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Education and Colonial Transition in Singapore and Hong Kong: comparisons and contrasts

JASON TAN

ABSTRACT As Hong Kong approached its hand-over to Chinese sovereignty, it has been instructive to compare its experience with that in other former British colonies. This article focuses on how education policies in areas such as the medium of instruction and curriculum changed as Singapore moved towards self-government and independence in the 1950s and 1960s. It also compares the changes that took place in Singapore with those currently occurring in Hong Kong. Observations will be made about the likelihood of the 'one country, two systems' concept working in Hong Kong after 1997.

Introduction

Amid the discussion on education and the 1997 change in political sovereignty in Hong Kong, it may be instructive to ask what lessons may be learned from the experience of other former British colonies. This article focuses on Singapore, which came under British control in 1819 and attained self-government in 1959. As in Hong Kong, the period of political transition from British colonial rule in Singapore, which lasted from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, was fairly long. Neighbouring Malaya had become independent in 1957 and in 1963 Singapore merged with Malaya, North Borneo and Sarawak to form Malaysia. In 1965, Singapore abruptly left Malaysia to become an independent nation. Initially, therefore, Singapore's transition was to integration with another state rather than to sovereign independence.

Another similarity between Singapore and Hong Kong lies in their importance as regional and international trading centres. Furthermore, both have fairly small land areas and majority Chinese populations. However, there are several major differences between the two. Unlike Singapore, Hong Kong is not likely to secede or to be ejected from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and become an independent nation. Second, Hong Kong's population is approximately 98% Chinese, while only approximately 78% of Singapore's population is Chinese. Policy making in the latter has therefore had to take into consideration the multiethnic nature of the population. Another difference is that considerations of China loom large in Hong Kong's politics and economy. However, Singapore's political leaders have had to take care that Singapore is not seen as a 'third China' (with the PRC and Taiwan), located as it is in the midst of neighbouring countries with Malay-Muslim majorities. Yet another difference is that while Singapore's colonial transition took place before it experienced rapid economic growth, Hong Kong's has taken place after it had attained international renown as one of the four 'Asian Tigers'.
The first part of this article examines the ways in which Singapore's education policies in the period of colonial transition changed in major areas such as the curriculum and medium of instruction and shows how these changes were inextricably linked to the concurrent political changes. The following section compares and contrasts the changes which took place in education in Singapore during its colonial transition with those currently occurring in Hong Kong. Observations will be made about the likelihood of the 'one country, two systems' concept working in Hong Kong education after 1997. Of particular interest is the fact that while Singapore still retains certain colonial links 30 years after full independence from Britain, some of these links have already been eroded or severed in Hong Kong.

Colonial Transition in Singapore and its Impact on Education

Throughout the nineteenth century, the British colonial authorities' involvement in educational provision was minimal. Apart from providing free primary education for a few years in the Malay language for a small number of ethnic Malays, the authorities accepted no responsibility for providing English-medium, Chinese-medium or Tamil-medium education at the primary or secondary levels. The task of establishing and funding schools was left almost entirely in the hands of Christian missionaries and wealthy merchants from various ethnic communities. Limited government grants were introduced for privately run English-medium schools, but none were forthcoming for Chinese- and Tamil-medium schools. Education was far from universal (Wilson, 1978; Turnbull, 1989).

The system of education in the first four decades of the twentieth century continued to be characterised by 'the absence of a single, clearly enunciated, guiding policy' (Wilson, 1978, p. 29). No attempts were made to articulate a common set of goals towards which all schools should strive. There was a wide range of schools, varying in terms of the management structure, government control and supervision, the medium of instruction, curricula and the quality of teaching staff (Gopinathan, 1974). The only schools where children of different ethnic backgrounds were enrolled were the English-medium schools, which catered for only a small minority. These schools were favoured by the colonial authorities in terms of funding and opened doors to clerical employment in the colonial civil service or in trading firms. The overall effect of such a system was socially divisive, accentuating racial, linguistic and cultural differences as well as the gap between rich and poor.

The first signs of a major reorientation in education policy appeared in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. In 1946 the government tabled a 10 year programme founded on several general principles (Colony of Singapore, 1948). One of them was universal, free primary education in any of the four main languages—Chinese, Malay, Tamil and English—in accordance with parental choice. Secondly, education was to aim at fostering civic loyalty and responsibility with a view to extending the capacity for self-government. 'Regional' schools, i.e. schools that served all ethnic communities regardless of race or creed, were encouraged, as was intermingling of students from various ethnic communities in school activities. In addition, a common primary school curriculum was suggested.

In a bid to find a long-term solution to various problems faced by the Chinese-medium schools, a committee representative of all parties in the Legislative Assembly was established in 1955 to make recommendations for the improvement of Chinese-medium education. The All-Party Report recommended that there should be equal treatment for all the four language streams—English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil (Singapore Legislative Assembly, 1956a). Secondly, the report recommended that a Singapore-centred loyalty and a Malay consciousness be inculcated through the use of standardised and Malayанизed textbooks for all schools. Thirdly, opportunities should be provided for students in English-medium and non-English-medium schools to study a second or third language, a move that was intended to prepare for the eventual merger of Singapore with the Malayan Federation. Besides promoting Malay as the national language in the Malayan Federation, Singapore would upset the balance of power by using English in education (Editorial Board, 1958). An English-medium school was established in 1958.

Fifthly, the report recommended that there should be a compulsory second subject at the primary level. The report also recommended that a Singapore-centred loyalty and a Malayan consciousness be inculcated through the use of standardised and Malayанизed textbooks for all schools. Finally, the report recommended that a Singapore-centred loyalty and a Malayan consciousness be inculcated through the use of standardised and Malayанизed textbooks for all schools.

Most of the report's recommendations were subsequently taken into account in the Colonial Transition Ordinance and commonalities Act in 1958 that granted non-Malay the right to vote and gave them the right to run English-medium, Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium schools, in which students from the different ethnic backgrounds were enrolled.

In yet another move to strengthen the use of Malay, a move that was intended to promote the eventual merger of Singapore with the Malayan Federation in the Malayan Federation, the Singapore government introduced the Ordinance and commonalities Act in 1958 that granted non-Malay the right to vote and gave them the right to run English-medium, Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium schools, in which students from the different ethnic backgrounds were enrolled.

The newly elected People's Action Party (PAP) government stated its commitment to the imposition of a common primary school curriculum in the Malayan Federation Act in 1958 that granted non-Malay the right to vote and gave them the right to run English-medium, Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium schools, in which students from the different ethnic backgrounds were enrolled.

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The new constitution was designed to foster and promote the interests of the indigenous people and state education should be a common primary school curriculum in the Malayan Federation Act in 1958 that granted non-Malay the right to vote and gave them the right to run English-medium, Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium schools, in which students from the different ethnic backgrounds were enrolled.
non-English-medium schools to interact through extramural activities. Fourthly, civics should be a compulsory subject in all schools and appropriate textbooks should be prepared. Fifthly, the report recommended bilingual education in primary schools and trilingual education in secondary schools. In particular, English and Malay were mentioned as compulsory languages. Besides being considered an important lingua franca in multilingual Singapore, the former was thought to be important for commercial and industrial development and for maintaining relations with other Commonwealth countries. The latter was felt to be important because of Singapore's close relationship with the Malayan Federation, where Malay was to become the official language. In addition, Malay was considered an important language for communication with Indonesia and the Borneo territories.

Most of the report's important recommendations were included in the White Paper on Education Policy released a few months later (Singapore Legislative Assembly, 1956b). Steps were subsequently taken to implement some of these recommendations. A single Education Ordinance and common Grant-in-Aid regulations were introduced in 1957 to replace existing ordinances and regulations. In addition, the Ministry of Education formed a Syllabuses and Textbooks Committee to draw up common syllabuses and textbooks. Civics was introduced into all schools (Doraisamy, 1969).

Further changes in educational policy occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s along with developments in the political arena. The British Parliament passed a State of Singapore Act in 1958 that granted self-government and local control over all domestic affairs. Plans were made for elections to a 51 member, fully-elected Legislative Assembly the following year (Turnbull, 1989).

The newly elected Peoples' Action Party (PAP) Government, led by Lee Kuan Yew, stated its commitment to equal treatment for the four streams of education (Ministry of Education, 1959). Another key area that was addressed was the enduring problem of social cohesion among the various ethnic and linguistic communities. The PAP implemented several measures to develop a common purpose and direction for the education system that it felt was still lacking. The Education Ministry's Syllabuses and Textbooks Committee revised all primary and secondary school subject syllabuses (Ministry of Education, 1962). In particular, a common ethics syllabus was published for primary and secondary schools (Ong & Moral Education Committee, 1979). Another measure was the concept of integrated schools, in which students using different language media for instruction were housed in common buildings under one principal. Joint participation in sports and other extramural activities was encouraged (Ministry of Education, 1959). The third measure involved standardising training for teachers in the four language media. Fourthly, the number of years of schooling was standardised for all four language streams. Finally, common national examinations were instituted at both the primary and secondary levels.

In yet another move to unify the education system, Malay was declared the national language, a move that was in line with the PAP's commitment since its founding in 1954 to the eventual merger of Singapore with the Federation of Malaya. The PAP hoped that promoting Malay as the national language would allay the fears of the ethnic Malay majority in the Malayan Federation that merger with the predominantly ethnic Chinese population in Singapore would upset the existing racial composition and balance of political power (Petir Editorial Board, 1958). All non-Malay-medium schools had to teach the national language as a second or third language (Ministry of Education, 1964).

The new constitution explicitly recognised the special position of the Malays as the indigenous people and stated the government's responsibility to 'protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language' (Singapore Government, 1958, p. 1). In the field of
education, various special policies were implemented in line with the promises laid out in the constitution. For instance, in 1960 the government announced that all Malays who were Singapore citizens or children of Singapore citizens would receive free secondary and tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 1962).

Further political developments during this period added to the politicisation of the education policy. The merger between Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak to form Malaysia was accomplished in 1963. Singapore left control over foreign affairs, defence and internal security to the central government in Kuala Lumpur, but retained considerable autonomy in finance, labour and education (Turnbull, 1989). Despite this autonomy, the federal authorities' exercise of control over internal security compromised Singaporean autonomy in education policy in some instances. For example, the federal authorities arrested student protesters from Nanyang University and Chinese-medium secondary schools in 1963. These students were allegedly involved in communist activities (Gopinathan, 1974).

As a result of the merger, Malays in Singapore found themselves part of a politically dominant Malay community. However, Singapore had its own constitution and did not implement the system of Malay quotas and special rights practised in the rest of Malaysia (Malaysia, 1963, Article 68). This highlighted the disparity in policies with respect to the Malays between Singapore and the rest of Malaysia and increased Singaporean Malay agitation for greater economic and political opportunities. The Singapore Government responded by rejecting calls for special quotas for Malays. Instead, education was to be the main means by which Singaporean Malays would close the socioeconomic gap separating them from other Singaporeans (Lee, 1965a, b).

This fundamental disagreement between the Singapore leadership and the central Kuala Lumpur government on how to approach the problem of ethnic economic imbalances led to a heightening of ethnic tensions during this period (Fletcher, 1969). Amid escalating ethnic tensions and increasingly vitriolic exchanges between Singaporean and Malaysian politicians, the Malaysian Prime Minister decided to expel Singapore in August 1965, less than 2 years after merger.

The PAP Government under Lee Kuan Yew reiterated its commitment to a multiracial and multilingual society (Turnbull, 1989). Lee felt that Singaporeans lacked the 'in-built reflexes' of loyalty and patriotism (Lee, 1966, p. 3). Once again, the education system was seen as a key means of promoting social cohesion. From 1966 onwards, all students were required to sing the national anthem each day as the national flag was being raised or lowered. They also had to recite a pledge of loyalty (Ministry of Education, 1966).

Social cohesion was also promoted through revisions to the civics and history syllabuses. A committee was formed to develop yet another civics syllabus that was introduced in all primary and secondary schools in 1968. Patriotism, loyalty and civic consciousness were stressed as desirable values (Ong & Moral Education Committee, 1979). At the same time, a new set of history textbooks in the four languages was published for use in primary schools. These textbooks related the story of the various immigrant communities and their descendants in Singapore.

The PAP continued its support of bilingualism in schools. The study of two languages, one of which was English, had already been made compulsory in primary schools in 1960. This policy was extended to secondary schools in 1966 (Ministry of Education, 1966). The rationale for bilingualism now become more explicit. The English language was to be retained as an important economic language and lingua franca. At the same time, the study of Chinese, Malay or Tamil, now termed mother tongues, was deemed crucial to the preservation of 'traditional values'.

With the increasing importance placed on English, not only in the education system but also in the economy, enrollments in non-English-medium schools plunged. By 1968, English-medium schools accounted for nearly 80% of all school enrollments.

Singapore and Hong Kong

A comparison of the sociopolitical experiences of the PRC政权 and the Hong Kong and Singapore examples highlights some similarities. First, as noted above, both cases have witnessed the heightening of ethnic tensions and increasingly vitriolic exchanges between Singaporean and Malaysian politicians, the Malaysian Prime Minister decided to expel Singapore in August 1965, less than 2 years after merger. At the same time, the education system was seen as a key means of promoting social cohesion. From 1966 onwards, all students were required to sing the national anthem each day as the national flag was being raised or lowered.

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With the increasing importance placed on English, not only in the education system but
also in the economy, enrolments in English-medium schools continued to surge. Meanwhile, enrolments in non-English-medium schools fell steadily. By 1983, when enrolment in English-medium schools had approached 90% of the total, the government announced that all schools would use English as the major medium of instruction from 1987 onwards.

Singapore and Hong Kong Compared and Contrasted

A comparison of the sociopolitical context in which decolonisation occurred in Singapore and that in which decolonisation is currently taking place in Hong Kong reveals a few major similarities. First, as noted at the beginning of this article, British colonialism was involved in both cases. Second, the duration of the timetable for the change of sovereignty has in both cases far exceeded most patterns elsewhere. The timetable in Singapore covered 20 years from the immediate post-war years until independence in 1965, while the period from the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in September 1984 until July 1997 spanned nearly 13 years.

At the same time, there are a few major differences. First, Singapore's base of human capital in the mid-twentieth century was much weaker than that in Hong Kong at the end of the century. This meant that Singapore had the added task of expanding access to primary and secondary education during its colonial transition. Secondly, the ethnic composition of the two populations differed. Ethnic Chinese accounted for approximately 78% of Singapore's population, with Malay and Indian minorities accounting for approximately 14 and 7% respectively. Policy making in Singapore in the transition period was thus made more complex by the multiethnic nature of the population. Hong Kong lacks numerically significant minorities, with ethnic Chinese forming approximately 98% of the population.

Thirdly, PRC played a much more significant role in discussions about decolonisation in Hong Kong than in Singapore. Unlike most erstwhile colonies, Hong Kong is not moving towards independence but to reintegration with the PRC. Some observers have questioned whether what is happening in Hong Kong is recolonisation rather than decolonisation. In contrast, Singapore moved from colonial status to approximately 4 years of self-government, followed by less than 2 years as a Malaysian state, before finally attaining full sovereignty. However, since the merger between Singapore and Malaya was strongly favoured by the British, it might be argued that it was also an example of recolonisation. Education policy making in Singapore during the transition was heavily influenced by considerations of the merger. It also took into account the need to allay the fears of Malaya's ethnic Malay majority about the loyalty of the ethnic Chinese majority in Singapore.

An examination of the changes in education policy accompanying both these colonial transitions also reveals major similarities and differences. The following discussion focuses on these similarities and differences, particularly in curricular reform and language policy and links them to their respective sociopolitical contexts.

The first major similarity involves curricular reform such as syllabus and textbook revision. Morris (1992) provided a comprehensive review of these processes, aspects of which are elaborated upon by Morris & Chan in this issue. The changes have included the addition of new subjects, the revision of existing subjects and an emphasis on civic education. For example, government and public affairs and liberal studies were added as new examination subjects in the late 1980s and early 1990s, respectively. Changes in the syllabuses for subjects such as history, geography and social studies have been implemented since the 1980s. The syllabus revision has been aimed at preparing students for their role as future citizens of both Hong Kong and the PRC. There is also increasing politicisation of the curriculum. For instance, in 1994 the Director of Education was involved in a controversy over the inclusion
of the events of 4 June 1989 in a new Chinese history textbook (Lee & Bray, 1995, pp. 365-366). Two years later, several educational organisations have called for the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Diaoyutai islands to be included in history textbooks.

As in Singapore civic education was also emphasised in Hong Kong in the run up to 1997. A year after the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1984, the Education Department issued a set of guidelines on civic education (Civic Education Committee, Education Department, 1985). In 1996, another set of guidelines was published (Education Department, 1996). The 1996 guidelines explicitly mentioned the transmission of knowledge about current PRC Government ideologies, Chinese culture and Chinese history, as well as the development of 'national identity and patriotic spirit' (Education Department, 1996, p. 22).

A major feature of curricular reform in Singapore was a Malayanisation of textbooks and syllabuses in the mid- and late-1950s. For example, less emphasis was placed on British geography and history and more emphasis was placed on the Malayan context. After independence, a corresponding process of Singaporeisation occurred. However, unlike moves in Hong Kong to increase knowledge about China, the curricula in Chinese-medium schools in Singapore were revised to reduce the emphasis on China. Since the mid-1950s and even up until the present time, social cohesion, civic loyalty and patriotism have figured prominently in the official education policy in a bid to draw together a multiethnic, multilingual population. Hong Kong, however, has not had to deal with the problem of uniting students from different language streams or ethnic groups. Instead, a major theme has been the preparation of students for their future status as citizens of the PRC. Syllabuses have been revised to include greater coverage of the PRC. Care has also been taken to portray the PRC in a more favourable light in textbooks and syllabuses.

Another major similarity in both Singapore and Hong Kong has been the contentious nature of language policy. Because of the British colonial presence, English has been one of the key languages in both cases. Hong Kong, unlike Singapore, has not had to deal with four parallel media of instruction. It might seem that Hong Kong's language policy making is therefore less complex as there are only two major media of instruction, English and Chinese. However, as noted by Adamson & Auyeung Lai in this issue, controversy about which medium of instruction to adopt and for which groups of students continued to plague the system on the eve of reintegration with China.

As in Singapore, Hong Kong has witnessed a progressive drift towards English-medium schools because of the economic benefits that parents perceive their children to gain from being competent in the language. However, with the advent of compulsory 9 year education since 1978, the majority of students have had great difficulty learning through English. Consequently, many schools that claim to teach in English actually teach either in Cantonese or in mixed code (Johnson et al., 1991). Language policy has featured prominently in a number of official and semi-official documents (see, for instance, Education Commission, 1990, 1995). Bilingual proficiency in both languages has been deemed important for Hong Kong's continued economic competitiveness. However, officials have sought, with limited success, to encourage both school authorities and parents to shift from English-medium to Chinese-medium instruction.

Another complication in the Hong Kong case is the discussion of the relative status of Cantonese tēu-d-eui Putonghua, the official language of the PRC. Since the 1980s the Education Department has encouraged the study of Putonghua in primary and secondary schools. Further grants were announced in 1995 for the improvement and expansion of Putonghua teaching and learning in schools. It is to be offered as an examination subject in the secondary school leaving examinations from 1998 onwards (Education Commission, 1995). Preliminary steps have been taken in the Sydney schools to offer Putonghua as an examination subject in the secondary school leaving examinations from 1998 onwards (Education Commission, 1995).

The Singapore experience shows that decisions is likely to link language policy and student performance. As in the case of Hong Kong, the Singapore education system has been revised to include greater coverage of the PRC. Care has also been taken to portray the PRC in a more favourable light in textbooks and syllabuses.

The current stress on the development of 'national identity and patriotic spirit' will likely continue to affect the Hong Kong education system. Further impetus may be given by the increasing importance of Cantonese and Hokkien in the local language scene. At the same time, it might seem that Hong Kong's language policy making is therefore less complex as there are only two major media of instruction, English and Chinese. However, as noted by Adamson & Auyeung Lai in this issue, controversy about which medium of instruction to adopt and for which groups of students continued to plague the system on the eve of reintegration with China.

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Preliminary steps have also been taken to introduce simplified Chinese characters into Hong Kong schools in order to bring Chinese language teaching closer in line with that in the mainland. In this respect, Singapore is far ahead of Hong Kong, having opted to keep in close step with changes in the PRC. Simplified Chinese characters were introduced in schools in the early 1970s and romanised Chinese (hanyu pinyin) in the mid-1970s.

The Singapore experience with language policy also shows that controversy over policy decisions is likely to linger after Hong Kong’s hand-over of sovereignty. Language policies have been revised periodically in response to the perceived ineffectiveness of the bilingual policy and to student difficulties in learning two languages (see, for instance, Ministry of Education, 1979, 1991). There is at times intense debate over the roles played by the various languages in Singapore society, in particular the link between language proficiency and cultural values (Pakir, 1992). Similar controversy will inevitably continue in Hong Kong after 1997. The main issues will be the respective roles of English, Cantonese and Putonghua in schools and in society at large. There will be strong and at times conflicting pulls. English will continue to offer international mobility and Putonghua access to the huge mainland economy as well as being a symbol of cultural proximity to the mother country, with Cantonese remaining a strong symbol of a distinct Hong Kong identity.

The current stress on developing a greater awareness of Chinese history, culture and national identity will likely lead to a gradual devaluation of the role of English in Hong Kong. Further impetus may be added to this trend if the number of PRC individuals, firms and businesses operating in Hong Kong continues to increase. Were Hong Kong to have become a sovereign state rather than reverting to the PRC, it seems likely that English would have retained a much stronger role.

At the same time, it is unlikely that Cantonese in Hong Kong will experience the fate it has suffered in Singapore since the advent of the Speak Mandarin campaign in 1979. The campaign aimed at eliminating the use of the various Chinese ‘dialects’ such as Teochew, Cantonese and Hokkien and encouraging the use of Mandarin instead. The main arguments put forward in favour of Mandarin are that Mandarin is the language of ‘high’ Chinese culture, that it is the best choice as a lingua franca among ethnic Chinese from different ‘dialect’ groups and that it will reduce the language learning burden for ethnic Chinese schoolchildren. In the period since the campaign was launched, the proportion of children who claim to use the Chinese ‘dialects’ at home has declined sharply. Instead, English and Mandarin have taken over as the dominant household languages for ethnic Chinese schoolchildren. In contrast, in Hong Kong Cantonese has not faced any serious threat to its status as the dominant language of social interaction from either English or any of the other Chinese dialects. Even in neighbouring Guangdong Province, where Putonghua is the sole official language, Cantonese continues to flourish as a major language of social intercourse. This is because the official policy in the PRC, while promoting Putonghua as the common national language, does not aim to stamp out the use of the various regional languages. Thus, the situation in Hong Kong after 1997 will probably be similar in some respects to that in Guangdong Province. Cantonese will continue to hold sway in informal social interactions. The only difference might be that Cantonese and Putonghua will co-exist as major languages in official contexts.

Hong Kong has been fortunate in having avoided some of the thorny issues that the Singapore Government has had to encounter. A notable example is the issue of ethnic disparities in educational achievement. In particular, the Singapore Government undertook various measures between 1960 and 1965 to narrow the gap in educational attainment between the ethnic Malay minority and the non-Malays. Thirty years after independence, these disparities continue to be highlighted by the government. Malay community groups
have received government assistance in their bid to improve educational achievement through such means as private tuition classes for students (Tan, 1995).

At present, the issue in Hong Kong that is most similar to this is the problems faced by new immigrant children in Hong Kong schools. These children have often spent a considerable part of their lives in the PRC and now have to adapt linguistically, culturally, and socially to life in Hong Kong. Some observers feel that they are unable to cope with instruction in Cantonese and English, having had their schooling in the PRC entirely in Putonghua. To date the Education Department has not instituted any comprehensive measures to address the problem (Mak, 1996).

The private international schools sector and the government-assisted English Schools Foundation (ESF) in Hong Kong, both of which cater largely for the children of expatriates working in Hong Kong, have expanded during the last few years of the colonial era. Little public controversy has been aroused by the heavy government subsidies to the ESF and, for a brief period of time, a number of international schools. This may be due to the fact that an increasing proportion of students in international and ESF schools are either the children of prospective Hong Kong emigrants or the children of returned migrants who have already secured foreign passports. The issue of ethnic disparities in Hong Kong has thus become overlaid with that of class and does not assume the significance that it has in Singapore. Bray & Leong (1996) predicted that the international schools sector is likely to have a strong future. They mentioned that in the event of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government increasing pressure on local schools to teach in Chinese, the international schools would be in demand from parents who wish their children to be fluent in English. In addition, some international schools may provide access to foreign university education for the children of PRC nationals employed in Hong Kong.

Finally, a major question in Hong Kong concerns the extent to which it will be possible to have one country, two systems in education. Although considerable autonomy has been promised, the Singapore case has shown that where matters of internal security are concerned the central government may find it necessary to override regional autonomy in education. Such a scenario may arise, for instance, when students participate in anti-government protests. It is not hard to envisage such a situation arising in Hong Kong, particularly in view of the precedents set by the involvement of students in various protests, such as those that occurred after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989.

Conclusion

The Hong Kong education system is undergoing some changes in the transition period that are similar to those previously seen in Singapore. This article has identified some broad similarities in the changes undertaken. It has also highlighted and explained some key differences.

A major similarity has been curricular reform, involving the addition of new subjects, the revision of existing syllabuses and the rewriting of textbooks. However, the exact nature of the reforms has varied according to the respective sociopolitical imperatives in both cases. First, curricular reform in Hong Kong has been heavily influenced by considerations of reintegration with the PRC. Textbook and syllabus revision has centred around greater coverage of the PRC. In Singapore, great effort was made to prepare standardised syllabuses and textbooks to replace the formerly disparate syllabuses and textbooks being used in the four language streams.

Civic education has been another key area of concern during the periods of colonial transition in both Singapore and Hong Kong. Civic education in Hong Kong has focused on preparing students for the civic education in Singapore, the multietnic population.

Language policy has also been an area of concern. Policy deliberations in Singapore contrast to the debate in Hong Kong. Singapore has adopted the language of social interaction as Putonghua with the aim of promoting Putonghua proficiency among their mestizo population. In Hong Kong, the many ethnic minority groups have one country, two systems in education after 1997. Hong Kong has also found that its education is likely to increase in status. In Hong Kong the issue of ethnic disparities in education is being addressed. Ethnic disparities in Singapore's colonial transition have been implemented specific education policies. The education system will provide interesting comparative evidence. The extent of autonomy is likely to increase with increasing political sovereignty.

Ethnic disparities in Singapore's colonial transition have also been implemented specific education policies. The extent of autonomy is likely to increase with increasing political sovereignty. This is particularly the case for ethnic minorities such as Chinese, Indian, and Malay. In contrast, ethnic minorities in the PRC will continue to be discriminated against. The extent to which the Chinese language will be used in the education system is likely to increase in significance.

Despite assurances in the Joint Declaration of 1997, the extent to which the Chinese language will be used in the education system is likely to increase in significance. The extent to which the Chinese language will be used in the education system is likely to increase in significance. The extent to which the Chinese language will be used in the education system is likely to increase in significance.

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preparing students for their future roles as citizens of the PRC and Hong Kong. In contrast, civic education in Singapore focused on forging a common national identity among a multiethnic population.

Language policy has come under official scrutiny in both Singapore and Hong Kong. Policy deliberations in Singapore have involved Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil, in contrast to the debate involving English, Cantonese and Putonghua in Hong Kong. The role and status of the former colonial language, English, has been on the ascent since independence. It is now the major medium of instruction in all schools. In Hong Kong, Putonghua is likely to increase in status as a language of government as well as communication with the PRC. Schools will therefore come under increasing pressure to improve Putonghua proficiency among their students. Cantonese will probably retain its status as the major language of social interaction. It is unlikely that the central PRC Government will promote Putonghua with the aim of stamping out regional languages as the Singapore Government has done in its Speak Mandarin campaign. Since Hong Kong was reverted to Chinese sovereignty instead of attaining full independence, English is likely to decline in societal status. In Hong Kong the English language may maintain its dominant status in higher education after 1997. However, its status in primary and secondary education will become increasingly precarious amid official moves to promote the greater use of Chinese as the medium of instruction. It will probably lose further ground as efforts to strengthen Chinese national identity among Hong Kong students gain ground. Hong Kong and Singapore thus provide interesting contrasts in how the status of the colonial language changes alongside shifts in political sovereignty.

Ethnic disparities in educational achievement have assumed a much larger role in Singapore's colonial transition than in Hong Kong. In particular, the Singapore Government implemented specific education policies to assist the Malay community in the years between self-government and independence. So serious were the disagreements between the Singapore Government and the Malaysian Federal Government over how to approach the issue of ethnic economic imbalances that they led in part to the eventual expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia. In contrast, ethnic disparities have received relatively little attention in Hong Kong. Government subsidy of international schools and ESF schools, the majority of whose students are the children of expatriates working in Hong Kong, has not provoked major controversy. This is partly because these schools also cater for the children of returned Hong Kong emigrants and prospective emigrants. Any ethnic overtones have thus become overlaid with class.

Despite assurances in the Joint Declaration of stability in Hong Kong's education system over the next 50 years, further reforms are likely to occur in the immediate post-1997 period, in particular those that seek to strengthen student identification with and loyalty to the PRC. The extent of autonomy enjoyed by Hong Kong in terms of education policy will hinge not only on the Joint Declaration provisions, but also on other factors. These include the relationship between the central Beijing leadership and the SAR Government, as well as the extent to which the central authorities perceive Hong Kong school curricula and student involvement in political activities to represent a threat to their own legitimacy.

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