

Chapter 50

Education for Justice–Oriented and Participatory Citizenship in a Politicized Era in Hong Kong

Shun Wing Ng

The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Koon Lin Wong

The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims at introducing issues of citizenship education arising from the social, historical, and political context of Hong Kong before and after its handover from Britain to the People's Republic of China in 1997. It then analyzes conceptions and typologies of active and participatory citizenship and the impeding factors affecting promotion of participatory and justice-oriented citizenship in the citizenship education curriculum by reviewing the education policy documents published by the Hong Kong Education Bureau. Ultimately, it conceptualizes four stages of development of citizenship education chronologically in Hong Kong with regard to the nature of politicization and de-politicization. Through reflection on the political movements triggered by young people in recent years in Hong Kong, this chapter concludes by specifying the importance of nurturing participatory and justice-oriented citizens in the citizenship education classrooms with immediate urgency for students' development, especially in the rapidly changing social and political context of Hong Kong.

INTRODUCTION

Education cannot be separated from its social and especially political contexts. It is shaped by its own history and socio-economic and political development (Leung, et al., 2014; Ng, 2016). Thus, the political implications of the education system, curriculum development and educational process always become the focus of studies of many scholars and educational researchers (Lee, 1996). For example, Patrick (2002) argued that the curriculum and pedagogy in the subject of civic education in the United

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States was perceived as contributing to nurturing undemocratic attitudes among youngsters in the 1960s because the textbook content avoided emphasis of social and political problems, lacked skills of critical thinking and inquiry, and highlighted unrealistic portrayal of political and civic life in that era. Hong Kong has also undergone the similar situation to that described above in the process of development of civic or citizenship education (Leung & Ng, 2004; Ng, 2009; Yuen & Byram, 2007). Morris (1997) points out that understanding of development of citizenship education in a society is a reflection of its specific social, political, economic and historical contexts.

It is generally agreed that education for citizenship aims at preparing young people to become active and participatory members of local, national and global communities. The role of participatory citizenship within social cohesion is considered to be a force involved in retaining the values of equity and diversity through the activities of civil society (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009). In this regard, one of the objectives of citizenship education relates to the promotion of values of societal participation such as becoming socially and politically responsible and aware of oppression and structural inequalities. However, citizenship education is never neutral or ideologically free and its character is influenced by the global view in which it is embedded (Howard & Patten, 2006; Leung et al., 2014).

In Hong Kong, citizenship education had never been substantially implemented during the period of colonization in which people were socialized to be apolitical and anational because the British colonial government successfully indoctrinated subject political culture during the period of their colonial rule (Ng, 2016; Ng et al., 2000). As criticized by Leung et al. (2014), Hong Kong's citizenship education has always been adopted as a means to discourage popular political participation. Thus, many people are politically apathetic. It is reactive and remedial in addressing civic issues such as the lack of civic knowledge and civic courage among young people and weak national identity, etc. (Fairbrother & Kennedy, 2012). Though de-politicization of citizenship education curriculum has still been prevalent in the post-handover era, interestingly, a lot of students from secondary and tertiary education institutions have taken initiatives to participate in the mass demonstrations on 1st July and in the candle night of memorizing the victims in the Tiananmen Square Incident to fight for social justice and democracy since 2003. Their active participation appears to take many Hong Kong people by surprise in such an apolitical education environment.

This chapter aims at introducing the social and political context of Hong Kong before and after its handover from Britain to the People's Republic of China (PRC). It then analyses the importance for promoting active, participatory and justice-oriented citizenship in the citizenship education curriculum. By reviewing and examining chronologically the education policy documents issued by the Hong Kong Education Bureau, it comes up with a clear picture regarding the nature of politicization and de-politicization of citizenship education development in Hong Kong and the types of citizens envisaged to be nurtured at each stage. Issues and concerns of education for participatory and justice-oriented citizenship are also explored. With reference to the political incidents having occurred in recent years, this chapter concludes by specifying the importance of adopting appropriate pedagogies in the citizenship education classroom for nurturing participatory and justice-oriented citizens with immediate urgency, especially in the swiftly changing social and political context of Hong Kong.

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