

## **Delivering Civic Education in Hong Kong: Why is it not an independent subject?**

### **Abstract:**

Internationally, there have been serious concerns to identify effective modes of delivering civic education for preparing youth for the future challenges of citizenship. This paper addresses the research question: “why do Hong Kong civic education teachers not prefer to deal with civic education as an independent subject?” It starts with a brief review of international debates and of the development of civic education policy of Hong Kong. Then it moves on to discuss why teachers tend to reject civic education as an independent subject based on the findings from an interview informed research. The findings reveal that teachers’ mis-understandings of the nature of civic education are the major reasons. Treating civic education as comprising educational activities involving the nurturing of attitudes, values and skills of students with little content knowledge, the teachers consider that civic education is best accomplished through, for example, extra-curricular activities and not as a subject that demands time slots in the school time table. It is argued that these mis-understandings will have negative impacts on the effectiveness of civic education, which is unfavourable to the nurturing of democratic cultures necessary for the development of the democratic system in Hong Kong and has to be rectified. Lastly, some recommendations for rectification that relate to civil society are discussed. Hopefully, this paper can shed light on the understanding of the preferences towards the modes of implementation of front line practitioners in schools internationally, since this phenomenon is common in some other nations.

### **Introduction**

In the 21st century, there is a growing concern that without active citizenship, which comprises both voting and active participation in civil society, democratic governance is fragile (Naval, Print & Veldhuis, 2002; Osler & Starkey, 2006). This observation leads to a renewed interest in civic education for democratic citizenship and human rights internationally (Davies, et al, 2001; Eurydice, 2005; Morris & Cogan, 2001;

Osler & Starkey, 2006; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald & Schulz, 2001). However, regardless of the call for civic education, there are many debates around different aspects of civic education. One aspect of the debates is that although schools have long been considered influential political socializing agents, reports about the impact of formal civic education on democratic citizenship are mixed; some identified positive impacts, while others identified none (Niemi & Junn, 1998; Print, Ornstromare & Nielsen, 2002).

### **Debates on implementation of civic education as a compulsory independent subject**

A debate that arises in relation to the effectiveness of civic education is whether there are more effective modes of implementation of civic education that could bring about stronger impacts on young people's civic learning. Internationally there has been an interest in monitoring the delivery modes of civic education curricula (Birzea et al, 2004; Kerr 1999; Torney-Purta, Schwillle & Amadeo, 1999). Policymakers and researchers alike have been concerned to identify the most effective forms of civic education for preparing young people for the future challenges of citizenship. There are debates both at the theoretical and empirical level. Theoretically, in arguing that schools are the guardians of democracy, Gould, et al (2011) contested that treating civic education as a core interdisciplinary subject, alongside English, mathematics and science, is one of the six proven practices that constitute well-rounded and high quality civic learning experiences. In criticizing the Crick Report, Faulks (2006) argued that, if we are to teach citizenship seriously and effectively, we need to treat it as being as important as established subjects in the national curriculum. Hayward & Jerome (2010) disputed that citizenship could not flourish as a cross-curricular theme because its rich knowledge content demanded a specific discourse. Similarly, Whitty et al (1994) argued that it was very hard for any cross-curricular theme to succeed because pupils had little awareness of the theme as a distinct entity from the host subject and no distinctive teaching methods or recognition and realization rules emerged. Moreover, if civic education is to be permeated into other subjects, for example, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), it will lose its identity, and become invisible in the curriculum.

On the contrary, on emphasizing the actions, behaviour, values, dispositions and commitments orientation of civic education, Pike (2007) argued that an over-emphasis upon civic education as a school subject may have unwanted effects because such an approach can distract from the importance of learning values in action across the

curriculum and through life experiences both inside and outside school. Though marrying civic education to PSHE to the extent that it loses its own identity may be problematic, divorcing civic education entirely from PSHE is not likely to help young learners see the relevance of citizenship to their personal lives. It is also argued that as civic education is very much concerned with values in action and fostering the motivation to combat injustice in society, the implied modes for teaching and learning may not sit easily with current pedagogical philosophies tied to content knowledge and the passing of examinations (Davies et al., 2005). It is also contested that assessment of civic education is difficult because citizenship can hardly be assessed in the same way as other curriculum subjects (Kerr et al. 2007; OFSTED 2005, 2006). Pike (2007) also argued that if civic education is assessed as other subjects, it will discriminate between children by comparing and awarding lower grades to some than others according to a predetermined standard of attainment. This may militate against the notion that all citizens are of equal worth, and would therefore be entirely inappropriate.

There are also debates at the empirical level. Fairbrother and Kennedy (2011) conducted a secondary analysis of the 1999 IEA Civic Education Study. They found that there is only a relatively small benefit of moving to either a compulsory or independent subject approach to civic education. However, a criticism is made that their comparative study, based on the database of IEA Civic Education Study, had not taken into account the content and teaching pedagogies of the civic education programmes and the backgrounds of the teachers involved, which are critical to the effectiveness of the programmes. On the contrary, Keating et. al. (2010) in their Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) in England put forward six recommendations for effective civic education. Among them, the first one is “ensure, where possible, that civic education learning is delivered in discrete timetable slots and for more than 45 minutes per week (p. 65)”. Another is “civic education lessons should be developed by teachers who are delivering the citizenship lessons and not conflated with Personal, Social and Health Education (p. 66)”. Similarly, Whiteley (2012)’s study had revealed that an independent subject of civic education in England had a positive and significant impact on three key components of civic engagement; efficacy, political participation and political knowledge. These studies seem to support the argument that though civic education, as an independent subject alone, may not be the most critical factor for effective civic learning, together with active pedagogies and well trained teachers, they become crucial in making civic education

effective. But regardless of the debates, the coalition government of the UK is considering opting for moving civic education from National Curriculum to Basic Curriculum, that is making it discretionary starting from 2014 (Whiteley, 2012).

As a former colony of the UK, the development of civic education in Hong Kong has also been subjected to similar debates. After discussing the debates internationally, in particular with reference to UK, this paper addresses the research question: “why is the presentation of an independent subject not preferred in civic education by Hong Kong civic education teachers?” The following discussion starts with a brief review of the development of school civic education policy of Hong Kong, particularly in the adoption of an independent subject approach to civic education for implementation in school. Then it moves on to discuss why teachers reject civic education as an independent subject based on the findings from an interview study conducted by the authors. Similarly to the discussion above, the findings reveal that the major problems are in the teachers’ mis-understandings of the nature of civic education. Most of those who reject civic education as an independent subject treat civic education as some kind of educational activities involving the nurturing of attitudes, values and skills of students with little content knowledge. Hence, they consider that civic education is best accomplished through extra-curricular activities and not as a subject that demands discrete time slots in the time table. It is argued that unless these mis-understandings are addressed, and appropriate remedial actions are taken, the effectiveness of Hong Kong school civic education will remain doubtful. This is unfavourable to the development of democratic citizenship in Hong Kong, which requests a corresponding democratic culture.

### **The development and implementation of civic education in Hong Kong Schools**

After being a British colony for 150 years, Hong Kong was returned to China on 1 July 1997 in accordance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration signed in 1984, as Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). Before 1980, in order to preserve the stability needed for governance, the colonial government depoliticized schools and civic education [1] and hence the political part of it sank into a dormant stage till 1980s. At the beginning of 1980s the British government initiated talks with China over the future of Hong Kong. The Sino-British Joint Declaration reached in 1984 restored China’s sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997. Since Hong Kong’s capitalist economic system contrasted starkly with the socialist system upheld in

Mainland China, Hong Kong is to become the HKSAR under the principle of ‘One Country, Two Systems’. This allows Hong Kong to retain her structure and the existing way of life with a high degree of autonomy. To prepare for self-rule and to address the rising political aspirations of the middle class, the colonial government introduced political reform aimed at building up a representative form of government in Hong Kong. In 1985, the *Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools* (CDC, 1985) (hereafter called *1985 Civic Education Guidelines*) were released to prepare youth to face the challenges related to the coming political and constitutional changes. This represented a call for civic education after it had been suppressed for decades, though the *1985 Civic Education Guidelines* were criticized as moralized and de-politicized because of the conservative political tone and weakness in political content (Leung & Yuen, 2012a ; Tse, 1997).

After the publication of *the 1985 Civic Education Guidelines*, several significant political events had tremendous impact on the development of civic education. Perhaps the most important example is the June 4, 1989 crackdown in China on the Tiananmen Square protestors and the subsequent demonstration by more than one million Hong Kong people in opposition to the crackdown. These events rendered the *1985 Civic Education Guidelines* outdated. The new *Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools* (CDC, 1996) (hereafter called *1996 Civic Education Guidelines*) were issued in 1996, just one year before the handover. It is commented upon as politicized as the agenda for civic education was expanded and included understanding politics and government, learning for democracy, national identity, human rights and promoting global perspectives (Leung & Yuen 2009). After the handover in 1997, there were several official documents published that related to moral and civic education. They were described as moralized and re-depoliticized to replace the politicized *1996 Civic Education Guidelines* (Leung & Yuen 2012a). These re-depoliticized policy documents seem to fit both the HKSAR and the PRC governments’ preference to keep Hong Kong as a depoliticized, financial, business, Chinese city (Leung & Ngai, 2011).

Concerning the modes of implementation, over a long period of time, there has been ongoing debate about the advantages and disadvantages of different curriculum approaches and whether the government should mandate an independent subject for civic education. There were numerous calls from politicians, educators, academics and civil society urging the government to shift from the policy instruments of capacity building measures and decentralization to a mandatory subject, in the interest of securing more effective implementation of citizenship education (Fairbrother, 2006,

2010; Fairbrother & Kennedy, 2011). For example, Morris and Morris (2001, 2002) argue that the non-compulsory approach produces a large gap between policy intentions and policy outcomes. Ng and Leung (2004) doubt whether schools can deliver citizenship education effectively through the permeated approach. It is also argued that by making it an independent subject, the delivery of civic education will become more systematic, structured, and comprehensive (Fairbrother, 2010). But those who support the non-compulsory and cross-curricular approach argued that it is flexible and diverse enough to suit the complex socio-political conditions of Hong Kong and it can encourage students to think over issues from different perspectives (Fairbrother, 2010; Lee, 2004)

Regardless of the debates, the official document *1985 Civic Education Guidelines* proposed that civic education should not be treated as just another subject and recommended a “whole school approach” under which civic education could be implemented through formal, informal and the hidden curriculum (CDC, 1985). The *1996 Civic Education Guidelines* recommended three modes of delivery, namely the “permeation approach”, “integrated-subject approach” and “specific-subject approach” (CDC, 1996). Schools are free to choose one or more approaches according to their needs and situations. Though the *1996 Civic Education Guidelines* have proposed the strategy of an independent subject, the idea of a mandatory, independent subject had never been adopted as policy. Fairbrother (2010) contested that there appeared to be insufficient support for the idea of the Hong Kong government mandating a compulsory, independent, secondary school subject of civic education, from education leaders. The major obstacle appears to be the strong sentiment for school autonomy in making decisions in the school based curriculum. However, regardless of what the guidelines proposed, most schools have adopted a permeation/interdisciplinary approach, supplemented with cross-curricular activities such as school assemblies, special events, and extracurricular activities, with amounts of time spent and assessment unspecified (Frailon et al., 2012; Lee & Leung, 2001; Ng & Leung, 2004).

Suddenly, however, in May, 2011, under pressure and following a request from the Chinese central government to strengthen the national identity of Hong Kong citizens, the SAR government announced replacing civic education by a mandatory independent subject called Moral and National Education in all primary and secondary schools in three years time, against a background of not preferring the independent subject approach. This decision aroused large-scale protests and demonstrations from July 2012 until September 2012. Finally the government was

forced to ‘shelve’ the mandatory independent subject of Moral and National Education and civic education was to be continued as school based educational programmes. There were many reasons for the strong reaction against the subject. The major reason was that the general public feared that it would become political indoctrination. Another one was that teachers were worried that this new mandatory independent subject would overlap many existing subjects and cause serious problems to the time tabling (HKPTU, 2011).

But regardless of the policy documents, the views of the education leaders, and the schools’ standpoint, what are the views of civic education teachers? We want to study how they perceive the mandatory independent subject approach for junior secondary civic education and their rationales. In particular, we would like to address the research question: “why is an independent subject not preferred in civic education by Hong Kong civic education teachers?” In the following discussion, we shall address the above research question based on the interview findings from some civic education teachers in secondary schools obtained from a public policy research project.

## **Research Design**

The following discussion is based on the report of the third phase of a larger public policy research project (2007-2010) [2], which aims to determine the suitability and desirability of implementing an independent and compulsory subject of civic education at the junior secondary level of Hong Kong’s education system. The project is divided into three phases. The first stage makes use of international experiences to investigate the relationship between desired citizenship outcomes and the use of any particular curriculum approach to civic education (Fairbrother, 2011). The second stage seeks the views of education policymakers and relevant interest groups on the appropriate approaches to civic education (Fairbrother, 2010). The last phase of the project conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with secondary school principals and teachers responsible for civic education so as to elicit a range of perceptions and opinions on the most appropriate mode of delivery of civic education for Hong Kong. Specifically, the interviews asked them about the desirability of establishing an independent and compulsory subject of civic education for all junior secondary students in Hong Kong.

In order to ensure that a variety of schools were involved, schools belonging to various sponsoring bodies, geographical locations, religious backgrounds, and delivery modes of civic education were included. By purposive and convenient sampling, 33 secondary schools (out of about 460) in Hong Kong were selected, of which 15 have a civic education independent subject and the remaining ones rely on permeation and cross-curricular activities. We then conducted interviews with 1 to 3 educators from each school, making up a total of 51 participants (4 principals and 47 teachers). Most of the teachers interviewed are co-ordinators or members of the civic education committee of their respective schools and some of them are teachers of civic-related subjects such as liberal studies and moral education. All interviews, either individual or focus groups were conducted from June 2009 to January 2010. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese, the native language of the participants, using the same interview guide, which asked the participants their general understanding of civic education, opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of their schools' approaches to civic education delivery, their views on the Government's approach to promoting civic education, and their views on making civic education a compulsory independent subject at the lower secondary level. All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim in Chinese, coded and analyzed with the help of qualitative data analysis software NVivo to look for themes and patterns. In the following discussion, the paper will focus on those teachers who do not prefer mandatory independent subject for civic education. Since both the sample schools and participants were not randomly chosen, we have no intention to generalize any finding from the data. Nevertheless, we hope that the study can shed some light on why secondary school educators do not prefer making civic education an independent subject and the implications, since this is a quite common phenomenon internationally.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Overall, a compulsory and independent subject appeared to be an unpopular curriculum approach among the respondents. In the interviews only 9 out of 51 respondents (17.6%) clearly support making civic education a compulsory and independent subject for all junior secondary students. Over half or 28 respondents (54.9%) oppose this policy or have deep reservations. Another 9 (17.6%) respondents



would support the policy conditionally and the remaining 5 (9.8%) have no comment (See Table I).

[Table I]

Respondents from schools having an independent subject of citizenship education are more likely than those from schools practicing the cross-curricular approach to support the policy. Out of the 22 respondents from schools with independent subject, 7 support making civic education a compulsory subject, but only 2 out of 28 respondents from schools without independent subject support the idea. However, even in schools having an independent subject, only 31% of the interviewees supported the policy. There were many reasons why teachers did not prefer independent subjects. The reasons will be discussed in detail below under the headings of “understandings of civic education”, “pedagogies adopted”, “worries about the assessments”, “worries about indoctrination” and “other practical reasons”.

### Understandings of Civic Education

Unlike other academic subjects, many of the interviewees, 37 out of 51 (72.5%), considered civic education as values, attitudes and skills oriented education and as life experiences related instead of knowledge oriented. This non-academic perception of civic education is well documented (Grossman, 2004; Lee, 2005; Leung, 1995; Lo, 2009; Morris & Morris, 2001; Ng, 2011). Hence, it should be taught through permeation into different subjects, extra-curricular activities and ethos. This idea echoed with Pike (2007)’s view. For examples:

Moral and civic education is about values and attitudes and is a socializing process. We should focus on school ethos and it cannot be taught through an independent subject (Mr. Yu, school A).

Unlike other academic subjects, civic education involves values and it aims at training students to have better communication with others, and better organizing power (Mr. Ng, school B).

Civic education is about life practice and is better implemented by permeation, general school mood and participation (Mr. Yung, school C).

If civic education is taught by an independent subject, it will become knowledge and academic oriented. But it should be about values and actions (Ms. Chen, school D).

Another important finding about the nature of civic education is that most schools visited are offering moralized civic education. Scholars like Heater (1990) Oldfield (1990) have argued that the core of civic education is political education because citizens are members of local, national and global political communities with their associated rights, responsibilities and identities. But judging from the teaching content of the 33 schools visited, 25 (75.7%) of them were classified as offering mainly moralized civic education. Four (12.1%) were considered having about 50–50 ratio of moralized and politicized civic education. Only 4 (12.1%) have more than 50% content about politicized civic education. This result is probably because of the moralized and depoliticized policy on Hong Kong civic education (Leung & Yuen, 2012b). Together with the loaded inclination towards values education, it is clear that the civic education in most of the interviewees' view is a form of moral values education focusing on the private sphere. These understandings of civic education towards values and attitudes in the private sphere affect their pedagogies adopted and hence their preferences of mode of delivery.

### Pedagogies adopted

Similar to the concern that the preferred pedagogies for civic education may not sit easily with current pedagogical philosophies tied to content knowledge (Davies et al., 2005), there is a general understanding in the interviewees that if civic education is treated as knowledge oriented, the flexibility of curriculum and teaching pedagogies will be lost. Students have to sit in rows to listen to teachers' lectures and this may become spoon-feeding. Some have the concern that it is hard to teach current issues if

the flexibility of curriculum and teaching pedagogies is lost. A total of 16 (31.4%) of the respondents had expressed various kinds of worries on pedagogies. For example,

A mandatory independent subject will request students to sit in rows and listen, which is not good for the learning of values. I think permeation in different subjects is better for the leaning of values and attitudes (Ms Chan, school E).

As a values education, we should adopt experiential learning. Moreover, if we use permeation, civic education will become more relevant to students' life experiences (Miss Lam, School F).

As an independent subject, there will be many restrictions and will lose its flexibility. For example, it will become difficult in using current issues in the teaching (Ms Tsang, School A).

### Worries about assessment

Similar to Kerr et al. (2007)'s comment on assessment, many interviewees, 17 (33.3%), expressed worries on the difficulties in assessment if civic education is treated as an independent subject, which will naturally include formal assessment by written examination. Since most of them perceived civic education as moral and values education, they argued that it is difficult or even impossible to set a reliable standard for evaluation objectively through formal assessment. Recording using portfolio has been suggested with reservation. Therefore, treating civic education as an independent subject is inappropriate.

If civic education is treated as other academic subject, I don't know how we could do assessment. Assessment used for academic subjects is not suitable for values education, such as, civic education. It is difficult if not impossible, to set standards for assessing attitudes and values (Ms. Chan, School G).

I think the most difficult task is assessment, if civic education is taken as a formal independent subject. How are we going to

assess students' voluntary service, by the number of service, the time involved or the quality of service (Mr. Lai, School H)?

We may try assessment by keeping portfolios of the students. But it is very time consuming and not practical, given our work load (Ms. Lam, School I).

Mr. Yu of School B argued that if civic education is treated as a formal independent subject, the nature of civic education may change and become more conservative.

If civic education is formalized and institutionalized as an independent subject with formal assessment, alternative and dissidents' voices will be suppressed because there will be standard answers.

#### Worries about indoctrination

There were 8 (15.7%) interviewees who had expressed the worries of indoctrination and ideological controls, if civic education is taken as an independent subject, especially if it is mandatory by the government. It reflected a strong lack of trust between the respondents and government. Ms. Wong of School K argued:

If the Hong Kong government wants to mandate the subject, I want to know what rationales they have behind the scene. Is it similar to the ideological education in Mainland China? I must regret to say I don't see a liberal and independent government in Hong Kong at the moment.

Similarly Ms. Liu, of School J said:

I don't trust the present government. If they mandate the civic education as an independent subject, it will become some form of ideological propaganda for control.

Ms Liu's colleague, Mr. Leung also expressed the worry about indoctrination but from different sources.

I am afraid that that it will be controlled by schools which in term will be controlled according to the ideologies of the sponsoring bodies.

This suspicion of possible indoctrination and partisan influences in politically educating their students in schools is also well documented (Brownhill & Smart 1989; Heater 1990).

#### Other practical reasons offered

There were several clearly expressed practical reasons that caused the teachers to refuse the mode of independent subject. 14 (27.5%) interviewees mentioned about the overlapping issue. Subjects or educational programmes that have been mentioned which may overlap with civic education included, Economic and Public Affairs, Social Studies, Life Education, Religious Education and Values Education etc. 10 (19.6%) of the respondents indicated that the time table is already too packed to accommodate any new subject. 6 (11.8%) of them revealed that adding a new subject will increase workload and another 6 talked about the lack of qualified teachers.

From the above discussion, it is clear that a mandatory independent subject for the teaching of civic education is not preferred by teachers. Instead, the permeation/interdisciplinary approach, supplemented with cross-curricular activities such as school assemblies, extracurricular activities and school ethos are the preferred modes of implementation for civic education. However, are these preferred modes of delivery of a depoliticized civic education adequate in addressing the political development of Hong Kong?

#### **How should Hong Kong's civic education move ahead?**

From the above discussion, there are many similarities between Hong Kong and UK in the debates on mandating an independent subject of civic education. The issues in both regions are controversial. However, unlike the UK, an established democracy, Hong Kong is in the process of developing its democratic political system and a mature democratic political culture is needed for its healthy development. Given the moralized and depoliticized nature of civic education, in both policy and practice for years, the civic education in the majority of schools will continue to be depoliticized after the shelving of the mandatory national education (Leung & Lo, 2012a). This phenomenon,

the lack of political education due to the depoliticized nature of civic education, has led to poor understandings of politics, democracy, human rights and rule of law among the citizenry, which has negative impacts on the democratic development of Hong Kong. For example, Chan & Chan (2006) pointed out that the colonial legacy and the lack of proper public education about politics have left many in Hong Kong with a misconception of democratic governance. Leung & Lo (2012b) revealed that there is a big gap between the understandings of human rights and rule of law of Liberal Studies teachers, who are considered to be important civic educators, and the international human rights standard. This is also partly attributed to the lack of teaching and learning of politics. This negative impact resulting from a depoliticized civic education is manifested by the preferred modes of delivery of not allocating specific time slots in the time table to discuss political issues. It is clear that there is a gap between what is needed in the nurturing of democratic political culture for the democratic development of Hong Kong and the actual practice in civic education in schools.

In facing the challenges ahead, the civic education in Hong Kong has to be reformed in both content and practice. In responses to the scenario, the Alliance for Civic Education, a civil society organization, published the *Guidelines on Civic Education from Civil Society (Theoretical Part)* (Leung et al, 2012). Some of the relevant recommendations are:

1. As citizens refer to the members of political communities, local, national, regional and global, and their associated rights, responsibilities, sense of identities, and participation, the core of civic education should be political education. That is the depoliticized nature of Hong Kong civic education should be rectified.
2. Since the lack of political knowledge among Hong Kong citizens is serious and the needs for building a health democratic political culture is urgent, a formal independent subject, or at least a formal independent time slot in the time table, for the discussion of political knowledge and issues is necessary, so as to enhance the political literacy of the citizens.
3. Since civic education goes beyond knowledge and includes the cultivation of values, attitudes, dispositions and skills, implementation modes other than an independent subject, or a formal independent time slot in the time table, is needed, for example, permeation indifferent subjects, cross-curricular approach etc. That is a whole school approach, blending several modes together is needed.

However, since these recommendations are contrary to the findings revealed in this paper, research is much needed to study how the gaps between the recommendations and findings can be narrowed.

## **Conclusion**

In the 21st century, it is well recognised that in order to have an effective democratic governance, a politically literate, active, and critically thinking citizenry is necessary. This leads to a renewed interest in education for democratic citizenship and human rights in civic education internationally. Though there are many newly emerging politically socializing agents such as the internet and social media, schools, which have long been called the Guardian of Democracy, remain one of the important agents. In order to play the role of Guardian of Democracy effectively, civic education aiming at nurturing citizenry with knowledge, values, attitudes and competences is critical. This holistic education calls for various implementation modes supplementing each other, including independent subject (or at least an independent time slot in the time table), permeation into different subjects, informal curriculum, extra-curricular activities and school ethos etc. It can be argued that different modes of implementation may have different influences on different aspects of learning. However, it seems that civic education as an independent subject is the most controversial mode among the many. There are many reasons leading to the controversies. One of the major reasons is that it reflects different understandings of civic education, particularly on the relative emphasis on the nurturing of knowledge, values, attitudes and competences.

Similar to the controversies above, drawing from the interview data from front line Hong Kong civic education teachers, this paper argues that in Hong Kong, because of the prolonged moralization and depoliticization of civic education in policy and practice, the understandings of civic education of most of the interviewees are dominated by the idea that civic education is moral values education, particularly in the private sphere. These value and attitude oriented understandings of civic education have strong implications for pedagogies and assessment. Consequently, unlike those traditional academic subjects, which are more knowledge oriented and have to be taught as a formal independent subject, the most appropriate implementation modes for civic education perceived are permeation into different subjects, informal curriculum, extra-curricular activities and school ethos, instead of independent subject. However,

the authors argue that this incomplete understanding of civic education deprives Hong Kong students of the opportunities of learning about political knowledge. This is unfavourable for the democratic development of Hong Kong, which demands the nurturing of a mature democratic political culture. Some recommendations for the rectification of the situation from civil society are proposed. Research is urgently needed to explore the tension between the expectation on the nurturing of political culture generated from the democratic development of Hong Kong and the reality in the civic education classrooms. We also need to study how civic education could be adjusted to support the nurturing of a democratic political culture.

**Endnote:**

[1] “Depoliticized civic education” refers to a civic education curriculum that incorporates little or no teaching content related to politics.

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25–42.

Table I: Respondents' Views on Making Citizenship a Compulsory and Independent Subject

Preference	Number of respondents	Percentage
Oppose or deep reservations	28	54.9%
Support	9	17.6%
Conditional response	9	17.6%
No comment	5	9.8%
Total:	51	100%