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Hong Kong Aspirations for Democracy: Understanding the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ Governance Principle

Eric King-man Chong

The Education University of Hong Kong

kingman@eduhk.hk

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Abstract

This paper argues that Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) aspirations for democracy face many stumbling blocks although the governance principles of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ promise such as ‘a high degree of autonomy’ and ‘Hong Kong people rule Hong Kong’. While modern representative government usually denotes a link between democracy and national sovereignty, Hong Kong SAR is part of China just makes the achievements of democracy difficult, not to mention a divided and fragmented society with antagonized in terms of political views. This paper argues that both pro-democracy and pro-establishment (pro-HKSAR and Beijing government) camps are required to communicate with reasons in their actions, and a recognition of changing values of Hong Kong society are needed. Citizenship education should take up the responsibility of educating consensual and deliberative democracy, though there are challenges indeed.

Keywords: democracy, ‘One Country, Two Systems’, Hong Kong, China

Introduction

In 1997, the former British colony of Hong Kong was returned to China. This reunification occurred during an era of globalisation during which China emerged as a strong economic power and witnessed a corresponding cultural revival. Nevertheless, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) remains distinct from China in that many Hong Kong people aspire for democracy, even as China continues to exhibit its ‘astonishing economic accomplishments under a market-Leninist system’ (Galston, 2018:5). In particular, over the past two decades, many Hong Kong people have sought the direct election of the government’s Chief Executive. During this time the world witnessed the digital revolution, the proliferation of mobile devices and the growing use of social media.

Back to the early 2000s, there has been a rise of citizenship education in schools around the world in countries such as Japan, South Africa, the US and the UK (McCowan, 2011), thus wanting to help democracy to work in the future. More recently, however, there has been a surge of populism and the worldwide election of populist political leaders, a development that ‘threatens the assumptions that shaped liberal democracy’s forward march in the 1990s and that continues to guide mainstream politicians and policy makers of the center-left and center-right’ (Galston, 2018:5). Mounk (2018: 98) observed that optimists from Adam Przeworski to Francis Fukuyama have publicly expressed their concerns for the stability of liberal democracy. Also, leading comparativist scholars, such as Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, have examined the circumstances in which supposedly consolidated democracies ‘might die’. Meanwhile, Dziuban et al. (2006) argued that democracy should be recognised as not being a static concept, and democracy should be learned and lived on a daily basis. Furthermore, though many countries call themselves democratic, many citizens engage in little political participation aside from periodic choices from a limited number of political parties, thus there is an urgent need for citizenship education and political participation (McCowan, 2011).

The context described above is relevant for Hong Kong, where candidates have promised to meet populist demands by providing social welfare and giving cash to citizens to relieve economic pressure. Meanwhile, mass mobilisation via the Internet and social media has drawn both ends of the political spectrum into confrontation. Despite this polarisation, democracy in Hong Kong can also be seen in light of the organisation of a distinct group of people with their own spoken language living within a nation, struggling to protect their legal system, freedom of speech, values and destiny.

This paper examines the principle of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ and its implementation, giving consideration to the realisation of democratic ideals in Hong Kong. In doing so, this paper sheds lights on democratic developments in the HKSAR under the auspices of China.

Democracy at a crossroads: Hong Kong’s handover from Britain to China

Many scholars have observed that Hong Kong’s return to China has not been easy despite their common Chinese ethnic and cultural character. The question of democracy remains an issue, with Hong Kong maintaining a capitalist system, using common law in its courts and cherishing the rule of law, human rights and personal freedom. Indeed, the people in Hong Kong first tasted democracy by participating in district-level elections in the 1980s, when the British developed Hong Kong’s representative system against the backdrop of negotiations between Britain and China regarding Hong Kong’s future. In 1988, Hong Kong elected members of the Legislative Council, which was the highest legislative body and had previously been dominated by the British colonial government and its appointed officials. Then in 1991, Governor David Wilson stopped presiding over the meetings of Legislative Council. At that time, Hong Kong’s pro-democratic camp performed well in Hong Kong’s first direct elections to the Legislative Council, which saw 18 legislators directly elected by the people of Hong Kong. This victory for the pro-democracy camp represented the views of a significant portion of Hong Kong’s people who wanted Hong Kong to rapidly move towards a fully elected Legislature based on universal suffrage and to increase the number of fully elected seats up to and beyond the transfer of sovereignty in 1997. However, the crackdown by the Chinese government on students and citizens demonstrating for democracy in the 1989 June 4 Tiananmen incident simply resulted in the city wanting more democracy in place before the 1997 handover to guard against any possible undemocratic exercise of power. The last governor, Governor Chris Patten, introduced some democratic reforms in the Legislative Council amidst strong protests from the Beijing authorities. Thus, Chinese-British relations entered a tense period during the years leading up to 1997.

The first Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa’s determination to ‘bring home the need for Hong Kong people to leave behind their colonial past and be united with China’ (Kan, 2007) can be seen in the phrases that he used in his policy address, such as ‘our Chinese values’ and ‘reunite with the motherland’. The early years of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, however, were marked by the economic problems of the Asian Financial crisis and by the outbreak of avian flu. In 2003, Hong Kong witnessed a significant protest of the Tung Chee Hwa’s administration’s weak capability to cope with these problems. This was a critical moment for Hong Kong SAR democratic movement in terms of mass mobilisation when,

even after the restoration of Chinese sovereignty, people pushed their traditional legal right to protest to the limit.

Meanwhile, since the 1990s when Jiang Zemin became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (1989 to 2002), China has defined itself as a socialist country with Chinese characteristics. This concept, widely considered bold and wise, combined communist central planning with highly regulated market mechanisms in finance, banking, industry and business development. After Deng Xiaoping's reiteration of reform and his declaration of the open door policy in the early 1990s, China developed its economy to an impressive extent but still maintained a strong hand and prohibited activities that promoted democracy and human rights. Anti-corruption campaigns also became a tool for the Chinese communist party to retain its legitimacy among the Chinese population, just as the ideologies of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism were losing their appeal with the general public. These campaigns targeted many once-famous leaders, such as Bo Xilai (Mayor of Dalian City, Minister of Commerce, and Party Chief of the Chongqing municipality who was once considered for the highest office), Wang Lijun (a former regional police chief who sought to challenge the US Embassy) and Zhou Yongkang (a former member of the highest Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party). Today, China imposes stringent controls over the Internet and social media, effectively preventing Chinese citizens from accessing sensitive information that may be critical of Chinese governance. Expectedly, one spill-over effect of China's economic, military and cultural strength is that the Hong Kong SAR remains under significant Chinese influence.

Implementation of 'One Country, Two Systems'

Establishing a Chinese national identity after 1997

Although the British had not promoted overt nationalism in Hong Kong by insisting on people singing its national anthem or flying the British flag, the Chinese government was eager to foster a sense of Chinese national identity in the HKSAR after the 1997 handover. The 1999 Education Commission's report, for example, recommended that students should learn more about modern China, to identify with it, and that the history and culture of Hong Kong should be taught in that context (Kan, 2007). The educational reforms of the early 2000s prioritised national identity and moved for its incorporation into moral and civic education. Furthermore, in the reform document *Learning to Learn: Life-long Learning and Whole-person Development*, the Curriculum Development Institute established the goal that Hong Kong students should understand their national identity and be committed to contributing to the nation and society (Curriculum Development Council, 2001). This nationalist education development stands in contrast to the colonial times when school curriculum was apolitical and aimed at developing a cultural – not a national – identity with

China. Thus, the post-colonial SAR curriculum was revised to include political issues and to develop a Chinese identity (Kan, 2007). This effort witnessed the organisation of student leadership training and student study tours across China. For society more generally, the HKSAR government reinforced Chinese national identity through television advertisements and by subsidising the Committee for the Promotion of Civic Education and its sponsorship of events, programmes and study tours to China. Understandably, these efforts emphasised China's recent economic achievements.

Nevertheless, a nationalistic Chinese identity is not fully compatible with Hong Kong's identity, which is perhaps the major categorisation of identity taken up by its people. In a survey conducted by the Public Opinion Programme of The University of Hong Kong in 2015, there was a sharp contrast of opinion between older and younger people, with respondents over 30 years of age recorded as having the strongest identification as 'Chinese' (20.2%) compared to the sample between 18 and 29 years of age (7.6%) and the overall population average of 16% (HKU POP, 2015). The respondents over 30 years of age remembered the colonial period when they were children, but having witnessed the transition from colonial to Chinese rule they perhaps felt more secure about a Chinese identity seen as hard won. The low scores on Chinese national identity for the younger group, however, cannot be accounted for by any emotional attachment to the colonial period. Explanations must be sought elsewhere.

The results of HKU POP (2015) survey can also be viewed as a trend when the 2011 survey results are taken into consideration. For the 18- to 29-year-olds, their identity as Chinese dropped from 11.8% in 2011 to 7.6% in 2015. At the other end of the scale, 42.4% of young people in this group indicated their identity as 'Hongkonger' in 2011, and this figure climbed to 55.6% in 2015 (HKU POP, 2015). Therefore, a 'fault line' appears to emerge between the attitudes of younger and older respondents to the HKU POP surveys regarding Chinese and 'Hong Konger' identity. In 2015, 36.2% of respondents in the 18- to 29-year-old group indicated that their identity was 'Chinese Hongkonger', and indeed this 'mixed identity' category was the most strongly endorsed for the respondents over 30 years of age (41.6%) and for the overall sample population (40.7%). Identity issues cannot always be viewed in simple or binary terms, especially for respondents in Hong Kong, but rather more as complex interactions of local and national identities. Nevertheless, this sense of interaction is missing for the 55.6% of young respondents who saw themselves as 'Hongkongers' in 2015 and the question of identity remains a key issue for contemplating how democracy can function with divergent perspectives of 'who we are' under the governing principles of 'One Country, Two Systems'.

Implementation of the Basic Law in light of democratic advancements

On the whole, the mini-constitution of the Basic Law has been efficiently implemented in HKSAR, and Hong Kong's legal system remains highly regarded in the international system, despite some of its articles having been exposed to serious contestation. For example, Article 45 stipulates that the Hong Kong SAR Chief Executive shall hold universal suffrage as a goal. Therefore, the pro-democracy camp has been pressuring the HKSAR government to determine the timeline for allowing the Hong Kong people to have universal suffrage when electing the Chief Executive of HKSAR and when electing legislative councillors. In addition, consistent and specific demands were made for double universal suffrage in elections for Chief Executive and for all of the seats of the Legislative Council since the early 2000s. Although the HKSAR government has repeatedly stated that all constitutional procedures must follow the relevant articles of the Basic Law, the Central People's Government of Beijing has been widely viewed as delaying democracy (The Foreign Correspondents' Club, Hong Kong). The pro-democratic camp suffered a similar setback during the Occupy and Umbrella movements in 2014 when their demands for open nominations for the Chief Executive went unmet. Furthermore, these movements opposed the two to three candidates nominated from a 1,200 person framework set by Standing Committee of National People's Congress on 31st August 2014. Naturally, for the pro-establishment camp, the failure to reach consensus among 7.3 million Hong Kongers, especially over endorsement of a proposal from Beijing on how to move ahead of the election methods for Chief Executive, represented a source of shame for Hong Kong lawmakers and signalled to Beijing that Hong Kong was losing its direction. Finally, Beijing issued its harshest condemnation yet of the Hong Kong protests throughout the 20-year history of Hong Kong under mainland Chinese rule.

The pro-establishment parties increased their financial and resource capabilities, which was noticeable in the elections at the district level. Previous scenarios of democrats coming to dominate these elections were rendered obsolete in the 2000s. The pro-establishment camp focused on grass-root support and cultivated clientelistic relationships by handing out welfare benefits to supporters. Simultaneously, the pro-democracy camp relied on moral ideals such as democracy, rule of law, human rights and issues of social justice. These divergent strategies resulted in the pro-establishment camp exerting control over the district level so that no effective opposition to government policies and initiatives could emerge.

In an age of political and ideological polarisation, Hong Kong is no exception. The assertion of Chinese economic and cultural power has taken its toll on the development of democracy in the HKSAR. Hong Kong's polarisation reflects two main positions. On one side is the pro-democracy camp, which comprises democratic political parties and their legislators, human rights activists and numerous civil society active groups, which consider

themselves to be safeguarding the rule of law and whose supporters are called ‘yellow ribbons’. On the other side is the pro-establishment camp, comprised of pro-HKSAR and Beijing government political parties, conservative business groups, professional interest groups and pro-Chinese provincial or township groups, calling themselves ‘blue ribbons’ and favouring social stability and economic prosperity over other concerns.

These two camps and their supporters have differing orientations towards the Beijing government and differing governing principles. Democratic and conservative activists increasingly clash in Hong Kong, with the conservatives favoured by both Hong Kong SAR government and Beijing authorities. The mobilisation of the pro-democracy camp is usually triggered by outrage over issues related to the rule of law and human rights. Also, since the annual 1st July rally of 2003, new and different demands related to the environment, society and gender have emerged. In contrast, the pro-establishment camp normally mobilises their supporters around Chinese national cultural events. Furthermore, in recent years, these conservative and anti-democratic camps have increasingly challenged the pro-democratic camps, accusing them of launching an ‘illegal’ Occupy movement’ in 2014 and finding fault with the legislative councillors’ oath-taking saga in 2016.

Indeed, these two political affiliations are distinguished by the analysis of electoral information from the Registration and Electoral Office, as they apply to core values, where each candidate presented their platforms on a single page. The pro-establishment groups mostly valued the rule of law and clean governance, whilst the pan-democrats placed a stronger emphasis on freedom and democracy, and the top values for the localist/radical camp were democracy, freedom and human rights.

Nevertheless, the author notes that a significant portion of Hong Kongers are not registered voters and, excluding those under 18 years old, may simply be following the same apolitical orientation of the past few decades. This group of Hong Kong people may or may not be willing become involved in politics, or they may be uninformed about the political processes and not able to function effectively. This apolitical character has its origins in the pragmatic pursuit of materialistic goals, accompanied by what sociologist Lau Siu-kai described as ‘utilitarian familism’ (Lau, 1982). Even back in the 1980s, a typical Hong Kong person might have been described as ‘apolitical’ or politically apathetic (Lau, 1982). Therefore, the Hong Kong’s political orientation can be summed up and further categorised as follows:

1. Pro-democracy camp

Traditional democrats who favour conventional institutional participation

Radical democrats who favour confrontational and non-institutional participation

Localists and self-determination advocates who favour social media mobilisation

Civil society-oriented NGOs with different agendas for human rights, social development and the environment

2. Pro-establishment

Traditional pro-Beijing parties and worker unions established before 1997

Traditional pro-business parties established before 1997

Newly established conservative parties oriented around ex-officials and businessmen

Representatives from rural areas

3. Apolitical and not concerned

Maintaining the capitalist way of life

Hong Kong has maintained a capitalist way of life that favours and even depends on business and finance. Thus, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1998 and the world financial crisis of 2008 hit Hong Kong hard, affecting its economy and stock markets. Consequently, there was a renewed focus among youth groups on topics related to self-determination and independence, which were linked to freedom of expression. Some of the related activities were suppressed through legal means and yet today a conservative pro-establishment ethos is found in this cosmopolitan city, which takes pride in its designation by the government as the Asia's World City.

Following the central government's significant increase in its activities in the HKSAR since 2003, many young Hong Kong people believe that there has been an accelerated process of 'mainlandisation' or the Sinification of Hong Kong (Lo 2008). These youth groups protested to protect daily life in Hong Kong's because of many mainland Chinese tourists crowd the streets. This effort may also be interpreted as a protest against the mainlandisation of Hong Kong in politics, society and ideology. From this perspective, Hong Kong is losing its lustre by the weakening of political values often associated with capitalism: human rights, freedom and an independent judiciary.

To remain unchanged for 50 years as promised in the Basic Law

The Basic Law stipulated that the basic legal and political framework of Hong Kong was to remain unchanged for 50 years. However, in many aspects, Hong Kong people have already sensed change. First, in politics, a rising and more resourceful pro-establishment camp has witnessed a proliferation of parties. Now the political spectrum includes the long-term pro-Beijing government party of the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong, the chartered rural areas representative and consultative organisation of Heung Yee Kuk, the pro-business party of Liberal Party and the new business oriented New People's Party. Such

an array of pro-establishment and pro-Beijing government parties offers choices for voters, whilst the pan-democratic parties have been afflicted by internal rivalries, generation gaps, and the fracturing of democratic forces into democrats, radical democrats, localists and pro-independence advocates.

Regarding society itself, the Hong Kong SAR has exerted stronger controls over public protests and sometimes over information and public opinion. Police tightened their grip on protest movements, allegedly by abusing their authority and by closely monitoring protestors, especially after the failed Occupy and Umbrella movements of 2014, thus aggravating tensions between police and the civic activists. In contrast, supporters of the pro-establishment camp favour a hard line approach to anyone disrupting the so-called stability and prosperity of Hong Kong, while also believing that such disruptions, if left unchecked by the police, harm national security and territorial integrity.

With regard to freedom of press, the HKSAR government is widely seen as favouring the media that is pro-HKSAR government and pro-Beijing government. Often, for example, the government releases early information to its allies in the media. However, there has been a chilling effect on the press freedom in Hong Kong with media ownership gradually shifting to Beijing. One related incident was the mysterious stabbing of the famous chief editor, Kevin Lau, of the Mingpao newspapers and the pro-democracy protests at the media outlet of Apple Daily. These incidents raise concerns over whether the media can sustain an independent view when reporting politically sensitive news.

Hong Kong people rule with a high degree of autonomy

In theory, the Hong Kong people rule their government. The Basic Law promised a high degree of autonomy. However, in recent years, there have been concerns about the frequent meetings between the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government (LOCPG) and the Hong Kong SAR's Chief Executive and top officials. Democrats complain about possible intervention in Hong Kong SAR's internal affairs. Also, in recent years, the LOCPG has taken an active stand on matters they deem important to national sovereignty, territory integrity and national security. The LOCPG, for example, accused a HKU law professor, Benny Tai, of proposing at a conference in Taiwan that Hong Kong be an independent country or part of a federation. Of course, most Hong Kong people are so politically pragmatic that they are unlikely to support any radical political action, much less any movement towards 'Hong Kong's independence'.

Furthermore, the State Council of Central People's government sought to define what is meant by 'a high degree of autonomy' by publishing a White Paper on Hong Kong

constitutional principles in 2014 and by communicating this report to Hong Kong's general public. Beijing concluded that 'a high degree of autonomy' does not signify complete autonomy because the Hong Kong SAR is under China's complete jurisdiction. Also, this White Paper demanded that judges and other judiciary officers 'love the Chinese country'. These developments triggered heated reaction because many Hong Kong people became accustomed to having quasi-autonomy and to valuing an independent judiciary. Asking judges who practice common law to love a communist one-party dictatorship is alarming many people in Hong Kong.

Other issues related to democratic developments

National education controversy

Efforts to reinforce a Chinese national identity in Hong Kong's educational system have resulted in opposition. In 2007, at the welcoming banquet hosted by the Hong Kong SAR Government on June 30, 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao earnestly advised that 'we should put more emphasis on national education for the youth in Hong Kong and promote exchanges between them and the young people of the mainland so that they will carry forward the Hong Kong people's great tradition of loving the motherland and loving Hong Kong' (Press Release, 2007-2008). Consequently, the Hong Kong SAR government advanced a school curriculum in 2011 that cultivated Chinese national identity and named it 'Moral and National Education' (MNE). There was a backlash, however, with protests against this MNE curriculum and its alleged threat to independent thinking. The 2012 anti-national education campaign was just a watershed that signalled the younger generations' fear of nationalistic indoctrination and bias regarding related educational content. The activists argued that the government's new education policy would serve to "brainwash" younger students, indoctrinate them and stifle their social and political autonomy as well as creativity (Ortmann, 2018). This anti-national education movement made some inroads, and many Hong Kong people have reservations over, or even opposition to, the adoption of a Chinese national identity.

Disqualifications of elected legislative councillors

There are complex issues associated with the government's strong hand in the disqualification of councillors who proposed self-determination or who swore oaths. Altogether, six legislative councillors were disqualified after the last Legislative Council's election in 2016, including the elected members of the youth party of Youngspiration. For example, although elected by voters, Yau Wai-Ching and Baggio Leung Chung-hang were disqualified because they had displayed a banner declaring that 'Hong Kong is not China' and had, during their oath-taking, placed their hands on the Bible. Following another legal charge that they had broken into the Legislative Council Chamber for this controversial oath taking, and following

their subsequent failure to make a final appeal, the Youngspiration party was adrift in 2018. Furthermore, other legislative Councillors such as Lau Siu-lai (Siu-lai teacher), Yiu Chung-yim and Nathan Law (a former student leader of Hong Kong Federation of Students) were also disqualified for reasons related to the oath-taking. Then, Leung Kwok-hung (nicknamed 'Long Hair') was also disqualified because of related conduct. These series of disqualifications divided the public. The pro-establishment supporters were pleased with the disqualifications of those who did not show respect to China. In contrast, those who supported the pan-democratic camp and championed youth voices, as represented by Youngspiration and Demosistō (roughly translated as 'the people stand'), believed that the Hong Kong SAR government and the Beijing authorities were dealing blows to Hong Kong's democratic ideals and harming discussion about its future. Finally, the pro-establishment camp proposed and passed the ruling on cutting short the Legislative Council's members' speaking time, a ruling set to begin in early 2018. This act, to prevent pro-democratic legislators from filibustering, was used to shorten the deliberation time on government's proposed legislation, budget plans and policies. This action by the pro-establishment camp, widely regarded as anti-democratic, shifted power from legislators to government officials.

Hong Kong democrats, old and young, are they still in the learning stage?

Mouk (2018) argued that 'the ability of liberal democracies around the world to translate popular views into public policy has been declining'. In Hong Kong, disillusionment with political parties has made the general public, especially the younger generation, distance itself from both the pro-democratic and pro-establishment camp, and they took a major step by coming out to protests by themselves.

One young student leader, Joshua Wong, emerged to lead others in opposition to the proposed moral and national education curriculum in 2011. They formed a student group, Scholarism, composed of upper secondary school and young tertiary students and led a successful social campaign to force the government to shelve the controversial national education curriculum. After gaining some popularity at 17 years of age, Joshua Wong said during the Occupy Central movement in 2014: 'I am fighting for democracy for my generation and the next generation'. Joshua Wong and his colleagues from Scholarism then created their own party. Later, Wong even made the cover of TIME magazine. What his party wants for Hong Kong in 2047 is self-determination, which is a sensitive and even forbidden topic from Beijing's perspective. Certainly, the Basic Law of Hong Kong does not allow for such an intention. Together with the Hong Kong Federation of Students and other youth groups such as Youngspiration, these students are fighting against the increased intervention of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Hong Kong affairs (Lo, 2015).

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of Occupy and Umbrella movements, young democrats have been attempting to learn how to make their positions understandable to the wider society, especially because the pro-establishment camp has gained almost half of the electoral support in the by-elections of the Legislative Council and because the pro-establishment and pro-Beijing government party captured West Kowloon, a pro-democracy stronghold, in April 2018's by-election. This accelerated the split of the pro-democracy camp into democrats, radical democrats, localist groups and pro-independence groups. The younger generation's non-materialist orientation, with its belief in freedom, autonomy and anti-establishment values (Inglehart, 1990), has led it to distrust both the prevailing democratic and pro-establishment camps, even while some hold a strong sense of Hong Kong identity and call for self-determination and independence. Arguably, for democracy to work in the future, democrats should look to deliberation, discussion, debate and even compromise. After all, democratic values include tolerance, fairness and justice, but never harassment, hate and fear (Kennedy, 2017).

University students also need to learn how to maintain a democratic form of expression. Kerry Kennedy says the uncivil behaviour displayed by university students in the row over pro-independence posters on university campuses in 2017 runs counter to democratic values such as open-mindedness (South China Morning Post, 12 September 2017).

There are also strong supporters of the young democrats. Martine Lee, for example, is a famous long-term elected democrat and a defender of human rights in Hong Kong. Lee said that there is nothing to worry about and that he believes Hong Kong should be proud of young democrats: 'Did we not make mistakes?' (The Foreign Correspondents' Club, Hong Kong).

Curtailing a senior secondary subject about critical thinking and multiple perspectives

At the time of this writing in early May 2018, the news reported that the government has agreed to review the senior form subject of Liberal Studies, which has been a subject of controversy because the pro-establishment camp in the legislature thinks that this Liberal Studies subject leads to excessive student activism. In particular, a consultative committee under the Education Bureau plans to propose that the seven-grade marking scheme be replaced by one that gives only a passing or failing grade, thus significantly reducing the importance of this subject in the eyes of both teachers and students. Originally, this subject, intended to broaden student horizons with critical thinking skills, has become a scapegoat for youth activism. However, with more voices coming from society regarding the possible effect of this subject on students' civic participation, some pro-establishment legislators and their backers call for complete removal of this subject from senior secondary school.

What lessons can we draw from Hong Kong aspirations for democracy about Chinese version of democracy?

Democracy in Hong Kong has been understood in Western liberal terms but now increasingly clashes with official proclamations of the executive-led Hong Kong SAR government and its view of unitary legislative and judiciary functions. With China imposing its authoritarianism, how should Hong Kong SAR democracy move forward? What can be expected of Hong Kong's evolution under a Chinese version of democracy?

Placing ethnic nationalism before civic nationalism

The rise of Chinese nationalism coincides with its rapid economic growth, increases in its military budget, technological modernisation, growing anti-Western sentiment and assertiveness in foreign relations (Zheng, 1999). After the 2000s, nationalism became a factor in Chinese issues of national sovereignty, territory integrity, foreign relations and debates over human rights and universal values. In particular, China adopted a perspective of ethnic nationalism on matters related to Hong Kong, viewing them through the prism of sovereignty and security. Today, therefore, any action that touches upon these considerations evokes a harsh response by the machinery of the national government. This can be seen in the strong handed approach towards any separatist tendencies in the Chinese Taipei government (Taiwan), the Xizhang (Tibet) autonomous region and the Hong Kong SAR. The Chinese version of democracy prioritises ethnic nationalism, insists that all people must support national sovereignty, and emphasises collectivism over individualism.

Repudiation of universal values

In recent years there has been a flurry of commentary in Beijing newspapers and on conservative websites attacking the idea of universal values as a Western plot to undermine party rule. Many conservatives fear that embracing universal values means acknowledging the superiority of Western political systems (The Economist, September 30, 2010). In July 2010, a philosophical question over the very existence of universal values turned into a political fight, dividing scholars, the media and perhaps even Chinese political leaders, as some analysts believe. This schism became somewhat visible in 2012 as the Communist Party prepared for a change of leadership, but any division quickly disappeared with declarations that China upholds its own socialist values and that Western universal values do not apply. There was also a ban on talking about universal values in China under the new leadership of Xi Jinping. Instead, Xi promoted socialist thinking with Chinese characteristics in a new era beginning in December 2017, which further concentrated political power around Xi Jinping (Xinhuanet, 22 December 2017). This new Chinese version of socialism is combined with traditional Chinese values such as loyalty, obedience, honesty and filial piety in the official propaganda.

Promoting a Chinese model of governance

China uses economic incentives to attract investment in the One Belt and One Road Initiatives, and it is establishing new diplomatic relations with countries which once had relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan). China is strengthening its control over the Internet and social media. The Chinese government also closely monitors human rights and religious activists. Regarding economic development, China diffuses its successful model of developing ports, highways and railways connecting cities with the hinterland, helping to extend this infrastructure to African and Central Asia countries along its Belt and Road Initiative. This Chinese model of governance, while it promises economic growth, also offers authoritarian governance as an alternative to the Western democratic model. This Chinese approach is attractive to other countries that are struggling to balance the exercise of political authority with their citizens' use of the Internet and social media. Interestingly, many scholars and observers originally assumed that after China's suppression of the democracy movement in 1989, a more educated and prosperous Chinese middle class was set to emerge and eventually demand democratic reforms. This prediction, however, has not come true (Galston, 2018), and the reality is that Chinese elites now generally support the Chinese communist government's consolidation of power.

Suggestions

Improving the institutions and processes of a quasi-representative and hybrid democracy is a timely consideration. It is also possible to contemplate what can be done, in the social and educational spheres, to alleviate the strong tendency towards nationalism and executive-led government at the expense of legislative deliberation and judiciary independence.

Reforming the political parties

First, there is a need for traditional political parties to undergo a process of internal reform. This is true for both the pan-democratic and the pro-establishment and pro-Beijing camps to make them more connected with Hong Kong citizens and to become more responsive to rising expectations and youth demands. There is also a need for the creation of alternatives to political parties, such as other ways of collecting public opinion and of assisting governmental decision-making. In Galston's words, 'political reforms are needed to restore the ability of liberal-democratic institutions to act effectively' (Galston, 2018: 15). The pro-democracy camp may rethink its strategy of creating mistrust of the Chinese communist stance, which is a strategy rooted in the events of the 1989 Tiananmen incident, which in Hong Kong triggered the rapid formation of political parties and groups (Lo, 1997). After more than 30 years, however, the pro-democracy camp should advance new visions and campaign strategies to address both a diversified population and an economically strong

China. Furthermore, political parties, interest groups and even the governmental departments may listen to people in a process of mutual understanding and learning because in a world of free-flowing information citizens can be better informed than in earlier eras. We must acknowledge that for representative democracy to work, the elites are required to communicate their reasons for actions (Rauh, 2018). The parties may consider being more active at the grass-roots and local levels, using both their physical presence and technology, social media and on-line methods to connect with both sides of the political spectrum and to foster a society of mutual respect, tolerance, fairness and open-mindedness. It is precisely the lack of representation and accountability in politics and in governmental decision-making process that has led to a sense of disillusionment and disengagement in Hong Kong in the first place. This disillusionment may bear many similarities with other parts of the world in which populism has gained momentum.

Recognising a change in values

Second, there should be a timely recognition of Hong Kong's changing and value system to reinforce a sense of healthy competition between both nationalistic and democratic values. However, people should be aware that Hong Kong has moved beyond materialist values (Inglehart, 1990) and that more people are adopting post-materialist values including the need to 'give people more say in the decisions of the government', to 'protect freedom of speech', to 'give people more say in how things are decided at work and in their community', to 'make their cities and countryside more beautiful', to 'move toward a friendlier, less impersonal society', and to 'move toward a society where ideas count more than money' (Inglehart, 1990, 74-75). Meantime, China is embracing the objectives of maintaining order, sustaining a high rate of economic growth, building a strong military and effectively controlling crime (Inglehart, 1990). It is reasonable to conclude that the Hong Kong citizens who uphold post-materialist values are those who support civic participation in protests and ask for more transparency and accountability in government. In their daily lives, these citizens also support civil liberties, freedom, openness and transparency in the workplace and community, environmental protection and sustainable development. They also value a society in which people cherish humanistic and environmentally friendly ideas.

Calling for citizenship education on teaching democracy

In light of increasing level of Hong Kong's authoritarianism at the expense of legislative and judicial power, there is a need to enhance student understanding of democracy and its workings. Citizenship education as a form of political socialisation (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995) and informal learning in politics (Pinnington & Schugurensky, 2009) are needed. Hong Kong school textbooks barely mention democracy, usually doing so with just one description of elections as a form of civic participation. Schools generally remain unwilling to teach the

topic of democracy. However, in a world with growing populist movements and with shifts towards authoritarianism in Asia, there arises the need for schools to teach about democracy: its meaning, structures, processes and daily practices.

Of course, the transmission of culture through education in schools is not a value-free or neutral process, as curricula and pedagogies always reflect both the distribution of power and the ideology of the dominant groups in society (Lau, Tse, & Leung, 2016). Therefore, teachers should adopt a neutral position in presenting different points of view, while developing students informed judgement. An open classroom or school culture is needed too in which students do not feel insecure about expressing their opinions, which points to the importance of the neutrality of teachers, which leads to students learning independently once they are left to themselves to discuss and decide on politically controversial issues (Stenhouse, 1970; Lockwood, 1996).

Conclusions

In the Hong Kong SAR, aspirations for democracy, traceable to the elections of the 1980s, diverge with China's nationalistic perspective. Teaching democracy in Hong Kong schools has become ever more difficult given that the government now emphasises the cultivation of a Chinese national identity, placing the Basic Law under the Chinese Constitution and requesting that schools teach about China's Belt and Road Initiative and about Greater Bay Area Development. However, facing a new generation of students who spend more time on social media than on community and social engagement, it becomes challenging for teachers to motivate students to think critically about the assumptions of nationalistic and executive-led governance. In politics, there is a need to reform the major parties and improve their representation. In society, there is a need to recognise Hong Kong's changing values. Finally, in education, there is a need for the curriculum to return to the teaching of democracy.

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