

An Analysis of Hong Kong's National Identity Struggle Through Secondary School History Education Perspective

Huiyu Chen^{1,a,*}

¹*University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, United Kingdom*
a. HXC867@bham.ac.uk

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Hong Kong's July 1st Conflict took place on the anniversary of the founding of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, when protesters clashed with the police and caused chaos resulting in huge losses in terms of public transport safety, finance and trade. The protesters stated that they only recognised Hong Kong citizenship and refused to be recognised as Chinese, and read out the Hong Kong People's Declaration of Resistance. In recent years, more and more studies have shown that Hong Kong's young generation identifies more with their Hong Kong citizenship and has a declining sense of belonging to the mainland China. This paper is dedicated to examining how Hong Kong and the Mainland differ in shaping the national identity of their citizens from the perspective of history education textbooks.

Keywords: national identity, Hong Kong, mainland China, secondary school history textbooks, Opium War

1. Introduction

In 1997, the Chinese government negotiated to regain the Commonwealth's sovereignty over Hong Kong, and since then the amount of cultural and economic interactions between Hong Kong and mainland China has rapidly increased. However, according to a survey on Hong Kong's "sense of national identity" conducted by the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong, as of the year of conflict in mid-2019, the percentage of individuals who self-regarded as Chinese is at its lowest level since the handover, 10.8%, while the percentage of people who recognize themselves as Hong Kong residents remains exceedingly large as 52.9% [1]. This is a departure from previous perceptions of national identity - national identity conflicts usually occur in those regions of the world where there are economic and educational disadvantages [2]. Thus, as a region with a GDP per capita equal to approximately five times that of mainland China in those days [3], and where education was at its best during this period, the phenomenon of conflicting national identities in Hong Kong is quite perplexing and worthy of study. This essay aims to explore how young generation in Hong Kong and mainland China are developing their sense of national identity from the viewpoint of history education, in which is often utilized in the cultivation of national identity [4-5]. Thus, the approach of this study is to investigate what kind of Chinese history education that the young students in both areas are receiving, as well as the effects that history education are having on processing the national identity among Hong Kong and mainland China youth approximately.

2. Hong Kong's Context — The Peculiar Secondary School History Education

The history curriculum in Hong Kong's schools is unique worldwide since it comprises of two completely different disciplines, 'History' and 'Chinese History', which vary not only in terms of their contents but also in terms of their methodologies and their presumptions about what constitutes history as a discipline. English medium (Anglo-Chinese) and Chinese medium schools make up the majority of educational institutions in Hong Kong. All except Chinese Language & Literature and Chinese History are taught in the former ones in English. The latter ones, referred to as 'Chinese Middle Schools', teach all subjects except English language in Chinese.

However, these two types of schools' approaches to teaching history took divergent paths. For instance, Chinese Literature and Chinese History were integrated as one subject in the test subjects for English medium schools, according to the 1948 annual report of the Education Department. And Chinese History did not become a distinct curriculum in English medium and Chinese medium schools until 1960 and 1962, respectively.

Many academics noted that history education was a significant factor in increasing the struggle over national identity [6-12]. The British Hong Kong authorities applied colonial education techniques throughout the British colonial era. In order to maintain the status of Chinese history education in the curriculum and purposefully weaken the political, national, and ethnic values of the Hong Kong people, schools avoided discussing political issues in the classroom and gave Chinese history education an excessively small amount of space in history textbooks or exams. This has had a significant impact on students' acknowledge of Chinese literature, history, and culture. Thus, it affected their decisions about cultural pride and national identity.

This study aims to explore the impacts of secondary school history education on cultivating Hong Kong and mainland China's secondary school students' national identity. The research questions are as follows:

1) how do secondary school history textbooks in Hong Kong and mainland China depict national identity?

2) when comparing Hong Kong and mainland China's secondary school history textbooks, what disparities may be seen in the descriptions of certain historical events (such as the Opium War)?

This study is a qualitative one utilizing an interpretivist framework and a grounded theory foundation. It reviewed the official websites of Hong Kong and Mainland China to examine the disparities between the policy documents and textbooks for secondary school history teaching. According to Bloomberg and Volpe [13], qualitative research is preferred because it places more focus on exploring, discovering, and describing the social environment or activity from the viewpoint of the study subjects. It's based on a naturalistic worldview that's open to interpretation. Given the literature [14-15], grounded theory is an effective qualitative approach for studying policies and practices. It's a way of studying the world as a whole with the intention of developing hypotheses to account for relationships between things. The goal is to go beyond simple description by giving the researcher access to the experience of a study subject in order to formulate or uncover a theory of a process, activity, or interaction [16].

Based on grounded theory with interpretivist framework, this research is a qualitative study that compared teaching materials (mainly textbooks) utilized in secondary schools' history education in target two areas.

This study analyzes the two editions of official textbooks that are most often utilized in both mainland China and Hong Kong in order to reduce bias in the results given the huge number of textbook editions in both sides. The textbooks from both Hong Kong and mainland China have been viewed online through research sites. The next section will analyze the target two secondary school history textbooks, Xiandai (refers 'modern' in Mandarin) Chinese History which published by

Modern Educational Research Society, Ltd. in Hong Kong and History of Renjiao version in mainland China, to examine how each text reflects national identity.

3. Value Orientation

It is essential to explore the general value orientation that the ancient Chinese history curriculum aims to transmit. The Hong Kong 'Xiandai Chinese History' employed topical organization, which included more topics and events than the mainland Chinese version, which utilizes chronological organization. However, there are similarities between the two textbooks' depictions of historical Chinese accomplishments. Both portray the concept that the economic, technical, and cultural development produced during the Chinese imperial dynasties allowed ancient China to constantly grow and expand its influence abroad, and that the legacy is still beneficial to the Chinese people now. It may be argued that by placing such a strong focus on shared origins and development history, individuals from various regions of China who have a Chinese ancestry come together to form a unique community that is set apart from others. Comparing the total demand for thorough knowledge in both textbooks to critical and systematic history study in high schools and colleges and universities, it is important to note that the requirement is not very high. When examining how individuals evaluate the information they got in secondary school as they enter later phases of their life, it is important to carefully assess whether such knowledge is internalized by secondary school students via thinking or simply accepted as fact.

4. Similarities and Differences in the Depictions of the Opium War in Secondary School History Textbooks

In this case, after coding the research has taken an analysis towards textbooks of secondary school history education in both Hong Kong and Mainland China from the official website according to constant comparative method to find out the similarities and differences. It has more specifically concentrated on the differences (e.g. what are the two different descriptions of the same historical event in each side's textbook). Constant comparative analysis is the foundational stone of classical grounded theory. Through the comparative process of axial coding, categories are correlated to find causal explanations for events and interactions. Coding and memoing are key heuristic techniques in constant comparative analysis. As explained by Holton and Walsh [17], conceptualizing data through coding and memos is the basis of grounded theory analysis, the goal of which is to discover an underlying pattern that may explain a particular problem or social behavior of concern. This latent pattern analysis approach focuses and reveals complex and often subtle patterns of behavior in the social environment to reveal an action plan. This method will help to indicate the similarities and differences between Hong Kong and mainland China secondary school history textbooks.

In 1840 the British forced the Qing government to sign the first unequal treaty in the history of China - the Nanjing Treaty, after breaking the closed door of China with gunboats in the Opium War. From then on, China began to become a semi-colonial country step by step. Due to the importance of the Opium War in the modern history of China, it was a matter of great interest for the academic circles in Hong Kong and the mainland, as well as for the history textbooks of secondary schools. The presentation of the concept of the Opium War in secondary school history textbooks of the two places was both similar and different due to the different values of the textbook editors towards the academic viewpoints on the Opium War. This section focuses on the similarities and differences in secondary school history textbook in terms of the descriptions about the Opium Wars.

There are two basic points of view shared by secondary school history textbooks on the Opium War in both Hong Kong and Mainland China and first one is the importation of opium is harmful to China's interests [18].

Textbooks on both places agree that the importation of opium in large quantities was a great danger to China, but the presentation is different. The Xiandai Chinese History devoted a large space to systematically explaining the dangers of opium to China in three ways: First, the massive outflow of silver and the sharp rise in its price; second, the damage to the health of the people and the weakening of the military; and third, the prevalence of bribery and the serious deterioration of the administration of officials [19]. The Renjiao edition after a brief description of the Sino-British trade in the text has stated that ‘from then on, smoke and poison were rampant, bringing serious disasters to China’. Then, in the form of small words, i.e. by reading the text, the spread of opium led to the outflow of silver, and China gradually lost its advantage in foreign trade; the smuggling of opium led to more corrupt officials and the army lost its fighting ability; opium addicts spread to all social strata, causing great harm to people's body and mind [20]. In general, the Xiandai Chinese History gives a detailed and clearly organized account of the danger of opium to China, and it uses data and diagrams to illustrate the points. The text in the Renjiao Edition is brief, but it is supplemented by the reading text, which to some extent makes up for the briefness of the text.

The second similarity is that both Hong Kong and Mainland agree that the Opium War had a huge impact on China. The Xiandai Chinese History devotes a special section to the analysis of the consequences of the Opium War [19]. After briefly stating that China was defeated and forced to sign the first unequal treaties in modern history, such as the Treaty of Nanjing, which set a precedent for the invasion of China by foreign powers, it goes on to explain from six aspects: the weaknesses of the Qing dynasty's rule, the serious undermining of judicial sovereignty, the loss of China's territorial integrity, the stationing of warships threatening the national defense, the economic and livelihood problems, and the consequences of the Opium War. The impact of the Opium War was analyzed in detail, including impact and diplomatic disadvantage, which presented a bleak picture of China after the Opium War to the students. In the text of the Renjiao edition, the impact of the Opium War on China is stated succinctly, i.e. since then, China's sovereignty and territorial integrity were destroyed, the traditional tribute system was broken, and China was forced to sign unequal treaties that humiliated the country. From then on, China was drawn into the capitalist world market [20]. The Xiandai Chinese History focuses on the influence on the national interest, while the Renjiao version briefly describes the influence on the overall interest of the country and further more, highlights the influence on the emperor and the officials from the top to the bottom. The two editions have their own distinctive features in terms of description.

The differences between the Hong Kong and Mainland writings on the Opium War centred mainly on the causes of its outbreak.

Xiandai Chinese History made the case that the Sino-British trade dispute was connected to the Opium War and that the Qing government's indifference and isolation were the fundamental causes of the war, but it did not contest the unfairness of the United Kingdom government launching the Opium War [19]. Why had England Gladstone called the conflict ‘an unjust war’, it was questioned. It has come to light with extensive investigation that the opium crisis was the primary factor in starting the war between Britain and China. This is due to the fact that China and Britain have long-standing political, economic, legal, and commercial disagreements. The conflict between China and Britain was inevitable given this complex history. The contrasts between China and Britain in diplomatic, economic, and legal issues are also highlighted on the table to demonstrate the certainty of a conflict between the two countries. Fostering students' diverse thinking and building an objective and unbiased attitude toward historical events may be accomplished by guiding them as they examine the complex connection between China and Britain about the opium trade as well as the political, economic, and legal elements of the two nations. Students may utilize this to develop sound and logical thinking practices.

The mainland history textbooks emphasized that the Western authorities, particularly the United Kingdom government, had worked tirelessly to smuggle opium into China in an effort to reverse the trade deficit, in addition they acknowledged that the Qing government had shut down its doors and adopted in the dream of being heaven-like supreme land [20]. The introduction also makes the case that during the seventeenth century, Western Europe has steadily undergone a capitalist transformation and come to dominate the continent. Then, in an effort to capture a larger global market, they rapidly expanded. Ancient China was singing and dancing in peace when the foreign nations arrived at the gates with their mighty ships and artillery. This shows that mainland textbooks held the view that the main cause of the Opium War's beginning, despite the Qing government's closed-door policy and haughtiness being one contributing factor, was the British merchants' greed for profit, which caused the spread of opium and poison in China and resulted in serious catastrophes for the nation.

There are certain parallels and contrasts between the Hong Kong and Mainland secondary school history textbooks' narratives of the opium war, as demonstrated by each volume of the conflict, which it is reasonable. It is not possible to conclude definitively which view more accurately reflects the actual historical event. Xiandai Chinese History, however, outperforms the Renjiao edition in terms of information transfer, the growth of critical thinking abilities, and the promotion of ideals of objectivity and impartiality. The descriptions are lacking in certain cases because they are too laborious and challenging. Overall, Xiandai Chinese History favors the improvement of students' multiple-perspective reasoning skills. It allows the present of controversies in history to students, provokes them to think, and nurtures their critical thinking and impartial and unbiased understanding of historical matters, along with those which help to facilitate their ability to produce common ground and rational opinion. History textbooks in the mainland China are deficient in this area for many reasons, but the main reason is that the mainland's viewpoints on history and education are different, and history textbooks often give positive accounts and seldom analyze themselves in relation to wars such as the Opium War, which had a great impact on the survival of the Chinese nation. This is inevitably detrimental to the teaching of history and to the development of skills and values in students. This is something that the history education sector in the mainland must pay great attention to.

5. Conclusions

History education is recognized as a strong tool in fostering civic virtue and forming a sense of national identity [21]. Over the past 20 years since the the return of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China, the contentious conduct and extreme views amongst Hong Kong young generations with regards to relations between Hong Kong and the Mainland have reflected their identity-based grievances, such as the division of their Chinese ethnic consciousness, a misunderstanding or struggle of their sense of national identity, alongside other such issues.

Without change, rebuilding runs the risk of repeating the reasons that led to the war in the first place, as the World Bank points out. It is necessary to address this national identity crisis between Hong Kong and the mainland China from all possible perspectives. First, avoiding the 'single attribution theory' of Hong Kong's identity as well as 'relativism' between local and national identities is important. The former often contrasts local identity with national identification and views it as being hostile to local awareness. By overemphasizing their differences, 'relativism' itself, which is a politicized identity discourse, unavoidably broke the connection between the two.

Second, it is necessary to resolve the underrepresentation of modern and contemporary Chinese history teaching in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's history curriculum tends to foster students' critical thinking, which is an important skill for mainland students to acquire. However, there is need for improvement and expansion in the teaching of contemporary Chinese history, particularly in relation to the history of colonial invasion, if we were to have any hope for alleviating the conflict of identities.

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