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**Title of paper:**

**Competition between politicized version and de-politicized version of civic education curriculum: The case of Hong Kong**

**Abstract**

This paper discusses the influence of Confucianism on civic education, focusing on Hong Kong as a particular case of concern. The development of Hong Kong's civic education is sketched, highlighting the competitions between the politicized and de-politicized versions of the civic education curriculum. Then we proceed to critique the notion that a de-politicized civic education is necessarily a distinctive feature of Asian civic education, which is undergirded by Confucian ideals. Finally, we argue that an eclectic version of civic education, comprising both political and moral components, is warranted. This is what Confucian tenets really mean. It is hoped that the discussion here will help us reflect about whether Confucian tenets justify de-politicization of education and civic education. This is important given the growing aspiration for democracy and citizens' participation in civil societies, particularly those whose cultural roots are in the Confucian tradition. . Moreover, we hope that the dialogues between Confucian traditions and the Western traditions discussed in the paper can shed light on some thought-provoking issues of interest to an international readership, particularly as China is becoming more influential globally.

**Introduction**

The Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Zone (HKSAR), Mr. Donald Tsang, announced in his 2010 Policy Address that starting from 2013 a new subject called Moral and National Education will be launched. In May, 2011 the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) published the *Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 to Secondary 6) (Consultation Draft)* (CDC, 2011)<sup>(1)</sup> for public consultation. This set off a strong debate in Hong Kong, in particular among the educational community, with regard to the meaning of and motives behind such an apparently de-politicised national education initiative. There is a concern about whether the critical thinking of the students will be affected.

In the literature, citizens are defined as members of political communities. Traditionally the term 'political communities' refers to states, and the term 'citizens' thus refers to national citizens. However, if we are referring to multiple communities in a globalized world, the meaning of the term 'citizens' should go beyond the confines of national citizens and refer to multiple citizens, covering citizenship at local, national, regional and global levels (Heater, 1990; Oldfield, 1990). Citizenship or civic education helps members of all such communities to understand, identify with, and participate in shaping their communities ie. become politically informed and active. Civic education should comprise the teaching of politics as one of its core elements and civic education without political education is at best incomplete. Political literacy, as a part of civic education, includes not just knowledge but also political engagement and participation, which is at the heart of citizenship (Kiwani, 2008).

However, de-politicized civic education, incomplete as it is, is not uncommon. In this paper, de-politicized civic education refers to a civic education curriculum that incorporates little or no teaching content related to politics. There are many nations and regions in Asia that adopt a de-politicized version of civic education, usually with strong moral overtones, and Hong Kong is a typical example (Leung & Ng, 2004). Indeed, de-politicization of civic education is by no means a phenomenon confined to Asia. A similar phenomenon was observed in schools of America and this was reported by Westheimer (2008) and Althof & Berkowitz (2006). However, if politics is understood as 'distribution of power' (Marshall, 1998), the power to define, exclude, and include worthwhile knowledge is indubitably political. Thus the act of de-politicizing a civic education curriculum is a political act in itself.

There are many reasons behind the de-politicizing of civic education. It can arise due to the interpretation of the term 'citizens'. When the term citizens is taken simply as 'members of communities', the political flavor of the term is diminished (Jin, 2010). De-politicization of civic education at school level may also occur where the teaching of politics has long been intertwined with a variety of worries: biased presentation, the invasion of schools by partisan politics, indoctrination of students... etc. (Brownhill and Smart, 1989; Spiecker & Straughan, 1991; Yuen, 2007). These worries make schools and teachers dodge the political. Crick for instance expressed the concern that teachers' suspicion will make citizenship education in the UK lose the right balance as 'political literacy' may be unduly watered down when compared to the other two strands: 'moral and social

responsibility' and 'community involvement'. This will result in a form of de-politicized citizenship education (Kiwani, 2008). De-politicization may also be instituted for the purposes of governance. The case of Hong Kong in the colonial era was a typical example (Leung & Yuen, 2009). Morris and Chan (1997) explained how the colonial government deliberately de-politicized the curricula to deal with problems of legitimacy and internal political conflicts. Morris, Kan and Morris (2001) also explained how the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government, due to political considerations, tried to play down any discussion of politically controversial topics in schools when sovereignty finally changed hands in 1997. The de-politicization of civic education in Hong Kong has been motivated by similar concerns discussed.

Moreover, there exists the argument that it is a distinct feature of Asian civic education to have depoliticized and morally inclined civic education, with a focus on moral and personal values rather than civic and public values (Kennedy & Fairbrother, 2004; Lee, 2004, 2009). However, no matter what the reasons are behind the de-politicization of civic education, such an act will reduce the political awareness of people and encourage passivity of citizens as it involves compressing or eliminating the political content of the curriculum, the very means by which schools can help youngsters learn about civic engagement of a political nature.

In this paper, we shall first sketch the development of Hong Kong's civic education, highlighting the differences between the politicized and de-politicized versions of the civic education curriculum. Then we will proceed to critique the notion that a de-politicized civic education, undergirded by Confucian ideals, is necessarily a distinctive feature of Asian civic education. Finally, we argue that, an eclectic version of civic education, comprising both the political and moral components, is warranted. It is hoped that the discussion here will help readers reflect on whether adherence to Confucian tenets justifies the de-politicization of education and civic education. This is important given the growing aspiration for democracy and citizens' participation in today's civil societies, particularly those whose cultural roots are deep in the Confucian tradition. Moreover, we hope the dialogues between Confucian traditions and Western traditions discussed in the paper will shed light on some thought-provoking issues of interest to an international readership, particularly as China is becoming more and more influential globally.

### **A brief sketch of Hong Kong's civic education history**

Hong Kong is a Chinese city which is liberal and cosmopolitan, and where historically Eastern culture has encountered Western culture. It was a colony of the United Kingdom for 150 years till its reunification with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997. The colonial government de-politicized Hong Kong's civic education to fit its own political agenda, restricted certain political rights such as universal franchise, but granted most civil and social rights to HK citizens. The legitimacy of the British regime was built on the economic progress it brought to the colony. It was not until the last decade of her rule that the colonial government started to reinstate political education in Hong Kong's civic education, which previously had remained non-political, parochial, and with a strong moral flavor.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1997, the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned to China and Hong Kong became a Special Administration Region (HKSAR). Hong Kong was promised a policy of 'One Country, Two Systems', which was stipulated in its constitutional document: the *Hong Kong Basic Law*. Hong Kong people are allowed to administer their domestic affairs, retain their own capitalist system and way of life. The central government of PRC has the powers to control the military and foreign affairs of Hong Kong. Even after the return of its sovereignty to PRC, HK basically has remained a society with relatively strong civil and social rights while political rights remain feeble (Fairbrother, 2005; Ghai, 2001). In terms of civic education, another attempt to de-politicize civic education arises as the government of HKSAR tries to promote a form of cultural national identity among the people and dodge controversial political issues. Moral training, involving the inculcation of traditional Chinese virtues, on the other hand is emphasized (Leung & Ng, 2004).

A more in-depth analysis of the different stages of Hong Kong's civic education can be found in Leung and Yuen (2009). Meanwhile, we would like to highlight that the development of civic education in Hong Kong has been underlined by two competing orientations: the first being a de-politicized version of civic education with a focus on personal moral development; the second being a politicized version of a civic education curriculum with a focus on politics, democracy, and human rights.

### **The two competing versions in Hong Kong's civic education curriculum development**

*The de-politicized version*

De-politicization of civic education during the colonial period was carried out mainly to avoid conflict between the pro-Beijing and pro-Taiwan factions, and to avoid the rise of national feeling among the local population. National identity and political affiliation with China or Taiwan were discouraged.

Hong Kong's civic education over the period 1997 – 2008, on the other hand, was characterized by official affirmation of national identity. De-politicization of the curriculum was implemented due to the need to ensure that such national identity was understood in a cultural way as there could be disagreement once the polity and politics of PRC were emphasized (Leung & Ng, 2004). The most noticeable change was that 'civic education' was replaced by 'moral and civic education' in the official documents, such as *Learning to learn: Lifelong learning and whole person development* (CDC, 2001) (hereafter addressed as *Learning to learn*), in which content related to politics, democracy and human rights was substantially downsized. Five paramount values namely responsibility, commitment, respect, perseverance and national identity were introduced in the main text, marginalizing values such as justice and human rights, which appear only in the appendix. In addition, the government gave a strong official affirmation to national education, focusing on cultural China but avoiding political China, and aiming at promoting patriotism and displaying love for the motherland and traditional Chinese culture. Values like filial piety, love for the family, modesty, integrity, the desire for continuous improvement and collective responsibilities are stressed. Sensitive topics on the other hand are avoided (Leung & Yuen, 2009; Morris & Morris, 2000).

This de-politicization tendency is also reflected in the *Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 to Secondary 6) (Consultation Draft)*, which was published in May 2011, after the Policy Speech of the Chief Executive. The document has a total of 293 pages with 166 pages of main text, the rest being appendices. As for the main text, the word 'civic' is replaced by 'national' in the title. Second, terms like 'Chinese Communist Party' (the ruling party of PRC) and 'political parties' are not found. The terms 'National People's Congress' (the equivalent of Parliament in the PRC) and the 'Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference' (a formal official national consultative mechanism in PRC) appear only twice. The word 'politics' or 'political' appears only sixteen times. The twenty Learning Objectives in the 'national domain' are clearly focused on Chinese cultures, histories, traditions, people's livelihood, economics, technologies,

and advancements. Politics in the PRC is seldom mentioned. Only three Learning Objectives touch upon politics, including key stage one (primary 1-3) which says that students are expected to: “learn the admirable qualities and virtues of outstanding figures from various fields such as politics, technology, culture, art, and academic studies in the country (P. 25)”. In key stage three (secondary 1-3), students are expected to “explore the relationship between the constitution of the country and its important government organizations and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and enhance understanding of the concepts of the state and “One Country, Two Systems” (P. 26). In key stage four (secondary 4-6), students should “understand the major contemporary achievements in the country in areas such as economy, diplomatic relations and technology to explore the role one can play in the development of the country, be willing to strive for the well-being of the country and its people, and strengthen national unity and develop affection for the country (p. 26)”. The tendency to de-politicize the curriculum is clearly manifested as the content related to politics is minimized, alongside an attempt to promote the appreciation of the achievement of the nation.

At the school level, de-politicized civic education has become the mainstream. The first author visited 33 secondary schools in a study entitled *Alternative Policy Instruments for Enhancing Citizenship Education (2007-2010)*. As many as 25 (75.7%) of the schools visited were found to offer mainly moralized civic education. The de-politicized version of civic education in schools may bear different names, such as civic education, moral and civic education, moral education, life education, affective education, holistic education, and whole-person development (Ma, 2009).

This de-politicized version of civic education has drawn support from both political and cultural sources. Politically, after 1997, the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong Mr. Tung Chee Hwa portrayed Hong Kong as a harmonious, apolitical capitalist city to be bounded together by Chinese Confucian values. In fact, this is consistent with the PRC’s official view of Hong Kong as a de-politicized, commercial Chinese city (Vickers & Kan, 2003). Culturally, this version is supported by the argument that it is close to the root of Chinese tradition, namely Confucianism, which is inhospitable to values such as individuality (in the Western sense), individual rights and democracy, which are fundamental to the understanding of citizenship in a Western perspective (Nuyen, 2002, 2005).

It has been argued that Asian civic education, in particular in those countries influenced by the Confucian tradition, has at least three intermingled features:

emphasis on harmony, spirituality, and individuality (viewed as self-cultivation). It is postulated that, unlike its Western counterparts, civic education in Asia should be de-politicized, inward looking, with emphasis on maintaining the status quo for harmonious relationships, and is expressed in terms of moral education, rather than by rights and a democratic system (Lee, 2004, 2009). However, this de-politicized view contrasts sharply with those who argue for a political version of civic education to which we now turn.

### *The politicized version*

There was an attempt by the colonial government to reinstate political education as a part of Hong Kong's civic education in late 1980s, shortly before the handover. This was directed mainly at the intended curriculum of Hong Kong. Morris (1990) gave a clear account of pertinent syllabus changes around this period. In 1984, the syllabus of Economic and Public Affairs was revised and discussion of representative government was included. A new subject Government and Public Affairs, which was concerned mainly with the learning of politics, was launched two years later. In 1984, the study of Chinese History was also extended to include the founding of the People's Republic of China. The trend was especially conspicuous with the publication of *School Civic Education Guidelines* in 1985 and 1996, (Education Department, 1985 & CDC, 1996). Teaching of politics, democracy and human rights as a corollary became possible. This was a response by the colonial government to the forthcoming political and constitutional changes associated with the handover in 1997. Sweeting (1990) stated "The relationship between politics and the school curriculum changed drastically after 1982 when it became clear that Hong Kong would return to Chinese sovereignty. The rationale for this was derived primarily from a desire to develop in Hong Kong a democratic political system which would be able to ensure its autonomous status after 1997." Morris and Chan (1997) commented that the study of previously sensitive, forbidden material, including some aspects of politics and the social and political context of the PRC, was for the first time, formally allowed.

This version of civic education was welcomed by the pro-democracy camp and the liberal elements of civil society. Politically, they contended that, in facing the gradual democratic development in Hong Kong, education for democratic citizenship and human rights had been hardly addressed in the de-politicized curriculum and this was detrimental to the democratic development of the society (Lee & Sweeting, 2001). Culturally, it was argued that Confucianism's view of

relationships and the Western view of rights could be complementary (Chan, 1997; Yung, 2010). Some elements of Confucianism may add value to the development of citizenship (Nuyen, 2002; Yung, 2010) and there is no reason why Confucianism, which should be a culture with vitality, has to remain static and could not develop and flourish to meet changing challenges (Kennedy, 2004). The following discussion will focus on the dialogues between the two versions.

### **The dialogues between the two versions**

Though the politicized and de-politicized versions represent different perspectives and propositions, we believe that there can be and should be dialogues between them. Such dialogues would be beneficial to the understanding of civic education in Hong Kong if we can:

- (1) examine the notion of civic education in the Asian perspective with critical reference to Confucian values;
- (2) keep in mind the contextual needs of Hong Kong society against which Hong Kong's civic education is carried out.

### Civic education in Asian perspective

What is unique about the Asian factor in civic education is a very complex issue, given the diversity of Asian communities in terms of nations, ethnicities, cultures, religions, political systems, and historical development... etc. Although there is no single version of Asian values, Kennedy & Fairbrother (2004) identified at least three different discourses: the 'Singapore School', the 'Mahathir Model', and the 'China Post-Tiananmen Confucianism-Nationalist Model'. In the following discussion, we shall focus on the third model (called the Confucian model hereafter).

Confucianism has often been interpreted at different levels: the philosophical level, the political ideology level, and the level of actual state policies and way of life (Chan, 1997). There is also a difference between 'Confucianism as an ideal' and 'Confucianism in practice' (Yung, 2010). This is important to understand because the interpretations of Confucianism at different levels may not be the same and can be pursued for different or even conflicting purposes. Confucianism, when interpreted as political ideology and actual state policies, can be, and has been, used as justification for the absolute powers of the Chinese Emperors in their governance (Chan, 1997). However, in this paper, Confucianism at the philosophical level or

Confucianism as an ideal will be adhered to. Since this discourse consists of many complicated issues beyond the scope of this paper, we shall only focus on the following issues, namely: (1) 'individuals and the collective', (2) 'rights and relationships', (3) 'rights, harmony and diversity', and (4) the 'apolitical and inward nature of Confucian tradition'.

### *Individuals and the collective*

Hungtington (1991) asserted that Confucianism put emphasis on the group over individuals and has little regard for the individual, which is a crucial element of citizenship and so is incompatible with the Western conception of citizenship. Lee (2004, 2009) argued that Confucianism understands the individual, not as individualism but as individuality, meaning the development of the quality of inner being and individual characters through self cultivation within the relationship with others and context. These views of individuals, with emphasis on relationships and context, seem to be different from and even incompatible with the Western concept. The Western concept of individuals is largely on individualism, and upon which individual rights and responsibilities are based. However, some scholars contend that Confucianism's emphasis on individuals in relationship to the communities, that is 'individuals-in-context', may in fact add value to the idea of citizenship. It may help to bring forth a proper balance and avoid the arising of extreme individualism, which is marked by over-assertion of individual rights at the expense of the common good (Nuyen, 2005; Yung, 2010). Compatibility of Confucianism with the Western conception of citizenship depends much on how the latter is construed. Confucianism is quite irreconcilable with the Western conception of citizenship in the liberal tradition that emphasizes individualism. However, the Western conception of citizenship in the communitarian tradition, which argues that an individual is an individual whose individuality is shaped by the community (Faulks, 2000), may have much in common with Confucianism. In Faulk's view, an individual is not just a rational being as the liberals contend, but a political animal, shaped by political communities and responsible for participation in the running of communal affairs. In fact, the dichotomy between liberalism and communitarianism has also been challenged (Miller, 2000; Sankowsk, 1999; White, 1997) and liberal-communitarianism has been proposed, implying that the liberal tradition may not necessarily be at odds with Confucianism (Miller, 2000).

### *Rights and relationship*

Confucianism is 'relationship oriented' and it emphasizes the individual-in-context while Western citizenship in the liberal tradition is 'rights-oriented' and is related to individualism. It is argued that 'rights orientation' is not in line with Confucian tradition because an over- emphasis on rights would hurt relationships, which are so valued by the Confucian tradition (Chan, 1997). On the other hand, some scholars argue that the idea of rights as social practice, originating from the West in the seventeenth century, should not be construed as limited to the West (Chan, 1997; Donnelly, 2003, 2007; Li, 2001; Tang, 2009). Donnelly (2007) for instance, argued that the idea of rights did not derive from specific cultures, either Western or non-Western. Instead, it resulted from the social, economic and political transformation of modernity, which in turn was related to the emergence of capitalism and nation-states. Rights evolved as the oppressed fought against the oppressors with the emergence of capitalism and nation-states. Rights are pegged to social evolution and this evolution is not necessarily limited to Western societies and cultures. In this light, the difference between 'rights orientation' and 'relationship orientation' is not caused by the differences between Western and Asian culture; but to the differences between tradition and modernity. In a similar vein, Chen (2010) argued that we should view the concept of 'rights' from the perspective of oppressions and liberation from oppressions, rather than cultures. Rights should be championed as a protection of the oppressed against the oppressors, regardless of cultures. From this perspective, Chen (2010) argued that although terms like 'rights' and 'freedom' were not used explicitly, similar ideas had been used in the fight for liberation of the oppressed in China's past. Ideas about 'rights' and 'freedoms' thus were not totally new in Chinese history.

There is an argument that the concept of 'rights' is not acceptable in Asian culture due to its communal and relational orientation. Chan (1997) however explained that this may simply be caused by the confusion between 'selfish interest' and 'self interest' inherent in the rights concept. The difference here is crucial. 'Rights' as a concept focuses on self-interest but does not necessary imply selfish interest. Chan (1997) further argued that the emphasis on caring relationships in the Confucian tradition does not rule out rights as interpreted in a 'self interest' sense. He contested that Confucian tradition champions a mutual caring and loving relationship, which transcends self interest in an ideal state. However, in a non-ideal state, if the relationship is broken down, the concept of *ren* (humanity) in the Confucian tradition, would not deny protection of rights for the vulnerable against the powerful. Yung (2010) echoed that Confucian tradition tends to focus on working with harmonious human relationships in an ideal state, using ideas such

as *ren* (humanity) and *li* (rites) to cultivate the inner character and morality of the people. It does not however deny the protection of basic rights of the vulnerable in a deteriorated relationship.

Based on these arguments, we contend that the 'rights orientation' and 'relationship orientation' actually complement, rather than compete with, each other. 'Relationship orientation' and 'rights orientation' are simply different modes of human behavior to guarantee the well being of the people under different status quos.

### *Rights, harmony and diversity*

'Harmony' is crucial in the Confucian tradition because it helps to maintain good relationships and stability. Harmony is so highly valued that some propose that rights should be relegated to second place. Consultative democracy, for example, is suggested to be a viable alternative to representative democracy based on the belief that consultative democracy is less divisive and more harmonious than direct election in representative democracy (Lee, 2009). Preserving harmony is deemed more important than basic political rights. In the case of Hong Kong, the colonial regime did administer Hong Kong effectively by "consultation and consensus" and the kicking off of representative development only happened in the 1980s. However, how a conservative version of democracy, for example consultative democracy, would fare in a 21st century Asian context may need to be critically reflected upon, given increased democratic aspiration and political participation on the one hand, and the recognition of the right to choose the government as a part of basic human rights on the other. The massive July 1<sup>st</sup> demonstration in Hong Kong in 2003 did witness more than 500,000 people taking to the street and one of the requests was to build up a directly elected government in Hong Kong. Popular movements of a similar nature were also observed in other Asian countries influenced by the Confucian tradition such as Taiwan (Chang, 2009) and South Korea (Chen, 2010). These suggest that the aspiration for upholding political rights, such as building up a representative government that rules with people's consent, is strong among the population, even in Asian societies with a Confucian heritage. The notion of denying basic rights for the sake of harmony is in fact outdated.

In addition, Chan (1997) rightly explained that Confucian tradition, though valuing harmony, would not rule out the recourse to rights and litigation to

recompense injury with justice if a harmonious relationship was broken down and harm to others was evident. The following quote from the Analects illustrates that Confucius' teaching didn't really mean justice should be sacrificed for the sake of harmony.

Someone said, 'What do you think of repaying evil with kindness?' The Master said, 'Then what are you going to repay kindness with? Repay evil with justice, and repay kindness with kindness' (Book Hsien Wan of the Analects (Ching, 2004)).

It is reasonable to conclude that though Confucian tradition focuses on keeping harmonious relationships and caring in an ideal state, it would not rule out the use of litigation and rights to protect the vulnerable in a broken and harming relationship. Therefore, "rights" and "harmony" could be considered as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Another related argument is that since the Confucian tradition values harmony for the maintenance of the status quo and relationships, it tends to disapprove of disagreements and opposing views for the sake of conformity (Nuyen, 2002; Yung, 2010). When this attitude is adopted as political ideology and implemented as state policies, it can unfortunately be used to justify suppressing dissenters by people in power. But upon a closer look, it is not difficult to discern that Confucius did in fact advise us to tolerate a diversity of views. This is reflected in the following quote from the Analects.

Exemplary persons value harmony but not conformity;  
petty persons value conformity but not harmony (Book Tze Lu of the Analects)

Nuyen (2002) argued that Confucius saw human lives as a blending of different and even opposing forces. Such blending is maintained in a harmonious manner by the Way (dao). This is similar to how different musical instruments making different sounds blend together into orchestral harmony. Harmony is manifested through diversities within unity, not by enforcement of conformity. This championship of diversity in Confucian beliefs is in line with the tolerance of diversity and dissenters upheld in Western citizenship.

*Apolitical and inward nature of Confucian tradition*

In response to the claim that civic education of Confucian heritage should be apolitical and inward looking, Kennedy (2005) argued that civic education in the Confucian tradition is not confined to personal matters of a moral nature. Instead, in that philosophy, starting from the development of the self and becoming a good individual, one is expected to work towards becoming a moral leader and take part in building up a moral society. In other words, there is an “act out” orientation in the Confucian tradition which of course implies political participation at the heart of Western political beliefs. The following quote from Book Tse-Chiang of the Analects is revealing:

If there is spare time while holding office, let it be given to study. Who is well-learned should apply himself to be an officer.

According to this quote, a man with achievement in the study of virtues should act out and be an officer and do good to society by assuming political powers through joining the public office. In the course of this, he should go back to education to consolidate the foundation of virtue. Besides, Confucius actually required the leader and the officials to be living examples of good morality to the people, believing that this was essential to achieve good governance. In the Analects (Book Tze Lu), the following quotes can be found:

If the prince is upright, his subjects will go well even though he does not give orders. But if he himself is not upright, even though he gives orders, they will not be obeyed.

Another quotation from Analects (Book Tze Lu) :

If a minister makes his conduct upright, what difficulty will he have to manage the government? If he can't rectify himself, how can he correct others?

What Confucius and his students have said and done has to be understood in historical context (Chen, 2010). At the time of the Spring and Autumn and the Warring period (BC 770- 221) in China, there were wars everywhere. The feudal kings were fighting each other and the people were ill treated. Confucius and his students were touring around various states trying to lobby the feudal kings

politically to behave and rule their countries according to such virtues as 'ren' and 'li' in their teachings. However the Confucian notion had been twisted as a form of political ideology and implemented as policy measures for the consolidation of the absolute power of the kings. This authoritative twisting of Confucianism was further strengthened in the Han Dynasty when Confucianism was granted the status of dogma with the suppression of other schools of thought, and became the curriculum for public examination one needed to pass to gain access to officialdom.

The discussion above points out that there is a need to critically reflect upon claims that, unlike its Western counterpart, civic education in Asia should be apolitical, inward looking, and lopsidedly in favor of harmony; and that moral education, rather than rights and democratic values, should be emphasized. This critique should be informed not just by going back to the tenets of Confucianism, but also by careful observation of the real socio-cultural landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly the popular aspirations that come as a part of it. Furthermore, the political development of the society in concern should be duly considered when civic education is being planned.

### The context of the Hong Kong

The Basic Law, which is the mini-constitution of Hong Kong, has stipulated that universal franchise will eventually be adopted. Now, following the decision of the National People's Congress of the PRC, the projected time for popular election of the Chief Executive is 2017; which is to be followed by that of a fully elected legislative body in 2020. Civic education is much needed to give young people the political knowledge required of an electorate. In addition to the democratic development of the political system, civic engagement of Hong Kong citizens, especially the youths, has changed substantively and this needs to be addressed in civic education. Both Lee (2003) and Schulz et al. (2010) have pointed out that Hong Kong youths' interest in politics and concern for freedom of speech etc are high in international comparative studies as revealed by IEA study in 1999, and ICCS study in 2010. Moreover, both Kennedy's (2010) re-analysis of 1999 IEA quantitative data and Leung's (2006) qualitative data point out that Hong Kong youth's understanding of "good citizens" is eclectic, including taking up conservative views about doing their best in their diverse roles and assuming more radical orientations, such as participating in demonstrations and protests, when trying to deal with unreasonable laws. Young citizens need to be provided with knowledge

and understanding of the political process so as to help them understand and make such choices wisely.

Recently, more and more young people in Hong Kong who were born after 1980 (often called post-80s) have participated actively in various social and political movements, protesting for issues related to democratic development, poverty, genders, cultural heritage, minorities' rights, environmental protection, and sustainability. Political groups, including those formed by young people further vitalized the civil society. Examples of such groups are: 'Scholarism', 'We are 90s' and 'Internet Freedom Concern Group'...etc. Recent surveys have also revealed that though the majority of HK people do not agree with confrontation politics, especially those that involve collision of bodies, the percentage of those supporting confrontational politics as effective in pressing for government's responses to popular aspirations is rising (Wong, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). Regardless of the attitudes toward confrontational politics, all these phenomena indicate that many young people are already taking an active role in politics. Given this, providing such young people with knowledge, values, and skills required for active participation is reasonable and much needed. This underlines the inadequacy of de-politicized civic education, which will result in political inaction and social tranquility.

Kennedy (2005) explained that even though Asian citizenship may be characterized more by moral virtues and personal values than by civic virtues and public values, a de-politicized civic education is not sufficient for Hong Kong in facing the complex and challenging future. Requiring young people to comply with traditional norms and values and remain de-politicized has become increasingly obsolete. Instead, civic education should be progressive and encourage youths to adopt participatory culture, allowing them to take part in the democratization process in an active and fully informed manner.

## **Conclusion**

There is a pressing need to critically assess the assertion that civic education in Asian societies with a Confucian heritage, such as Hong Kong, should be confined to moral education of a de-politicized nature. Our proposition is premised on two arguments. First, Confucian beliefs are not ontologically incompatible with their Western counterparts in the concern for justice and rights of the people. The claim that rights and justice are the price to be paid for harmony may not be in line with the original intention of Confucius. This argument is complicated by the fact that

Confucian thoughts have often been used in Chinese history as a political tool to buttress the authority of the regime. Secondly, changes that have come with modernity, including increasing expectation of political participation, make attempts to de-politicize civic education difficult to justify. Such a de-politicized version of civic education will not help the society when youth participation is already a hard fact of political life. In the case of Hong Kong, the democratic reforms will further mean that a politicized version of civic education has become an urgent need.

Therefore, we argue that contests between the de-politicized and politicized versions of civic education in Hong Kong are unnecessary and we propose that educators of both points of view should work hand in hand to create eclectic versions of civic education which can draw on the strengths of both sides for the common good of Hong Kong as a cosmopolitan, open, pluralistic society. Building up a truly informed democratic society is also in line with the wish of the people and the promises made in the Basic Law and this will require citizens who have both moral principles and political efficacy.

#### **Footnote:**

1. After about twelve months of consultation, the *Moral and National Education Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 to Secondary 6)* (CDC, 2012) was published on 1 April, 2012. Many amendments have been made and all primary and secondary schools are requested to implement the curriculum within the coming three years. This paper has not covered this document because of the time constraint.

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