

EDUCATION BESIEGED: ANALYSIS OF THE REVIEW OF LIBERAL STUDIES DURING THE OCCUPYING MOVEMENT IN HONG KONG CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Liberal Studies have become a compulsory subject in Hong Kong's New secondary school education, but, the subject has continuously been criticized. The earlier social movement of the 'Against the Implementation of Moral and Nation Education', and the subsequent 'Occupy Central Movement' made Liberal Studies a scapegoat. Many pro-government groups were organised to attack the school teaching subject of Liberal Studies, as being too politicised. The government had to conduct a midterm review of the subject under this crisis, and this process resulted in a high degree of public attention. During this period, the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were being attacked and criticized seriously. The results of the expected review process were not only without practice, and the reform was very limited. With careful analysis, we can still find the existence of hidden ideology, in the revised change.

KEYWORDS: Liberal Studies, Ideology, Knowledge Construction and Occupy Movement

INTRODUCTION

To design an education system for the future, we must envisage future changes in society, to cater for the needs of learners in the new society, and to define the new role and functions of education in the changed environment.

(Review of Education System: Reform Proposals Consultation Document, Education Commission, May 2000, p. 1)

The "One Country, Two Systems" governance has been followed in practice for twenty years, but the social controversy could not halt the intervention of self-management and autonomy of administering Hong Kong. The society in Hong Kong sprouts two contradicting camps, the establishment and the opposition. This was especially evident after the 'Occupy Movement', in 2014. People are polarized into two extremes. The one extreme is pro-governmental, which is conservative and supports the communist domination of Hong Kong's affairs. The other one, however, opposes this and is both democratic and reformist. It is liberal, but being framed as colluding foreign external forces, for the intervention in Chinese internal affairs. The education system could not escape this clamouring situation, especially the newly adopted subject of Liberal Studies, to be taught in the new senior secondary schools. This subject has been a compulsory subject in the senior secondary school curriculum, which was adopted in 2009 with the restructuring of the education system. This controversial situation, however, was caused by the recent public attention, Brought about by the 'New Academic Structure Medium-term Review'. The review process ended in 2016, but, there were only a few academic revisions updated, even though there were quite a lot of voices expressed by teachers, on the subject of Liberal Studies.

This study intends to the reflection and gain an understanding of the recent review process of the school subject, Liberal Studies, in the Hong Kong context. The understanding of the review process (what) and the explanation of the revision of the knowledge content (why), the teaching strategy of Liberal Studies and the assessment by examinations (how) will be analysed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The education system transmits culture to its particular society. To a certain extent, the policy set up by the national or regional government has shaped the way of how students learn and what they learn. The ideology of the ruling class has quietly invaded our mind. Stephen J. Ball's expression of education related issues can generalise the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. That should be how the content of education should be understood, interpreted and analysed.

The British Hong Kong government decolonised education in Hong Kong, especially after the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989. Therefore, the alternative education system was unified in 1994 with three years of university studies such that there were three years of junior secondary education, two years' senior secondary education and two years' pre-university. The four years of university would not be provided for financial assistance at the time.

With the retrocession of sovereignty over Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China in 1997, the education reform was initiated. After a series of reforms over educational management, curriculum and pedagogy, the new academic structure was implemented in September 2009, resulting in the restructuring of the senior secondary school to be three years long instead of two years, senior secondary and two years pre-university. It followed that the university studies were lengthened from three years to four years, effective from the year 2012. The new senior secondary schools' curriculum provided a knowledge structure of the new academic system where all educational particulars were reconstructed.

Generally, there were three core subjects which were compulsory for mass education in Hong Kong, which were Chinese, English and Mathematics. The intention of unifying the education system in 1992 made Liberal Studies an additional core and compulsory subject to the university admission examinations, but the universities of Hong Kong rejected this proposal which was put forward by the colonial Hong Kong government. However, the new academic structure adopted Liberal Studies as an interdisciplinary and core compulsory subject of the senior secondary curriculum in the Hong Kong special administrative region's governance, in addition to Chinese, English and Mathematics consequently. The restructuring of this education system was started in 2009.

The new academic structure medium-term review of the new academic structure was started in 2012 and finished in 2015. During this stage of governance, Hong Kong witnessed the most radical political movement and social unrest. After the students' political movement of 'Against Implementation of Moral and National Education'¹, the first to follow was the 'Occupy Central Movement'²(in 2014) and after, the 'Fish Ball Unrest' (in 2016). The 'Occupy Central Controversy' was prolonged for two years and consequently, a series of sit-in protests took place in Hong Kong from September to December 2014 after the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress made the decision on the

¹ It was a school curriculum proposed by the Education Bureau of Hong Kong. Since the return of sovereignty, promoting national education and enhancing students' understanding of China and national identity. This has become a goal of schools. The subject was particularly controversial for applauding the communist and nationalist positions of China's government on the one hand, and criticising republicanism and democracy on the other. Following the opposition from the public, the government postponed the commencement of the subject indefinitely.

² It was a civil disobedience campaign, namely the non-violent occupation of Central. It advocated to pressure the government of China into granting the electoral mechanism to satisfy the equal universal suffrage of the Hong Kong chief Executive election.

domination of the nomination process of electing the Chief Executive on 31st August 2014. Furthermore, civil unrest broke out in Monk Kok with eventual violence between police and protestors. The participants of these two events inevitably included many students. In this context, Liberal Studies as a compulsory school subject was unreasonable and unfortunately blamed, as the main cause of the disaster.

In between the reviews and updates, the part of the most concern part was the teaching content of Liberal Studies, which faced a lot of challenges of the society, such as teaching, assessment guidelines, choice of issues and examination questions. There were many demonstrations, conference talks and protests, expressing the concern about the curriculum, teaching and assessment of Liberal Studies. Education was under attack, during this politicised period in Hong Kong. According to the checklist of major updates in the Curriculum and Assessment Guide, announced by the Education Bureau, there were four major updates, after the new academic structure medium-term reviewed:

<p><i>Curriculum Framework</i></p> <p>Revise the questions for enquiry and explanatory notes in the framework of respective modules.</p> <p><i>Teaching and Learning</i></p> <p>Include the extension of scope for Independent Enquiry Study (IES)</p> <p>Include the revision of the assessment of IES.</p> <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <p>Specify the assessment, design of the subject with effect from the 2016 Examination in greater detail. ☐</p> <p>Specify that schools may refer to the live examination papers regarding the format of the examination and the standards at which the questions are pitched. ☐</p> <p>Specify that starting from 2014/15 at S4, a structured enquiry approach for IES has been adopted.</p> <p><i>Learning & Teaching Resources</i></p> <p>Include the learning and teaching resource “Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Resource Package – Interpreting the Curriculum and Understanding the Assessment”.</p>
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For the understanding and explanation of education, Sociology of knowledge provides pivotal concepts, for recognition and analysis of school education and curriculum. Since, sociology is used to criticise and review a specific behaviour under a conceptualised approach, knowledge is constructed by society and, it follows that, the curriculum is organised by the knowledge from society. The purpose of studying the curriculum through sociology, is to criticise the dominant groups (the people who constructed the curriculum), so as to make the school curriculum more reasonable.

This research is going to review the new senior secondary Liberal Studies curriculum (the updated version), from a sociological point of view. This is to investigate the social implication of the Liberal Studies curriculum, and to uncover the revelation of the new academic structure, medium-term review. Furthermore, the study will be constructed in a

historical context so that, the situation of Hong Kong during this period can be included in the analysis and the understanding of this curriculum reviewing process.

Sociology of knowledge was a subject, that evolved from sociology. The first to propose this term was the philosopher, Max Scheler (1874 – 1928), and, according to Scheler (1924), sociology of knowledge was the analysis of the functional interrelations of social processes and structures. Later, a Hungarian sociologist, Karl Mannheim, brought it out into the field of sociology of philosophy. Mannheim (1936) suggested in his book “The sociology of knowledge seeks to comprehend thought in the concrete setting of a historical-social situation out of which individually differentiated thought only very gradually emerges.” Mannheim denied the idea of objective academic knowledge, and proposed the idea that one’s intellectual point of view was inherently connected to one’s social position.

In the early 1970s, a different and more controversial approach to the discipline of education was developed, the so-called ‘new sociology of education’. One of the subfields derived from the new sociology of education, is the sociology of educational knowledge, some academics also call it the sociology of curriculum as “knowledge” and “curriculum” are related and inseparable. It is a way to explore the formation of the school curriculum and its influencing factors, from the point of view of sociology. Specifically, the sociology of educational knowledge is to reveal and analyse the choice of knowledge, the organisation of knowledge, and the evaluation of other phenomena in the school curriculum.

In the past, the sociology of education emphasised the analysis of the system and people involved, while the sociology of educational knowledge focused on the discussion and critiques of the origin of knowledge and the content of the curriculum. The main scholastic representatives of the sociology curriculum are M. Young, B. Bernstein, M. W. Apple, and H. Giroux, etc. They believed that the knowledge in the school curriculum should not be treated as naturally existing; instead, it should be examined at any time so as to reveal any political implications and ideology behind the curriculum.

Sociologists have always questioned the knowledge behind the curriculum. Young (1971 and 1998) also stated that knowledge is artificial and socially constructed. Thus, different groups in society derive different knowledge, and knowledge is subjective and relative. It is, therefore, concerned about the uneven distribution of educational outcomes to one where the interplay of knowledge, the curriculum and power are for the elite and the ruling class. One major question about the curriculum is why such knowledge is selected for inclusion in the curriculum, while other knowledge is not. This phenomenon of stratification of knowledge illustrates the control and injustice of our society.

Gramsci (1971) interpreted the idea of “hegemony”. This assumes that something (probably ideology) truly and comprehensively existed, which infiltrates into the society and forms a restriction on consciousness among the public. To criticise a curriculum, it is important to understand how the idea of hegemony permeated into people’s mind. Young (1971) in response stated that, the school is acting as the “hegemony” of culture and ideology. Schools do not exist solely to deal with students, but also to address the official knowledge of governance.

A modern sociologist, Michael W. Apple, put forward his idea, to analyse the knowledge in schools and the issue of curriculum control. Apple believes that knowledge in the curriculum is neither objective nor neutral. It is a kind of domination, or the presentation of an ideology. Apple has also proposed that, the traditional questions about the sociology of the curriculum should seriously discuss history. He argues that, the school curriculum to be considered as a conscious or unconscious ideological selection, from the organised social knowledge.

Apple (1979) put forward that, some of this is quite worth thinking about: whose knowledge is it is? Who makes the choice of knowledge? Why are such modes used to teach and organise the knowledge? Finally, who benefits from the knowledge.

Basically, these questions are related to the concepts of ideology, hegemony and power and they should be interlinked with ideology and social or economic power, in order to expose the content of the ideology which is hidden inside the curriculum. There is no doubt that, the knowledge presented in the school is full of ideology, as the chosen knowledge in the curriculum must reflect the faith and point of view (to a certain degree) of the dominant class. Gramsci (1971), mentioned two essentials of hegemonic ideology. The first is to “create” a category and emotional structure, in order to penetrate the ideology into our lives. The second is a group of intellectuals, to legitimise these categories and structure, making these types of ideology very neutral. In the formation process of the curriculum, there are often included many distributions of interests, economics and cultures, and derivatives of conflict and opposition in the curriculum.

The traditional teaching materials have always been standardised and contained lots of bias, unilateral ideology, which was transmitted to students. These sources were “created” by the ruling class. Apple (1979) wrote in his book “ideology and curriculum” and asked why certain viewpoints would be presented in school as an objective, factual knowledge? Ou Yung-Sheng (2001), a professor of Pedagogy in Taiwan, pointed out that schools choose, adopt or exclude certain teaching materials based on a particular type of ideology, or even trying to distort and hide certain facts to suit the needs of "social control". To reach the purpose of social control, one of the main tricks to achieve social control is an ideological control using the curriculum, and this is related to the problem of the “hidden curriculum” which has a primary function in social control.

The selection of teaching materials and content may affect students’ opinion, value or attitude intentionally or unintentionally, while such ideology cannot be seen or is possibly hidden in the curriculum. The scholars call it the “hidden curriculum”. Elizabeth Vallance (1973) stated that, the purpose of the hidden curriculum was “social control”, such as indoctrination of values. The hidden curriculum disseminates values, attitudes and a knowledge framework imperceptibly. It influences the students more than what is being taught in the formal curriculum. The ruling class of society has the right and the power, to select and control the distribution of knowledge in school. It defines what kind of knowledge students can learn and must learn. The most effective way to reach ideological control is by controlling the school curriculum.

METHOD OF STUDY

The study intends to gain understanding of the process of reviewing Liberal Studies, which is a compulsory subject of senior secondary schools’ education in Hong Kong. The analysis comes through the concepts of sociology of the curriculum. If the research can analyse more aspects of the mid-term review of the curriculum of Liberal Studies, then the concepts of sociology of knowledge adopted with history can be mediated. The research notes are in the historical context of Hong Kong during this period.

That is to say, the study explores what knowledge of Liberal Studies is during the review of Liberal Studies and who can make the choice of such knowledge. More importantly, the analysis puts more effort into understanding and elaborating the reasons for adopting the modes of education and the organisations of Liberal Studies’ knowledge in Hong Kong and to trace the contents of Liberal Studies that is beneficial for those interests. Therefore, this research will initiate a

discussion about the contents and historical context of the process of reviewing Liberal Studies in Hong Kong. This research attempts to analyse many aspects of the mid-term review of Liberal Studies and studies the implication of this area.

Content of Study: The Context Analysis of Reviewing Liberal Studies

The history, the social divisions and the many competing interests and value systems found in a modern society are expressed in the school curriculum as much as they are in its system of government or its occupational structure. Likewise, curriculum debates, implicitly or explicitly, are always debates about alternative views of society and its future (cited in Young 1998, p. 9).

This study reflects the reviewing process of Liberal Studies and related matters concerning the new senior secondary school education in Hong Kong. It comes to a curriculum debate in Hong Kong. The design of Liberal Studies aims to broaden the students' knowledge base while also enhancing their social awareness through the study of a wide range of issues (Education Bureau 2014, p. 1). In fact, the implementation of the senior secondary schools' education required a review in 2014 and Liberal Studies is one of four compulsory and core subjects in the public examination system for the university places admission. The review was necessary for defining the problem of implementation of the new senior secondary education. The revision could then be done upon the review findings. The review investigated the curriculum design, teaching methods or pedagogy and effectiveness of teaching, and assessment. Teaching of Liberal Studies could achieve the expected effectiveness depending on whether our society accepted such pluralistic cultures and nurturing right values for the youth of Hong Kong. Moreover, Hong Kong is a pluralistic society that, caters for different values, attitudes and reasonable discussions of controversial issues. Liberal Studies should not contain certain political standpoints and should not intend to make students hold or not hold any political perspectives. Students' political rights must be protected and should not be denied. Liberal Studies did not contain certain attitudes, to agree or disagree upon the standpoints of students on issues.

The one aim of senior secondary Liberal Studies is, "to help students appreciate and respect diversity in cultures and views in a pluralistic society and handle conflicting values". However, a pluralistic society is often complicated. It always refers to complicated issues which requires the teaching of Liberal studies, so as to cater for this. This is the school, a place of learning and for students to have access to different voices and opinions, so as to understand the reality of the world.

The political content and assessment was shown in Question Paper I of Liberal Studies, in 2014, which expressed the problem of recent public order events. The following shows the Source A of the question paper³.

³ No photographs show here.

Source A

<p>Photograph 1: Hong Kong Celebrations Association organised a march on 1stJanuary, 2013.</p> <p>The Big banner held by the marchers in the foreground of the photograph says: Unite youth power. Back up Hong Kong with concerted effort.</p>	<p>Photograph 2: Civil Human Rights Front organised a march on 1stJanuary, 2013.</p> <p>The Big banner held by the marchers in the foreground of the photograph says: New Year’s Day March. Citizens’ grievances flare up. Deceiving Chief Executive steps down. No to the Cheating Government. Universal suffrage now.</p>
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It was a politicalised scenario of Hong Kong society and the most important point of this was that it was more controversial that the pro-government protest was organised to show their support for the Leung Chun-ying administration⁴. They were discovered as being paid for the pro-government show – and this was reported by the media. The examination question intended to ask for students, to identify and elaborate on difficulties for the Hong Kong government, to govern Hong Kong as reflected by the demands shown in the two photographs in Source A. In addition, the question raised the controversial situation of Hong Kong on genuine universal suffrage and genuine democracy which were promised by the Communist government through the Basic Law and caused the ‘Occupy Central Movement’ which fought for true democracy for the Hong Kong society later. It differed as participation was voluntary and that it protected fighting for the public sphere of civil society, such as democracy and human rights. Furthermore, the question continued to ask for ‘Expressing demands through processions and demonstrations helps to improve the quality of life of Hong Kong people.’ Students were requested to respond to the following question: “to what extent do you agree with this view’. Students can explain their answer from the sources and their own knowledge.

It is inevitable that a political question and life is often lined to politics, no matter whether this is done consciously or unconsciously. Living in the developed information era, social affairs can be seen as political issues. Every country has its own political education, if not so, the country will not be able to maintain unity and cannot be sustained forever. The problem is identifying what the real contents of political education teachings are. Some teach their own history, some teach their own constitution, and some can even teach ideology.

Reading the examination question which was examined in 2014, it was a question to ask about politics in Hong Kong. Students had to understand the real situation in Hong Kong. One of the controversies towards Liberal Studies is its content involved civil political participation. The reason why the public, especially young people, have increased their participation in social movements is blamed for this. This causal relationship of the content of the school subject which involved politics and the political movement is questionable. However, the establishment camp and the pro-government social groups always bring out this question to criticise the subject of Liberal Studies as being too political such that students became politicised. In the recent public order events, the situation of young people participating in the social movement has demonstrated an increasing trend. Some issues are directly related to the young people such as the implementation of moral and national education being led, managed and operated by the groups of young people who were students of secondary schools. The question of ‘Expressing demands through processions and demonstrations helps to improve the quality of life of the Hong Kong people’ advocated the alternative way of expressing demonstration. It was the assessment of the social participation of people and the consciousness of participating in social movements,

⁴The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2017.

which were carried through students' lessons. Some authorities considered this teaching as not being acceptable in classrooms.

About the open and reform policy of China, the teaching guidelines suggested that state leaders repeatedly state that it is necessary to keep on reforming the political system. Teachers are advised to cite related news or examples for students to explore the reasons for reforming the political system and to put forward suggestions for further reform. As the electoral mechanism of China is related to political participation, teachers are further advised to cite news or case studies related to the election of the National People's Congress of China. Student enquiry is guided into the actual representativeness of National People's Congress deputies at various levels and whether there could be any necessary revision in the National People's Congress deputy system (Education Bureau and Examinations and Assessment Authority 2013, p. 50). Moreover, more and more people have been participating in the Weiquan movement⁵(the movement of maintaining people's rights) in China, which usually involves various official-civilian conflicts or disputes between the public and enterprises. Teachers could also consider selecting some incidents of the Weiquan movement for student enquiry (Education Bureau and Examinations and Assessment Authority 2013, p. 52). These two controversial issues were recommended for student learning though this might jeopardise legitimacy of China's governance.

For the more political issue of national identity, it was also another examination question that required an explanation. Question Paper II of Liberal Studies in 2013 discussed the problems associated with Chinese national identity in Hong Kong. The following is the question.

Photograph A: Hong Kong people participating in the June Fourth Candlelight Vigil in the Victoria Park in 2012.

Photograph B: Hong Kong landing on Diaoyu Islands on 15th August 2012.

Photograph C: Hong people donating money for the Sichuan earthquake disaster relief in 2008.

What do you think are the factors motivating Hong Kong people to participate in some major events concerning the nation, such as those shown in the above photographs? Explain your answer.

'Hong Kong people's participation in major events concerning the nation will enhance their national identity.' To what extent do you agree with this view? Explain your answer.

The question asked which national identity of the people of Hong Kong related to political or social activities that were quite common in the context of Hong Kong. Students were expected to have enough consideration and recognition about these issues. However, it was blamed as being too political that the students might not have enough knowledge to analyse these issues. On the contrary, the question actually helped to fill the gap in students' social and political consciousness. It was to prevent students from social ignorance and to increase their awareness of social issues. The following paragraph was expressed in the 'Curriculum and Assessment Guide' of Liberal Studies, which states that more education should be provided for students outside the classroom. Moreover, experiential learning is the prominent concept in catering and enhancing students' learning.

It is repeatedly expressed by the Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide that teachers should explore

⁵The Weiquan movement is a non-centralised group of lawyers, legal experts, and intellectuals in China who seek to protect and defend the civil rights of the citizenry through litigation and legal activism. Among the issues adopted by Weiquan lawyers are property and housing rights, protection for AIDS victims, environmental damage, religious freedom, freedom of speech and the press, and defending the rights of other lawyers facing disbarment or imprisonment. Individuals involved in the Weiquan movement have met with occasionally harsh reprisals from Chinese officials, including disbarment, detention, harassment, and, in extreme instances, torture.

the opportunities for students to learn in real contexts and authentic settings. Such experiential learning enables them to achieve certain learning goals that are difficult to attain through classroom learning alone. Life-wide learning opportunities are particularly important for Liberal Studies, because the subject is concerned with real human concerns in contemporary society. In fact, opportunities for learning exist everywhere in the community. With instruction and guidance from their teachers, students can explore the community through observations, surveys, interviews and various forms of fieldwork.

Experiential learning is an important pedagogy in Liberal Studies. After the examination question in 2013, teachers were allowed to use more progressive pedagogies for teaching and providing real experiential learning opportunities for students. The curriculum guide, stated that teachers are able to teach their lessons outside the classroom in order to “learn in real contexts and authentic settings”, such as participating in lectures, field trips, games and so on. From the experience in these learning activities, students can have direct contact with the environment and broaden their knowledge base, while training to observe the things around them. An outcomes approach starts by describing what a learner can expect to achieve or by defining criteria for recognising learning that has already been achieved (Young 1998, p. 86). A crucial point is that students can grasp the facts and the truest knowledge of the issues as a basis for enquiry studies. However, the case becomes more controversial and critical that teachers have the responsibility to provide experiential learning for the understanding of political and social movements in Hong Kong. This should come to a new discussion on whether students should experience the June Fourth Candlelight Vigil in the Victoria Park or the Occupy Movement in Central. The political spaces that took place happened in Hong Kong’s political context should provide real experiential learning that would have been quite difficult to attain through classroom learning alone.

We must remember the demonstration held for opposing the implementation of Moral and National Education in the summer holiday of 2012 when Leung Chun-Ying had just assumed office to be the Chief Executive. The social movement was prolonged for two months and forced the government to shelf the curriculum within the period of the summer holidays in 2012. There are some people who will always believe that a student’s participating in the protest derived from Liberal Studies in the school education. It was a successful social movement and the movement was operated and managed by a 15 year old student leader, Joshua Wong. In fact, the student movement should be appreciated and the group of secondary school students should take responsibility for fighting for reasonable education (not brain washing) and a fair democracy in the society of Hong Kong.

However, the pro-government agents opposed Liberal Studies and they criticised the curriculum as being focused too much on political issues. They expressed again the opinion that Liberal Studies violated the purpose of education of achieving the educational goal of whole person development. The opponents against Liberal Studies always criticised the curriculum which focused too much on political issues, and this violated through Liberal Studies, helping students develop positive values and attitudes towards life. Later, the ‘Liberal Studies Concerning Coordinated Committee’ was established by pro-Beijing elites and they included many politicians, professionals, school headmasters and medical doctors. They criticised Liberal Studies strongly as being too political and not being implemented in the right way. One of the members was a Legislative Councillor, Leung Mei-fun, who was a judicial professor. She suggested Liberal Studies should not be a compulsory subject and should be placed as an elective for students.

Law Fan Chiu-fun Fanny, one of the members of the Executive Council and the former Secretary of the Branch of Education and Manpower in the Hong Kong government, also stated that Liberal Studies was intended to train students to

think independently and to understand problems from multiple perspectives. However, based on her opinion, Liberal Studies seemed to be more biased towards political issues and based on certain aspects of information. However, the formation and initiation of Liberal Studies as a school subject was her policy when she was the Secretary for Education. However, she deemed that today, Liberal Studies were not taught as she expected.

When Tai Yiu-ting Benny published the article through the Hong Kong Economic Journal proposing an act of civil disobedience by the ‘Occupy Central’, it proposed to pressurise the Government into granting an electoral system which "satisfy the international standards in relation to universal suffrage" in the 2017 election of the Hong Kong Chief Executive. The society changed to be more controversial and disputing. The people of Hong Kong went on to argue whether the political movement was a right social movement in fighting for democracy through the action of civil disobedience. School teachers were put into the arena, whether they could teach this controversial topic in the lessons of Liberal Studies since the issue became a hot topic which might be examined by the public examination paper. The issue should not be escapable and political participation is actually the subject content. The consequence of this turned out to be the political movement of the Occupy Revolution, which was carried out from 28th September to 8th December 2014 (79 days). The moment, following straight after the ‘Occupy Central Movement’ was exposed, the government carried out the consultation on the revision of the Liberal Studies curriculum.

The controversy towards the midterm review of Liberal Studies being aroused among the public was covered in the news article posted on 26th October 2014 in the Ming Pao News, right after the occurrence of the ‘Occupied Central’. It mentioned that the Education Bureau held the meeting with officers of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority. Then more meetings were held with education officers and teachers of Liberal Studies. They advocated revision of the contents of the Liberal Studies curriculum by the “very” senior government personnel⁶. During the meeting, some members blamed the political issues involved in Liberal Studies as the reason for the large number of students participating in the social movement. They determined that it was necessary to eliminate the political issues in the Liberal Studies subject. They pointed out that politics should not be taught in classrooms.

On the same day, the Education Bureau issued a press release against the relevant news reported. They have not denied reviewing the ratio of political contents in Liberal Studies, and stressed that there was no relevance to the hot issue of the “Occupied Central”. It was stated that views and discussions on the curriculum and assessment framework of the Liberal Studies subject were being collected and there would be further consultation. The final recommendations of the medium-term review and the long-term development of Liberal Studies were announced in July 2015.

The public called into question whether the Education Bureau, the Curriculum Development Council and the Examinations and Assessment Authority would implement the revision in phases based on important professional and student learning-centered principles. They also questioned whether these revisions were specifically related to the Occupy Movement protests and were held because of the instruction from the senior Government Officials. The Education Bureau repeatedly expresses their hopes that politics would not interfere with the school curriculum development, and that the professional mechanic of curriculum determination and assessment development in Hong Kong were expected and respected.

⁶The public guessed Leung Chun-ying (the Chief Executive) or Carrie Lam (the Chief Secretary).

The Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union responded to the report of the government opposing the deletion of politically-related content in Liberal Studies and they expressed their strong opposition against the government's intervention in professional education. Students should not have political illiteracy. The union criticised that the government blamed the current social conflicts and contradictions as emanating from Liberal Studies. They pointed out that the authorities reversed the causality. The public suspected the sudden changes made by the government and the issue was related to the current social situations and attempted to override the professional revision of the curriculum by political considerations. Cheung Yu-fai expressed that the midterm review had already started since the end of the first Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examinations started in 2012, and they did not include any discussions about the deletion of political contents. The suggestions about the review at the time of the upsurge of social movement were inevitable to be interpreted as preventing students from recognising politics.

Chiu Wing-Kai Stephen was the chairman of the Liberal Studies Subject Committee and he explained the midterm review of Liberal Studies into the public media many times in attempting to resolve the major arguments towards the curriculum structure. He pointed out that the Liberal Studies curriculum deliberately added a lot of elements across different issues and topics, so as to interrelate the different sections among the modulus. As the repeated issues appeared in different modules, the teachers were confused in teaching the subject. Moreover, the length of time of all the lessons was not enough for teachers to accomplish teaching of the whole syllabus.

The main purpose of the revision should clarify the problem faced by the front-line teachers. The Education Bureau outlined a few principles in the review, and the focal point of this review was to reduce the teachers' workload, including deleting excessive contents that were considered as redundant and too broad. It also included merging the topics that were repeated. A more systematic and coherent exploratory process was expected to result from this and more substantial changes were expected. The review was as loud as thunder, but it only resulted in tiny drops of rains. That is to say that there were only minor revisions that came out of this big review, which meant that the outcome of the amendment failed to meet the original purpose of the amendment, which was to simplify and reduce the numerous and difficult curriculum content and the expectations of Frontline Liberal Studies teachers. Nor did the review solve the fundamental problem of the curriculum framework.

The revision of the curriculum content of Liberal Studies could be recognised, by comparing the version of Liberal Studies Curriculum and Assessment Guide before (with updates in January 2014) and after (with updates in November 2015) the midterm review, the major updates of the Curriculum Framework were mainly in the two areas of 'Personal Development' and 'Society and Culture'. A section that was completely deleted was 'how adolescents reflect upon their interpersonal conflicts and develop relationships with others. while living skills were added into the Modulus of Personal Development. The youth had not been treated in the essence. The challenges and difficulties faced by young people in Hong Kong are serious and unfair. In fact, they met with serious social problems nowadays. The university quota was insufficient to fulfil their expectation and the graduates could not find jobs. The 'Occupy Central' just reflected their desires for not only universal suffrage, but also social justice and greater and fairer opportunities in the society of Hong Kong.

The other hidden curriculum is related to the topic of globalisation. The enquiry questions highlight the political, economic, social and cultural impact of globalisation. However, the major stress lay in the interactions and integration of all the economies in the world under the drive of globalisation. Originally, students had to understand whether the spread

of globalisation promotes international understanding or causes greater conflicts among ethnic groups, religions, cultures and political entities. They also had to know how the mainland and Hong Kong should meet the opportunities and challenges of globalisation. These were the pivotal contents related to understanding and analysing the human conflicts and contradictions. Unfortunately, these were deleted in the 2015 revision. Students were instead led to focusing on studying the responses of different individuals and organizations on globalization. This topic was deleted indicating the reduction of contents and the parts of complicated and conflicting issues on globalisation.

Firstly, the major purpose of the midterm review was to reduce the workload of the front line teachers. However, such amendments played little impact on the implementation of teaching and curriculum and failed to reduce the teaching content. To sum up, the amendments have changed some things in the curriculum framework. The review only fixed a few minor problems, by deleting and combining the excessive or repeated contents and clarifying the vague concepts by correcting the wordings. In fact, the amalgamation of contents did not mean the teachers were able to save time as they still needed to spend just as much time on the combined contents. The importance of each topic was not simply defined by the number of words expressed in the curriculum guide. Many of the changes were not reflected in the major amendments required, such as the deletion of issues of political globalisation. That is, the title of the chapter was deleted, but its contents were taught and discussed through teaching of other contents of globalisation.

There was a significant problem facing Liberal Studies, which were considered an interdisciplinary subject. The general assumption was that the basic knowledge was insufficient for students in catering diversified requirements. With the lack of subject knowledge, such as Economics, Geography, History or Sciences, students were not designated sufficient knowledge to cope with the demands of globalisation. The social, political participation is the content of the curriculum of Liberal Studies. Students are required to know what factors determine the level and form of social-political participation by Hong Kong residents, what the significance of their participation is why they have different demands and what the impacts of their demands are. The factors affecting the level and form of socio-political participation are related to the expected cost and probable outcomes, social structure, political factors (political culture or the credibility of the government), education and the media. While the argument among the public started with the updates of the Curriculum Framework, the controversial part was on the youth's political participation, though the content of the youth participation in community affairs was deleted.

According to the official documents from the Education Bureau, the content of these two modules is repeated, the breadth and depth of the issues covered was too much for the students, especially the content about "Hong Kong adolescents' participation in community affairs". According to the official explanation from the Education Bureau, the reorganisation was simply shifting the content about "Hong Kong adolescents' participation in community affairs" from module 1 to module 2 theme 2 in the "Rule of law and socio-political participation", to become a "more comprehensive" inquiry. Moreover, according to the principle of consideration, the revised content in "Question for enquiry" and "Explanatory notes" should remain unchanged under the premise of maintaining the overall framework of the original curriculum, so that the involved category was more specific and focused on streamlining this learning content. However, such changes in these two modules merely weakened the role of adolescents in society and had a negative effect on the importance of participation in community affairs in the growth of Hong Kong adolescents.

The main reason for this amendment was political. As with discussion and argument among the public, any revision at this sensitive moment might cause dispute. The Education Bureau of the government carried on this review

and caused the bad image of political suppression. The political arena in Hong Kong was rife with the upsurge of mass protests, such as the movement against 'Moral and National Education; and the 'Occupy Central'. Moreover, the recent social movements were actively organised and mobilised by students. The amendment might cause further social actions against the government. Since the student movement might not make the government postpone the revision, the legitimacy crisis of education might further jeopardise the effectiveness of governance. Students might not accept this authoritarian instruction and they were provoked.

As a matter of fact, Lo Ka-Yiu, the Senior Manager of Assessment Development in Hong Kong's Examinations and Assessment Authority, pointed out that in one of their research about Liberal Studies teachers, more than 80% of teachers agreed the examination framework was consistent with the course objectives on 31st March 2015. This result was based on a school survey on Liberal Studies. According to the research, it seemed that most of the teachers agreed there was no serious problem against the examination. As such, there were no urgency and unacceptability of the changes in the review. Since the Liberal Studies education and examination were carried on, the public merely criticised the political standpoint of the authority and the persons who were responsible for the examination papers.

Under this context, there was no political question in the public examination in 2015. When the public, on the contrary, criticised the apolitical action of the assessment authority, the political question reappeared in the 2016 examination. The 'Occupy Central' was assumed to be a hot topic of the examination. The political question was not asked directly about the 'Occupy Central' but it tested students' cognitive ability of universal suffrage for electing the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Democracy was for the 'Occupy Revolution' and the social unrest by the students to fight for. It generated a new controversial event again.

CONCLUSIONS

The curriculum was affected and intricately linked to economic and political considerations. We should consider the existence of a set of social ethics that have been described as the Hong Kong core values. The distinctive epithet of Liberal Studies was considered worthy of a free (that is liberal) man and directed to general intellectual enlargement and refinement. Hong Kong was based on manufacturing and commercial (partly trading) activities in its past history. It is now replaced by a knowledge-based and knowledgeable economy. The way the education based and the knowledge-based economy interacted was by exploring the inquiry issues. Students who leave schools merely having mastered the basic skills (reading, writing and calculating) cannot cater for the competitive globalising world. If not so, it is no longer the case in the knowledge-based society. This was particularly noted with advances in information, techniques and the explosive global knowledge in metropolitan Hong Kong. Pupils must acquire a greater amount of knowledge and possess skills catering for the fast changing world, in terms of reasons, facts, realities and information. The old conception of knowledge is already inadequate for handling and catering the complicated issues in our society nowadays.

The Liberal Studies subject consists of six modules and it is grouped into three areas of studies. These three areas are linked together and the ideas interact in various ways. It can be concluded that the revision of the curriculum of Liberal Studies was not prominent. It contains a hidden agenda. We cannot find obvious or pivotal changes in the contents of the subjects and the public of Hong Kong give similar comments about the revision. The entire review of the reviewing process cannot give a similar conclusion. The revision of the curriculum is fully

ideological and hegemonic. However, the authorities did not want to deal with the complicated society and the controversial situation and the historical context during the stages during which radical political movement took place. The revision should not be done drastically in this context; otherwise legitimacy might be jeopardised. Moreover, the curriculum policy-makers and professional experts in the Liberal Studies subject should be clever enough, and they could make their professional decisions on defining the content to be taught and the pedagogy to be conducted. The following is the observable summary of the content revisions.

Table1: The Mid-Term Revision of the Curriculum of Liberal Studies in 2015 Summarised

Topic	Ideology Involved
The Youth Related Personal Understanding and Interpersonal Relationships	Weakened the Role of the Youth in the Society. Deleted the Content of Political Participation and Transferred this to Hong Kong Studies.
Hong Kong Studies	No Content Changes.
Opening Policy of Modern China	Affirmed the Opening Policy for Economic Development and the Importance of Political Reform for Good Governance.
Globalisation	Deleted the Important Contents or Issues of National and Racial Conflicts.

It was said that the nature of the issues involved in the curriculum were essentially controversial. The implementation of value orientation and consideration must be reasonable. However, the choices of the events involved in Liberal Studies are inevitable not to be distinct with certain core values of Hong Kong which are challenging the power. Young (1971) suggested that knowledge is socially constructed. How to construct a knowledgeable society like Hong Kong is as skilful task which requires the policy practice to reflect the reality. Knowledge is so subjective that different groups derive different perspectives of knowledge. Apple (1979) also reminds readers that we should always reflect that one who is “critical thinking” is ideologically laden. The analysis in the historical context of Hong Kong can tell this story. Struggle never halts.

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