

Liberal Studies in Hong Kong SAR of China: The fate of an innovative and inquiry learning school curriculum for encouraging multiple perspectives and critical thinking¹

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Abstract

Liberal Studies has been established as a mandatory senior secondary school curriculum in Hong Kong since 2009. As one of university-entrance required subjects that aims at developing students informed understanding and decision-making, Liberal Studies requires teachers to adopt critical thinking training and multiple perspectives in teaching and learning. Since then, Liberal Studies teachers and their students inquire into controversial issues about Hong Kong, modern China and globalization. This innovative and inquiry school curriculum, however, has been criticized as one of the culprits of making Hong Kong's youths active participants in unconventional civic participation. In recent years, the pressures from the pro-establishment camp of the legislature have argued for either changing it from mandatory to elective curriculum, lessening the examination requirements, or relegating it from graded to non-graded assessment status. All these, if carried out, will possibly make Liberal Studies exist in name only, not to mention already causing uncertainties and bewilderment among teachers and students. This paper shall review the development and debates surrounding this innovative and inquiry curriculum. It will possibly shed some lights on how an invisible climate of authoritarianism can exert impacts on a school curriculum.

Keywords

Liberal Studies, youth, civic participation, Hong Kong

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Introduction

Liberal Studies has been established as a mandatory senior secondary school curriculum in Hong Kong since 2009. By disciplinary nature, it draws upon concepts, theories and issues in humanities, social sciences, citizenship education and health education. As one of university-entrance required subjects that aims at developing students informed understanding and decision-making, Liberal Studies requires teachers to adopt critical thinking training and multiple perspectives in teaching and learning. Since 2009, Liberal Studies teachers and their students are required to inquire into controversial issues about Hong Kong nowadays, modern China and globalization. This innovative and inquiry school curriculum, however, has been criticized as one of the culprits of making Hong Kong's youths as active participants in unconventional civic participation, most notably the 2012 anti-national education campaign, 2014 occupy Central and umbrella movement and the latest 2019 protests against an extradition bill to China. In recent years, the pressures from the pro-establishment legislators' camp have mounted up in either changing Liberal Studies from mandatory to elective curriculum, lessening the examination requirements, or relegating it from grading to non-grading in assessment. All these, if carried out, will possibly make Liberal Studies exist in name only, not to mention causing uncertainties among teachers and students, and creating negative views on Liberal Studies in the society. This paper shall review the development and debates surrounding this innovative curriculum, in which keywords related to Liberal Studies are identified before and during data analysis based on the interests of the researchers and their reading of the literature (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). It will possibly shed some lights on how an invisible climate of authoritarianism can exert impacts on a school curriculum.

Hong Kong Curriculum Reform - Origin and rationale

Integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum becomes widely discussed since the 1980s (Jacobs, 1989; Beane 1995), such as curriculum integration (Adler & Flihan, 1997; Beane 1995, 1997, 2005; Clark, 1997; Jackson and Davis, 2000; Awbrey *et al.* 2006). Interdisciplinary concepts are found to be important for planning integrated curricular (Forgarty, 1991). Integrated curricula are found to deepen levels of student understanding and lead to increased motivation (Erickson, 2007). Before the 2000s, however, Hong Kong school subjects were regarded as too much fix on traditional subject line without much knowledge integration between subjects. Various subject knowledge has been taught in compartmentalized subjects, with repetition across

different subjects. Students may learn particular topic in one subject and then repeatedly learning similar topic, especially on those topics related to society, humanities, culture and health education.

Meanwhile, there have been good practices in cross-curricular linkage between civic education, thinking and analytical skills programmes, and value education in many schools. Hong Kong, just like any other education system in east Asia, the significant factors about citizenship are considerations of economic nationalism, Confucianism, and developmental authoritarianism which may combine varying commitment to national pride, cultural pluralism, and global competence (Ho, 2018; David 2018). Also, Hong Kong's civic education, whether as an independent subject or immersion approach, has been shaped by its own colonial history and socio-economic and political development; and the political development and nationalistic policies in China (Chong, Yuen & Leung, 2015; Leung, Chong & Yuen, 2016). Hence, there is a need to take into account international teaching experiences in cross-disciplinary studies, in particular on critical thinking, life education, values education and citizenship education. In addition, there is an increasingly pragmatic need of providing interdisciplinary curriculum for students, which shall expand student horizons and help them to understand Hong Kong, China and the world in an integrated way, especially after the resumption of Chinese sovereignty in 1997 which marked the return of this British colony to China.

The Hong Kong's education reform (CDC, 2001) started in the early 2000s, in which reforms are conducted on different school subjects and improving the curriculum contents. School curriculum planners are asked to put student-centered approach and constructivism as their organizing principles. For teaching methods, school teachers are asked to practice more on different teaching strategies such as role play, group discussion, collaborative learning, value clarification, problem solving and creative thinking, while in teaching humanities and social sciences in senior secondary forms (for students about 15 to 17 years old), teachers are asked to use issue-based inquiry method. In particular for senior secondary forms, the government reformed the whole curriculum in 2009, and assigning Chinese language, English language, mathematics and Liberal Studies as the four main and compulsory subjects that students must learn before they shall sit for the public examinations for competition of public-funded university degree. The Curriculum Development Council, which is a government appointed advisory body on kindergarten, primary and secondary school curriculum development and composed of principals, teachers, parents, business and technology sectors and tertiary institution scholars (The Government of Hong Kong SAR, 2019), and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority,

set the curriculum guidelines for this Liberal Studies subject. Curriculum guidelines in Hong Kong can be described in terms of Kennedy (2008) eclectic, pragmatic interpretation. Since Liberal Studies is one of four required subjects for the public-funded university entrance, therefore, its assessment methods is also subjected to the setting and review by Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, because this subject composes of both conventional examination-based assessment and a project-based Independent Enquiry Study. Lo and Po (2009) argue that Liberal Studies was planned as an integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum that enable students to see patterns and connections of knowledge at a conceptual and transferable level of understanding. Liberal Studies can also be characterized as encouraging open-mindedness and curiosity in learning, which are dispositions of creative thinking (Ritchart, 2002), and open-mindedness refers to the ‘ability to reflect critically on incoming information, consider and “play” with alternative points of view, and intuitively and flexibly look for patterns and connections between elements, while curiosity drives the development of intelligence’ (Erickson, 2007, p.15). Liberal Studies has been implemented since 2009 for Senior Secondary Four to Six students (CDC & HKEAA, 2007), and has been updated in 2015 (CDC & HKEAA, 2015).

The Liberal Studies curriculum - Aims

Liberal Studies is an interdisciplinary study of inquiry questions and controversial issues related to the personal development, humanities, society, and sciences. It has been put forward to achieve integration of knowledge in learning among the students and thus enabling students to have a holistic perspective in their analysis and judgement. The idea behind is an interdisciplinary curricular can cultivate students’ thinking skills on examining real life issues. The Liberal Studies curriculum aims to:

broaden students’ knowledge base and enhance their social awareness through the study of a wide range of issues. The modules selected for the curriculum focus on themes of significance to students, society and the world, designed to enable students to make connections across different fields of knowledge and to broaden their horizons. The learning experiences provided will foster students’ capacity for life-long learning, so that they can face the challenges of the future with confidence. (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p.1)

The relationship between learning knowledge, value and skills should be conceptualized in an integrated way with each one contributing to each other in

teaching and learning. Liberal Studies thus encompasses knowledge, learning skills, and values thinking in the curriculum planning and implementation, and the moral values that this curriculum want to teach are mainly personal, interpersonal, social and cultural values, though when they teach some modules such as Hong Kong today, modern China, and globalization, values which are related to civics and political shall be touched upon. Teachers are, however, asked to teach such civics and political values when examining controversial issues in a balanced way. Teachers teach different perspectives and values associated with a problem or issue, so that students shall learn about the related knowledge and concepts in multiple ways.

Liberal Studies – Modules

Liberal Studies intends to bring together different disciplines of knowledge and concepts that are related to the study of personal, society and humanities, technology use and public health. Such knowledge and concepts are embedded in different domains of enquiry questions and issues for teachers to design school-based teaching contents and materials for students to learn. In planning Liberal Studies lessons, teachers take into account of different students' capabilities in their school and even according to different classrooms. This is the idea of school-based curriculum where teaching and learning shall take into account of school characteristics, socio-economic background and students learning needs under a government mandated curriculum guidelines. The three main modules of Liberal Studies include:

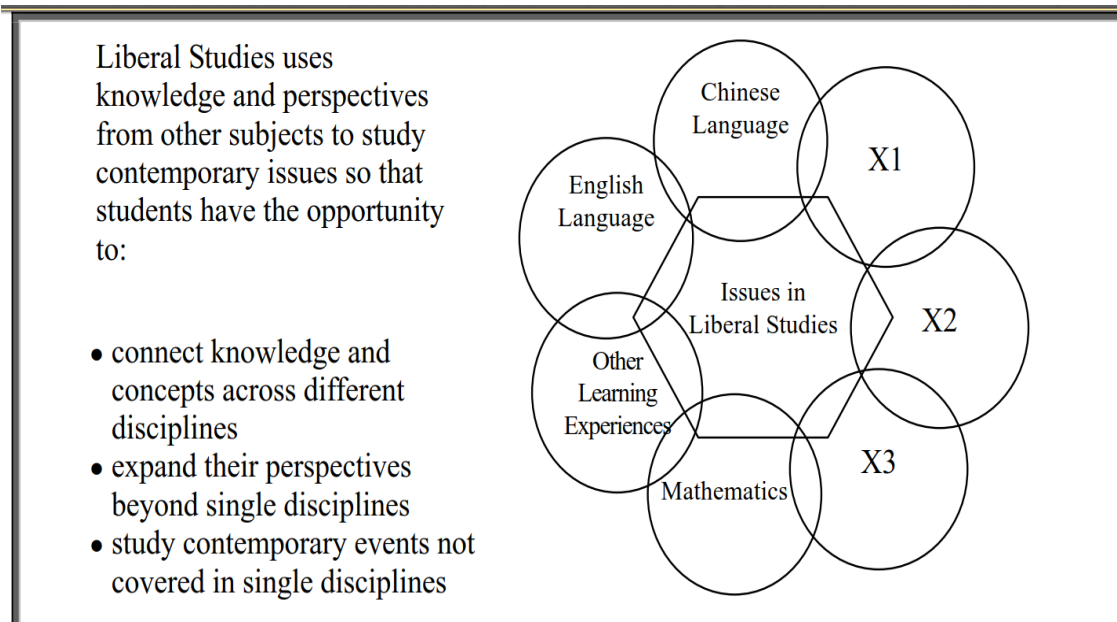
- Self and Personal Development
- Society and Culture: Hong Kong Today, Modern China, Globalization
- Science, Technology, Environment and Public Health

Within each module, inquiry questions are listed out in the Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority's approved curriculum guidelines. The teachers can adapt such inquiry questions in their own school-based curriculum development and implementation, and they can also utilize various textbooks published by private commercial publishers. Moreover, as specified by the Curriculum Development Council and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (CDC and HKEAA, 2007, p.3):

Liberal Studies adopts a student-oriented approach. It aims to help students understand themselves, and their relations with others and the environment in which they live. The intention is not to turn students into specialists in any well-defined

academic field, but to enable them to become informed, rational and responsible citizens of the local, national and global community.

Liberal Studies and three year of Senior Secondary curriculum



Source: (CDC & HKEAA, 2007, p.2)

Liberal Studies - Teaching methods

Although Liberal Studies is a subject that is school-based design and implemented by Liberal Studies teachers, but the official guidelines for school emphasizes teaching and learning can make reference to following teaching methods:

- Issue-based learning
- Experiential learning
- Critical thinking skills
- Multiple perspectives
- Value formation and judgement

The above teaching methods shall help teachers to lead students explore questions in a multiple way. At the classrooms, teachers are usually required to adopt student-centered approach in leading students for applying multiple perspectives and developing their critical thinking, so that they can arrive at informed judgement in their analysis of problems or controversial issues. In fact, multiple perspectives (Jennings, 1997) and social issues (Evans, Newmann, & Saxe 1996; Beane, 2005) are

emphasized in contemporary curriculum development. Students' critical thinking abilities are also attained when these cognitive activities are not taught as subsequent add-ons to what they have learned, but are instead explicitly developed in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills (Glaser, 1984; Fisher & Scriven, 1998). Furthermore, from scholarly analysis on Liberal Studies, learning features which aim at cultivation of active citizenship and enhancing social awareness and debating skills on public affairs can be discerned (Leung, 2008; Leung and Yuen, 2009; Yuen, Leung & Lu, 2016)

Developments of Liberal Studies

2009: Becoming a required subject

When new Senior Secondary Diploma was established in 2009, Government pushed ahead Liberal Studies as one of the required subjects in senior secondary school education (for students aged about 15 to 17 years old). Although the education sector at that time concerned whether teacher training and teaching resources can support this new subject, there was a general welcome of Liberal Studies because it would be a non-traditional disciplinary subject that can enhance students' concern about the society and cultivate students' capabilities in an integrated way. Very few concerns were posed at that time regarding the possibility of Liberal Studies turning out to be a subject for ideological indoctrination. Yet, a few critics voiced out to the Education Bureau that the Chinese translation of 'critical thinking' could lead students to adopt a critical attitude towards other people's view.

2012-2015: Critics emerging on Liberal Studies

During 2011, the Hong Kong SAR government suggested to put forward moral and national education (CDC, 2012) as an independent subject in primary and secondary school education. It is for developing the moral and national qualities of Hong Kong students, especially there has been nationalistic needs and national unity of developing a Chinese national identity among Hong Kong students in the eyes of Chinese regime. The government's effort for an independent subject of moral and national education, however, caused an anti-national education campaign of protesting against suspected indoctrination and biased contents in 2012, which lasted through a whole summer. Some government funded teaching resources on this moral and national education curriculum are criticized as biased towards arousing students' emotion without paying sufficient attention to the possible abuse of

affective education, which may lead to indoctrination (Leung and Lo, 2012). This anti-national education campaign saw student groups such as Scholarism as the main forces, while some parent groups also came out to support the students. The several demonstrations and hunger strike to press the government to withdraw the proposed moral and national education curriculum. These protests, moreover, made Hong Kong's society concern about whether students already got a heightened sense of civic awareness and whether there is any connection between this civic awareness and students taking Liberal Studies. Since then, the Pro-establishment camp has been criticizing Liberal Studies as instigating students' participation in social movements, which has caused social instability. An unexpected outcome was that students treat critical thinking as 'criticising' public policies (*South China Morning Post*, 9 May, 2018). Meanwhile, in professional terms, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority streamlined the assessment framework for IES in 2011, which is intended to reduce administrative work involved in conducting assessments and submitting marks, and supposedly making IES more manageable for students and teachers (HKEAA, 2011). Next, in December 2014, the Education Bureau changed the Chinese translation of 'critical thinking' into something like 'deliberative thinking', which is regarded as intentionally de-emphasizing 'critical thinking' for teachers and students use. Among the discussions in recent years, there are voices for making Liberal Studies a non-compulsory subject that is not examined or has examinations but just pass or fail in assessment, with reduced contents. These will be explicated below.

2016-2019: Renewed accusations on Liberal Studies

The interview research done by Lee and Chiu (2017) revealed that Liberal Studies has not made secondary school students more radical. Instead, it facilitates more rational discussions on political issues between teacher and students. In short, studying the topics in Liberal Studies made senior secondary school students acquired more political knowledge because they have gained the cognitive knowledge and thinking skills, but it does not make them participate in civic affairs. Leung (2017), who is a citizenship education scholar, interviewed some students who involved in the 2014 Occupy and Umbrella movement. Leung found that that some Hong Kong students, after analysing and comparing the proposal by Chinese National People's Congress with Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, came up with a cognitive judgment that the decision did not meet the three criteria of a "genuine universal suffrage". Some students, in Leung's interview, even had made a moral judgment that the decision was political unjust, leading to moral passion of

upset and anger, which motivated them to take political action and participate in the Occupying Movement. Several interviewed students argued that it is their moral obligation as reflected in the slogan, “Living in an era of confusion, we should have a sense of obligation”. Perhaps, based on the above moral judgment on social and political issues, several youth groups founded around 2016 who demand self-determination and they caught the media attention a lot by staging protests against government’s deferral of democratic development of Hong Kong (Chong, 2018).

When the current Chief Executive Carrie Lam took over administration of Hong Kong SAR in late 2017, the attacks on Liberal Studies died down a bit. Meanwhile, the once controversial national education is being promoted through a required Chinese History in junior secondary, the Basic Law education, and a lot of subsidized study tours to major and rising cities of China (e.g. Greater Bay Area including Guangzhou and Shenzhen, Shanghai, Xian and capital city of Beijing). Immersion approach of national education in different subjects is promoted by government instead of pushing forward again a mandatory subject of national education. Liberal Studies, however, started to be associated with questions about how teachers teach identity, civic participation, and attitudes towards China when post-2014 Occupy and Umbrella movement did not see much ‘positive improvements’ in the eyes of pro-Beijing government supporters. In fact, social conflicts can be found regarding integrating Hong Kong legally and culturally with a larger Chinese nation-state (Jackson, 2014).

In November 2017, as a routine review after introducing education reform and a new senior secondary system for more than 10 years, a government appointed committee on the school curriculum was set up to review the implementation and impacts of education reform. One of the committee’s objectives is to review Liberal Studies in the senior school education curriculum. In fact, Liberal Studies has received favourable comments on its curriculum and assessment from the Education Bureau, the Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority in the both short-term and mid-term reviews in 2013 and 2015. Thus, we can possibly say that at least during the teacher consultations in recent years, the curriculum and assessment reviews of Liberal Studies have been well received and implemented by most secondary school teachers.

The government’s Task Force on Review of School Curriculum (2018-19), however, is mulling to reduce the total class hours of four core subjects, including Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies. As at 2 April 2019, news suggest that Liberal Studies will remain a compulsory subject at this stage, and the methods of grading students’ performance will remain unchanged. However, students may choose to opt out from the Independent Enquiry Study (IES) in their

three years of senior secondary education, which accounts for 30% of class hours. If students decide to skip the IES module, the highest grade they can get in overall assessment of Liberal Studies is lowered to Level Four, which is still good enough for the basic requirement for public-funded university entrance. Besides, news reported that the six modules of the Liberal Studies subject may also be integrated into four. In May 2019, Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, which is the largest teachers' union in Hong Kong for many decades and has actively represented teachers in teacher-related professional matters, reported that they learnt about the government's Task Force on Review of School Curriculum (2018-19)'s proposal on Liberal Studies curriculum development: Students can choose no opting for IES in assessment, but the highest Level that such students can get is only "4" out of a total of "5". This proposal aims at reducing pressures on school teachers and students, but some Liberal Studies teachers either think that independent enquiry study is fundamental in the training of multiple perspectives and critical thinking, or that students currently can still get a Level or more than "4". Thus, this proposal of allowing opting out of IES may not receive strong support (HKPTU, 2019).

During the summer of 2019, protests began to surface and target on the government proposed extradition law to China. The series of protests saw many young people participating in it. As a result, pressures from the society have been increasing on Liberal Studies again. The latest charges by the first Hong Kong's Chief Executive put the blame of youth using violence in the protests on Liberal Studies (SCMP, 3 July, 2019). Also, the pro-establishment Beijing camp of legislators accused this liberal studies subject of causing young people to come out and protest. Their accusation centers on their alleged 'biased' contents of textbooks, as well as their claim that some teachers are teaching this liberal studies subject in biased way. They have been trying to reduce the importance of this subject, such as making it a non-examinable subject or no longer a university entrance required subject. However, there are several research which found no plausible links between studying Liberal Studies and taking civic actions; and teachers maintained professional neutrality (Fung & Su, 2016; Fung & Lui, 2017; Chiu, Yuen, Leung, 2018). Once, even the education officials defended the Liberal Studies by saying that there is not any proof of causing the students to take radical actions (SCMP, 11 July, 2019).

In fact, the various pressures on Liberal Studies so far can be classified into two main categories, namely non-political considerations and political considerations. For non-political considerations, those supporting STEM education think that assigning four subjects, namely Chinese language, English language, mathematics and Liberal Studies as required subjects in senior secondary has reduced the chance of students to take

other electives, especially affecting those science subjects (e.g. biology, physics, chemistry). They propose students should have more lesson times to study STEM related subjects, which could be helpful for Hong Kong to build up its scientific and technology talents. Therefore, they either propose to exclude Liberal Studies from the required subjects or cut down government's recommended class hours on Liberal Studies. But these proposals have not been widely discussed in the society and not yet endorsed by the government. For political considerations, since most contents of Liberal Studies can be applied critical thinking skills which ask students to examine questions and issues related to society and politics of Hong Kong and China, and that this subject does not have pre-approved textbooks (which was a consensus between the government and the curriculum development committee at the beginning), thus raising the concerns of pro-establishment voices on whether all these will make students become critical of Hong Kong SAR and China governments. In short, Liberal Studies becomes the scapegoat of students taking active participation in the society.

One result is Hong Kong's parents and students are bewildered by all these debates surrounding Liberal Studies. They have to accept that unless some clear decisions regarding Liberal Studies in the overall senior secondary curriculum to be made by the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum beyond 2019, then they shall continue to treat this Liberal Studies as one of four required subjects for public-funded university entrance, and to consider whether taking the IES for their project study in addition to taking the public examination towards the end of senior secondary education.

Current professional challenges on Liberal Studies

The current professional challenges encountered by Liberal Studies include, for example, resources reduction, unforeseeable future, as well as an overall semi-authoritarian political climate.

Resources reduction: Schools redeploy both manpower and learning resources to other subjects such as Chinese language and English language in view of the student high passing rate in Liberal Studies. This resource reduction for Liberal Studies, however, may in turn affect students' chance of getting into universities. Yet, with a high passing rate of passing Liberal Studies in all these years, schools switch to put more emphasis on other subjects that they think with more resources given, their students shall have a higher chance to get better results for university entrance.

Unforeseeable future and low morale of Liberal Studies teachers: Teachers feel being marginalized owing to the cutting of Bachelor of Education programme in Liberal Studies in several universities, negative news about the future of Liberal Studies, and lack of recognition in university enrollment (Ta Kung Pao, 27/3/2015). All these have adversely affected the teachers' morale and so casting an unforeseeable outlook on this subject. Some Liberal Studies teachers even cast doubts on the sustainability of teaching this subject.

Political climate: As mentioned before, there are some groups in pro-establishment camps exerting protests and other pressures on Liberal Studies teachers because of students' civic orientation, though the situation has become better now. The Hong Kong society itself is also getting semi-authoritarian because the Hong Kong SAR government has been criticized on disqualification of several people elected legislators and banning pro-democracy activists from joining elections in recent years. For example, Legislator Regina Ip Lau Suk-yea criticized Liberal Studies for mainly discussing topical events, and thus lacking theoretical support with an over-arching theme for the curriculum (SCMP, 2015; SCMP, 2018). She called for a reversion of this mandatory subject back to an elective subject, similar to the previous Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination syllabus (Ip, 2017). Meanwhile, Legislator Priscilla Leung Mei-fun has been criticizing Liberal Studies for its emphasis on political events, which in her opinion created an anti-Chinese mindset among secondary school students. She called for replacing this mandatory subject with Chinese history (Yeung, 2014). Therefore, there have been significant pressures on the curriculum contents of this university entrance required subject of Liberal Studies.

Discussion

A need to understand students' views

A semi-liberal (economic liberal but not politically) and semi-authoritarian Hong Kong SAR regime nowadays, while facing increasing pressures from pro-establishment camp and critics of student protests, seems to put reservation on students' critical thinking development because of a rising of student activism since the anti-national education protest in 2012. Suspects argue that government and pro-establishment wants to trim down this subject through a review of curriculum and assessment. Nevertheless, is the curriculum review a good policy choice to deal with student activism, in terms of achieving what it intends to do and avoiding any washback effect? Neglecting any student reaction over change of curricular and assessment decisions, not to mention students' reaction to the current protests, may cause the regime in

further legitimacy troubles. Student voices need to be heard nowadays. A more balanced and understandable attitude towards the on-going curriculum and assessment reviews of Liberal Studies should be in place, as well as in the whole society to perceive and facilitate the development of student activism.

Liberal Studies as important component of democratization

Spires (2017) argued that the debate on Liberal Studies mirrors aspects of the broader economic, political, and social tensions as they relate to Hong Kong youth, and the Hong Kong society at-large. Liberal studies has the potential to be an important component in helping Hong Kong toward a more democratic system, despite Hong Kong's markedly undemocratic past as a colonial possession, and through its transition to its new position as part of an authoritarian China (Spires, 2017). Liberal studies also offers a useful focal point from which to explore whether a democratization process is occurring in Hong Kong, and if it is indeed occurring, how it is manifesting in the public discourse as well as educational reform (Spires, 2017). The Liberal Studies curriculum's focus on building up self-understanding and interpersonal relationships, understanding social issues in Hong Kong and China, as well as the emphasis on self-awareness and development are promising from a democratic perspective. As Bullock (2015) stated, "Hong Kong's liberal studies classes may represent the beginning of a new age for the Chinese as a whole". Although Bullock may be overstating the importance of the course as it currently stands, these sentiments echo the potential benefits that specific civics elements of this curriculum offer. Of course, with the recent pro-establishment's political climate of putting the fingers on Liberal Studies in making students more politically aware and thus participating in demonstrations and protests, the discussion and use of Liberal Studies in education as a focal point for developing democratic and actively engaging citizens has become much more difficult to sustain.

The link between studying a subject and civic participation

At present, the debates are at the juncture where different political camps tries to exert the impacts on the future of this interdisciplinary, integrated and innovative subject. The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, who stand for teacher most of the time, of course argue for respecting the professionalism of teachers in planning and delivering Liberal Studies lessons and in assessment tasks. On one hand, pro-democracy legislators and the Professional Teachers' Union argue for the importance of cultivating multiple perspectives, critical thinking and informed

judgement among the future generations support (HKPTU, 2019), but on the other side, proponents of pro-establishment camp said this subject must be revamped in order to make it having lesser political impacts on students. Such pro-establishment forces think that by having a curriculum review and adjusting particular topics and textbooks related to Hong Kong and China, students shall no longer be so much politically motivated to take part in demonstration and protest. However, such suspected link between studying particular subject and civic participation may not be justified because a common sense can already tell that there could be many factors such as time, cost and resources influencing a person taking actions. Furthermore, previous research tells that there is not much link between studying Liberal Studies and taking part in political engagement (Lee and Chiu, 2017).

Conclusion

The liberal democratic ones or, actually, the world in these days should prepare for the ideological and strategic resurgence of populism and authoritarianism, because the latter got significant supports nowadays. ‘Populism’ exhibits in Hong Kong through social movements, such as wanting to bring down national education in 2012, which was alleged to have indoctrination tendencies of emphasizing only the positive side of the nation when teaching young people. But then populism exhibit on the lines of wanting democracy, human rights and freedom in Hong Kong in the 2014 Occupy and Umbrella movement, and 2019 anti-extradition law to China and the subsequent anti-mask banning law in October 2019. ‘Authoritarianism’ exhibits through the government increasingly tightening the control over political claims of self-determination and independence, and barring activities related to such claims (e.g., incident of Financial Times editor Victor Mallet not allowed to enter into HK in 2018), though such autonomy supports are mainly found among teenagers and young adults. ‘Authoritarianism’ knocks on school curricular (e.g., Liberal Studies) through pro-establishment voices to propose to change the curricular contents.

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