

## **From ‘civilising the young’ to a ‘dead-end job’: gender, teaching, and the politics of colonial rule in Hong Kong (1841–1970)**

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The feminisation of teaching is an important topic in education and gender studies. Discussions have been enriched by comparative and international studies as well as a gendering perspective in which a complicated view of the role of the state has emerged. In colonial Hong Kong, although the government was limited in its support of teacher training, its strategic control was not ineffective. Through regulating the teaching force, the colonial regime was instrumental in training women to help civilise the young and in creating a dead end job – that of a ‘primary school teacher’. It also constantly (re)constructed the nature and role of ‘Chinese teacher’ and ‘Chinese women’. By revealing some seldom-explored strategies and disrupting the fixed meanings of ‘Chinese teacher’, ‘Chinese women’, and ‘primary school teacher’, this paper unravels the intervention and (re)invention of the colonial regime in the teaching occupation and probes their implications for a patriarchal society.

**Keywords:** feminisation, gendering, Chinese women, primary school teacher, colonial rule

The ‘feminisation of teaching’, which refers to ‘the gradual increase in the numbers and the proportion of women teaching in most state school systems, along with their low status and pay within that system’,<sup>1</sup> is an important topic in education and gender studies. Although scholars of each field have their own specific approach, a ‘remarkable consensus’<sup>2</sup> about the causes and effects of feminisation has been gradually reached. Modernisation, population growth, expansion of primary education, increased state involvement and economic alternatives for men, as well as the availability of abundant and cheap female workers, have been identified as the precursors of this process. The declining status and autonomy of primary school teaching, the exit of male teachers, and the exploitation of female labour are the effects that the process is said to produce.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Prentice and M.R. Theobald, eds. *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women & Teaching* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>2</sup> A term coined by J. Albisetti, ‘The Feminization of Teaching in the Nineteenth Century: A Comparative Perspective’, *History of Education* 22, no. 3 (1993): 253–63.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, the following studies have more or less subscribed to this framework when explaining the feminisation of teaching: H. Bradley, *Men’s Work, Women’s Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989); M. David, *The State, the Family, and Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); M. Grumet, ‘Pedagogy for Patriarchy: The Feminization of Teaching’, *Interchange* 12, nos. 2–3 (1981): 165–84; J. Purvis, *A History of Women’s Education in England* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991); M. Strober and D. Tyack, ‘Why Do Women Teach and Men Manage? A Report on Research on Schools’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no. 3 (1980): 494–503.

In recent years, this framework has been further enriched by a comparative and international perspective. One fine example of work in this area is the seminal review essay by James Albisetti (1993),<sup>4</sup> which highlights important differences among countries as well as regional disparities in terms of the rates and levels of feminisation. The book edited by Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Roman (2006),<sup>5</sup> which includes research from Spanish-speaking and/or Catholic countries, further illuminates the common and distinctive factors influencing the feminisation of teaching across nation-states.

Feminist studies have also helped develop a more sophisticated view of the role of the state in the feminisation of teaching. It is increasingly recognised that states used institutional practices to manipulate the sex composition of the occupation as well as cultural strategies to redefine the nature of women and the job. They would impose a marriage ban on women teachers at different times to regulate the supply of teachers,<sup>6</sup> and/or restrict women from teaching at pre-schools, lower grades, and girls' schools, whereas men would be required to teach upper grades and in co-educational schools.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Albisetti, 'The Feminization of Teaching', 253–63.

<sup>5</sup> R. Cortina and S. S. Roman, eds., *Women and Teaching: Global Perspectives on the Feminization of a Profession* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> See Albisetti, 'The Feminization of Teaching', 257–58 and M. Van Essen, 'Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920: Feminization in Dutch Elementary and Secondary Schools from a Comparative Perspective', *History of Education* 28, no. 4 (1999): 413–33.

<sup>7</sup> The gendered prescription existed in Argentina, Brazil, Germany, and the Netherlands: see G. Fischman, 'Persistence and Ruptures: The Feminization of Teaching and Teacher Education in

While some states would lower entrance standards to attract and accommodate the massive increase of women teachers and thereby de-skill the job,<sup>8</sup> others would lengthen the certification requirement to attract women of better backgrounds to teaching.<sup>9</sup> States also employed various gendered ideologies<sup>10</sup> or redefined the nature of the job<sup>11</sup> to attract women workers and to justify the lower pay that they received.

Argentina', *Gender and Education* 19, no. 3 (2007), 355; F. Rosemberg, 'Educational Policies and Gender: An Assessment of the 1990s in Brazil', in *Women and Teaching*, op. cit. 143–46; Albisetti, 'The Feminization of Teaching', 262; M. Van Essen, 'Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920', 431.

<sup>8</sup> The employment of uncertificated women was an acceptable practice in France, England, Costa Rica, Spain, and Mexico; see S. Trouve-Finding, 'Teaching as a Women's Job: The Impact of the Admission of Women to Elementary Teaching in England and France in the Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries', *History of Education* 34, no. 5 (2005): 483–96, and Cortina and Roman, *Women and Teaching*, 5. In Brazil and the Netherlands, the states accepted lower certification standards from women teachers; see Rosemberg, 'Educational Policies and Gender', 144 and Van Essen, 'Strategies of Women Teachers', 419–21.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Blount, 'Manliness and the Gendered Construction of School Administration in the USA', *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 2, no. 2 (1999): 55–68; Strober and Tyack, 'Why Do Women Teach', 498.

<sup>10</sup> Several gendered ideologies have been mentioned in the literature, ranging from stressing the innate, maternal, loving, caring nature of women and their suitability to teach young children; to the compatibility of teaching with marriage; to teaching as an ideal preparation for motherhood; to social maternalism. See H.C. Araujo, 'The Emergence of a "New Orthodoxy": Public Debates on Women's Capacities and Education in Portugal, 1880–1910', *Gender and Education* 4, nos. 1/2 (1992): 7–24; C. Steedman, "'The Mother Made Conscious": The Historical Development of a Primary School Pedagogy', in *Family, School and Society*, ed. M. Woodhead and A. McGrath (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986), 82–95; Cortina and Roman, *Women and Teaching*, 1–20; Strober and Tyack, 'Why Do Women Teach?', 494–97; G. Morgade, 'State, Gender, and Class in the Social Construction of Argentine Women Teachers', in *Women and Teaching*, op. cit. 2006, 81–103; Fischman, 'Persistence and Ruptures', 353–68.

<sup>11</sup> Joan Scott's seminal essay on gender as an analytical concept has inspired studies to use gender to decode cultural meanings in apparently gender-unrelated categories; see Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 28–50. I am not aware of any scholar who has utilised her insights to explore

Clearly, the strategies used by states to involve women in teaching are varied and complex, and deserve closer examination.

In colonial Hong Kong, from the early 1840s to the late 1930s, teaching was a job predominantly carried out by foreign men and ‘Chinese assistant masters’, and concerns about Anglo-centricity and male domination were not an issue. It was only in the 1920s that some Chinese women, who were regarded as politically more reliable, were trained to be vernacular teachers in order to help stabilise colonial rule. In the post-war reconstruction period, the government purposely created the job category ‘primary school teacher’ and delimited its nature and prospects. To aid the rapid expansion of primary education, it also hired more women while suppressing their wages by defining them as ‘occasional workers’, who then became the numerical majority in primary school teaching.

Nevertheless, these historical processes, which encompass changes in institutional practices and constant ‘reinterpretation and contestation of gendered

the history of the teaching occupation, but the studies by Ava Baron on labour history and Dana Britton on the history of prison officers have helped me re-examine the history of the job category ‘primary school teacher’, especially with regard to when and how it became associated with ‘women’s work’. See A. Baron ed. *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991) and D. Britton, ‘Gendered Organisational Logic: Policy and Practice in Men’s and Women’s Prisons’, *Gender and Society* 11, no. 6 (1997): 796–818.

meanings'<sup>12</sup>, have not been adequately studied. A few studies have examined the processes of feminisation,<sup>13</sup> yet the meanings of the cultural categories of 'Chinese women', 'Chinese teachers', and 'primary school teacher' have not been questioned but have rather developed 'the appearance of timeless permanence'.<sup>14</sup> This paper attempts to fill these gaps by providing a gendered history of the teaching occupation. By revealing some seldom-explored strategies and disrupting the fixed meanings of some common categories such as 'Chinese teacher', 'Chinese women', and 'primary school teacher', it aims to unravel the intervention and (re)invention of the colonial regime with regard to the teaching occupation, and to probe their implications for a patriarchal society.

Because of these new foci, this paper has to cover a relatively long period, 1841 to 1970, and impose a gender-sensitive periodisation.<sup>15</sup> As such, the whole

<sup>12</sup> J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (Harlow, England; Hong Kong: Pearson Education, 2010), 283.

<sup>13</sup> See Bernard Hung-kay Luk, 'Opportunities for Women in Tertiary Education', in *Women and Education in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan*, ed. Comparative Education Center (SUNY, Buffalo: Graduate School of Education Publication, 1990), Chapter 7; Hung-kay Luk, *Cong Rong Shu Xia Dao Dian Nao Qian: Xianggang Jiao Yu De Gu Shi* (Hong Kong: Step Forward Publisher, 2003), 199–207. Fang has provided a short historical account of the Vernacular Normal School for Women; see Jun Fang, 'The Vernacular Normal School for Women (1920–1941): The Sole Female Teacher Training Institute in Hong Kong', *Education Horizon* 48 (2003): 56–63.

<sup>14</sup> Scott, *Gender & the Politics of History*, 43.

<sup>15</sup> According to Baron, historical studies are not gender-neutral and feminist scholars should develop their own periodisation; see *Work Engendered*, 5.

period is divided into two main phases. The first phase, covering the arrival of the British in 1841 until the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in 1941, traces how and why women were increasingly employed as teachers to civilise the young. The second period, begins in 1946, after the Japanese occupation ended, and concludes in 1970, the year before universal primary schooling was introduced. It covers the circumstances related to the birth of the ‘primary school teacher’ – a dead-end job – and how the colonial government reconstructed women teachers as cheap and casual workers.

#### **A male-dominated job in an Anglo-centric system (1841–1941)**

Before the British arrived in 1841, the schools in Hong Kong were *shushu* (traditional Chinese schools) in which a single male teacher supervised a group of male students of all ages, from early morning until dusk, in reading and exhortation. Although they received low and unstable wages, these teachers enjoyed a rather high social position in Chinese society.<sup>16</sup> However, this kind of vernacular education was not well regarded by the British. Apart from giving limited support to some mission schools and a few chosen village schools, educational provision by the government was minimal, as its main interest in Hong Kong was to give British merchants a strategic outpost from which to trade with China. This instrumental interest was probably shared by the

<sup>16</sup> Luk, *Cong Rong Shu Xia*, 29–40; Anthony Sweeting, ‘Hong Kong’, in *Teacher Education in the English-Speaking World: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. T. O’Donoghue and C. Whitehead (Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing, 2008), 98–9.

majority of people in Hong Kong, who had come from mainland China to escape poverty, famine, or civil war, and who hoped to return to their homeland when the situation improved.

A narrow concern with entrepôt trade together with a fleeting population partly explained why a limited and elitist system was installed. Education was intended to produce bilingual and bicultural elites that would function as middlemen, clerks, and interpreters to meet the needs of the trade with China and serve broader Sino-British economic and diplomatic interests.<sup>17</sup> The colonial government had also established in the territory a dual system in which vernacular (Chinese) and English education co-existed, but the latter was ranked above the former and teachers of different races enjoyed different statuses. Anglo- (or Euro-)centricity was obvious in the teaching hierarchy when the personnel were examined:

The headmasters, senior teachers, and other important knowledge-brokers were non-Chinese, usually of British, other European, or American stock. These were the people who planned, developed and implemented the curriculum. For the day to day running of an 'upper grade' school, they were able to make use of the services of Chinese assistants, who received far inferior employment terms.<sup>18</sup>

Under this system, 'Chinese assistant masters' – Chinese teachers – were assigned less prestigious jobs and received lower pay than European and British teachers in

<sup>17</sup> Bernard, H.K. Luk, 'Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum: Heritage and Colonialism', *Comparative Education Review* 35, no. 4 (1991): 650–68.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Sweeting, 'Hong Kong Education within Historical Processes', in *Education and Society in Hong Kong: Toward One Country and Two Systems*, ed. G.A. Postiglione (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1991), 43.



government schools because they were ‘not competent, even under the closest supervision, to do more than to teach the most elementary of subjects’.<sup>19</sup> Yet, despite the negative perception of Chinese teachers, little was done to improve their quality. Their training was usually seen as being merely a matter of money. Most teachers at government schools were recruited from overseas. Only when foreign sources dried up or were too expensive, such as during the period after the First World War, would the Education Department reluctantly accept ‘a dilution of their services by a locally trained product’.<sup>20</sup> A pupil-teacher scheme, which trained two to three student teachers a year, was the main apparatus from the 1860s to the early 1900s.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Female education and the spread of the English language in Chinese families***

Girls’ schooling had not been a concern of the local Chinese community, partly because most Chinese families did not see the need to educate their daughters, and partly because most transient male workers left the female members of their family in

<sup>19</sup> Comments of the Headmaster of the Central School and the Inspector of Schools, Frederick Stewart; see Education Report 1866, paragraph 4. The Education Reports quoted in this article are taken from the collection of Gillian Bickley, *The Development of Education in Hong Kong, 1841–1897: As Revealed by the Early Education Report by the Hong Kong Government 1848–1896* (Hong Kong: Proverse Hong Kong, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> See Hong Kong Education Department, *Annual Report* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1922), paragraph 24. The Annual Reports quoted in this article (which were re-titled as Annual Summaries after 1956) were all prepared by the Hong Kong Education Department.

<sup>21</sup> See Vivian Wai-man Yiu, *An Evaluation of Teacher Education Policy in Hong Kong* (MSocSc thesis, The University of Hong Kong, 1983).

China.<sup>22</sup> While acknowledging the lower status of girls and women in Chinese society and the problems associated with women trafficking and *mui-tsai* (bond servants), the colonial government did little to ameliorate the situation but merely presented these issues as ‘social problems’ that were associated with Chinese immorality.<sup>23</sup> Female education advanced very slowly in the colony, and the training of Chinese assistant mistresses took place almost 50 years later than that of Chinese assistant masters.

Missionaries were the first and main group who provided schooling to Chinese women, the poor in particular, in the early colonial period.<sup>24</sup> Their main intention, apart from providing ‘suitably educated marriage partners for young Chinese male converts’,<sup>25</sup> was to evangelise and civilise the native women through an English education that could ‘exercise and open the mind to an extent which learning Chinese

<sup>22</sup> For instance, the Tung Wah Hospital Group offered free education for boys in 1880 but to girls only in 1931. *Kaifong* (neighbourhood) schools, which were usually small in scale, offered free vernacular education for Chinese boys, but no provision for girls was recorded until 1894. The Confucius Society only started their first girls’ school in 1922; see Patricia Chiu, *Girls’ Education in Colonial Hong Kong (1841–1941): Gender, Politics and Experience* (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2009), 101–105.

<sup>23</sup> Chiu, *Girls’ Education in Colonial Hong Kong*, 53.

<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed account of the efforts of missionaries to make educational opportunities available to poor and marginalised women in Hong Kong, see Patricia Chiu, “‘A Position of Usefulness’: Gendering History of Girls’ Education in Colonial Hong Kong (1850s–1890s)”, *History of Education* 37, no. 6 (2008): 789–805.

<sup>25</sup> Carl Smith, *Chinese Christians: Elites, Middlemen, and the Church in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 208.

... never could do'.<sup>26</sup> However, the English instruction was later considered a 'mistake', as some poor, young Chinese girls were rumoured to have become the kept mistresses of foreigners. This state of affairs angered the locals, who stoned the headmistress of the Diocesan Native Female Training School in 1864 for causing girls' degradation. The incident led the mission schools and the Inspector of Schools, Frederick Stewart, to change the emphasis of girls' education. It then began to focus merely on sewing, knitting, needlework, and elementary instruction in Chinese. The teaching of English or any other accomplishments was forbidden as these 'could give them a distance from their future humble sphere of life'.<sup>27</sup>

A 'breakthrough' finally came in 1888 when the new Inspector of Schools, Ernst J. Eitel, urged the government to give Chinese girls an education 'more of the mind than of needlework'.<sup>28</sup> In his petition, he cited several reasons to argue that there was an urgency for a 'new' type of female education, such as the unnecessary panic caused by ignorant Chinese mothers, the declining morality perceived in society, and increased social demand from educated Chinese men who wanted 'fit helpmates for

<sup>26</sup> The words were from Mrs. Irwin, a school committee member of the Diocesan Native Female Training School (DNFTS); cited by Patricia Chiu, *'A Position of Usefulness': A Gendered Discourse of English Language Education (1850s–1900s)*, Conference and Exhibition on 'Education and Heritage', (June 26–27, 2009, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Education Report, 1865, paragraph 43.

<sup>28</sup> Annual Report, 1898, paragraph 19.

them in domestic and conjugal matters'.<sup>29</sup> At first sight, Eitel's views on girls' education in the colony seemed to be very similar to those of some early missionaries. Both saw the need to educate women for the 'marriage market'<sup>30</sup> and believed in the (moral) superiority of English education in promoting civilisation. For instance, Eitel criticised the system of Chinese teaching as limiting mental and moral vision because it 'confines the mind of Confucius twenty-four centuries ago, cramps the intellect, stunts the growth of moral feeling and bends the will into antagonism to everything non-Chinese'.<sup>31</sup> He also saw the Chinese language as contributing 'comparatively little aid towards a promotion of modern civilization'.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, there are two distinct differences in the Inspector's discourse. First, Eitel was confident that an elementary English education would not turn Chinese girls into concubines of foreigners because his target groups were not poor girls but 'sisters of the boys now attending the Government Central School'.<sup>33</sup> They were daughters of a class of Chinese and Eurasian business elites who were rising in

<sup>29</sup> See Ernst J. Eitel, A Report to Frederick Stewart, the Colonial Secretary in Hong Kong, on 5 July 1889, No. 41, CO 129/242, 80–82.

<sup>30</sup> Chiu, *A Gendered Discourse of English Language Education*, 2–6.

<sup>31</sup> Education Report, 1895, paragraph 15.

<sup>32</sup> Education Report, 1895, paragraph 9.

<sup>33</sup> CO129/242, paragraph 4.

economic and political prominence.<sup>34</sup> Eitel was aware that since the 1870s, the Chinese population had become more settled in the colony, and more affluent Chinese families were able to appreciate the commercial value of English education for their sons, though not yet for their daughters.<sup>35</sup>

Second, what Eitel proposed was a non-sectarian English education. He was less bothered with the evangelising mission of the English language probably because he was dismayed at the limited civilising effects that an English education could produce at the time in the colony:

Now here in Hong Kong, where for twenty-seven years the Government has annually spent ever increasing sums of money to give Chinese boys an English education, wondering all the time why this continuous teaching of English produces so little visible effect in the direction of spreading the knowledge of the English language in the Colony ... the Government have ... by leaving the men brought up with a knowledge of English to marry wives devoid of that knowledge, methodically prevented the spread of the English language in Chinese families.<sup>36</sup>

Eitel clearly believed that the English language could have had more substantial moral effects on the Chinese community if the government could get the educational targets right. He envisioned that women, ‘as the mothers of future

<sup>34</sup> For discussions of this thriving Chinese and Eurasian elite class, see Wai-kwan Chan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society: Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); John Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 63–88; Wing-sang Law, *Collaborative Colonial Power: The Making of the Hong Kong Chinese* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 9–29.

<sup>35</sup> Education Report, 1890, paragraph 9.

<sup>36</sup> CO129/242, paragraph 5.

generations',<sup>37</sup> should be more likely than men to spread the English language, civilise the young, and promote positive attitudes towards the colonial government in Chinese families. His plea gave rise to the founding of the Government Central School for Girls (later renamed the Belilos Public School, BPS) in 1890.<sup>38</sup> Gradually, the notion that Chinese daughters should receive English education gained popularity among well-to-do families. At the turn of the century, a number of fee-paying girls' schools were established to train young, modern ladies via an English or Anglo-Chinese education.<sup>39</sup> Before long, the civilising role of women was extended from private homes to classrooms, especially in vernacular schools when political unrest in China and later in Hong Kong intensified.

### ***Civilising the young in vernacular schools and the teaching of conservative Confucianism***

The period of the 1910s and '20s was probably the most turbulent time in Hong Kong's history because of the political upheavals in neighbouring China. The Chinese Revolution of 1911 brought to Hong Kong not only an influx of refugees, but also a constant interflow of teachers and ideas between the two places, and the growth of

<sup>37</sup> Annual Report, 1888, paragraph 10.

<sup>38</sup> When BPS was first set up, a pupil-teacher scheme was also established. Not surprisingly, its headmistress, Mary Ward, recruited an English girl as a pupil teacher to be trained to assist her work. See Chiu, *Girls' Education in Colonial Hong Kong*, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Examples include Ying Wa Girls' School, Diocesan Girls' School, St. Stephen Girls' College, St. Paul Girls' College, and Maryknoll Girls' School; see Chiu, *Girls' Education in Colonial Hong Kong*, 90–101.

vernacular private schools. In less than 30 years, the Chinese population in the territory increased almost three-fold, from 280,564 in 1901 to 706,100 in 1925.<sup>40</sup> There was also a sharp growth in vernacular education in the period; the enrolment figure in Chinese vernacular schools rose from 16,500 in 1918 to 42,000 in 1928.<sup>41</sup> Accompanying these changes was the spread of fervent nationalism, anti-colonialism, and anti-British sentiments within those schools, which also helped promote vernacular education for girls and training for women teachers in Hong Kong.

While ‘women without knowledge’ were considered virtuous in China before the Late Qing Dynasty, the repeated defeats by the Western powers led Chinese reformers to believe that the nation’s weakness lay in the illiteracy of Chinese women, because uneducated mothers failed to bring up healthy and intelligent offspring for the country. When some Chinese scholars and teachers moved to Hong Kong, they began schooling for girls and equipped them with the necessary skills to become teachers of young children, in the hope that the future of China could be salvaged.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See Chai-lok Wong, *Xianggang Zhongwen Jiao Yu Fa Zhan Shi* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1996), 254.

<sup>41</sup> See Yu-shek Cheng, *Government and Public Affairs: Education* (Hong Kong: Summerson Eastern, 1987), 5. In 1937, the figure was up again to 67,988 and the number of vernacular primary schools had risen to 650, as compared to 100 in 1899; see Wang, *Xianggang Zhongwen Jiao Yu*, 336.

<sup>42</sup> For discussions of the contributions of some of these pioneers to girls’ education, see Wang, *A Xianggang Zhongwen Jiao Yu*, 193–204; Luk, *Cong Rong Shu Xia*, 90–7. For a discussion of female education in Late Qing and early Republic China, see Paul Bailey ‘Active Citizen or Efficient Housewife? The Debate over Women’s Education in Early-Twentieth Century

Because of the rapid rise in numbers and the nationalistic emphasis in vernacular schools, the government saw the need to tighten its control and regulation. The first Education Ordinance, introduced in 1913, empowered the government to inspect all schools and refuse registration to some. This unprecedented legislation was intended to curb the spread of Chinese national sentiment in schools, monitor their political propaganda and activities, and regulate teachers who were politically suspicious.<sup>43</sup> The colonial government also seized control of teacher training in order to produce more politically reliable teachers. Vernacular teachers' classes (part-time) were set up at the Technical Institute in 1914. The Department for the Training of Teachers within the Faculty of Arts was established at The University of Hong Kong in 1916 to train and supply 'pro-British' graduate (English) teachers to serve both China and Hong Kong.<sup>44</sup> Two vernacular normal schools, one for men and one for women, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, were also founded in 1920.<sup>45</sup>

China', in *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth Century China*, ed. G.R. Petersen, R. Hayhoe, and Yu Yongling (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001), 318–347.

<sup>43</sup> Carroll, *A Concise History*, 83.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Sweeting 'Training Teachers: Processes, Products, and Purposes', in *An Impossible Dream: Hong Kong University from Foundation to Re-establishment, 1910–1950*, ed. Chan Lau Kit-ching and Peter Cunich (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2002), 69.

<sup>45</sup> These two vernacular normal schools were both closed down in 1940 shortly after a new, co-educational teachers' college, Northcote College of Education, had been established in 1939.



In spite of these attempts, the political unrest and the nationalist and anti-colonial movements in China, such as the 1919 May Fourth Movement, continued to worry the government. The situation was particularly alarming when the General Strike and Boycott of British Goods broke out in 1925 and became the longest strike in the history of the colony. The turmoil originated in the May 30<sup>th</sup> Tragedy, and soon escalated into a series of general strikes and boycotts against British goods in Hong Kong. The whole incident lasted for more than 16 months and severely crippled the economy.<sup>46</sup> However, what particularly worried the government and its allies was the active involvement of teachers and students in the turmoil. In his lengthy written memorandum,<sup>47</sup> Robert Kotewall,<sup>48</sup> a Eurasian businessman and a prominent

<sup>46</sup> In 1925, after a labourer was killed in a Japanese cotton mill factory, students and workers launched a demonstration in Shanghai during which British police shot and arrested some protesters. The shooting soon triggered public anger and widespread protest against the British police force in all major Chinese cities. Massive numbers of workers and students in Hong Kong left for Canton (Guangzhou) where financial aid and accommodation were provided by its coalition government, comprising members of the Chinese Communist Party and some left-wingers of the Kuomintang, which also blocked strikers from returning to Hong Kong. For a detailed analysis of the various causes of the Strike, such as nationalism, anti-imperialism, and economic inequalities and hardship in the colony, see Jung-fang Tsai, *The Hong Kong People's History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2001), 121–172.

<sup>47</sup> This memorandum, containing three parts and 111 paragraphs, reads like an official investigation of the 1925 Strike and Boycott. It was written by R.H. Kotewall and published along with a report by the Governor, Reginald Stubbs, and appeared in a Colonial Office paper (CO), CO 129/489, in 1926.

member of the Chinese community, advised the colonial government to ‘get to the root of the evil’:

Obviously the first remedy is an increased watchfulness in the schools. Special care should be exercised in the supervision of the vernacular schools in particular, for these can the more easily become breeding grounds of sedition. The teachers should be carefully chosen and supervised for this reason.... To my mind we should get to the root of the evil. The Chinese education in Hong Kong does not seem to be all that it should be. The teaching of Confucian ethics is more and more neglected, while too much attention is being paid to the materialistic side of life ... great stress should be laid on the ethics of Confucianism which is, in China, probably the best antidote to the pernicious doctrines of Bolshevism, and is certainly the most conservative force, and the greatest influence for good.<sup>49</sup>

It is noteworthy that Kotewall did not mention nationalism, anti-imperialism, anti-British sentiment, or economic hardship as possible causes of the Strike but attributed it to the instigation and bad influence of Bolshevism and materialism. In this re-presentation, he warned of the dangers of letting vernacular schools become ‘breeding grounds of sedition’ and spoke of the need to carefully choose and supervise teachers. Moreover, he stressed the importance of rectifying the role of Chinese education and elevating the teaching of Confucian ethics in vernacular schools. This latter suggestion was unusual as the colonial government and the affluent Chinese and Eurasian families did not have a high regard for education in the

<sup>48</sup> Robert Kotewall was an appointed member of both the Legislative and Executive Councils during the inter-war period. He was an important ally to the government and played a key role in settling the Strike; see Carroll, *A Concise History*, 99–105.

<sup>49</sup> CO, 129/489, paragraphs 88 and 90.

Chinese language.<sup>50</sup> Yet, the version of Confucianism that Kotewall intended to revitalise was a particular strand of morality that ‘put emphasis on hierarchy and subservience to patriarchal authority, and cultural heritage over statehood and citizenship’.<sup>51</sup> In practice, it was translated into the building of moral character as the ‘new’ spirit of education, with Chinese (vernacular) teachers taking on the role of conservative moral guardians. These were urgently needed in order to counter the nationalistic views as advocated by the new intelligentsia in private vernacular schools – that education was the key to saving the nation and teachers were ‘emancipators of China’.<sup>52</sup> This new morality was popularised through some important institutional practices. For example, with the support of Chinese businessmen, a new Government Chinese Middle School was established; the Department of Chinese at The University of Hong Kong was founded; some vernacular schools were chosen to receive government subsidies and served as good examples to emulate; some Chinese senior literati were appointed by the Governor to positions of prominence; and the subject

<sup>50</sup> The thriving Chinese and Eurasian families had a low regard for the Chinese language. They actually petitioned the Governor, John Pope Hennessy (1877–1883), to increase the teaching of English in the Central School at the expense of Chinese learning; see Anthony Sweeting and Edward Vickers, ‘Language and the History of Colonial Education: The Case of Hong Kong’, *Modern Asian Studies* 41 (2007), 15–16.

<sup>51</sup> Luk, ‘Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum’, 659.

<sup>52</sup> Tsai, *Hong Kong People’s History*, 164–167; Sweeting and Vickers, ‘Language and the History of Colonial Education’, 21.

‘civics’ and a model syllabus were introduced for all private schools to follow.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, as the majority of vernacular teachers in the New Territories were from Guangzhou, the province where most workers and students resided during the Strike, a Government Taipo Vernacular Normal School, which accepted male students only,<sup>54</sup> was established in 1926 to serve that particular area.

Nevertheless, there was another strategic cultural intervention that has escaped attention in studies on Hong Kong history or education: the attempt by the colonial government to recruit more women from respectable backgrounds to become vernacular teachers.

### ***Recruiting women from well-to-do families to be vernacular teachers***

In the memorandum on the Strike, the pro-colonial businessman particularly extolled the bravery of schoolgirls during the Strike:

It is very necessary to learn from these events how to prevent the corruption of schoolboys in future, and particularly their attempts to interfere in politics.... [P]raise could be accorded to St. Paul and St. Stephen’s Girls Schools which were the last of the schools to close, all their girls showing pluck in attending regularly in spite of personal threats at a time when many boys skulked off. When St. Paul’s Girls’ School was closed, some of the senior girls offered their services, through me, to the Postmaster-General, and although

<sup>53</sup> Jun Fang and Xianjun Xiong, *Xianggang Jiao Yu Tong Shi* (Hong Kong: Ling Kee, 2008), 179–223.

<sup>54</sup> A possible explanation is that not many girls received schooling in the rural areas of the New Territories and demand for female teachers was not great; see Jun Fang, ‘Tai Po Vernacular Normal School (1926–1941): The Pioneer of Basic Education in the New Territories’, *Education Journal* 29, no. 1 (2001): 143.

their offer was thankfully declined on account of their delicate physique they were useful to our Propaganda Bureau....<sup>55</sup>

Obviously the girls' heroism and boys' cowardice related not so much to their school attendance as to their political orientation and support for the government, as the former offered services to a regime under siege whereas the latter went on strike and interfered in politics. It was because of their political allegiance that the colonial regime had entrusted these schoolgirls with propaganda activities. Yet, they were not ordinary Chinese women but daughters from well-to-do families who attended the two prestigious girls' schools.<sup>56</sup> At a time when politically reliable vernacular teachers were badly needed to bolster colonial rule, it is highly probable that the government would have regarded these schoolgirls as a desirable source of supply.

There were indeed some subtle and even favourable initiatives introduced into the Vernacular Normal School for Women (VNW) in the inter-war period (1927–1941). For instance, despite the rising demand for women teachers, the number of years of training was lengthened from two in 1920 to three in 1927 and then to four in 1928, and only in 1938 did it come down to three years again. This change could be

<sup>55</sup> CO 129/489, paragraph 86.

<sup>56</sup> St Stephen Girls' School and St. Paul Girls' School were established in 1906 and 1925 respectively. As Anglo-Chinese schools, both were attended by girls of upper-class Chinese and their educational emphasis was on nurturing 'modern young ladies' by combining Eastern culture with Western knowledge; see Chiu, *Girls' Education in Colonial Hong Kong*, 96–97.

interpreted as a measure to ensure the quality of the female graduates.<sup>57</sup> However, caution should be exercised when one compares the required years of study and the passing rates of this school with those of the other two male normal schools. From 1921 to 1940, the required length of study at the Vernacular Normal School for Men (VNM) remained two years, and for the Vernacular Taipo Normal School (TNS), it was initially two years but was lengthened to three in 1928.<sup>58</sup> When the passing rates are compared, it is found that they were around 35% and 10% for the VNM and the TNS respectively, whereas the rates for female graduates of the VNW stood at around 70% for the whole period.<sup>59</sup> Given that the intellectual contents of the training programmes of the VNM and the VNW were rather similar,<sup>60</sup> the higher passing rates of the VNW indicated strongly that the quality and performance of female student teachers were not inferior to those of their male counterparts. If the purpose of lengthening the period of

<sup>57</sup> Fang, 'The Vernacular Normal Schools for Women', 60.

<sup>58</sup> The entrance requirement of this rural normal school was much lower than those of the other two urban schools, and some students had not even completed their primary schooling; see Fang, 'Tai Po Vernacular Normal School', 144.

<sup>59</sup> The calculation of the percentages is based on the tables that appear in the following papers: Fang, 'Tai Po Vernacular Normal School', 145; Fang, 'The Vernacular Normal School for Women', 59–60; Jun Fang 'Vernacular Normal School for Men (1920–1940): An Important Cradle of Chinese Teachers in Early Twentieth Century Hong Kong', *Educational Research Journal* 20, no. 1 (2005): 125–6.

<sup>60</sup> The contents of the two training programmes were very similar, except for the textbooks used in Classics. See Fang, 'The Vernacular Normal School for Women', 58–60; and Fang, 'Vernacular Normal School for Men', 129–31.

training was to ensure the quality of student teachers, one might wonder why the government did not extend this for the two male normal schools.

The differences among the three normal schools are more revealing when their school fees and campus facilities are also examined. In both the VNM and the VNW, students were charged two dollars per month, whereas in the TNS, they were charged no fees as the school needed to attract male recruits and to retain them to teach in the New Territories after graduation. When the training of VNW teachers was lengthened, it meant more expensive costs for women student teachers and their families, which was obviously beyond the limits of lower classes. The campus facilities of the three normal schools also varied. The campus of the TNS was probably the least equipped and most sub-standard, as it had no library or sports field, but only a small room for ping pong.<sup>61</sup> The VNM was not much better. When it first opened in 1921, it borrowed the premises of Chung Wah College of Man Mo Temple, a vernacular school. The problem of the small campus size was not addressed but rather worsened when the VNM was absorbed by the Government Chinese Middle School in 1926 and moved to a vacated site that was previously occupied by a government primary school.<sup>62</sup> The situation of the VNW was enviable by comparison. A new, well-facilitated, separate school campus was built for women student teachers in 1927 and a sports ground was

<sup>61</sup> Fang, 'Tai Po Vernacular Normal School', 141–2.

<sup>62</sup> Fang, 'Vernacular Normal School for Men', 125–6.

added in 1931, which meant that the female students could enjoy basketball and volleyball.<sup>63</sup>

There also existed other preferential practices for women vernacular teachers. For instance, women teachers in the early colonial days in Hong Kong were not restricted to teaching pre-school or the lower section of primary schools. In 1931, the VNW actually established the Division of Upper Primary in its premises so that women students would have the opportunity to be trained in teaching practices.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the government introduced a policy to encourage grant-in-aid schools to hire women vernacular teachers, as the amount of subsidies that a school received was determined by the number of qualified women teachers that it hired.<sup>65</sup>

In view of the disparities and preferential practices, there are good reasons to believe that even though the three normal schools aimed to provide more politically reliable vernacular teachers, they attempted to recruit male and female students from different social backgrounds. The lengthening of training, the rigorous certification requirements, and the better campus facilities of the VNW were some of the measures

<sup>63</sup> Fang, 'The Vernacular Normal School for Women', 59. What matters here is not simply the sports ground but also the emphasis on physical education in VNW. Physical education was actually seen as a key component in the training of modern 'young ladies' – a middle class femininity – in the inter-war period; see Chiu, *Girls' Education in Colonial Hong Kong*, 81–97.

<sup>64</sup> Fang, 'The Vernacular Normal School for Women', 60.

<sup>65</sup> Fang, 'The Vernacular Normal School for Women', 61.



used by the colonial government to attract young women from well-to-do families to be trained as vernacular teachers and to promote conservative Confucianism, thus helping to stabilise its rule. These strategies probably explained why more qualified female vernacular teachers (202) than male teachers (169) were produced by 1940;<sup>66</sup> and why women comprised almost 40% of the total teaching force by 1939 in this once male-dominated occupation.<sup>67</sup>

The salary of a Chinese assistant mistress was the lowest in the Anglo-centric, male-dominated teaching hierarchy,<sup>68</sup> but the training and the teaching job could be important to women. It was possible that some young women might undertake teacher training to make themselves more eligible as wives and mothers.<sup>69</sup> However, for those Chinese women who wanted to earn a sufficient income to become independent, teaching was one of the few professional occupations available in an economy

<sup>66</sup> The figures quoted come from Fang, 'The Vernacular School for Women', 59; Fang, 'Vernacular School for Men', 128; and Fang, 'Tai Po Vernacular School', 145. One hundred and sixty-nine is the total number of graduates of the two male normal schools.

<sup>67</sup> The percentages recorded in the Annual Summaries before the Second World War were usually a combined figure for primary and secondary schools. Separate entries and statistics for primary and secondary schools, and their teachers, began to appear in the official data after the war.

<sup>68</sup> See E. Burney, *Report on Education in Hong Kong* (London: Published on behalf of the Government of Hong Kong by the Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1935), 21.

<sup>69</sup> According to Ford, some women graduates of the Education Department at The University of Hong Kong did not take up teaching but saw it as a preparation of motherhood and wifehood, see S. Ford, 'Women, gender and HKU' in *An Impossible Dream: Hong Kong University from Foundation to Re-establishment, 1910–1950*, ed. Chan Lau Kit-ching and Peter Cunich (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2002), 137.

dominated by trading businesses and a few manufacturing industries.<sup>70</sup> With its emphasis on intellectual content and English learning,<sup>71</sup> teaching enabled some women to develop a professional career.<sup>72</sup>

### **The emergence of the ‘primary school teacher’ and a ‘dead-end job’ (1946–1970)**

Immediately after the war, the British government decided to continue to rule Hong Kong for various reasons, such as to revive its national glory, maintain a strategic base for British business in China, and preserve its interests in the new post-war world order.<sup>73</sup> It had to restore the confidence of the Chinese population and its legitimacy to rule, and it did this via its reconstruction efforts. One remarkable development was the rapid expansion of primary schooling, which clearly showed a heavier involvement of the colonial government in educational provision for the territory than during the

<sup>70</sup> In 1931, 2,366 women were employed in ‘professional occupations’, the majority being teachers, nurses, and members of religious bodies; see Chiu, *Girls’ Education in Colonial Hong Kong*, 66.

<sup>71</sup> See Hong Kong Committee on the Training of Teachers, *Report of the Committee on the Training of Teachers* (Hong Kong: Government Printers, 1938), 163–8, in which some members found the content of training too academic and stressed the importance of English learning for vernacular teachers.

<sup>72</sup> A good example is the headmistress of the VNW, Madam Chan Yat Hing, who was promoted from a vernacular teacher to become the headmistress of VNW for 21 years. See Fang, ‘The Vernacular Normal School for Women’, 58.

<sup>73</sup> See Carroll, *A Concise History*, 127; Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 145.

previous phase. More specifically, in 1950 the regime embarked on a 10-year education project that aimed to build 50 government primary schools in the next 10 years.<sup>74</sup>

This initial expansion plan was very soon compounded by a rapidly increasing population and political developments in China. After the People's Republic of China was finally established in 1949, refugees kept flocking to Hong Kong, further exacerbating the problems with the population explosion and the growing demand for schooling. In the first decade of the post-war era, the population expanded almost four-fold, from 600,000 in mid-1945 to 2.5 million in 1954. The enrolment figure immediately after the war was only about 7,000 but it had risen to 239,809 by 1954; however, the number of 'school-less children' remained high: at least 50,000 and possibly as many as 175,000.<sup>75</sup> The government responded with a more aggressive expansion plan. A new, seven-year plan was launched in 1954, the main goal of which was to further hasten the quantitative provision of primary education so that by 1961, 215,000<sup>76</sup> new school places would be created.

The commitment, however, was still half-hearted as the goal was to provide a very basic education to the populace. In his annual report in 1949, the Director of Education,

<sup>74</sup> A. Sweeting, *A Phoenix Transformed: The Reconstruction of Education in Post-war Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1993), 84.

<sup>75</sup> Sweeting, *A Phoenix Transformed*, 95.

<sup>76</sup> When this primary education expansion programme officially ended in 1961, the total increase in primary school places was 313,000, and the original target was met a year earlier; Cheng, *Government and Public Affairs*, 5.

T.R. Rowell, commented on the training of teachers as being at ‘too high a level for the majority of the private schools’.<sup>77</sup> In the same report, he also argued for the need to change the purpose of education, commenting that it should not aim to provide academic training or formal knowledge, but to teach pupils ‘how to behave intelligently in the kind of situation they are likely to meet, less in what they know than in what they can do’.<sup>78</sup>

Thereafter, the purpose of primary schooling was redefined; it was now seen as an education ‘complete in itself and not merely as a preparatory stage for further education’.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, a new teacher training college, Grantham Training College, was opened in 1951, which was purposely set up to produce large numbers of ‘primary school teachers’ that could teach using the Chinese language.<sup>80</sup> There were two notable features of this new development. First, a new job category of ‘primary school teacher’ was constructed and for the first time officially entered into the nomenclature of government schools. The incumbent was defined as ‘a holder of a

<sup>77</sup> *Annual Report*, 1948/49, 29.

<sup>78</sup> *Annual Report*, 1948/49, 40.

<sup>79</sup> *Annual Report*, 1952/3, 7. In fact, in 1963 less than 8% of primary school leavers were able to secure a place in public secondary schools; see Hong Kong Government, *Statement on Government's Policy on the Re-organization of the Structure of Primary and Secondary Education* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1963), 2.

<sup>80</sup> In 1957, a one-year course was also set up in Northcote Training College, the first teacher training college to provide a two-year course to certificated teachers. In 1960, a new teachers' college, Sir Robert Black Training College, was also founded to aid the rapid development of primary education.

Grantham Training College certificate, responsible for the lower primary school, and normally not eligible for promotion'.<sup>81</sup> This simple job description clearly shows how primary school teaching, as a job with poor promotion prospects, was historically and socially constructed. It was also designated to be of lower status in the teaching hierarchy. Under the new certification requirement, 'primary school teaching' was not only defined as a complete, distinct, and lower level from that of secondary school teaching, but it also came to be designated as the lowest of the low within a further officially instituted hierarchy. Primary schooling was formally differentiated into two sections, with an upper primary section presiding over a lower section, that were staffed by teachers with different certificates. 'Certificated teachers', who made up about 20% of the teachers in a school, with their more prestigious qualification, longer training (that is, two years), and chances of promotion presided over the upper section, whereas 'primary school teachers' were assigned to the lower section.

Second, for the sake of expediency, teacher training programmes not only lasted for just 12 months but were also 'planned with a minimum of academic studies'.<sup>82</sup> While teacher training in the past had emphasised the learning of English, was broader in content, and was intellectually more demanding, this crash training course was in

<sup>81</sup> *Annual Summary*, 1956, 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Annual Report*, 1952, 106. After graduation, student teachers were required to undergo two years of supervised training in approved schools before an official certificate was granted.

Chinese and focused mainly on pedagogical skills.<sup>83</sup> With this new emphasis, trained teachers were unlikely to switch careers but instead would probably stay in this ‘dead-end job’. Worse still, this measure reinforced, if not introduced, the idea that teaching lower grades was easier and intellectually less demanding. Indeed, that ‘teaching in the lower primary school is not considered a highly skilled job and the efficiency is often low’ was cited as a reason for rejecting parity between the salaries of secondary school and primary school teachers.<sup>84</sup>

***The predominance of women in primary school teaching as cheaper/untrained teachers***

If qualification had replaced race as the stratifying factor in the once Anglo-centric teaching hierarchy, the feature of male domination was also redefined. Men no longer numerically dominated the teaching occupation, though they still enjoyed higher pay than women. Amidst the mass expansion of schooling in this period, women teachers began to outnumber men teachers, and the proportion of their employment in primary school teaching rose from 41.6% in 1949 to 65% in 1970 (see also Figure 1 below).<sup>85</sup>

As in the previous period, women teachers were again preferred. It was plausible that

<sup>83</sup> There were nine core subjects and one elective in the one-year training course. All but the subject English were concerned with pedagogical skills. The information was obtained from a Special Exhibition entitled ‘Old Books. New Collections’ at the Hong Kong Museum of Education, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, 6 February 2010 to 22 April 2010.

<sup>84</sup> R.F. Simpson, *Teacher Productivity and Professional Training* (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Council for Educational Research, 1966), 8.

<sup>85</sup> Calculations based on *Annual Report*, 1949 and 1970.

women were still regarded by the government as politically more reliable for this vocation, as concern about communist infiltration into schools still prevailed in the post-war period.<sup>86</sup> Yet, an equally important reason was that women were cheaper. As they received only three-quarters of the salary of their male counterparts, they were used to economise educational expenditure in the context of ambitious expansion.<sup>87</sup> An informal discriminatory quota of two women to one man was operative when admitting students into the full-time programmes of the teacher training colleges. In the employment policy of government schools, as well as of some grant-in-aid schools, the same ratio, one male to two female teachers, was also adopted.<sup>88</sup>

(Insert Figure 1 here)

Figure 1: The Feminisation of the Primary School Teaching Workforce from 1938 to 1970

Nevertheless, at a time when the economy was struggling and in the process of transforming itself to being manufacturing-based, teaching appeared to be an attractive job option to both genders, despite its dead-end nature. In fact, although the percentage of male teachers had declined over the years, the actual figures, as revealed in Figure

<sup>86</sup> Some scholars have also noted the continual use of various strategies to control and contain communist influence in the colony. See Beatrice Leung, 'Political Impacts of Catholic Education in Decolonization: Hong Kong and Macau' (CAPS Working Paper, Hong Kong: Lingnan College, 1998), no. 82 (10/98), 6–10; Sweeting, *A Phoenix Transformed*, 192–220; Sweeting & Vickers, 'Language and the History of Colonial Education', 8.

<sup>87</sup> Luk, *Cong Rong Shu Xia*, 203.

<sup>88</sup> Hong Kong Commission on Education, *Report by R.M. Marsh and J.R. Sampson* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1963), 65.

1, were still on the rise. The pattern shows clearly that men did not abandon teaching but that the rise in women teachers was even sharper. This explains why the Reform Club, an interest group specialising in policy critique, argued that schools should discontinue the practice of discriminatory pay:<sup>89</sup>

Because women teachers are paid less than men, the ratio in both Government and grant-in-aid schools is two females for every male. As women are about to benefit from a change in Government policy which will introduce equal pay for equal work, the Club feels that schools should begin to think of engaging men as well as women—and not to continue discriminating against the former from a purely selfish point of view.

However, the gains of women should not be overstated, given the number and sex of untrained teachers.

(Insert Figure 2 here)

Figure 2: The Feminisation of Untrained Primary School Teachers from 1948 to 1970

As shown in Figure 2, untrained teachers made up from 72.6% to 35.3 % of the total workforce in primary school teaching from 1948 to 1970. Obviously the total percentage of untrained teachers was on the decline, but the percentage of women untrained teachers was on the rise, as they consistently constituted between 40% and 60% of this untrained teaching force. As untrained teachers, regardless of their actual

<sup>89</sup> See Reform Club of Hong Kong, *Second Ten Years Anniversary, 1959 – 1968* (Hong Kong: The Club 1969), 31.



qualifications,<sup>90</sup> they could only seek employment in private schools – the main educational providers in a period of rapid expansion.<sup>91</sup> The salary that they received was usually much lower than those in government and subsidised schools, and was comparable to that of ‘a rickshaw-puller or a maid’.<sup>92</sup> Although the government had regularly monitored and imposed a limit on the amount of tuition fees that private schools could charge students, it had done nothing to regulate the meagre salary received by untrained teachers, despite persistent requests to do so from the public and the Teachers’ Association.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, the success of the educational expansion project in the post-war period was to a large extent dependent on the exploitation of the group of ‘untrained teachers’ in which women were the majority.

### ***Women teachers as ‘occasional workers’***

The government might remain non-interventionist with regard to untrained teachers, but its own exploitation and discrimination did not go unchallenged. Its financial and patriarchal concerns in exploiting women were exposed in the debate over equal pay.

<sup>90</sup> Some untrained teachers might have received higher education in mainland China or gained a degree at a post-secondary institute in Hong Kong, but these qualifications were not recognised in the colony.

<sup>91</sup> Private schools were the main suppliers of primary school places in the 1950s and ’60s. They were gradually phased out after the introduction of compulsory and free education in 1971.

<sup>92</sup> The comparison was made by the Teachers’ Association; see Li Yiu-bor ‘Editorial’, *The Path of Learning: Journal of Hong Kong Teachers’ Association*, no. 8 (1952): 3. Even in 1970, it was reported that the wages of teachers in private schools were about 25% of those received by teachers working in government and subsidised schools (*Wah Kiu Yat Pao*, 31 January 1970).

<sup>93</sup> Sweeting, *A Phoenix Transformed*, 120–38.

The practice of wage differentials between male and female civil servants, teachers included, was upheld until the mid-1960s. Women's groups had fought for equalisation since 1949, but their appeals were repeatedly rejected on two grounds: the financial implications<sup>94</sup> and the need to give male teachers a 'male breadwinner wage' to support their families.<sup>95</sup> When the campaign for equal pay was revived in the early 1960s, the government finally agreed to introduce equal pay but only to a small group of professionals or 'career women'. It, however, refused to grant parity to women teachers because they were not considered 'professionals'. In the review report, a professional was defined as a holder of a university degree or graduate diploma of education, and had to be at least at scale 10 on the professional scale.<sup>96</sup> Measured against these definitions, women primary school teachers could never qualify because the training they received and the job position they occupied were purposefully designed to be non-professional.

Although this non-professional job was created by the colonial government as a measure of expediency, the Colonial Secretariat brushed this historical process aside and resorted to another construction. He treated all women 'non-professional'

<sup>94</sup> See Hong Kong Legislative Council, *Hong Kong Legislative Council Official Report of Proceedings* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1960), 146.

<sup>95</sup> See Hong Kong Colonial Secretariat, *Report on Women's Salary Scales in the Public Service* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1962), paragraph 2.

<sup>96</sup> Hong Kong Colonial Secretariat, *Report on Women's Salary Scales*, paragraph 21.

workers/teachers as ‘occasional workers’, since, he argued, they ‘serve for a few years until they marry; some then leave. Others continue to serve, their duties being interrupted by maternity leave, until family responsibilities become too pressing, when they resign’.<sup>97</sup> About 70 years earlier, women’s maternal nature was seen by the School Inspector as a reason for educating them in English so that they could help civilise the young. Now, motherhood was re-presented by the Colonial Secretariat as a hindrance to work commitment that could legitimise its discrimination and exploitation. Equal or higher pay for female teachers appeared unnecessary because women were only casual workers. The label ‘occasional workers’ became a ready excuse for the government to suppress the wages of women teachers. It also effectively erased the complex historical processes that brought women into the teaching occupation, and the contributions that they had made to the colonial government and to the education sector.

## **Conclusion**

By gendering the historical development of the teaching occupation in Hong Kong, this article has revealed the strategies used by the government to attract women teachers. It has also shown how some common categories, such as ‘Chinese teachers’, ‘Chinese

<sup>97</sup> Hong Kong Colonial Secretariat, *Report on Women’s Salary Scales*, paragraph 42.

women’, and ‘primary school teacher’, were ‘at once empty and overflowing’,<sup>98</sup> but intimately related to the politics of colonial rule. Chinese (male) teachers in the early days received little attention from the colonial government as its interest was mainly economic. By being assigned to the role of ‘Chinese assistant masters’, the job incumbents were viewed as parochial, incompetent, and culturally and morally inferior to their English or European counterparts. In the turbulent inter-war period, Chinese (male) teachers were regarded as politically dangerous individuals who had to be heavily regulated or carefully cultivated in conservative Confucian ethics so that they could take on the role of conservative moral guardians. In the post-war reconstruction period, while their political reliability was still a concern, Chinese teachers were treated more like semi-skilled workers, as the newly created job – ‘primary school teacher’ – suggests.

Similarly, the nature and worth of ‘Chinese women’ were also constantly reinterpreted. In the early days, though Chinese women were understood as victims of a patriarchal and immoral society, the colonial government was conscious not to upset the social fabric of the Chinese community and so preferred women to accept their humble sphere of life. It was only towards the end of the 19th century that Chinese women – daughters of the thriving Chinese elites – were seen as important moral

<sup>98</sup> Scott, *Gender & the Politics of History*, 49.

guardians whose maternal nature rendered them more suitable to help spread English in Chinese families. Then, their maternal nature gave way to their political allegiance, and daughters of well-to-do families were increasingly recruited into the Euro-centric and male-dominated occupation to help promote pro-government values in vernacular schools. The nature and worth of 'Chinese women' were redefined again in the post-war period. They were represented as 'occasional workers' who could be discriminated against when the government expanded its educational provision. By examining the shifting and contradictory reconstructions of cultural categories, as well as the government practices that regulated, reformed, and transformed the teaching occupation, this historical investigation has provided a nuanced understanding of colonial rule in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, the effects of these strategies and changes on women were not uniform; rather, they were very much dependent on a woman's social class and qualifications. Women from better social origins were given not only access to intellectual space but also a chance to craft a teaching career. Women who managed to get onto a crash course in teaching and take up positions as 'primary school teachers' could become state employees and receive a stable, albeit low, wage. However, those women, usually from lower classes, who did not receive pre-service training were left

to be exploited by private schools until they were eligible for in-service training courses.

The effects also appear uneven when the patriarchal context of Hong Kong is taken into consideration. It is undeniable that the colonial government took an instrumental, and even patriarchal, approach to educating women and allowing them to be teachers. However, by providing this once marginal group with opportunities to enter the male preserve and by 'discriminating' against men in favour of cheaper women workers when the former were also looking for teaching assignments, the colonial government effectively, albeit unintentionally, undermined the patriarchal structure and practices of Chinese communities in Hong Kong, at least in the teaching occupation. The varied experiences of women teachers, as well as the subtle social and cultural changes in teaching in Chinese society, have indeed complicated our understanding of the relationship between patriarchy, education, and colonial rule.