at particular points in time are not referred to, nor used as analytical frameworks. As a result of the academic orientation of Chinese History, students are presented with a body of facts without any means of achieving genuine understanding and with little chance for critical analysis.

In this way, the curriculum content of Chinese History has been characterized throughout the past sixty years by its focus on a relatively static body of facts, and on orthodox views that aim at providing moral instruction to students and promoting a Han-centred view of history. It is this curriculum, characterized by depoliticization and decontextualization, that has corresponded to the socio-political needs of Hong Kong, both during colonization and after the handover of sovereignty. During the colonial rule, the Chinese History curriculum encouraged political apathy on the part of students, which meant that it would not pose a threat to the colonial government. Since the handover, on the other hand, Chinese History has been seen as a means of instilling in students a sense of national identity, although in reality, this aim has not been realised in terms of teaching and learning, and examination.

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