One Hong Kong: Two Histories
‘Chinese History’ and ‘History’ in the Hong Kong School Curriculum

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1. The Origins of a Unique Division - Why are there 2 history subjects in the Hong Kong school curriculum?

It is common practice in most countries for the school subject of history to be divided in two, with part of the school history course devoted to national history, and part devoted to the history of the rest of the world. However, Hong Kong’s school curriculum is, to our knowledge, unique in the way it separates ‘History’ and ‘Chinese History’ into two entirely distinct subjects.¹ Our purpose in this paper is to first look briefly at the origins of this division, but then to focus on the situation during the past two or three decades and the nature of the very different subject cultures which the two ‘histories’ have acquired. We consider the roles and relative status of the two subjects in the light of the various political and educational changes that Hong Kong has experienced over the past few decades. In an attempt to make our discussion of these differences more concrete, we have looked at the way in which textbooks, examination papers and marking schemes for the two subjects have dealt with three particularly sensitive historical topics. Finally, we attempt to explain why the division between the two histories has persisted into the post-colonial period, and we draw some conclusions about the impact of colonialism on history teaching and on the treatment of issues of culture and identity in Hong Kong schools.

There are two types of schools in Hong Kong, categorized as English medium and Chinese medium schools. English medium schools are often referred to as Anglo-Chinese schools in which all subjects are taught in English except Chinese Language & Literature, and Chinese History. Chinese medium schools are commonly termed Chinese Middle schools where all subjects are taught in Chinese except English Language. The first government Chinese Middle school was established in 1926. At that time the Chinese Middle schools mainly followed China’s 6-3-3 system. The curriculum, which included

¹ ‘History’ is often referred to locally as ‘World History’ in order to distinguish it from ‘Chinese History’, but the official title of the subject is simply ‘History’.
syllabus, textbooks and subjects were all adopted from China. In the Anglo-Chinese schools, emphasis was put on English language and World knowledge (of History, Geography, and Natural Science). Classical Chinese was included as supplementary course.

For the Anglo-Chinese schools, when the Certificate of Education Examination (CEE) was inaugurated in 1937, History, taught in English, existed as an independent subject. At that time, Chinese History did not exist as a single subject. It was incorporated in Chinese Studies. The inclusion of Chinese History in the CEE can be dated back to 1950 when a subject called Chinese literature and history was introduced in the examination. It was not until 1965 that Chinese History became an independent subject, alongside the separate subject of History in the Anglo-Chinese school CEE.

In the case of Chinese Middle schools, the subject ‘History’ comprised both Chinese History and World History. When the first High-level exam (for grade 12) was introduced in 1952, the history syllabus included contemporary Chinese history (1644-1945) and modern Europe (1789-present). It was in 1967 that Chinese History became an independent subject in the CEE in Chinese as well as Anglo-Chinese Middle Schools.

The transformation of the status of Chinese History, from being a part of Chinese Literature in Anglo-Chinese schools and History in Chinese Middle schools, to becoming an independent subject in the curriculum, could be seen as the result of a desire on the part of Hong Kong’s colonial administration to construct a legitimating shield against anti-colonial sentiments.

During the Republican period (1912-1949), there were no locally produced textbooks and hence Hong Kong schools had to use textbooks published in China which tended to be virulently nationalist and anti-foreign (Report of the Chinese Studies Committee, 1953, p.31). As early as 1953, the Chinese Studies Committee was established by the colonial government. It criticised the content and methods of Chinese studies (including Chinese History) in China, and subsequently stated the committee’s view of the unique nature of Hong Kong and hence the mission of Chinese studies in the colony.
In the past, Chinese studies in China tended to aim at producing arrogant and bigoted Chinese nationalists. This is not educationally sound and should be strongly discouraged in Hong Kong. Since the founding of the Republic, the Chinese politicians have striven hard to unite the nation by appealing to the people’s patriotism, narrow nationalism and racialism. This explains why History textbooks published in China usually contain anti-foreign allusions, comments and propaganda, and are, therefore not quite suitable for use in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is contiguous to China. It is not only the show-window of World democracy in the East, but also the meeting-place and melting-pot of Eastern and World cultures. Here, Chinese pupils cannot only retain and cherish what is best in their culture, but learn of what is best in British and World thought.

In these textbooks, the emphasis should be on social and Cultural History rather than Political History. Objectivity in treatment is, of course, to be strictly observed, especially in connection with such topics as the Boxer Uprising and the so-called Opium War. (Report of the Chinese Studies Committee 1953, p.31)

However, particularly since ‘Chinese History’ was to be taught in Chinese, the work of drafting syllabuses and writing textbooks was not under the direct or detailed supervision of expatriate colonial officials. So long as they avoided sensitive issues in modern Chinese History, and did not dwell on the iniquities of foreign encroachments on Chinese sovereignty, the scholars who devised the curriculum were free to pursue their own agenda, which was generally one of intense cultural conservatism. The curriculum for Chinese History that emerged thus aimed at giving students a thorough grounding in the history of traditional, dynastic China, ending abruptly at 1911. Provided there was no threatening of the colonial regime, the government only exercised a symbolic control over the development of the subject.

From the 1950s onwards, Hong Kong secondary schools thus had two entirely separate history subjects. The separation was reinforced by the use of different
languages of instruction for Chinese and ‘World’ History, since part of the rationale for separating history into two subjects was that it made no sense to teach the history of China to Chinese students through the medium of English. Hong Kong’s expanding system of publicly funded schools was overwhelmingly English medium. Initially, EMI schools were encouraged by the government, which was willing to give funding to schools (almost always EMI) established by missionaries, but less willing to grant assistance to CMI schools. However, there was also strong demand from local parents for an English-medium education for their children. The pedagogical implications of using English to teach World History in particular will be examined briefly below. As regards medium of instruction policy in general, by the late 1970s, as Hong Kong’s secondary schools were attempting to adapt to cater for a mass rather than an elite student clientele, the government began to advocate mother-tongue instruction. However, unwillingness to hazard the regime’s fragile legitimacy on this controversial issue meant that it was not until just before the formal handover to Chinese rule that the government decided to compel most schools to switch to using Chinese as the medium of instruction.

As a result of this change in government policy, History, as well as Chinese History, is now taught in Chinese rather than English in most schools in Hong Kong. It might be supposed that this language factor, along with the demise of the colonial regime in response to whose political concerns the old curriculum for Chinese History was devised, would open the way for an abolition of the arbitrary division of History into two subjects. However, for reasons that will become apparent, Hong Kong schools look set to retain their two histories for some time to come.

2. Contrasts between the two histories

A. Aims of history education.

History teaching for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination(CEE) (Grade 11) took its present shape following the establishment of the Curriculum Development Committee in 1972. This committee drew up a ‘Teaching Syllabus’
establishing criteria for two separate history subjects: World History and Chinese History. Before they did so, the teaching of history had been largely based on the requirements of the different examinations, namely HKCEE, Higher level exam and Advanced level exam. These ‘Examination Syllabuses’ stipulated the aims of the examination and attached a list of the topics that were to be examined.

Under the previous examination syllabuses, the aims of education for History were unstated, perhaps because they were regarded as too obvious to require elucidation. The transmission of ‘historical knowledge’ was the assumed aim of both History and Chinese History, with past examination papers and marking schemes exercising a strong influence on pedagogy.

With the introduction of the Certificate level ‘Teaching Syllabus’ for History and Chinese History in 1983 and 1990 respectively, considerable differences became apparent in the intended curricula for the two histories. While History focussed on the development of skills, the official syllabus for Chinese History now specifically stated its objectives of nurturing students’ good conduct through the study of historical figures as moral exemplars, and of highlighting the value of understanding traditional Chinese culture.

However, it is doubtful whether the publication of these official curriculum statements signified any radical new divergence between the two subjects. By the time of the publication of these official teaching syllabuses, the two histories had long since acquired distinct subject cultures of their own. Not only were they entirely separate at the school level, taught in different languages by different teachers responsible to separate ‘History’ and ‘Chinese History’ panel chairs, but the separation extended to university level and to teacher training arrangements. At the University of Hong Kong, for example, dynastic Chinese History was and still is taught in Chinese by lecturers belonging to the Chinese Department, while the history of modern China is taught largely in English by lecturers from the History Department.

History has tended, by virtue of the language in which it has been taught and the background of those involved in the development of syllabuses and the training of teachers, to be heavily exposed to overseas influences, particularly from England. Thus, from the 1970s onwards, English officials and university lecturers, most notably Tony
Sweeting at the University of Hong Kong, and through him a number of local teachers and curriculum developers who were his students, have themselves been influenced by changes which have taken place in history teaching in England. For example, Sweeting (1974) sought in the 1970s to import some of the methods and concerns associated with the ‘New History’ in England, emphasising the ways in which history could be used to teach interpretative and analytical skills, as well as inculcating more liberal social attitudes.

As in England during the same period, in Hong Kong over the past thirty years attempts to justify the teaching of history in terms of the skills it imparts have been symptomatic of a perceived need to defend the retention of the subject within an increasingly crowded school curriculum. However, in Hong Kong the predicament of history as a school subject has been complicated by the fact that it has been taught in a foreign language: English. The competency of many Hong Kong teachers to teach in English has long been in doubt – and even more so the ability of most students to learn through English. English-medium education has helped to ensure that rote memorisation of model examination answers has been overwhelmingly the dominant style of pedagogy across the school curriculum. This has naturally tended to frustrate efforts to transform history in schools into a skills-oriented, critical discipline. In addition, the perception of history on the part of both students and many school principals as a subject that is neither very important or relevant has led to a steady decline since the late 1970s in the proportion of secondary students taking history. A 1996 study found that secondary three students ranked history among the least ‘important’ of their subjects – only PE, Music and Art were considered ‘unimportant’ by more students. History was also ranked 13th out of 15 in terms of the number of students who considered it their most interesting subject. (Yuen, 1996)

By contrast, the same study found that considerably more students considered Chinese History interesting, and far fewer considered it ‘unimportant’ than was the case with History. Unfortunately, the author of that study made no attempt to investigate the reasons for this. However, data gained from interviews with teachers and curriculum developers, along with our own personal experience, has led us to conclude that the reasons for Chinese History’s greater popularity are firstly that it has always been taught
in the students’ own language, and secondly that the intellectual demands it makes on students differ from those made by History. In addition, the status of Chinese History within the school curriculum as a whole has tended to be strengthened in recent years as a result of Hong Kong’s transition to Chinese rule, since in curriculum terms this subject has been seen as the tabernacle of the eternal flame of Chinese culture. The security of its status is reflected by the fact that the Advanced level syllabus for Chinese History has hardly changed for thirty years or more. Changes made to the Certificate level (grade 11) Chinese History are mainly confined to the extension of the period of study. Members of the Chinese History teaching community have not felt compelled to justify the continued existence of their subject in terms of ‘skills’ or complex and demanding pedagogical objectives. Even though the Chinese History syllabus has acquired a formal list of worthy aims, little attempt has been made to translate these into practice by reforming the methods of assessment.

Thus, in the case of World History, the changing aims of the official subject syllabus have led to actual changes in the classroom, so that students now, for example, encounter data-based questions requiring more analytical skill than factual recall, as well as learning something about local history. The moralistic agenda of Chinese History, with its emphasis on factual recall rather than analysis, has by contrast remained essentially unchanged. This lack of change is a reflection of the complacency of a subject community assured of retaining or even enhancing its status within Hong Kong’s schools.

**B. Chronological Scope**

In terms of the chronological scope of the two subjects, World History has always focused to a far greater extent on contemporary history. Indeed, the new syllabus for Certificate level History, due to come into effect in about four years time, is devoted entirely to twentieth century history. Students are currently required to study between 100 and 200 years of world history, mainly to do with Europe and East Asia. Chinese history covers more than 3,000 years but it was only in the 1990 syllabus that the scope of studies was extended up to 1976. In other words, the study of contemporary Chinese History, following the end of the Second World War, was avoided for more than 40
years. Even now many teachers do not bother with the contemporary period because of the amount of time needed to cover dynastic history, and because many of them feel less familiar with the more modern topics in the syllabus. This is reflected in the small number of candidates who choose to answer questions on the contemporary period.

The origins of the neglect of contemporary Chinese History owed much, however, to the desire of the colonial authorities from the 1950s into the 1980s to keep politics – especially Chinese politics – out of the school curriculum as far as possible. The aversion towards political controversy that many teachers have retained has contributed to the neglect of contentious topics such as the Chinese Civil War (though not of the concurrent Sino-Japanese conflict, which is also covered in the World History syllabus). While nationalist sentiments with a small ‘n’ may now be politically correct, many teachers have preferred to avoid voicing opinions on the Nationalist-Communist rivalry which has dominated Chinese history for so much of the contemporary period.

Both History and Chinese History devote a great deal of attention to political history. In the case of World History, a greater concentration on nineteenth and twentieth century history, along with a new topic structure that since the mid-1980s has focused on issues such as nationalism, liberalism and the development of representative government, has provided students with ‘a more politicized historical framework than was previously the case, and one more relevant to Hong Kong’s future’ (Morris 1988). Chinese History, by contrast, has continued to encourage apolitical sentiment on the part of students. The political bent of Chinese History relates to the rise and fall of the dynastic cycles over three millennia. Thus students of Chinese History are taught of the glories of China’s traditional civilisation, the virtues of wise and strong rulers, and the evils of weak government and foreign depredation, invariably portrayed as the consequences of corrupt and venal behaviour on the part of emperors or their officials.

C. Assessment through Public Examinations

Until the early 1990s, both subjects followed a similar assessment system at Certificate level, using essay questions and multiple choice questions. At A’ level, assessment was entirely essay-based until 1994. However, from 1993 and 1994, data-
based questions totalling 40% of the assessment weightings have been included in World History at Certificate level and A’ level respectively. Meanwhile, assessment methods for Chinese History in the Certificate level have remained unchanged. It was in 1994 that data-based question totally 25% was included in the Advanced level Chinese History. Data-based questions have served as the means of implementing World History’s concern with students’ acquisition of historical methods or skills, whereas, as we have already noted, the acquisition of such skills has not been similarly valued in the study of Chinese History as far as the Certificate level is concerned.

The numbers of students taking Chinese History at HKCE and A/AS level have consistently been much higher than the numbers of those taking History – in most years roughly double. This has probably owed much to a perception on the part of students of Chinese History as a relatively straightforward, if dull, examination subject. The fact that History, as well as posing a somewhat more taxing intellectual challenge to candidates in public examinations, has, until very recently, been largely taught and examined in English, may well have deterred many students who are weak in English from taking the subject.

Both Chinese History and History continue to set a multiple choice paper at HKCE level, though in the case of History the weighting of this paper has been reduced following the introduction of data-based questions. The minutes of History subject committee meetings at the Hong Kong Examinations Authority, as well as interviews with the subject officer, indicate that one of the main reasons for the retention of multiple choice questions has been a lack of confidence in the ability of markers to exercise their own discretion. The subject officer believes that multiple choice questions, if they are set well, can test skills besides simple factual recall, although other members of the subject committee have occasionally expressed reservations about the retention of this type of question. In the case of Chinese History, however, the question of the appropriateness of multiple choice questioning as a form of assessment does not appear to have troubled curriculum developers.

The following table summarises the differences between the intended curricula for History and Chinese History.
The intended curriculum for Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (CEE) (Grade 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Chinese History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-1983: aims unstated or assumed, emphasis on transmission of historical knowledge</td>
<td>• 1990: aims unstated, emphasis on transmission of historical knowledge</td>
<td>• 1990: understand traditional Chinese culture, and the political, social and economic aspects of the dynastic history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983: 3 main skills to be developed: -identifying relationships between events in their time context. -providing rational explanations for historical events on the basis of the evidence available. -thinking sceptically and empathetically.</td>
<td>• nurture students’ good conduct through the study of historical figures. -develop students’ objectivity and analytical power through learning the causal relationship between historical events’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content - Chronological scope of studies</td>
<td>• pre-1983: A. East Asia 1870-1952 B. Europe 1870-1960 C. The USA 1860-1963 (any two papers to be studied)</td>
<td>• pre-1990: From ~2100 BC (Xia dynasty) to either 1911 (end of Qing dynasty), or 1945 (end of the Sino-Japanese War), or 1949 (the founding of the Peoples’ Republic of China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1983: 14 topics on Asian &amp; European history, covering the period 1760-1970 (from 1993, 8 of the more modern were designated ‘core’ topics – for purposes of MCQ and DBQ assessment)</td>
<td>• 1990: From ~1600 BC (Shang dynasty) to 1976 (the downfall of the Gang of Four).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessment</td>
<td>• pre-1983: Paper I- Two essay questions, Paper II- Multiple Choice</td>
<td>• pre-1990: Paper I - 3 essay questions, Paper II- Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1993 :newly-introduced data-based questions -40%. 1 essay question &amp; MC.</td>
<td>• 1990: no change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. The case of particular historical topics
In the following section, two topics (the Opium War and the Boxer Incident) and the issue of the inclusion of local history in the two histories are dealt with so as to bring out the differences between the two history curricula.

A. The Opium War
The table below highlights the similarities and differences between History and Chinese History in handling the topic ‘Opium War’ with reference to data drawn from textbook narration, public examination questions and the corresponding marking schemes.
## The handling of the topic ‘Opium War’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook narration</th>
<th>Chinese History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>pre-1997 edition:</strong></td>
<td>- pre-1996 edition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2 most popular textbooks:</td>
<td>- all textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The First Anglo-Chinese War</em></td>
<td>‘The Opium War’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sino-Western relations worsened as Westerners perceived as ‘barbarians’</td>
<td>: grade 9, 3 most popular textbooks - British caused the war. : Grade 10, China’s foreign policy led to the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Opium trade - lower priority</td>
<td>- 1996 &amp; 1997 edition:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- more ‘pro-Western’ (pro-missionary)</td>
<td>- national sentiment descriptions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘The British …ignored the virtue of justice by importing large amounts of high price opium to China’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Opium was ‘detrimental to China’ changed to ‘detrimental to the nation’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘the physical and spiritual health of ‘the Chinese people' changed to ‘national people’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘the insulting Treaty of Nanjing was signed’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Treaty of Nanjing marked an era of suffering in the modern history of China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Lin Zexu is portrayed a hero:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘a bright official’, ‘the most persistent official’, ‘far-sighted’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- a portrait of Lin Zexu destroying opium in Fumen is included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Elliot- a key figure in starting the war:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘adopted an active attitude in advocating the export of opium to China for economic benefits’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘persuaded the British government to use force against China’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘Elliot’s barbarous behaviour …’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘Lin Zexu is restricted in the study of trade’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Elliot’s activities are highlighted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Opium War is more focused on China’s foreign policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Opium War is more focused on China’s foreign policy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The Opium War is more focused on China’s foreign policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examination questions</th>
<th>Marking schemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEEs</strong> frequently set during the past 12 years. Require more analysis than in Ch. History:</td>
<td>marking not in point form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ‘To what extent was the Anglo-Chinese War (1839-42) caused by the “opium problem”?’</td>
<td>e.g. ‘Candidates are expected to discuss Sino-British conflicts arising from the British desire to maintain the opium trade’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- comparative questions – especially on the opening of China and Japan by the Western powers – have also been popular.</td>
<td>CEE – not frequently set, appeared four times since 1970, straightforward:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A level provoking questions e.g.</td>
<td>-the background leading to the war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ed, please give 1-2 eg.</td>
<td>-the content of the Treaty of Nanjing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-the impact of the war on our country (1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-the attitude and policy adopted by Lin Zexu in opium trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A level - required critical thinking – e.g. critically examine the different causes and impacts of the war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- China’s restrictions on trade placed as the first point, followed by the import of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Political Sensitivity

The ‘Opium War’ is the most politically sensitive topic in our region’s history. At times of tension between Britain and China, the ‘Opium War’ has often become a topic of debate in the newspapers. Thus, in 1973, an editorial in the *South China Morning Post* attacked the Education Department for excluding post-1945 Chinese history from the syllabus. Subsequently, there were newspaper articles (e.g. October 5, 1973: Wen Wei Pao) making inquiries about the intention of the colonial government in advocating a pro-British perspective as reflected in exam questions such as: “Explain the causes of the Opium War in terms of the following perspectives: economic, cultural and historical tradition” (1973 CEE). The Chief Executive, C.H.Tung, said to the press (March 11, 1997) that accounts of the Opium War needed rewriting because the opium issue was not properly presented in the textbooks.

The political sensitivity of this topic can still be perceived in the latest editions of textbooks for History and Chinese History. Self-censorship has clearly influenced the production of textbooks for both subjects, for example in the use of terms designed not to offend the Chinese government. Thus, in History, the term ‘The Opium War’ is substituted for ‘The First Anglo-Chinese War’, and descriptions that carry national sentiment and affection emerge in the narration, so that in Chinese History, ‘China’ is referred to as ‘our nation’. In the case of one of the most popular History textbooks, the account of the Opium War was radically altered in the 1996 edition, in a clear effort to make the account conform more closely to the orthodox mainland interpretation.
Moral Education

There is a marked difference between the teaching of Chinese History and of History concerning the inculcation of moral values. Thus, the Chinese History curriculum gives great prominence to the commissioner Lin Zexu when students examine the ‘Opium War’. This is because a stipulated aim of the course is to nurture students’ good conduct through examining historical figures. Also, in the official syllabus (Grade 7-9, 1997), it states that through Lin’s story, students are to learn about ‘serving the country whole-heartedly and protecting the interest of the national people.’ Lin’s role in the Opium War is also given prominent attention in the textbook, the exam questions and the marking scheme.

Hence, the role of Chinese History, as perceived by those who teach it, is to transmit an understanding of correct and incorrect values, whereas this is not the case in World History.

Political Socialization

Chinese History was originally intended to present a ‘apoliticised’ version of history, at least to the extent of avoiding topics and interpretative perspectives that explicitly related past events to contemporary controversies. In addition, the pedagogical approach, designed as it has been to inculcate a set of traditional moral values while requiring the memorisation of received interpretations by rote, would seem to be calculated to discourage the development in students of a capacity for independent thought. Although avoidance of politically sensitive issues was initially a hallmark of this subject, since in recent years it has become politically correct to adopt an openly nationalist stance in Hong Kong, textbooks and syllabuses for Chinese History have become more explicit in their nationalism. Whatever the ideological character of political socialisation has been, however, the pedagogical means adopted by Chinese History teachers appear consistently to have reflected the conviction that ‘model answers’ produce model citizens.
The teaching of History in Hong Kong schools, as opposed to Chinese History, has also been characterised by rote learning, though not to quite the same extent. In addition, there has been a real shift in both the ideological subtext of formal History syllabuses, and in the pedagogical methods adopted for implementing them. In terms of both ideology and pedagogy, the shift has been in a markedly liberal direction. The introduction of data-based questioning in particular, as well as the general ethos of the subject, aim at fostering critical attitudes in students. The degree of success with which such attitudes have in fact been fostered is difficult to gauge, but examination questions and, particularly at A’ level, marking schemes too have been designed so as to reward candidates who display an ability to argue critically. Thus the subject of History, which was previously like Chinese History more ‘apolitical’ in its avoidance of some more sensitive periods and issues, has during the past fifteen years become, at least potentially, a vehicle for the promotion of liberal democratic values within the school curriculum.

B: The Boxer Incident

In the same way as the previous table, the table below synthesizes how the two histories deal with the topic ‘The Boxer Incident’ with reference to textbook narration, public examination questions and marking schemes.

The Handling of the Topic ‘The Boxer Incident.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook narration</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Chinese History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>refer to the topic as ‘The Boxer Uprising/Rebellion’</td>
<td>causes: (three most popular textbooks)</td>
<td>refer to the topic as ‘The Boxers’ causes: (all four textbooks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-Chinese author – emphasises origins of anti-foreign feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td>reaction against foreign encroachment ‘a burst of anti-foreign feeling’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the other two-unfavourable internal conditions, e.g. natural disasters, support from the people and Cixi (the imperial government) impact: two out of three textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td>internal conditions e.g. corrupt officials, natural disasters, and support from Cixi less emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political consequences within China, e.g. revolutionary movements, rise of provincialism</td>
<td></td>
<td>three out of four textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-Chinese writer - how the foreign powers modified their strategies towards China</td>
<td></td>
<td>the national pride of Chinese was badly hurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boxer was described as ‘barbarous’ the role of Cixi:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in tight control of power, hence emperor Kuang-xu could do nothing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cixi named the Boxer “righteous people”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Exam question
- A variety of question types, some on descriptive:
  - With reference to the period 1895-1911, examine (i) the main features of foreign activities in China, and (ii) China’s response to these activities. (1986, CEE)
  - more on analytical:
    - Why did the Boxer Uprising take place? What impact did it have on China? (1978, CEE)
    - To what extent was the Boxer Uprising brought about by foreign activities in China? (1984, CEE)

### Marking scheme
- Candidates are rewarded for argumentation or analysis:
  - e.g. answers with indiscriminate account of anti-foreign incidents / activities, or of foreign aggression in China, score less than five marks [out of 25]. (1989 A-L)

### CEE-background:
- (a) The anti-foreign sentiment is originated from foreign encroachment which included territorial and economic despoliation
- (b) Cixi’s support

### Impact:
- Focus on the loss of sovereignty and national pride, economic deprivation, rise of provincialism and revolutionary ideas.

The differences between the aims and methods of Modern World History and Chinese history are also clearly demonstrated in the ways they handle the topic of ‘The Boxer Incident’. This was an outbreak of anti-foreign sentiment which originated in Shandong Province in north-eastern China in 1900, spreading to cities such as Tianjin and Beijing. More hawkish elements within the Qing imperial court, led by the Dowager Empress Cixi, gave their active support to the movement. A number of foreigners, particularly missionaries, along with many Chinese converts to Christianity, were killed, and the Boxers besieged the foreign legation quarter in Beijing for several weeks until they were dispersed by the combined forces of various foreign powers. This defeat is generally considered to have delivered a fatal blow to the prestige and credibility of the Qing regime.
Interpretation of the Incident

There are differences between the two courses in terms of their interpretation of causes, as well as in the way students’ answers are assessed. Most Chinese History textbooks place greater emphasis on foreign encroachment as the dominant cause of the Boxer than do Modern History texts. The books use statements such as:

‘…after the Sino-Japanese war, Shangtung became the German sphere of influence. People had long suffered from foreign aggression and anti-foreign activities were generally given support by the people…’

‘The Boxers aimed at assisting the Qing court to fight against the foreigner. They killed missionaries and burnt the churches. Later, many people joined them and Cixi formally recognised the society’s legitimacy.’

The Chinese History marking scheme also places foreign encroachment as the dominant cause of the Boxer.

‘…people’s anti-foreign state of mind was a result of foreign expansion in China…’

‘…foreign aggression led to a severe blow to the traditional industry and China had to suffer from economic hardship.’

In contrast, the interpretation put forward in World History textbooks tends to see foreigners as having become, at least in part, scapegoats for problems in China, many of which were not of their making. The increasingly blatant foreign encroachments of the 1890s were, it is sometimes implied, simply an obvious hook onto which to hang a number of other largely unrelated grievances. Thus, the non-Chinese author of one textbook emphasises the irrational and racist elements in Chinese anti-foreignism, while other World History textbooks generally draw attention to the factors besides foreign encroachment that gave rise to the Boxer Incident.

There are some similarities, however, including the role played by the Dowager Empress Cixi in the rebellious acts of the Boxer. This was prominent in texts for both histories, but especially so in Chinese History, where her treacherous and ‘insincere’ behaviour is the object of moral condemnation.
A sort of ‘moralising nationalism’ – seeing historical events as a consequence of the good or bad moral character and sincerity of these people – prevails as a sub text in textbooks for Chinese History, as well as in one or two more recently published History textbooks. This may be partly as a consequence of the switch to using Chinese as the medium of instruction, along with the fact that many new textbooks have in recent years been written first in Chinese before being translated into English, whereas previously the reverse tended to be the case. Thus, in one recently published History textbook, the theme of Cixi’s ‘sincerity’ (or lack of it) recurs on page after page, reflecting the kind of approach more traditionally associated with Chinese History. As with the revisions to the account of the Opium War in another popular textbook, this emphasis reflects the sort of moralising, nationalist account favoured in mainland China, and perhaps similarly indicates an urge on the part of a local textbook publisher to be – and be seen to be – politically correct.

C: Local History
The incorporation of local history in the history curriculum has long been a debated issue. In an attempt to make our discussion more concrete, the following table spells out the development of local history in the two histories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/syllabus</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Chinese History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975 interim syllabus (Grade 7-11)</td>
<td>exHORTs teachers to make use of local history to bring the subject alive for students, but no practical suggestions on how to do</td>
<td>• not offered at any level until 1997 the revision of Grade 7-9 Chinese History syllabus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade 7-9</td>
<td>-1991, a pilot scheme on local history</td>
<td>• Hong Kong history appeared as an appendix.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Hong Kong history included in the revised syllabus for junior forms</td>
<td>• A-L:</td>
<td>• teachers are reminded time allocated to Hong Kong history should not affect the teaching of other Chinese history topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1980 under ‘British colonial and Commonwealth history’</td>
<td>-1984 withdrawn from the syllabus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1994 reappears under ‘Asian History’.</td>
<td>-local history, instead of history of British colonial links</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-section 7 (Hong Kong and the wider world 1945-1980), ‘Relations and interaction of Hong Kong’s internal developments with events and trends in China and other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended objective</td>
<td>to contribute to students’ knowledge and understanding of their own community and culture, as well as other major cultures of the world</td>
<td>to promote students’ interest in Chinese History, and build up students’ affection in the locality and their identification with the Chinese race.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Handling of Local History

The influence of the changing political climate on History teaching seems most apparent in issues relating to the teaching of local history. During the latter years of British rule the issue of whether or not Hong Kong history was to be offered and, if so, at what level and in what way it was to be taught became a matter of considerable political sensitivity. However, when teachers and curriculum developers were asked whether they felt that the exclusion or downplaying of local history within the curriculum in the 1960s or 1970s seemed odd, most stated that they themselves at that time felt no pressing need for the promotion of Hong Kong history. The drive for the introduction of local history came in the late 1980s from a few individuals within the Advisory Inspectorate of the Education Department. Their efforts coincided with very significant changes underway in Hong Kong’s social and political situation, since many commentators have seen the late eighties as marking the rapid emergence of a definite ‘Hong Kong identity’ among the local population. In addition, whereas the scholarly field of Hong Kong history was until the 1970s a peculiarly desolate one, by the late nineteen-eighties there existed a substantial and varied corpus of historical scholarship upon which curriculum developers were able to draw in designing a local history course.

It has often been alleged in the local Chinese press that the British authorities in Hong Kong were anxious to keep local history out of the curriculum because they were afraid that including it would lead to the arousal of anti-British sentiment. It is true that the British authorities did, from time to time, express concern about the way in which topics such as the Opium Wars were handled. However, the fact that the Opium War was, until the past few years, virtually the only topic in the curriculum which related directly to the history of British rule in Hong Kong, does not seem to indicate that the government was actively manipulating the history curriculum in order show the British
record in Hong Kong in the most favourable possible light. The neglect of local history seems rather to have been a reflection of the lack of importance attached to Hong Kong history by a local population which has only begun consciously to adopt a ‘Hong Kong’ as distinct from a ‘Chinese’ identity within the past fifteen or twenty years. The fact of British rule, as well as certain policies of the colonial government – including the policy of keeping the school curriculum in general as ‘apolitical’ (Morris and Sweeting 1995) as possible – have undoubtedly had an impact on the politics of identity in Hong Kong. However, there is no evidence to support the assertion that the neglect of local history specifically, and its introduction into the curriculum during the present decade, have been the results of any sinister colonialist or neo-colonialist plot.

Before 1997, Hong Kong history was entirely absent from the Chinese History curriculum, though Hong Kong history has been offered at the Advanced level History since 1994. It has been argued that, since the A’ level syllabus covers only 19th and 20th century history, the historical relationship between Hong Kong and China has not been given due emphasis. However, the chronology is the same for all topics, and the adoption of a shorter time-span and more contemporary focus for History at senior secondary levels has been motivated by a desire to maximise the depth of coverage, and make the syllabus more relevant to students. In addition, the curriculum for History at junior secondary level begins its coverage of local history in the Stone Age, and does not reach the Opium War until the second year of the course.

The study of Hong Kong history became a hotly debated issue in the 1990’s, especially when it was formally incorporated into the revised syllabus for junior level History.¹ This generated controversy as the government’s motives were seen to be part

¹ When the revised World History syllabus was issued in 1995 incorporating Hong history, queries were raised, particularly in pro-Chinese newspapers. It was speculated that the British Hong Kong government was trying to dissipate the nationalistic feelings of Hong Kong’s pupils. In Wenwei Bao (29 August, 26 and 30 September 1995), Hong Kong Standard (26 September 1995), Ming Pao (11 July 1994, 27 September 1995, 17 January 1997), and Dagong Bao (14 October 1995), there were articles which talked about the relevance of the inclusion of Hong Kong History in the Chinese History curriculum. W.Y.Wu, the group leader of the cultural sub-group of the Preliminary Working Committee for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, in an interview with Wenwei Bao (26 September 1996), said that Hong Kong was part of Chinese territory and therefore Hong Kong history should be incorporated into Chinese History instead of World History.
of a colonialist attempt to dilute the nationalistic sentiment of the students by internationalising Hong Kong, thus creating a more independent Hong Kong after 1997. This controversy led eventually to the incorporation of Hong Kong history into both World History and Chinese History, with revised syllabi issued in 1996 and 1997 respectively.

Although World History and Chinese History now both incorporate Hong Kong history, their approaches are entirely different. In World History, Hong Kong history is studied alongside the chronological development of Western civilization. Hong Kong is therefore seen from a more international perspective. In Chinese History, however, issues of Hong Kong history listed for teachers’ reference are related to the chronological development of historical China. Thus, Hong Kong is rather seen as part of China.

**Overall Summary**

In regard to the comparisons made in the previous sections, the following table summarizes the two history curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall summary of the differences between World History and Chinese History</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of history</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| | a critical discipline (at least in theory). Historical truth is not absolute – different, equally valid interpretations are possible. | • the official syllabus stipulates ‘the development of students analytical ability and objective attitude’, it is, in practice, trying to project an orthodox view.  
• in the syllabus guide it spells out specific views of certain historical events (1990 Grade 10-11, p.11)  
- ‘The emperor Qin Shi-huang’s harsh policies had agitated the anger of the people and eventually led to the downfall of the empire’.  
- ‘Wang Mong made use of his identity – being the relative of the queen - to usurp the Han’s ruling authority’.  
- ‘The Qing court used both oppressive and gentle measures in ruling the Han people, hence laying a good grounding for administering the country for a long period of time’). |

| **Historical methods** |  | • Vaguely put e.g. the curriculum guide specifies: the study of source materials aims at (1) cultivating students’ self learning |
|  | • emphasise the importance of reasoned argument with reference to appropriate sources. |  |
the introduction of data-based questions has led to an increased emphasis on the critical use of primary source material.

ability (2) stimulating students’ thinking.

the official document has never raised the possibility of different interpretations of historical events and personalities based on valid source materials and reasoned argument.

data-based questions have never been introduced in the CEE, though incorporated in A-L in 1994.

before the introduction of data-based questions:
- considerable gap: over-reliance on rote-learning of ‘facts’, textbook interpretations and ‘model’ answers.
- after the introduction of data-based questions in CEE in 1994, and the shift towards mother-tongue teaching:
  - tend to narrow the gap

contradictory between the intended and implemented curriculum as reflected in the examination reports:
- students mainly focus on political(dynastic) history
- students know little about the cultural, intellectual, social and institutional history
(all these aspects are listed as the aims of the curriculum)
students pay little regard to the contemporary period, especially after 1911.
(the syllabus published in 1990 stipulates the ‘spirit’ of ‘detailing the contemporary history while de-emphasizing the ancient history’).

no overtly moralising tone in the intended curriculum and exam questions.

the subject is seen as a moralising agent.

- teaching good conduct through the study of certain historical figures.
- at the junior level, a prescribed set of value is laid down under each topic.

shift over the past two or three decades:
- from simple objective of understanding the past
- to a more complex and ambitious set of objectives such as ‘critical thinking skills’, ‘sceptical’ attitude towards sources, and ‘civic-related’ aims geared towards enabling students’ to exercise their rights as citizens of an increasingly liberal, democratic polity.

considerable differences before and after the handover of sovereignty in 1997:
- from ‘knowing’, ‘understanding’ and ‘analysing’ the traditional Chinese culture, dynastic history, and behavioural modelling of certain historical figures
- to an explicit development of a sense of belonging to China and the Chinese race.
Differences between History and Chinese History

The differences between the two histories can be explained in the following ways:

1. In the Chinese tradition, history is regarded as a study of what can be called an orthodox view of history. Views expressed by official historians and virtuosos are taken as authoritative. Hence, in the Chinese History syllabus, the stated aim ‘…to promote students’ analytical power and self learning ability…’ actually refers to involving students in **understanding the reasons** behind certain conclusions made by historians. As reflected in the marking schemes, for some questions students are asked to provide reasoned arguments, yet they are seldom required to challenge these established views and offer alternative interpretations. World History, on the other hand, adopts the practice of western historiography and so interpretations based on evidence and reasoned arguments are encouraged. That is why data-based questions were introduced into CEE History in 1994, but have never been on the agenda of CEE Chinese History.

2. Chinese History is regarded as a moral discipline. The behaviour of certain historical figures is often used as an example for students to follow or avoid. This sort of guiding exemplar can be found in the official syllabus and in the marking scheme. In contrast, World History in its promotion of the skill of critical thinking does not include this kind of moralising tone in either the intended curriculum or the marking scheme.

3. World History is more geared to **social needs**. The shift of aims, from ‘understanding the past’ in the 1970’s to ‘critical thinking skills and civic related aims’ in the 1980’s and 1990’s reflects the social change from an elitist education (academically oriented) to that of mass education (skills oriented). Because of its more sensitive subject matter, Chinese History has had a special **political role** to play both before and after the change of sovereignty. Under the colonial administration, the cultivation of a local and national identity was a sensitive issue to be avoided. The provision of Chinese History as a separate subject within the school curriculum can be seen as a legitimating shield against anti-colonial sentiments. As long as there was no threatening of the colonial
regime, the government only exercised a symbolic control of the development of the subject.

Since the handover of sovereignty, the SAR government has sought to use Chinese History to definitely promote nationalism and as a means of enhancing the new regime’s legitimacy and authority. The Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa, in his first policy address (8 October 1997) made the following statement:

We will incorporate the teaching of Chinese values in the school curriculum and provide more opportunities for students to learn about Chinese History and culture. This will foster a stronger sense of Chinese identity in our students.

Therefore the latest junior level curriculum guide for Chinese History (1997) included the aim of ‘…building a sense of belonging to China and the Chinese race.’

**Conclusion – History, Colonialism and Chineseness in Hong Kong**

Comments by political figures – and by some academics – concerning the nature of the colonial impact on Hong Kong’s education system, have tended to reflect the assumption that there was direct manipulation of the school curriculum by the colonial authorities with the aim of promoting ‘colonial thinking’. Our study of the development of Hong Kong’s two histories suggests that the real nature of colonialism’s impact has been somewhat more subtle and complex than is commonly supposed.

Robinson (1986), a historian of British imperialism, has argued that colonialism is better understood not simply as the projection of ‘metropolitan drives’ from Europe on a ‘passive periphery’. Rather, he argues that imperialism usually proceeded ‘by combining with local interests and affiliating with local institutions’ so that ‘the true metropolis appears neither at the centre nor on the periphery, but in their changing relativities.’ Thus the history of imperialism is not simply the story of the forcible imposition of European models on other parts of the world, but of a variety of different ‘collaborative contracts’ tacitly arrived at between indigenous elites and colonial powers. The terms of such contracts are, Robinson says, seldom simply dictated by the colonialists, whose reliance
on the collaborators often gives the latter considerable leverage and scope to pursue their own agendas. Moreover, this collaborative model blurs the distinction between ‘colonial’ patterns of dominance of one state by another and other forms of influence not normally considered ‘colonial’.

The separation of history into two separate subjects was the act of a colonial administration concerned to limit possible threats to its own legitimacy, while at the same time accommodating elements of China’s historiographical tradition within a curriculum otherwise dominated by subjects taught in English and modeled on English prototypes. The evolution of the subject of Chinese History can thus perhaps be best understood by seeing it as the product of a ‘collaborative contract’ between nervous British administrators and the highly conservative Chinese scholars and educationalists who were behind the drafting of the original textbooks and syllabuses. However, the very conservatism of the approach adopted in the teaching of Chinese History, which in the 1950s was at variance with the sort of approach favoured in mainland China, by the time of Hong Kong’s transition to Chinese rule was being seen by the scions of the new political order as a virtue to be strengthened and encouraged.

The development of the curriculum for History, meanwhile, has been subject to strong influence from England, where History teaching over the past couple of decades has been undergoing fairly radical changes. The sorts of values or skills that History has increasingly sought to promote – such as those of critical and independent thought – could perhaps also be seen as part of the bigger British agenda for the preparation of Hong Kongers for life under Chinese rule. As we have seen, certain changes, particularly the introduction of local history, have been interpreted in this way by Hong Kong’s pro-Beijing press. However, a view of curriculum development for History which sees it as part of a neo-colonialist conspiracy does not seem to be supported by the evidence. Those responsible for shaping the curriculum, and for teaching the subject in schools, have overwhelmingly been local Chinese. The initiative for the introduction of local history, for example, was entirely in the hands of a few committed Chinese officials in the Advisory Inspectorate. The political climate in Hong Kong during the late 1980s, as well as the changing priorities of the colonial administration, may have strengthened support in various quarters for the local history project, but there is no evidence of any
interference by the policy branches of the colonial administration in the process of curriculum development for History.

The interpretation of history in China has traditionally been seen as a central function of the state, with the production of authorised accounts of the national past being the province of a department of the imperial government. Though it owes its separate existence to the politics of colonialism in Hong Kong, the approach to history embodied in the Chinese History subject is perhaps quintessentially Chinese in its assumption that the state will determine the ‘correct’ version of the past. With respect to the subject of History, however, despite the presence of some pro-Western bias particularly prior to the 1980s, the subject culture, as well as the nature of the topic content, has meant that greater emphasis has been placed on the provisional nature of historical knowledge, and the need for a critical, skeptical approach to historical sources. Superficially then, of the two histories, Chinese History and the values it promotes might seem to be more authentically ‘Chinese’, while History might be seen as an English-inspired colonial import.

Whether it is considered fair to see Hong Kong’s two histories in this light depends very much on which views of ‘Chineseness’ and of the nature of culture more generally are taken. If culture, and Chinese culture in particular, is taken to be a static ‘essence’, incommensurable with other cultures, then the approach to history which the subject of Chinese History embodies would seem to be more legitimate. This is very much the sort of approach to Chineseness espoused by the current Beijing regime, as well as prominent members of Hong Kong’s new administration. This approach posits a dichotomy between ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ (or ‘foreign’) culture of the sort which is expressed in the words of a nineteenth century Chinese statesman: ‘Chinese learning for essentials; Western learning for practical use.’ To describe the situation relating to history teaching in Hong Kong this could be rephrased ‘Chinese historiography for the national past; Western historiography for everywhere else’. Thus, for the politically ‘essential’ task of teaching students about the national past, an authentically ‘Chinese’ approach is required, whereas for an understanding of the rest of the world, a Western-style approach is acceptable. This sort of view of history teaching coincides with the desire of the new
regime on the one hand to bolster the ‘Chinese’ identity of local people, while at the same time retaining Hong Kong’s role as an ‘international city’ for commercial purposes.

Chinese History thus continues to perform a collaborative role by trimming its content and approach in such a way as to bolster the legitimacy of the new regime. Just as in other respects the post-handover administration has grasped the levers of colonial government more firmly than recent British administrations were willing to do, in the area of curriculum policy for Civics, Chinese History and the ‘Chinese subjects’ generally it has been far more proactive in promoting its own view of what should be taught and how. If History has, by contrast, been left alone more or less, this is probably because its more global focus makes it at once both less controversial and more peripheral to the Tung administration’s project of promoting Chinese culture and nationalism through the school curriculum. Only in the area of local history has History really trespassed on controversial territory, and in doing so revealed the extreme sensitivity of Beijing-affiliated elements regarding the question of how to interpret Hong Kong’s past. History continues to offer some students the opportunity to study the local and global past in a spirit somewhat more critical and analytical than that which characterises most other subjects taught in Hong Kong schools. However, the proportion of Hong Kong students who do actually experience the study of history – of whatever sort - in a critical spirit remains relatively small.

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