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NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN POST-1997 HONG KONG: ADOLESCENTS’ CONSTRUCTION OF PATRIOTISM AND IDENTITY

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(English)

1. Objectives of study

a) To unravel national consciousness among Hong Kong adolescents by ascertaining the pluralistic nature of patriotism and identity, their relationships with each other as well as with relevant variables such as trust and knowledge of Mainland China and Hong Kong among Hong Kong adolescents; and

b) to inform policies and practices of national education.

2. Methods¹

Focus group discussion (12 groups) and a survey (N=1,445) were conducted between mid-April and July, 2011 to gather qualitative and quantitative data from secondary school students in Hong Kong.

Sample

School type. Three secondary schools were selected to represent those that provided relatively more national education activities, and another three schools were selected to represent other schools. They are referred to in this report as Type II and Type I schools, respectively, and each grouping was made up of one school located in Kowloon, the New Territories, and on Hong Kong Island. All six schools were co-educational local schools, as opposed to international or English Foundation schools. The classification of school type was validated by survey results showing a significantly higher level of student participation in national education activities in Type II than in Type I schools.

Age (Form). Form-5 and Form-2 students were chosen for comparison.

¹ There had been considerable public controversy during 2011 over the government’s proposal to introduce a new moral and national education curriculum to schools. We have tracked significant events in the debate and conducted a media analysis of three newspapers. Although this supplementary study was not part of the research proposal, and hence not required, the results uncovered widely different views on the proposal and would be helpful for understanding the influence of the media on students’ views about national education.
Place of birth. The majority of students were Hong Kong-born. There was a smaller but significant number of Mainland-born students in both the focus groups and survey for comparison, although place of birth was not a sampling criterion.

Gender. Gender was not part of the design and its comparison was outside the scope of this project. As it turned out, approximately even numbers of male and female students were represented in the focus groups and the survey.

Focus group discussion (12 groups, 47 students)
In each school, two separate groups made up of Form-5 and Form-2 students (3-4 students each), respectively, were formed to talk about patriotism, identity, trust, knowledge of the Mainland and Hong Kong, and national education activities. Group members were selected by their teachers. The mean number of words per group was 9,634, with the overall word count being 115,608.

Survey (N=1,445)
The survey was conducted by means of a self-administered Chinese questionnaire that covered seven major aspects of national consciousness.

1) Chinese and Hongkonger identities,
2) constructive and blind patriotisms toward the Mainland and Hong Kong,
3) trust in the governments, people, and societies of the Mainland and Hong Kong
4) sources of knowledge about the Mainland and Hong Kong,
5) knowledge about the Mainland and Hong Kong,
6) attitude toward national education, and
7) participation in national education activities.

Care was taken to construct questions that would elicit free responses, not forced choices. For example, students were invited to indicate the strength of their Chinese identity separately from that of their Hongkonger identity, rather than to force them to choose between the two identities.
3. Objective One

The empirical results are complex and extend well beyond the first objective. Only those results that are directly related to the first objective will be highlighted in this section of the Executive Summary. Details of these and other results are reported in the main body of the report.

Pluralistic nature of identity and patriotism

Identity

- Most students self-identified as having both a Chinese AND a Hongkonger identity (75.1% overall). This normative pattern of dual identities applied to Hong Kong-born (72.6%) and especially Mainland-born (87.8%) students. Only among students who were born outside Hong Kong, the Mainland, or Macau did the percentage of dual identifiers drop to 60.0%.

- In the focus groups, there was general agreement that Hongkongers were Chinese in the sense of nationality, and their discussion was generally free from colonial or other considerations that might otherwise have pitted the Hongkonger identity against the Chinese identity. For them, “Hong Kong is a part of China, you are a Hongkonger, and therefore you are also Chinese” (“香港是屬於中國的，所以你是香港人，其實也就是中國人”), and “I am a Hongkonger, and Hong Kong has been reunited with China, and therefore I am Chinese” (“我是香港人，那現在香港回歸中國，那我就是中國人”). These widely shared beliefs and reasoning in support of their dual identities also led many to self-categorise as “Chinese-Hongkonger” (“中國香港人”).

- Single identifiers (identified as Chinese or Hongkonger, but not both) were relatively rare (23.8% overall). For Hong Kong-born students who were single identifiers, most self-identified as Hongkonger; conversely, Mainland-born single identifiers tended to self-identify as Chinese.

- Negative identifiers (identified with neither) were very few (1.3%).

- Considered separately, the Chinese identity was stronger in Type II than Type I schools, whereas the Hongkonger identity was stronger in Type I than Type II schools,
mainly because of more Mainland-born students in Type II than in Type I schools. The strength of each identity did not differ between Forms. Considered jointly, the Hongkonger identity was stronger than the Chinese identity among the Hong Kong-born, but weaker among the Mainland-born.

- The focus groups revealed considerable differences between Hong Kong- and Mainland-born students in the emotional meanings they attached to the Hongkonger identity. The identity was a source of pride and attachment for Hong Kong-born students, but was relatively void of emotional significance to Mainland-born students.

**Patriotism**

Students differentiated between constructive and blind patriotisms, and between patriotisms toward the Mainland and Hong Kong. This pluralistic construction of patriotism showed systematic variations according to:

- the nature of patriotism (stronger constructive than blind patriotism),

- school type (stronger blind patriotism toward the Mainland in Type II than in Type I schools),

- Form (blind patriotisms toward the Mainland and Hong Kong declined with age),

- school type and Form (constructive Hong Kong and constructive Chinese patriotisms were stronger among older students in Type I than in Type II schools, but weaker among younger students in Type I than in Type II schools), and

- place of birth (compared to Mainland-born students, Hong Kong-born students endorsed blind Chinese patriotism less and constructive Hong Kong patriotism more).

Constructive Chinese and constructive Hong Kong patriotisms were strongly inter-correlated, as were blind Chinese and blind Hong Kong patriotisms. That is, within each type of patriotism, loving the country and loving Hong Kong were psychologically bound together. This unity of love provided a genuine base for students in the focus groups to claim their dual love of both the country and Hong Kong (愛國愛港). Relatively few students expressed preference for one over the other, and those who did usually aligned their preference with their birthplace.

The focus groups revealed two varieties of constructive patriotism toward the Mainland, one of which was more idealist and the other more cautious or guarded due to perceived risk associated with criticizing the Mainland.
Correlations of identity and patriotism with one another and with trust

Correlations between identity and patriotism
The Hongkonger identity correlated positively with constructive patriotism toward both Hong Kong and the Mainland. It correlated negatively with blind patriotism toward the Mainland (that is, the stronger it was, the weaker blind patriotism was toward the Mainland). It was unrelated to blind patriotism toward Hong Kong.

By contrast, the Chinese identity correlated positively with Chinese patriotisms only, both constructive and blind.

Correlations between identity and trust
Students with a strong Hongkonger identity trusted both Hong Kong and the Mainland, whereas those with a strong Chinese identity trusted the Mainland but not Hong Kong.

Correlations between patriotism and trust
The correlations were complex. The main pattern was that whereas trust in Hong Kong was most highly correlated with constructive Hong Kong patriotism, trust in the Mainland was most highly correlated with blind Chinese patriotism.

Cognitive structures of Chinese and Hongkonger identities
The overall pattern of correlations showed that the cognitive structure of the Chinese identity was predominately China-centric, characterised by exclusive connections with only Chinese patriotisms and with a narrow trust that did not generalise from the Mainland to Hong Kong. On the other hand, the cognitive structure of the Hongkonger identity, though largely Hong Kong-centric, was relatively more open to Chinese patriotism and more inclusive in its trust of both the Mainland and Hong Kong.
Correlations of identity and patriotism with other aspects of national consciousness

Correlations with knowledge about Mainland China and Hong Kong
Knowledge was conducive to constructive patriotism on the one hand, and to the development of a critical attitude toward blind patriotism on the other:

- Knowledge about the Mainland correlated positively with both constructive Chinese and constructive Hong Kong patriotisms, and negatively with blind Chinese and blind Hong Kong patriotisms.

- A similar pattern of results was evident for knowledge about Hong Kong.

Correlations of knowledge with identity were significant only for Hong Kong-born students:

- their knowledge about Hong Kong was positively correlated with their Hongkonger identity and negatively correlated with their trust in the Mainland, and

- their knowledge about the Mainland was negatively correlated with their trust in the Mainland.

For Mainland-born students, their knowledge was unrelated to their identities. The negative results suggested that their knowledge was not part of their identity either as a Chinese or a Hongkonger.

Correlations with participation in national education activities
The correlations differed according to place of birth:

- For Mainland-born students, their participation in national education activities was unrelated to their identity or patriotism.

- For Hong Kong-born students, their participation was positively correlated with blind Chinese patriotism and Chinese identity.

Correlations with attitude toward national education activities
Whereas the actual participation in national education activities was lowly correlated with identity and patriotism, attitude toward (that is, support of) national education was more highly correlated. The highest correlations were all related to China, not Hong Kong. Support of national education was positively (and highly) correlated with blind Chinese patriotism, Chinese identity, and trust in the Mainland. These results apply to both Hong Kong- and Mainland-born students.
4. Objective Two

To inform policies and practice of national education, we draw on results relating to Objective One as well other results reported in the main body of the report.

**Pluralistic nature of identity and patriotism**

*Dual identities have taken root in adolescents and can provide a healthy platform for national education*

As dual identities are the normative pattern of adolescent development, the cognitive structures of the Chinese and Hongkonger identities uncovered in the study can complement one another to provide a broad overall identity for the majority of adolescents to make sense of and integrate the Chinese side and the Hong Kong side of their national consciousness. If more single identifiers can change to dual identifiers, the developmental benefits of dual identities would spread and the drawbacks of single identity would decrease.

National education policy and practice should capitalise on and further promote dual identities, to be supported by corresponding educational and political discourse in the wider society. The contrary policy or practice of elevating one identity above another would be counterproductive and oppose dual identities that have become the norm and taken root in adolescents.

*Constructive patriotism is valued over blind patriotism*

Students differentiated between constructive and blind patriotisms, and endorsed the former more strongly than the latter. National education and activities that are perceived to help them develop constructive patriotism would be more well received than those that emphasise blind patriotism.

*Psychological unity in the love of the country and Hong Kong*

National education policy and practice should heed students’ yearning for unity in their love for both the country and Hong Kong, instead of prioritizing the two. This unity of dual love has a genuine psychological base and could lead to distress if forced to divide.
**Room for improving attitude toward and participation in national education activities**

Mainland-born students were more favourable in their attitude toward national education and participated more in national education activities. There is considerable room for broadening the relatively narrow base of support to cater for the needs and development of Hong Kong-born students.

**Mix of students and school atmosphere**

Students from a Type II school with a significant mix of Mainland- and Hong Kong-born students commented favourably on the bicultural atmosphere of their school as an important factor in motivating them to learn more about the Mainland. Whilst it is difficult to generalise from these comments, it seems that the presence of a significant number of Mainland-born students may serve as a potential motivational and interpersonal resource for learning more about the Mainland, pending on a conducive bicultural school environment supported by student exchange programmes that increase the interflow of students from both sides of the border.

As Mainland-born students are set to increase in absolute and relative numbers, their needs for and positive impact on the development of national consciousness deserve serious advanced consideration in the development of national education policy and practice.

**Introduction of compulsory national education**

The Moral and National Education Ad Hoc Committee that was “tasked with mapping out the controversial introduction of compulsory national education in all Hong Kong government schools has suggested it be delayed until as late as 2015” (South China Morning Post, 26 January, 2012). The delay, if true, would give more time for stakeholders to understand national education from the students’ own perspective and in terms of their national consciousness. We hope that the present report would prove to be helpful as a catalyst in bringing the students’ perspective on national education and their national consciousness to the attention of the government, schools, the general public, and fellow students.