

Lessons in Patriotism

Producing national subjects and the de-Sinicisation debate in China's post-colonial city

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Fifteen years after the former British colony's "reunification with the motherland" on 1 July 1997, the relationship between mainland China and Hong Kong remains as uneasy and conflict-ridden as ever. An increasingly porous border, evidenced by an influx of mainlanders from day-trippers to real estate speculators, as well as what is seen as the growing political influence of Beijing, have sparked popular fear in the Special Administrative Region (SAR) over the imminent "mainlandisation" (*daluhua* 大陸化) of the city. Deepened resentment towards the mainland has also become more openly and unabashedly expressed: In February 2012, a full-page advertisement was printed on the local tabloid *Apple Daily* condemning mainlanders as "locusts," in retaliation for Peking University professor Kong Qingdong's provocative remarks that Hong Kongers are "bastards" and "running dogs of the British government."⁽¹⁾

These recent flare-ups bring to the fore deeply rooted issues of belonging and national identity in China's post-colonial city. According to a survey conducted in June 2012, the society's self-identification as Chinese dropped to a 13-year low on the eve of the 15th anniversary of reunification.⁽²⁾ People in the SAR identify themselves most strongly as "Hong Kongers" (*Xi'anggangren* 香港人), then in descending order as "members of the Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua minzu yifenzi* 中華民族一份子), "Asians" (*Yazhouren* 亞洲人), "Chinese" (*Zhongguoren* 中國人) and "global citizens" (*shijie gongmin* 世界公民). Worryingly for Beijing, identification with the title "nationals of the People's Republic of China" (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guomin* 中華人民共和國國民) is found to be the lowest of all. For youths under the age of 30, it is found that the number of those who view themselves as "Hong Kongers" is 60-72 percent higher than those who identify themselves as "Chinese."⁽³⁾

It is at this perhaps unpropitious moment that the programmatic introduction of patriotic lessons under the banner of *guomin jiaoyu* (國民教育), or national education, was announced by the Hong Kong government. The controversial decision contributed to one of the city's most successful civil movements since the handover and stimulated productive probes into the enduring question of what it means to be a "patriotic," "motherland-embracing" national subject in a city where colonial legacies such as the rule of law remain defensively treasured. What emerged from the debates also highlights the tensions embedded in such seemingly unproblematic notions as the city's "necessary integration" with the mainland.

This article analyses the issues of belonging, national identity, and citizenship through an examination of the national education debate and looks

ahead to the future of mainland-Hong Kong relations in the 18th Party Congress era.

Learning to love China

During his visit to Hong Kong in commemoration of the 10th anniversary of reunification in 2007, President Hu Jintao highlighted the need to strengthen national education for youths in order to "pass on Hong Kong compatriots' glorious tradition of loving the country and loving Hong Kong" (*aiguo aigang de guangrong chuantong* 愛國愛港的光榮傳統). This manifest instruction from Beijing was swiftly heeded by the administration headed by then Chief Executive Donald Tsang. The budget for national education witnessed a staggering six-fold rise from HK\$5 million in 2006 to HK\$35.3 million in 2007.⁽⁴⁾ This figure further increased to HK\$60 million in 2008.⁽⁵⁾ In policy addresses, Tsang pledged to give greater weight to elements of national education in primary and secondary curricula. In 2007, the government vowed to encourage more schools to assemble flag guard teams and promote flag-raising ceremonies. A year later, a National Education Funding Scheme for Young People was launched to subsidise large-scale events targeting youngsters. The subsidy quota for secondary students to participate in mainland exchange trips was raised from 5,000 per year to 37,000. To promote national education "in a more strategic and systematic manner," a platform named Passing on the Torch was created to facilitate coordination between voluntary groups engaged in the organisation of exchange activities.⁽⁶⁾

1. "Hong Kong advert calls Chinese mainlanders 'locusts,'" BBC, 1 February 2012, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-16828134 (consulted on 12 November 2012).
2. The survey is conducted by the Public Opinion Program of the University of Hong Kong. See their press release on 26 June 2012, <http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/release/release937.html> (consulted on 12 November 2012).
3. *Ibid.* Another government-commissioned survey conducted in 2010-2011 by the Department of Sociology and Social Policy of Lingnan University showed that 42.9 percent of youths see themselves as Hong Kongers, 30.7 percent as China's Hong Kongers (*Zhongguo de Xi'anggangren*), and 13 percent as Chinese. The study was commissioned by the Commission of Youth and the findings were announced in November 2011. Full report available for download at www.coy.gov.hk/tc/research/hk_youth_development.html (consulted on 12 November 2012).
4. Yu Man, "Dangmin jiaoyu" (Party-national education), *iSun Affairs*, 29 July 2012, www.isunaffairs.com/?p=9538 (consulted on 12 November 2012).
5. Tan King-sin, "Xianggang guomin jiaoyu ya chaoyue zhengdang" (Hong Kong's national education must transcend party politics), *Yazhou Zhoubao*, Vol. 26, No. 31, 2012, www.yzzk.com/cfm/Content_Archive.cfm?Channel=ed&Path=2302130572/31ed1.cfm (consulted on 12 November 2012).
6. Hong Kong government, 2008-2009 Policy Address, www.policyaddress.gov.hk/08-09/eng/p123.html (consulted on 12 November 2012).

It was in Tsang's 2010–2011 policy address that the introduction of Moral and National Education (*deyu ji guomin jiaoyu ke* 德育及國民教育科) as an independent, standalone subject was proposed. Beijing's design was clearly articulated in an editorial that appeared in the *People's Daily* overseas edition:

Many surveys have shown that Hong Kong youths' knowledge of the country's condition (*guoqing* 國情) is far from ideal. For instance, fifteen years after the SAR's return, a significant proportion of young people still have no idea what the May Fourth spirit represents; some do not even know who the President is. The SAR government's introduction of Moral and National Education serves to fill these gaps in knowledge of *guoqing*, and helps young people to adapt to the changing times.

What concerns Beijing is not just the lamentable paucity of factual knowledge about China, however. More important is what it perceives to be the worryingly slow progress in the "return of people's hearts" (*renxin huigui* 人心回歸) to the motherland. Since 1997, the land has (been) returned to China, but not the hearts and minds of those who inhabit it. National education in the post-colonial city, it is argued, is necessary to raise up a future generation that will "grow to love our motherland and Hong Kong, aspire to win honour and make contributions for our country, and have a strong sense of pride as nationals of the People's Republic of China."⁽⁷⁾

Tsang's curt, one-line proposal on the subject, buried in an otherwise lengthy policy address, largely fell outside the media limelight and certainly did not arouse the public uproar it did less than two years down the road. Following the address, an ad hoc committee was set up in 2010 to see to the subject's implementation. A draft Curriculum Guide (*kecheng zhiyin* 課程指引) prepared by the Curriculum Development Council was released in May 2011, accompanied by a four-month period of public consultation. The revised Curriculum Guide was formally announced in the final months of the Tsang administration. On 30 April 2012, the Education Bureau declared that Moral and National Education as a standalone subject is to be introduced in a "progressive manner" through a three-year initiation period before it becomes compulsory in primary schools in 2015 and in secondary schools in 2016.⁽⁸⁾

The series of incidents that precipitated the outpour of public anger, however, did not take place until Tsang had completed his second term in office. On 4 July, days after Leung Chun-ying was inaugurated as the new Chief Executive, the media reported the publication of a highly controversial teaching handbook. Entitled *The China Model* (*Zhongguo moshi* 中國模式), the handbook lauds the Chinese Communist Party as a progressive, selfless, and united ruling organisation (*jinbu wusi yu tuanjie de zhizheng jituan* 進步、無私與團結的執政集團) and commends the democratic (*minzhu xing* 民主性) and superior (*xiuyue xing* 優越性) nature of China's current political system. The ideal model (*lixiang xing* 理想型) of the Chinese system is contrasted with the ungainly American electoral system, in which people are made to suffer the catastrophic consequences of pernicious competition between parties (*zhengdang e'dou renmin dangzai* 政黨惡鬥，人民當災). While it critically examines phenomena such as forceful land appropriation (including the Wukan incident), contaminated milk powder, and the Wenzhou high-speed rail crash, the handbook steers clear of such politically sensitive issues as the Cultural Revolution and the June Fourth tragedy.⁽⁹⁾ An editorial in *Ming Pao*, a local newspaper, condemned the handbook for

"putting makeup on the Chinese Communist Party and single-party authoritarianism," with the thinly veiled objective of "political brainwashing" (*zhengzhi xinao* 政治洗腦).⁽¹⁰⁾

The controversial text was compiled by Baptist University's Advanced Institute for Contemporary China Studies, newly founded in 2009 and currently headed by Victor Sit, a former member of the National People's Congress. The Institute worked under the appointment of the National Education Services Centre (*Guomin jiaoyu fuwu zhongxin* 國民教育服務中心), set up by the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, a pro-Beijing organisation that receives substantial annual subsidies from the government.⁽¹¹⁾ From 2008 to 2010, the Centre pocketed as much as HK\$27.33 million in subsidies from the Education Bureau.

The dubious links between the government, pro-Beijing organisations, and educational institutions unsettled the public. Hundreds joined in an online petition denouncing Baptist University for sacrificing its academic integrity for the fulfilment of dubious political assignments.⁽¹²⁾ Similar arrangements for the production of other national education materials were soon revealed. Another program, criticised for "indoctrinating" credulous primary school students by cultivating unreflective, sentimental notions of patriotism, was compiled by an organisation affiliated with the City University of Hong Kong after receiving HK\$8 million in sponsorship from the Quality Education Fund. The Blended Learning Curriculum Design for Hong Kong National Education has been adopted in at least 18 primary schools over the past three years.⁽¹³⁾

Another aspect found problematic was the Assessment Program for Affective and Social Outcomes (APASO) (*qingyi ji shejiao biaoqian pinggu* 情意及社交表現評估) introduced by the Education Bureau. The APASO consists of a number of scales by which students are to evaluate their performance. One of these scales is "National Identity and Global Citizenship," useful as "an index on the duty to the nation, emotional attachment to the national, global citizenship, and attitudes toward the national" of schoolchildren. In its implementation, schools have devised such measurements as "We should support the country even if the people believe that the country has done wrong" and "We should buy made-

7. Hong Kong government, 2007–2008 Policy Address, www.policyaddress.gov.hk/07-08/eng/p116.html (consulted on 12 November 2012).

8. Government press release, "Committee on Implementation of Moral and National Education," 22 August 2012, www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201208/22/P201208220223.htm (consulted on 12 November 2012).

9. Copies of the handbook were published in March and distributed free of cost to primary and secondary schools in mid-June, as reference materials for the launching of national education. For an online scanned copy of the handbook, see www.scribd.com/doc/99483509 (consulted on 12 November 2012).

10. "Youshi zhi shi jiehe jiazhang wei xiayidian bianzhi guomin jiaocai" (Experts and parents should unite to design national education syllabi for our next generation), *Ming Pao* editorial, 7 July 2012.

11. Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers website, www.hkfew.org.hk (consulted on 12 November 2012). Tan King-sin, "Xianggang guomin jiaoyu ya chaoyue zhengdang," *art. cit.*

12. Petitioners decry the loss of academic freedom, citing another political controversy involving the university's survey centre that took place during the 2012 Chief Executive election. On the earlier political controversy, see Tanna Chong and Simpson Cheung, "Tang admits aide called university on half-done poll," *South China Morning Post*, 20 January 2012. The Institute, however, remained adamant in face of mounting criticism. It defended the handbook in an online declaration and attacked "individual political groups" for discriminatorily perverting its content and launching "campaign-style critiques" (*yundongshi pipan*). The Centre was similarly intransigent. Even after Education Secretary Eddie Ng admitted that the handbook was partial, the Centre's director Yeung Yiu-chung openly contested Ng's remark by saying that the content is objective, and that not using it for teaching is a "waste" and an act of "shutting oneself out" (*ziji fengbi ziji*). "Jiaolian Yang Yaozhong fanji" (Yeung Yiu-chung retorts), *Ming Pao*, 7 July 2012.

13. The content of the program is available online at http://ne.actin-education.hk/Website/ne/swf/NE%20touch%20flash/Flash_touch_160511_3.5.2_updated29.swf (consulted on 12 November 2012).

in-China products in order to protect the employment situation in China.”⁽¹⁴⁾

The adverse turn in public opinion days after the handover of power took the Leung administrative by surprise. Deep suspicions of the new Chief Executive's cosy relationship with Beijing – sentiments that Leung's contender for the top job, Henry Tang Ying-yen, had effectively exploited during the election, and that Leung's own actions after his victory have served to aggravate – only intensified public anxiety over national education and consolidated distrust of the new government. Misguided and ill-considered comments made by pro-Beijing supporters of national education helped little in allaying concerns. Just as the outcry against “brainwashing” grew in volume, National Education Services Centre representative Wong Chi-man was quoted as saying that “all education is, to some extent, designed to brainwash”: “I think the word ‘brainwash’ is too negative. It evokes something out of ‘Clockwork Orange.’”⁽¹⁵⁾

Activism against “red indoctrination”

What followed was a rare collaboration between different forces against national education in the society and the staging of civic action on a scale comparable to the 1 July 2003 demonstration through which citizens successfully blocked the introduction of an anti-subversion security law in the Basic Law of Hong Kong. The first mass protest took place on 29 July, with organisers reporting a turnout of 90,000.⁽¹⁶⁾ A month later, as the summer holidays drew to a close, an Occupy Tamar movement with protesters clad in black took over the government headquarters at Admiralty.⁽¹⁷⁾ The siege lasted for ten days, during which a marathon hunger strike was staged, until the Leung administration backed down on 8 September by cancelling the three-year initiation period and promising that national education will not be introduced as an independent subject within his term.

What was particularly noteworthy about this demonstration of collective will was the extraordinarily marginal role played by the city's political parties, including the usually strident People Power. Although the pan-democrats joined in the opposition against national education, they were not the chief organisers of the crucial movement that eventually forced the government to change its mind. Instead, the pressure group behind the victory was made up of students, parents, and teachers without a unified political background. The Civic Alliance Against National Education (*minjian fandui guomin jiaoyu ke dalianmeng* 民間反對國民教育科大聯盟) was established in July 2012, led by the student body Scholarism (*xuemin sichao* 學民思潮), the National Education Parents Concern Group, and the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union. Among these three, the young, post-90s activists of Scholarism drew society-wide applause and brought “a glimmer of hope,” according to political commentator Albert Cheng, to the city's democracy dream.⁽¹⁸⁾

Scholarism was founded by three secondary school students in May 2011 after the draft Curriculum Guide was first released for consultation, when its core leader, Joshua Wong Chi-fung, was only 15. Scholarism used the social media network Facebook to draw attention to national education and recruit supporters, attracting more than 200 student members. Funded by members' own pocket money and donations obtained through street rallies, the group was efficiently organised with labour divided into policy, public relations, music, and action teams.⁽¹⁹⁾ During Occupy Tamar, which required meticulous planning from the setting up of tents to the assembling of sound systems, the young activists demonstrated “extraordinary discipline and or-

ganisational skills” and provided protesters with an abundant selection of snacks and drinks that “would put [convenience store chain] 7-Eleven to shame.”⁽²⁰⁾ They also showed keen political acumen by maintaining a cautious distance from political parties, warning them off to prevent the movement from being hijacked by mainstream politicians and to avoid accusations of being used as puppets. From the beginning, the movement has remained singularly focused on the issue of national education, one of the key reasons, indeed, for its eventual success.

The high-profile activism of Scholarism attracted criticism and censorship. *South China Morning Post* columnist Alex Lo alleged that it operates like “a radical cult involving young children.” “Well, we don't have a cult leader yet,” he wrote in a piece entitled “Just who is brainwashing whom?,” “but the pure enthusiasm, youthful rebellion, rejectionism, intransigence and total contempt for the authorities are all on display.”⁽²¹⁾ Asia Television (ATV), a local broadcaster, went further to vilify Scholarism as a pawn (*qizi* 棋子) manipulated by politicians backed by foreign powers in London and Washington. The 3 September episode of *ATV Focus*, an evening prime-time news commentary broadcasted on weekdays, portrayed Hong Kong as polarised between the “constructive camp” (*jianshepai* 建設派) and the “destructive camp” (*pohuipai* 破壞派). The student activists were labelled as “wilful young ruffians” (*renxing shiqi de eshao* 任性使氣的惡少) who are “extremely poor at playing politics,” adding the barely concealed threat that they were putting their soul, studies, and futures at risk.⁽²²⁾ The program is understood to be under the charge of Louie King-bun, former senior editor of the pro-Beijing newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*.⁽²³⁾ In fact, the day after the controversial show was released, *Ta Kung Pao* itself ran a front-page report assailing the teachers and activists that joined the anti-national education hunger strike, reviling them as “black hands” (*heishou* 黑手) controlled by political forces.

The provocative ATV program precipitated an avalanche of complaints. Tens of thousands wrote to the communications authority saying that the program had breached the authority's code of practice, which states that free-to-air television licensees should ensure that their programs are accurate and impartial. The chief editor of ATV news resigned.⁽²⁴⁾ Chang Ping, one of China's best-known commentators, called the episode Hong Kong's “4/26 moment.” He drew parallels with the 1989 Tiananmen democracy movement – “the same young faces, the same steel in their eyes, the burning passion, the fearlessness” – and compared the ATV program to the notorious *People's Daily* editorial of 26 April 1989, which branded the peaceful demon-

14. “Xuesheng aiguo pinghe wen yingfou ting guohuo” (Students quizzed on whether they should support made-in-China products in “patriotic assessment”), *Ming Pao*, 18 July 2012.
15. Alexis Lai, “National education’ raises furor in Hong Kong,” CNN, 30 July 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/30/world/asia/hong-kong-national-education-controversy/index.html> (consulted on 12 November 2012).
16. The police put the turnout at 32,000.
17. The movement registered a peak turnout of 120,000 on its busiest night.
18. Albert Cheng, “HK's young activists bring hope of democracy,” *SCMP Insight & Opinion*, 14 September 2012.
19. Emily Ting, “No thought control,” *SCMP Young Post*, 31 July 2012, <http://www.yppscmp.com/home/website/Article.aspx?id=4394> (consulted on 12 November 2012). “Xuemin sichao quan jilu” (Record of Scholarism), *iSun Affairs*, 26 July 2012, www.isunaffairs.com/?p=9552 and <http://www.isunaffairs.com/?p=9558> (links consulted on 12 November 2012).
20. Alex Lo, “National education a lost cause for CY,” *SCMP*, 3 September 2012.
21. Alex Lo, “Just who is brainwashing whom?,” *SCMP*, 5 September 2012.
22. The video and transcript are available at the website of ATV, www.hkatv.com/v5/11/atv_focus (consulted on 12 November 2012).
23. Simpson Cheung and Laura Zhou, “10,000 complain over ATV programme calling Scholarism a ‘pawn’,” *SCMP*, 5 September 2012.
24. *Ibid.*

strations in Beijing an upheaval. He observed the same tactics deployed against students: belittling their intelligence by depicting them as manipulated puppets, and representing them as a grave threat to social stability.⁽²⁵⁾ The attachment of the "black hand" label is nothing new – It has been variously applied to democracy advocates such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo. Worryingly, it is the same repertoire of strategies and stock of lexicons that these Hong Kong news groups are now faithfully drawing from.

The mainland media did not extensively cover the Hong Kong protests. When they did, they showed clear disapproval. A *Global Times* editorial expressed its surprise at the "strong emotions and lack of rationality" that riveted Hong Kong society, saying that it behaved like "Cairo one year ago" rather than "a developed democratic society."⁽²⁶⁾ Mostly it resorted to information blocks. Scholarism's account on Sina Weibo was frozen, and for a time, keywords such as "national education" and "Leung Chun-ying" were reportedly banned from microblog searches.⁽²⁷⁾

Censorship did not prevent mainlanders from showing solidarity for the movement raging on the other side of the border. Among the most vocal are those now living and working in the SAR. Speaking at a public forum, Hong Kong-based journalists Hui Kei and Zhang Jieping shared their experience of being brought up to unconditionally love the Communist Party under the Chinese education system. "National education is packaged to not look like brainwashing, so Hongkongers will be willing to have a trial run," Zhang cautioned. "But once thoughts take root, there will be no turning back."⁽²⁸⁾ Another widely circulated essay was penned by a mainland student living in Hong Kong, in which the author presents a powerful critique of patriotic education for encouraging the mindless glorification and repetition of what both teachers and students know to be lies.⁽²⁹⁾ Disconcertingly, such gestures of support for Hong Kong proved to be dangerous. Zhang Xuedong, a teacher at the East China University of Political Science and Law in Shanghai, was suspended for airing anti-national education views on his Sina Weibo account. An outspoken critic, Zhang had previously petitioned China's Education Minister Yuan Guiren to abolish compulsory classes and exams on Marxism for university students.⁽³⁰⁾

Nationalism with Hong Kong characteristics?

The national education debate directed attention to the fundamental issue of what patriotism and nationalism mean for the SAR: Should there, indeed, be a version of "nationalism with Hong Kong characteristics"? "It is as ridiculous as it is sad that, while the world is hungry for knowledge and understanding of a country that is home to one-fifth of the world's population and its second-largest economy, we in Hong Kong are rejecting this need," writes a lecturer at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. "Young people in Hong Kong know so little about China that getting to know it is as essential as learning addition and subtraction."⁽³¹⁾ It would be a grave mistake, however, to simplistically label opponents of national education as refusing to learn anything about China. Many were against national education as it was designed and conceived by the Education Bureau, and not necessarily against introducing the subject itself.

The strongest critique concerns the kind of nationalism being fostered as defined by the Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide. Tsang Wing-kwong, professor at Chinese University, points out that the proposed national education encourages a kind of primordial, essentialist nationalism that is irrelevant to and incompatible with the situation of the SAR. It is built on dated notions of kinship ties, geographical embeddedness and

boundedness, and feelings of consanguinity as found in concepts such as "blood is thicker than water" (*xuenong yushui* 血濃於水), "descendants of Yanhuang" (*Yanhuang zisun* 炎黃子孫), and "sons and daughters of the land of the Yellow River" (*Huanghe dadi de ernü* 黃河大地的兒女). This type of ethnic nationalism based on deep-seated, narrowly-defined notions of "same roots, same hearts" (*tonggen tongxin* 同根同心) often conflates "family" and "nation" and leads easily into exclusivistic ethnocentrism. The draft Curriculum Guide also explicitly adopts a passion-based (*yiqing weiben* 以情為本) or inspiration-by-passion (*yiqing yinfa* 以情引發) approach in educating youngsters.⁽³²⁾

What is appropriate for Hong Kong, Tsang proposes, is the cultivation of "civic nationalism." In contrast to ethnic nationalism, which builds solidarity based on irreducible and unchanging elements such as blood ties, civic nationalism emphasises a sentiment of "comradeship" based on the equal participation and mutual cooperation taking place within what German thinker Jürgen Habermas called "a community of citizens," with the collective vision of sharing in the same fate (*gongtong mingyun* 共同命運) and being in the same boat (*tongzhou gongji* 同舟共濟). Eric Ma, professor at Chinese University, makes the similar argument that any form of national education for the city must seek to bring up "citizen-nationals" (*gongmin guomin* 公民國民) who respect basic humanity and do not distinguish between we-group and them-group, love and hate based on blood ties.⁽³³⁾

While some believe that national education as a subject can be retained with its problematic contents plucked out, others advocate for a more fundamental reform that replaces *guomin* education with citizenship or civic education (*gongmin jiaoyu* 公民教育). The city's ethnic minorities, for example, have rallied alongside opponents of national education, saying that the proposed curriculum marginalises them and risks engendering racism.⁽³⁴⁾ An honorary adviser of the Hong Kong Association of the Heads of Secondary Schools recommends the introduction of a citizenship education that cultivates "democratic and constructive patriotism" through promoting the universal values of multiculturalism, pluralism, and cosmopolitanism.⁽³⁵⁾ The Hong Kong Alliance for Civic Education has since 2002

25. Chang Ping, "HK's student protesters must stay focused on national education," *SCMP Insight & Opinion*, 8 September 2012.
26. "Mainland has no desire to change HK," *Global Times*, 10 September 2012, <http://www.global-times.cn/DesktopModules/DnnForge%20-%20NewsArticles/Print.aspx?tabid=99&tabmoduleid=94&articleid=732083&moduleid=405&PortalID=0> (consulted on 12 November 2012).
27. Ada Lee, "Scholarism's Joshua Wong embodies anti-national education body's energy," *SCMP*, 10 September 2012.
28. Jennifer Ngo, "HK-based journalists from mainland label national education 'brainwashing'," *SCMP*, 19 August 2012.
29. Hu Qingxin, "Ni yongyuan meiyou banfa jiaoxing zhuangshui de ren" (You can never wake up someone who is pretending to sleep). Full text available at the House News, <http://thehousenews.com/patriotism/%E4%BD%A0%E6%B0%B8%E9%81%A0%E6%B2%92%E6%9C%89%E8%BE%A6%E6%B3%95%E5%8F%AB%E9%86%92%E8%A3%9D%E7%9D%A1%E7%9A%84%E4%B%A%BA> (consulted on 12 November 2012).
30. John Kennedy, "Shanghai academic quits CCP after teaching duties suspended," *SCMP*, 10 September 2012.
31. C. K. Yeung, "Critical reflection needed on national education," *SCMP Insight & Opinion*, 16 August 2012.
32. Tsang Wing-kwong, "Xianggang tequ guomin jiaoyu de yulun pian" (A Critique of the debate surrounding national education for the HKSAR), *Jiaoyu Xuebao*, vol. 39, No. 1-2, 2011, pp. 1-24.
33. Eric Ma Kit-wai, "Blood thicker than water: Are the Chinese born to love their country?", *Ming Pao Opinion*, 8 October 2012.
34. There are an estimate 14,000 ethnic minority students attending government-subsidised schools. Christy Choi, "HK minorities urge the use of civic study instead of national education," *SCMP*, 23 August 2012.
35. Wong Wai-yu, "Some suggestions toward resolving the present situation concerning Moral and National Education," *Ming Pao Opinion*, 6 October 2012.

worked towards the development of teaching materials for schools in this direction.⁽³⁶⁾

A second point of contention is the suspiciously urgent introduction of national education when the teaching of Chinese history itself has been neglected for more than a decade. In the curriculum reform initiated in 2000, it was determined that Chinese History was no longer required to be taught as an independent, standalone subject. Instead, the teaching of Chinese History can be broken down and parcelled out, for example through combination with World History or incorporation into an Integrated Humanities program. Only 5 percent of total school hours need to be allocated to Chinese history-related topics. As of 2008, only about 70 percent of secondary schools still kept Chinese History on their lists of subjects.⁽³⁷⁾ Barely more than 8,300 out of some 73,000 student candidates took the Chinese History paper in the 2012 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, less than half of the number of students who, for instance, took Chemistry or Economics. The number is expected to fall further.⁽³⁸⁾

Many have since called for the resurrection of Chinese History as a compulsory subject in junior secondary forms. In 2008, the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers joined forces with Education Convergence and two history teachers' groups to form the "united action group on the popularisation of national history education" (*guan zhu pu ji guoshi jiaoyu lian he xing tong zu* 關注普及國史教育聯合行動組), petitioning the Tsang administration to bring the subject back. Then in June 2011, after the government released the consultation draft for Moral and National Education, the Democratic Party tabled a motion to reinstate Chinese History. Ironically, the demand was blocked by the pro-establishment camp.⁽³⁹⁾ The apparent lack of concern for Chinese History teaching stood in stark contrast to the displayed enthusiasm for national education, and made the public reasonably wary of the genuine intentions behind the insistent push for the program's introduction.

"De-Sinicising" Hong Kong

The national education controversy also led to an intense debate over the phenomenon of "de-Sinification" or "de-Sinicisation" (*qu Zhongguohua* 去中國化) in Hong Kong. The term de-Sinicisation has been most strongly associated with the pro-Taiwan independence or the Taiwanisation (*Taiwan bentuhua yundong* 臺灣本土化運動) movements, which under the Chen Shui-bian administration from 2000-2008 led to campaigns aimed at eliminating Chinese influence and strengthening the separateness of Taiwanese identity. To Beijing, the de-Sinicisation label basically entails the most serious offense of advocating secession, separatism, and independence with the aim of breaking up China.

As the national education debate raged on, two influential Hong Kong-based commentators of *Yazhou Zhoukan* (亞洲週刊) – a newsmagazine founded by Time Warner in 1987 and bought out by the Ming Pao Group – wrote that the controversy is putting the city in a "very dangerous" de-Sinicisation crisis (*qu Zhongguohua weiji* 去中國化危機). Tan King-sin argued that opponents of national education have thrown out the "China" baby (*Zhongguo* 中國) when they tried to get rid of the murky "Chinese Communist Party" (*Zhonggong* 中共) bathwater. "China" has become a term hijacked by politics and a target of unrelenting demonisation (*bei yaomohua* 被妖魔化).⁽⁴⁰⁾ Editor-in-chief Yau Lop-poon cautioned that by not drawing a clear distinction between the Party and the state (*dangguo bufen* 黨國不分), "anti-Communist sentiment has unknowingly evolved into anti-China

sentiment."⁽⁴¹⁾ Yau argued that Hong Kong is "losing China" (*Xianggang zhengzai shiqu Zhongguo* 香港正在失去中國) and turning into an "ahistorical city" (*qu lishi de chengshi* 去歷史的城市), and called upon the populace to rediscover its own narration and knowledge of China (*minjian Zhongguo lunshu* 民間中國論述).

The de-Sinicisation debate was triggered by the waving of British flags and the colonial flags of Hong Kong at recent protests, including at anti-national education rallies. The Facebook Group "Raise the Flag on Hong Kong" (*Xianggangqi piaoyang* 香港旗飄揚), for example, advocates the use of colonial flags to show discontent with the current administration and to "resist China's colonial rule in Hong Kong" (*fandui Zhongguo dui Xianggang shixing zhimin tongzhi* 反對中國對香港實行殖民統治). The pieces by Tan and Yau further cited growing publicity for the Hong Kong City-State Autonomy Movement (*Xianggang chengbang zizhi yundong* 香港城邦自治運動). The Autonomy Movement was initiated based on the influential writings of Dr. Chin Wan-kan, who teaches Chinese studies at Lingnan University. Chin argues that Hong Kong has a quality of "purity" it should not lose and advocates for it to become a self-governing city-state.⁽⁴²⁾ Publicity for the Autonomy Movement has grown with exacerbating relations between mainlanders and Hong Kongers aggravated by a series of incidents. In mid-September, the Liberate Sheung Shui Station campaign (*guangfu Shangshui zhan* 光復上水站) was organised by netizens, with British flags and placards reading "Chinese people scram back to China!" used to protest the influx of parallel goods traders.

The *Yazhou Zhoukan* pieces were received with trepidation by some of the city's public intellectuals. Journalist Ng Chi-sum penned an alarmed reply cautioning against the careless gesture of putting the de-Sinicisation hat (*koushang qu Zhongguohua de maozi* 扣上「去中國化」的帽子) on the anti-national education movement. The Autonomy Movement remains a minority in the city, Ng points out, and had little if any influence on the anti-national education movement. Rather than de-Sinicisation, what the movement hoped to achieve was eliminating the influence of the Chinese Communist Party (*qu Zhonggonghua* 去中共化) and preventing Party worship. Applying the de-Sinicisation label is a dangerous move that puts Hong Kong's civil society on equal footing with those rallying for Taiwan independence.⁽⁴³⁾

Ng's premonition of political escalation proved justified. As anti-national education rallies petered out in October, officials began to strike back through a series of high-profile public remarks targeting "forces" calling for

36. "Xiang Gang: Renmin jiaoyu zai minjian" (Hong Kong: Civic education in the society), *iSun Affairs*, 26 July 2012, www.isunaffairs.com/?p=9602 (consulted on 12 November 2012).

37. Lee Chi-hung, "Zhongguo lishi jiaoyu yushi bingjin" (Chinese history education moving forward with the times), Education Bureau, www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=6389&langno=2 (consulted on 12 November 2012).

38. Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority press release, "2012 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination Results Released."

39. Dennis Chong, "Bring back Chinese history, say lawmakers," *SCMP*, 17 June 2012.

40. Tan King-sin, "Xianggang guomin jiaoyu zhi zheng jue qu Zhongguohua weiji" (Hong Kong's national education debate must avoid crisis of de-Sinicisation), *Yazhou Zhoukan*, Vol. 26, No. 33, 2012, http://www.yzzk.com/cfm/Content_Archive.cfm?Channel=ae&Path=2283519512/33ae1a.cfm (consulted on 12 November 2012).

41. Yau Lop-poon, "Gangren yao xunhui minjian Zhongguo lunshu" (Hong Kongers must rediscover its own narration of China), *Yazhou Zhoukan*, vol. 26, no. 37, 2012, <http://yzzk.com/cfm/inews.cfm?Path=2254475392&File=20120906/yz041636.htm> (consulted on 12 November 2012).

42. Website of the movement available at http://hkam2011.blogspot.hk/2011/06/blog-post_25.html (consulted on 12 November 2012).

43. Ng Chi-sum, "Fan xinaoshi guomin jiaoyu jiushi qu Zhongguohua ma?" (Is opposing brainwashing national education 'de-Sinicisation'?), *Ming Pao Opinion*, 21 August 2012, <http://news.sina.com.hk/news/20120821/6-2750033/1.html> (consulted on 12 November 2012).

Table 1 – Comparison of the 2008 and 2012 Hong Kong Legislative Council elections.

	2008 Legislative Council election	2012 Legislative Council election
Geographical constituencies (GCs)	30	35 Two seats added to New Territories East, and one each to New Territories West, Kowloon East, and Hong Kong Island.
Functional constituencies (FCs)	30	35 30 Traditional FCs 5 District Council (Second)
Total	60	70

independence (*Gangdu shili* 港獨勢力). *China Daily* bluntly characterised the Moral and National Education debate as “a political duel between national identity recognition and ‘Hong Kong independence’ activists.”⁽⁴⁴⁾ Former deputy director of Beijing’s Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office Chen Zuo’er warned that separatist forces are “spreading as quickly as a virus” in the SAR.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The Office’s former director, Lu Ping, attacked advocates of separatism as “sheer morons” and remarked with acrimony that they should renounce their Chinese nationality, as China “would not be bothered losing this handful of people.”⁽⁴⁶⁾ In certain commentaries, the SAR is portrayed as a base for foreigners scheming to destabilise China. The *China Daily* piece said that “Hong Kong has become a beachhead for Western powers headed by the US [...] and they have trained a bunch of native speakers to act as their functionaries with a much larger number of followers.”⁽⁴⁷⁾ Lew Mon-hung, a delegate to the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, alleged that Hong Kong is being built into a bridgehead for Americans to bring about a colour revolution in China.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The worrying escalation of the national education debate against the background of growing mutual enmity demonstrates the fragile and volatile state of relations between mainland China and Hong Kong. As a *Ming Pao* editorial soundly cautions, the politically charged labels of “de-Sinicisation” and “separatist forces” risk upgrading the city’s politics to the level of ideological struggles (*shanggang shangxian* 上綱上線) through the manufacturing of false enemies and contradictions (*diwo maodun* 敵我矛盾).⁽⁴⁹⁾ Should Beijing take to the diagnosis that Hong Kong is under the “viral” threat of forces vying for independence, greater intervention in the SAR’s affairs through appendages such as the Central Liaison Office will only be legitimised as a necessary prescription.

A deadlocked government

Managing the increasingly delicate relationship between the mainland and Hong Kong will thus be one of the top governing challenges of the new SAR administration. It must demonstrate loyalty to Beijing, appease local supporters, and at the same time be responsive to an increasingly vocal civil society. The national education controversy has demonstrated the complicated considerations and potential difficulties associated with such a task,

and the Leung administration’s management of the rapidly unfolding crisis was found wanting. The launching of the Occupy Tamar movement left Leung staunchly unmoved. Even into the fifth day of the siege, Leung told protesters that the “precondition” for talks “cannot be withdrawing or not withdrawing” the program.⁽⁵⁰⁾ He changed his mind five days later, vowing not to forcibly introduce national education within his term.

Granted, the newly inaugurated administration was inexperienced. An official later admitted that the government was encumbered by a combination of a “brand new” education minister and “baggage-carrying” officials who, having participated in the preparation of national education for years under the Tsang administration, saw its introduction as a matter of “normal course” and following “standard operational procedures.”⁽⁵¹⁾ Nonetheless, the administration’s delayed reaction also showed its straddled position. On the one hand, it misjudged the extent and tenacity of public opposition and must struggle belatedly to maintain its popular legitimacy. On the other hand, it had to take into account the political interests of its own supporters in the government, including many Beijing-friendly groups that have braved public opinion and stood for national education.

The strategic significance of both was magnified with the 2012 Legislative Council election taking place in September, in which the makeup of the city’s new legislature for the next four years was to be decided. The 2012 election was significant in that it was the first election to take place after the passage of the constitutional reform package in 2010. Under the new format, the number of seats has increased from 60 to 70, with an additional five seats for both geographical constituencies (GCs) and functional constituencies (FCs). The FCs category has since its inception been criticised as dominated by anti-democratic special interest groups with links to Beijing, and elected based on extremely narrow mandates. The five newly added seats under FCs, colloquially referred to as “superseats,” were instead elected by all registered voters who are not eligible to vote in traditional FCs. Based on a much broader public mandate, the superseats opened a new battleground for the pro-establishment and pan-democratic camps.

At first the government, straddled by the pro-establishment camp’s concern that backing down on national education would help the pan-democrats gain political capital, insisted on launching the program. Their underestimation of the resilience of public opposition eventually forced the government to haphazardly abandon its policy just one day before the election in order to avoid an electoral disaster. The pan-democrats’ clear stance against national education, however, seemed to have translated weakly in bolstering electoral support. Although they performed well in the FCs, securing three out of five superseats and increasing their traditional FCs seats

44. Keung Kai-hing, “‘HK independence’ attempt a display of political naivete,” *China Daily*, 18 October 2012.

45. “Chen Zuo’er: Gangdu shili ru bingdu manyan” (Chen Zuo’er: Hong Kong independence forces spreading like a virus), *Ming Pao*, 15 October 2012.

46. Gary Cheung and Stuart Lau, “Love China or leave, Lu Ping tells Hong Kong’s would be secessionists,” *SCMP*, 1 November 2012. Lu Ping, “HK can’t do without mainland,” *SCMP* Letters to the Editor, 12 October 2012.

47. Keung Kai-hing, *art. cit.*

48. Lew Mon-hung, “Qu Zhongguohua shi fanduipei peihe Mei chongfan Yatai de zhengzhi biaoyan” (“De-Sinicisation” is the opposing camp’s cooperation with America’s return to Asia political show), *Wen Wei Po*, 24 September 2012.

49. “Gangdu maozi buneng luankou” (The hat of “Hong Kong independence” cannot be casually put on), *Ming Pao* editorial, 26 October 2012.

50. “Withdrawing national education classes not an option, C.Y. Leung says,” *SCMP*, 4 September 2012.

51. Gary Cheung, “Leung ‘caught off guard’ by national education row, Wu says,” *SCMP*, 20 October 2012.

from four to six, in the GCs they secured only 18 out of 35 seats, a disappointing result compared with the 19 out of 30 seats won four years ago.⁽⁵²⁾

It remained unclear whether the last-minute concession offered by Leung appeased some voters and thereby assisted the pro-establishment camp in the election. Many of the victories won by pro-establishment candidates could be attributed to a formidable system of centralised planning and meticulous coordination (*peipiao* 配票) that proved particularly useful under a system of party-list proportional representation based on the Hare quota. Some from the pro-establishment camp, in fact, found Leung's climb-down strikingly ill-timed. Lau Nai-keung, a member of the Basic Law Committee of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, called Leung's inopportune announcement a "clumsy political move" that pleased no one. "To those who braved unspeakable pressure to come forward to show their support for national education," he argued, "this amounts to an unprincipled sell-out."⁽⁵³⁾ Attending to increasingly vocal public opinion amidst a general anti-mainland atmosphere while not alienating loyal supporters within the government will be a growing challenge for the SAR administration.

The 18th Party Congress Reshuffle

The once-in-a-decade leadership transition in China will have an impact on mainland-Hong Kong relations. As analysts point out, the new Politburo Standing Committee included "an unprecedented number of party officials with strong Hong Kong connections".⁽⁵⁴⁾ Xi Jinping, the new President, has been heading the Central Leading Group on Hong Kong and Macau Affairs since 2007. Zhang Dejiang, who was Guangdong party secretary from 2002 to 2007, and Zhang Gaoli, who was Shenzhen party secretary from 1997 to 2001, both met with SAR officials on a regular basis during their time in the southern province. Looking ahead, as Xi takes up his new position as the top leader of China, he will continue to chair the Leading Group but will become altogether less hands-on with regard to the affairs of the SAR. At the same time, though he failed to join the Standing Committee, Li Yuanchao is tipped to be promoted to vice-president, who, according to tradition, is responsible for supervising Hong Kong affairs. Li is a close protégé of Hu Jintao known for his relative open-mindedness, and his appointment "could mean a relatively open atmosphere for Hong Kong."⁽⁵⁵⁾

Despite this hopeful sign, political commentator Johnny Lau Yui-siu believes that the central government is gradually "losing patience" with the intractable city. Members of the powerful Politburo have developed an "antagonistic mentality" and are ready to put the city "in a tighter Beijing grip."⁽⁵⁶⁾ A changing tone can already be detected in Hu Jintao's report at the 18th Party Congress. In his section on Hong Kong and Macau affairs, two new expressions have been picked out by analysts as signals of a novel Beijing interpretation of the SAR's political situation.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The first is the new emphasis on the importance of "protecting national sovereignty, security, and developmental interests" (*weihu guojia zhuquan anquan fazhan liyi* 維護國家主權、安全、發展利益), in contrast to the past focus on defending the principles of "one country, two systems," "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong" and "a high degree of autonomy." Hu pointedly highlighted the need to "prevent and stop foreign forces (*waibu shili* 外部勢力) from interfering in Hong Kong and Macau affairs." Following his report, the deputy director of Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office published a 6,000-word article in the pro-Beijing *Wen Wei Po* calling on the SAR government to legislate the anti-subversion security law Article 23 "in due course" to combat growing "external interference".⁽⁵⁸⁾

The second is the novel expression that Hong Kongers must "share in the integrity and glory of being Chinese" (*gongxiang zuo Zhongguoren de zunyan he rongyao* 共享做中國人的尊嚴和榮耀). This gentle reminder directly points to the "return of people's hearts": As a *Global Times* editorial points out, mainlanders have grown "quite uncomfortable with a few Hong Kong people's nostalgia for its colonial past and sense of superiority against mainlanders."⁽⁵⁹⁾

What mainland officials perceive to be the growing power of de-Sinicisation and separatist forces in the SAR may indeed harden their resolve and strengthen their belief that Hong Kong youths need a healthy dose of national education. With the controversial Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide shelved on October 8, the Civic Alliance Against National Education has called it a temporary victory. Others believe that the government's climb-down is only a delaying tactic, as the introduction of national education has only been shelved, not completely abolished.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Given the freedom to decide whether to introduce national education and how to introduce it, individual schools have now become the new battlefields for vigilant activists, and for more optimistic educators the new laboratories for developing more objective syllabi to teach the next generation about China. While Hong Kongers will not see the government push for national education in the next five years, the issue will remain a highly sensitive one as citizens of the former British colony continue to negotiate their identity and grapple with the profound implications of their city's return to Chinese rule.

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52. In the FCs, opposition to national education assisted Ip Kin-yuen, the candidate representing the Professional Teachers' Union to contend for the Education FC, in defeating his opponent Ho Hon-kuen, the representative of Education Convergence. The Union's crucial role in the Civic Alliance Against National Education was thrown in stark contrast to Ho's refusal to participate in the 29 July demonstration.
53. Lau Nai-keung, "National education climbdown wins no friends," *SCMP* Insight & Opinion, 14 September 2012.
54. Chow Chung-yan and Colleen Lee, "First-hand experience helps Xi keep tabs on HK affairs," *SCMP*, 16 November 2012.
55. "Li Yuanchao tipped to oversee Hong Kong and Macau affairs," *SCMP*, 10 November 2012.
56. Tanna Chong and Tony Cheung, "Beijing will use tighter rein on HK, says analyst," *SCMP*, 18 October 2012.
57. "Gangdu maozi houyizheng fouxian" (The side-effects of "Hong Kong independence" showing), *Ming Pao* editorial, 9 November 2012. "Hu criticises Hong Kong separatism in 18th Party Congress report," *Apple Daily*, 9 November 2012, <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/first/20121109/18062006> (consulted on 12 November 2012).
58. Joshua But, "Fury at claim of foreign 'interference'," *SCMP*, 23 November 2012.
59. "Mainland has no desire to change HK," *Global Times*, 10 September 2012, www.globaltimes.cn/content/732083.shtml (consulted on 12 November 2012).
60. Albert Cheng, "HK's young activists bring hope of democracy," *art. cit.*